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CARRICK KEEPS CALM DESPITE MAN UTD MISERY

IN BRIEF

OMANI ARRESTED FOR KILLING CITIZEN, SHOOTING TWO OTHERS IN IBRA

An Omani was arrested in connection with a shooting incident that left one citizen dead and two injured, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said on Saturday. ROP said that the Police Command in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate arrested the suspect in the shooting incident, which took place in the Al Haymah area of the Wilayat of Ibra, in which a citizen died and two others sustained serious injuries. The investigations indicate that the crime had something to do with an unsettled dispute between the men involved. The ROP said that legal procedures against the suspect are underway.

AL ROOFOOF EXPANDS DHOFAR COFFEE CULTIVATION



Al Roofoof is expanding coffee cultivation at Hairiti in Dhofar Governorate from a research base that dates to 1980. Its nursery has provided around 25,000 seedlings since the current investment phase began in June 2024, Project Director Eng Bakhit bin Mahad Tabook said.

In an exclusive interview at the farm, Tabook said the project deliberately began with the nursery because expansion depends first on reliable planting material.

“The nursery is the foundation of the cultivation”, he said. “From it, seedlings can be planted on the farm itself or supplied to farmers and interested growers”.

The project is still in an establishment phase and has not announced commercial coffee volumes. The nursery figure shows planting capacity; it does not, by itself, quantify commercial production or farm-level returns.

Tabook said Hairiti is working with five Arabica coffee varieties — Daw’a’iri, Adaini, Khawlani, Hammadi and Matari — and is studying three Brazilian Arabica varieties.

He said the company is also using genetic testing in France to examine varietal identity, although final documentation has not been released. **REPORT ON P13**

SEE KHAREEF 'S MAGIC AT ITS BEST IN SHIHEYT



Shihey Sinkhole is a natural geological formation created by the dissolution of limestone over long periods. Defined by its oval shape, impressive depth, and vegetation growing at its base, the sinkhole possesses unique natural and touristic value, making it a popular pit stop for visitors during Khareef Dhofar.

REPORT ON P4

OMAN’S FIRST AI SEZ TO ATTRACT 106M

HAMOUD AL MAHREZI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

OMAN’S first specialised economic zone (SEZ) dedicated to artificial intelligence is estimated to attract RO 106 million (\$275 million), in three phases over an area of approximately 104,000 square metres near Muscat International Airport.

The move is a part of Oman’s strategic commitment to building a knowledge- and innovation-based economy.

Dr Siham bint Ahmed al Harthi, Chairperson of Afouq Investment and Development United—the developer and operator of the zone—stated that construction on Phase 1 is expected to commence in the fourth quarter of 2027.

The zone targets the growth of Omani startups to transform into billion-dollar “unicorn” companies, supporting Oman Vision 2040’s goal of raising the digital economy’s contribution to GDP to approximately 10 per cent by 2040.



The AI zone will feature business incubators and accelerators, prototyping and robotics labs, industrial automation hubs, a dedicated research and application centre, a data centre, and cloud computing infrastructure. It will also offer training and event facilities, while talks are underway with leading international universities to establish a specialised university focused on AI technologies. Dr Al Harthi said

Afouq is in discussions with global companies, including Microsoft and IBM. The company is also examining partnerships with local and international investment funds and firms, leveraging the competitive incentives offered by Oman’s Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, which include tax exemptions and 100 per cent foreign ownership for investors.

The zone aims to serve as a hub for innovation, scientific research, and advanced technology localisation. Furthermore, the zone targets the growth of Omani startups through advanced scaling programmes, empowering them to expand and transform into billion-dollar “unicorn” companies, supporting Oman Vision 2040’s goal of raising the digital economy’s contribution to GDP to approximately 10 per cent by 2040.

Guns silent, Hormuz choked as US plans ‘toughest’ Iran sanctions

CAIRO/WASHINGTON: The United States and Iran exchanged defiant messages ahead of Monday’s scheduled announcement of new US economic sanctions that could impact the Islamic Republic and Tehran’s most important trading partners including China.

As the war neared six months old, the two sides were not exchanging fire but also not pursuing peace talks. All the while, oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz have virtually halted as Tehran clings to its leverage by threatening to strike any unauthorised oil tankers that attempt to transit the narrow waterway. US Treasury Secretary

Scott Bessent will hold a press conference on Monday amid promises to reveal “the toughest sanctions in history” on Iran while also urging China to cooperate with Washington. China buys more than 80 per cent of Iran’s shipped oil, according to 2025 data from analytics firm Kpler. Beijing urged diplomacy.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said on Saturday that the imminent US announcement of new economic sanctions on Iran was an “assertion of extraterritorial sovereignty over every independent member state of the United Nations.”



While the US has effectively blockaded Iranian vessels in their ports, the Strait of Hormuz remained bottled up with thousands of seafarers stranded on hundreds of vessels. — Reuters

“Such secondary sanctions find no foundation in international law,” he said in a post on X.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who has warned of economic consequences against any country that provides “any type of lifeline to Iran,” said on Friday that Washington was observing “what happens” in the conflict.

“They would love to make a deal, but they’re not ready to make the right deal, in my opinion,” Trump said of Iran.

While the US has effectively blockaded Iranian vessels in their ports, the Strait of Hormuz remained bottled up with thousands of

seafarers stranded on hundreds of vessels. Only four commodity ships sailed along the strait on Thursday, none of them large crude carriers or liquefied natural gas tankers, ship-tracking data showed.

However, Iran has granted permission for a number of Iraqi oil tankers to pass through the Strait following repeated requests from Baghdad, Iran’s state news agency IRNA reported on Saturday.

IRNA said obtaining special permission for Iraqi tankers was one of Baghdad’s main requests during Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf’s visit to Iraq. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The expo reflects OCCI’s commitment to supporting economic activity across the governorates.

SMES SHOWCASE
PRODUCTS AT OCCI
EXPO IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The second edition of the ‘Empowerment and Excellence’ exhibition, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), represented by its Small and Medium Enterprises Committee, is being held at the Al Gharif project in Dhofar Governorate and will run until August 30.

The exhibition brings together more than 50 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) representing a range of activities, including perfumes and frankincense, modern and traditional fashion and textiles, Omani hospitality and food, and traditional crafts and industries.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the OCCI Board of Directors, who said the event reflects the Chamber’s commitment to supporting economic activity across the governorates and showcasing their entrepreneurial potential and productive capabilities.

He stressed that supporting SMEs is an important avenue for promoting economic diversification and increasing the private sector’s contribution to GDP, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and governorate development programmes.

Al Rawas said investment in SMEs goes beyond supporting existing businesses, extending to nurturing a new generation of entrepreneurs capable of innovation, creating added value and generating employment opportunities.

He also called for greater coordination among government and private-sector institutions and supporting organisations to strengthen the sector’s ability to grow sustainably and create a more competitive environment for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Amer al Muslihi, Chairman of the OCCI Small and Medium Enterprises Committee, said the exhibition builds on the success of its first edition and reflects the Chamber’s continued efforts to strengthen the presence and contribution of SMEs in the governorates’ economies.

He said the Chamber remains committed to helping SMEs access new opportunities and markets while providing platforms that enable them to grow, sustain and expand their businesses and strengthening partnerships that support the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Among the initiatives highlighted was the franchise programme adopted by the OCCI Franchise Centre, which has contributed to the registration of more than 40 trademarks across Oman, supporting businesses in developing their models and expanding their operations. — **ONA**

Jabal Shams hike honours late adventurer Nadhira Al Harthi

AL HAMRA: A mountain hiking event was organised at Jabal Shams in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, with the participation of over 100 individuals from mountain hiking, running, and outdoor activity communities in the Sultanate of Oman, to honour the late Omani adventurer Nadhira al Harthi and her fellow mountaineers who lost their lives while climbing Broad Peak in Pakistan on July 30, 2026.

The memorial hike saw a remarkable turnout for both the full summit route and the shorter route. It offered an opportunity for people of all nationalities and



More than 80 participants completed the hike to the summit, covering nearly 24 kilometres.

members of various mountain sports communities. More than 80 participants completed the hike to the summit, covering nearly 24 kilometres.

The route included multiple designated time points and return points, enabling leaders to make

informed decisions and was based on timing, weather conditions, and each participant’s physical condition.

The Himam Adventures Club undertook the task of surveying and clearing the mountain, with its teams accompanying the last groups to ensure all participants completed the route safely.

The event commenced at 6:30 am from the main assembly point at the Jabal Shams summit, located at the Sama Jabal Shams Resort, following a brief commemorative break and the signing of the summit’s commemorative logbook. — **ONA**

Al Rustaq City Walk to boost tourism, commercial activity

SAID AL SALMANI
AL RUSTAQ, AUGUST 22

THE AL RUSTAQ City Walk project in Al Batinah South Governorate is well underway, with an implementation rate of 50 per cent.

Levelling and backfilling works have begun, paving the way for the completion of the remaining construction and implementation phases. The project is part of efforts to create integrated urban destinations that enhance quality of life and support economic and tourism activity. It offers a range of commercial, recreational, service, and sports facilities.

The project is strategically located opposite Al Rustaq Hospital, close to several vital facilities, including the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Al Rustaq Sports Complex and the highway.

Its proximity to several tourist and heritage sites, such as Ain Al Kasfah, Al Rustaq Castle, and the Sultan Qaboos Mosque, further enhances its importance as a service, investment, and tourism destination.

The project spans approximately 28,000 sq m, with a built-up area of around 7,500 sq m. It comprises a range of multi-use buildings and facilities designed to provide a comprehensive experience for residents and visitors, enhancing commercial and recreational activity.

The project involves retail shops, restaurants, cafes, a private medical clinic, a cinema, a suspended



The City Walk project is near several tourist and heritage sites, which further enhances its importance as a tourism destination.

The project reaches 50 per cent completion and is part of efforts to create integrated urban destinations that enhance quality of life and support economic and tourism activity

children’s playground, separate gyms for men and women, and a motel with several guest rooms. It has a central plaza, green spaces, seating areas, and recreational water sites, creating an attractive and welcoming environment for all age groups.

The project’s architectural design matches the unique local

environment, drawing inspiration from the mountains of Al Rustaq. The various components of the project are visually and functionally integrated, contributing to a cohesive urban environment that fosters social interaction and enhances the visitor experience.

Once completed, Al Rustaq City Walk is expected to be a qualitative addition to the urban landscape of the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, and a new destination for residents and visitors. It will contribute to revitalising commercial and tourism activity, supporting economic activities, and enhancing the wilayat’s position as a vital destination in the Al Batinah South Governorate.

Omani Grade 10 student develops innovative power generator

ARWA AL HASHIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Omani Grade 10 student Abdullah bin Salem al Hadhrami has developed an innovative project titled ‘A Continuous Power Generator’, reflecting the growing interest among young people in sustainable energy and environmental solutions.

The project is based on the principle of electromagnetic induction, through which electricity is generated by rotating copper coils within a magnetic field.

The resulting electrical energy can be used to power devices or recharge batteries, offering potential applications where a reliable electricity supply is required.

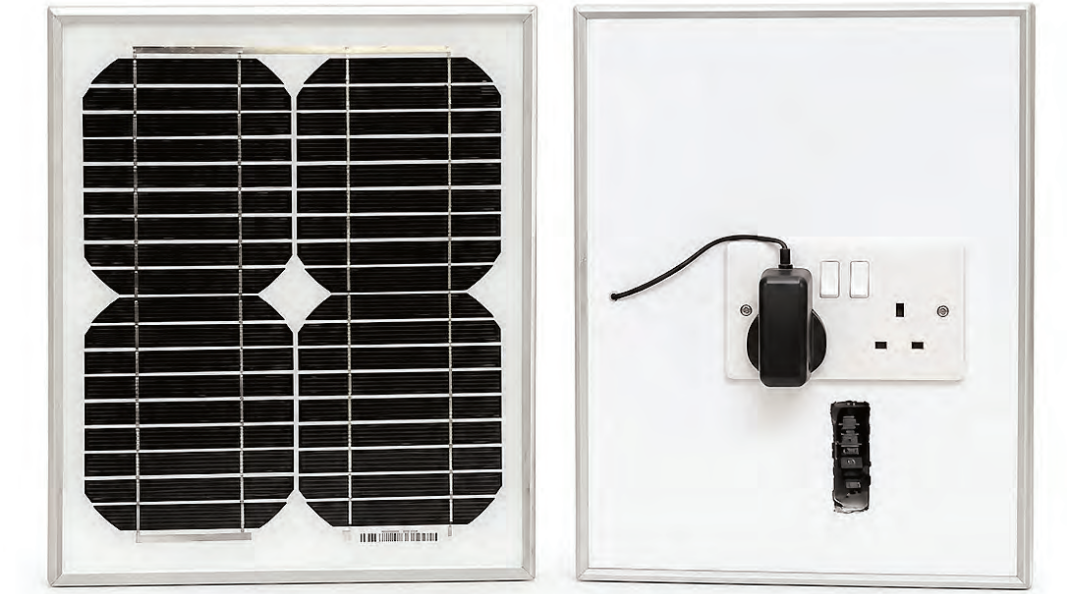
Abdullah said the idea was inspired by the growing need to improve energy efficiency and reduce reliance on conventional energy sources.

The design can also be integrated with renewable energy systems, including solar power, potentially



ABDULLAH
BIN SALEM
AL HADHRAMI

The generator can also be integrated with renewable energy systems, potentially helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support efforts to address climate change



Abdullah’s innovative project is called ‘A Continuous Power Generator’

helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support efforts to address climate change.

The proposed generator could have applications in homes, farms, campsites, remote communities and emergency situations where access to the electricity grid is limited. When combined with

rechargeable batteries or an auxiliary power source, the system could provide a more reliable supply of electricity.

Developing the project presented several technical challenges, particularly in reducing energy losses and maintaining a stable electrical output. To address these challenges, Abdullah incorporated a voltage regulation circuit, voltage booster, improved coil connections and a rechargeable battery to enhance the system’s performance.

Looking ahead, Abdullah plans to further improve the generator’s efficiency and strengthen its integration with renewable energy technologies.

He hopes the system can eventually provide power for small devices and support communities in remote areas while contributing to clean-energy and environmental sustainability efforts.

The project highlights the creativity and determination of Omani youth and underscores the potential role of young innovators in developing solutions for a more sustainable future.



SHORTTAKES

HAIMA CRASH
LEAVES ONE DEAD,
SEVERAL INJURED

KABEER YOUSUF
HAIMA, AUG 22

One person was killed and several others injured when a vehicle carrying two families travelling from Abu Dhabi to Salalah overturned near Haima at around 1:30am on Saturday.

According to the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the injured were airlifted to Nizwa Hospital for treatment.

The group comprised Salil, his wife Surumi and their four children, as well as his friend Shaheen, his wife and their two children.

The 4x4 vehicle reportedly overturned about 40km from Nizwa. Salil and his daughter were critically injured, while the other passengers sustained moderate to serious injuries and were taken to hospital.

The ROP urged motorists travelling to Dhofar during the Khareef season to exercise extreme caution, particularly on long journeys.

It advised drivers not to continue driving when feeling sleepy or fatigued and to strictly observe road safety regulations.

“Please obey speed limits and maintain a safe distance between vehicles. Avoid reckless overtaking, speeding and driving on natural green spaces,” the ROP said.

It also urged motorists to ensure their vehicles are properly maintained and that tyres are in good condition before undertaking long journeys.

“Take regular breaks and rest if you feel fatigued during the journey,” it added.

SALALAH TO HOST
FORUM ON SOCIAL
INVESTMENT



SALALAH: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will organise the ‘Social Investment and Sustainable Development 2026’ forum in Salalah on August 30, 31.

The opening ceremony will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The forum will serve as a national platform for dialogue, integration and partnership-building, seeking to promote social investment as a sustainable pathway for investment and development. It aims to transform social, economic and environmental challenges into viable, scalable and measurable investment opportunities and initiatives with lasting developmental impact.

The two-day forum will focus on shifting social investment from short-term initiatives towards sustainable and impactful investment models.

It will bring together government institutions, the private sector, investors, civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs to exchange expertise, build partnerships and develop practical, feasible and measurable initiatives.

It will also highlight successful national experiences and models and explore ways to channel resources and funding into projects that generate financial returns while delivering social, economic and environmental benefits, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The forum will address four main strategic areas: empowerment and integration, partnerships and stimulation, capacity-building and knowledge and innovative financing.

— ONA

OMANI TROUPE
STAGES PLAY
AT RUSSIAN
THEATRE
FESTIVAL

MOSCOW: The Al Dan Theatre Troupe for Culture and Art presented its play ‘A Bite of Bread’ as part of the official competition of the eighth edition of the International Festival of Chamber Theatre Forms in Kineshma, Russia.

The performance was attended by an official representative of the Embassy of Oman in the Russian Federation, along with Russian cultural figures, delegations from participating countries,

artists, theatre professionals and members of the public.

An introductory seminar and press conference were also



An introductory seminar and press conference were held in Moscow.

held, highlighting the theatrical experience of ‘A Living Wage’, the development of Omani theatre and the importance of international participation in exchanging experiences and expertise and strengthening cultural ties among artists from different countries.

The troupe also set up a small exhibition outside the performance venue featuring brochures introducing its work and Omani theatre. — ONA

Biting flies alter livestock
routines during Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 22

FOR LIVESTOCK owners in Dhofar, the night-time movement of cattle is a familiar feature of Khareef — a seasonal routine shaped by tiny blood-feeding flies whose numbers increase as the monsoon transforms the mountains.

During this period, many cattle are kept in dark shelters during the day and released to graze after sunset, reducing their exposure to the biting insects.

For Mohammed bin Muslim bin Ahmed, who raises cattle and camels, the arrival of the seasonal flies changes not only when his animals graze, but also where they are taken.

“When the fly season begins, the cattle remain inside during the day,” he told the Observer.

Camels are managed differently. “We take them out early in the morning before sunrise and allow them to graze for a short time,” he said. “When the sun rises, we move them away from the grazing areas.”

Some are taken to drier ground between the mountains and the Nejd, where pasture is limited and the influence of Khareef is weaker.

“These are dry places where Khareef does not reach strongly, and they are more suitable for camels during this period,” Mohammed said.

Other livestock owners move



Flies can restrict grazing in some areas during the rainy season, making them a limiting ecological factor.

Scientific research shows that the phenomenon involves several species of blood-feeding flies rather than a single species

their camels towards the coastal plain, where he said the biting flies are considerably less troublesome.

“Some of our people move towards the plain near the sea, where the effect of these flies is much weaker,” he said.

His account reflects a wider seasonal pattern across rural Dhofar. While cattle alter their grazing hours, some camel herds change their location altogether.

Scientific research shows that the phenomenon involves several species of blood-feeding flies rather than a single species.

A 2011 study published by SQU identified *Haematobia minuta*, *Musca crassirostris* and *Forcipomyia whitcombei* among species that feed on domesticated animals in Dhofar.

The study found that the flies can restrict grazing in some areas during the rainy season, making

Campaign engages community on environment

SALALAH: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with several government entities — the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, Dhofar Municipality, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Environment Authority, Mwasalat, and Oman Airports — has launched the Sustainable Dhofar campaign.

The initiative aims to promote a culture of sustainability and innovation while actively engaging the community to propose solutions for environmental and urban challenges in Dhofar Governorate.

The campaign seeks to support sustainable development and enhance the overall quality of life by empowering youth and national talent



ABDULLAH BIN ALI
AL BUSAIDI

Director-General of the
Oman Logistics Center

The campaign seeks to support sustainable development and enhance the overall quality of life by empowering youth and national talent



The initiative aims to strengthen a culture of sustainability and innovation while improving the quality of life in Dhofar.

innovative ideas. It also aims to strengthen partnerships among government entities, the private sector, academic institutions, and entrepreneurs.

Abdullah bin Ali al Busaidi, Director-General of the Oman Logistics Center, said the campaign complements the ministry’s efforts

to advance green mobility practices across Oman. He noted that the campaign was intentionally timed to coincide with the second edition of the Gulf Green Mobility Forum in Salalah, reinforcing Oman’s commitment to adopting sustainable transport solutions.

Al Busaidi added that the initiative aims to deeply root a culture of sustainability and encourage various segments of society to contribute ideas that help build a sustainable future for the region.

He explained that citizens, visitors, investors, and entrepreneurs can submit their ideas and proposals via the “Amed” platform, which was launched alongside the campaign to receive initiatives focused on digital and logistical sustainability.

— ONA



I N S I D E S H I H E Y T

NATURE, SINKHOLE, AND A MAGICAL GETAWAY

*Shihey*t is known for its foggy atmosphere, expansive green pastures, and picturesque mountain views during Khareef

Ardit Farm: A prominent mountain farm in Taqah that supports local food supply and community cohesion.

Sheheet Sinkhole: A major geological landmark formed by dissolved limestone over time, featuring an oval shape

Visitors recommend opening an additional direct route from Sheheet to Wadi Darbat to reduce peak-season traffic congestion.

Need a direct road to the Sheheet Sinkhole to avoid routing traffic through quiet residential neighbourhoods.

Access to Shihey

requires a 4x4 vehicle, particularly for those hoping to reach Wadi Ghidhat or explore beyond the village.



STAFF REPORTER
TAQAH, AUGUST 22

SHIHEYT in the Wilayat of Taqah, Dhofar Governorate, stands out during the Khareef season as one of the prime natural destinations combining lush greenery, fog, and expansive pastures. Its proximity to Wadi Darbat, continues to enhance its attraction.

It is distinguished by its vast plateaus and green pastures during Khareef, as well as agricultural lands that historically served as an important source of food and livelihood. Its proximity to Taqah City has facilitated communication with local markets and services, supporting both agricultural and pastoral activities.

Wadi Darbat is one of the most prominent natural features near Shihey

t. Abundant water and favourable climatic conditions have enabled agricultural prosperity and the production of various crops,

including coconuts, sweet potatoes, bananas, papayas, corn, lemons, and other produce benefiting residents of the region and neighbouring areas.

Shihey

t is also associated with the Ardit Farm, one of the well-known farms in the mountain area of Taqah. Its agricultural output has supplied essential produce to locals and supported surrounding communities, while farming itself has played a key role in strengthening social ties and community cooperation.

Additionally, the area hosts the “Shihey

t Sinkhole, a natural geological formation created by the dissolution of limestone over long periods. Defined by its oval shape, impressive depth, and vegetation growing at its base, the sinkhole possesses unique natural and touristic value, making it a popular pit stop for Khareef visitors.

As a trending destination, tourists have called for the development of services and facilities to ease traffic and access to tourist sites while preserving the



environment, pastures, and green spaces.

Abdullah bin Sulaiman al Farsi, a visitor from the Wilayat of Ibri, noted that Shihey

t features stunning scenery and mild weather during Khareef. He highlighted that

the fog, greenery, open pastures, and mountain views make it a highly attractive destination.

Al Farsi pointed out the importance of providing mobile toilets along the main road during the season, as well as establishing designated parking areas on the road shoulders. This would serve visitors and prevent vehicles from trampling pastures and green zones, thereby preserving the area’s scenic beauty.

Meanwhile, Ali bin Mubarak al Azri, a visitor from the Wilayat of Nizwa, suggested exploring the possibility of opening an additional access route from Shihey

t toward Wadi Darbat. Given the area’s proximity to the wadi, he explained that a new outlet would smooth traffic flow and ease congestion on the current road, particularly during peak hours.

Al Azri added that while the Shihey

t Sinkhole attracts many visitors, reaching it requires better access. Currently, the lack of a clear, paved, and independent road forces visitors to navigate through residential neighbourhoods and

intersecting streets. He advocated for building a direct, paved road to the site away from residential areas, alongside parking spaces at the perimeter. This would streamline tourist access while protecting local residents’ privacy and ensuring site safety.

Similarly, Mohammed bin Qasim al Ajmi, a visitor from the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, praised the striking natural beauty of Shihey

t during Khareef, noting that the foggy atmosphere and green carpet covering the mountains and pastures give the site a distinct character blending mild weather with diverse natural scenery.

Al Ajmi emphasised that the area deserves to be a primary destination for tourists during Khareef due to its rich mix of mountains, greenery, fog, and open pasturelands.

Access to Shihey

t requires a 4x4 vehicle, particularly for those hoping to reach Wadi Ghidhat or explore beyond the village.

Though it lacks major infrastructure, Shihey

t’s quiet charm is exactly what makes it stand out.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Palestinians inspect the damage after militant Israeli settlers set fire to stone quarry machinery in the West Bank. — Reuters

Ex-envoys urge joint French, UK action on Palestinian territories

PARIS: Dozens of former senior French and UK diplomats on Saturday urged their governments to work together to uphold international law in the Palestinian territories, accusing Israel of seeking to “destroy” any prospect of a viable Palestinian state. The 102 signatories of the letter published in Le Monde included former British ambassadors to the UN Jeremy Greenstock and Emyr Jones Parry as well as the former directors for the Middle East at the French foreign ministry Yves Aubin de la Messuziere and Denis Bauchard.

They said the involvement of France and the UK was essential, given the historic roles of the two powers in the Middle East and the fact that both are permanent members of the UN Security Council. “Our two nations believe that those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held to account. Only then can our governments rebut the accusation of double standards. That is why they must act together to uphold international law in Palestine,” said the letter. It accused Israel of seeking “to destroy any prospect of an independent Palestinian state, showing contempt for the law, the rulings of the International Court of Justice and countless UN Security Council resolutions.” — AFP

Indonesia deploys hundreds of soldiers to tackle Borneo fires



Haze blankets a riverside residential area along the Kahayan River in Palangkaraya. — AFP

JAKARTA: Indonesia is deploying an additional 1,500 soldiers to Borneo, an official said Saturday, to help tackle wildfires that have burned through swathes of the island and created thick smog choking some areas. Fires between January and July burned over 200,000 hectares of land — an area three times the size of the capital Jakarta, the government said this week, as dry conditions driven by a powerful El Nino weather pattern take hold.

President Prabowo Subianto, on a visit to Borneo on Saturday to lead wildfire response meetings, ordered increased troop deployment, said Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya. “An additional three Indonesia National Armed Forces battalions, or around 1,5000 personnel, will be brought in from outside Kalimantan starting today,” Teddy said in a statement. Six helicopters were also set to arrive on Saturday to boost waterbombing operations, Teddy said.

The government is monitoring the situation closely, mobilising resources to help contain the spread of the blaze, Prabowo told reporters in the Central Kalimantan provincial capital of Palangkaraya. “We’re taking mitigation measures. The important thing is to immediately stop the spread of fire spots,” said the president. — AFP

DEADLY MIGRATION

14 missing after boat sinks off Tunisia



Search and rescue operations were ongoing on Saturday after a boat carrying 15 irregular migrants capsized off the coast of Tunisia, an official said. National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli said the boat sank 14 nautical miles off the coast of Zarzis overnight Friday to Saturday, and that one person had been rescued so far. Tunisian Observatory for Human Rights president Mostafa Abdelkebir said that four bodies had been found. — AFP

SUDAN FARMS LIE BARREN AS EL NINO LEAVES NILE BANKS DRY

GEDAREF: Along the bone-dry riverbanks of the Nile in Sudan, farmers struggle to pull water to their crops. Others gather to pray for rainfall over cracked earth. Across the country, farmland that could feed the world’s largest hunger crisis many times over lies fallow, as weary farmers once again find themselves in the crosshairs of faraway destruction.

The powerful El Nino climate pattern strengthening in the Pacific Ocean, which impacts

winds and rains across the world, has delayed crucial rains and led water levels in the life-giving Nile to drop precipitously. Just south of the capital Khartoum, farmer Al Tigani Fadlallah points to an island that shouldn’t be there. “The water usually covers it by July, but you can see it even now,” he said.

The UN’s food and agriculture organisation says the season “is unfolding under heightened climate risk, driven by El Nino conditions,” including delayed and

below-average rains, and long and frequent dry spells. Farmers say it is one of the hardest seasons in recent memory, but climate research shows it will not be the last.

Climate and hydrology scientist Elfatih Eltahir, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has studied the link between El Nino and the Nile for thirty years. Eltahir warns that “more transparency and cooperation” are also needed between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the reservoir. — AFP

Syria condemns Israeli strike as ‘flagrant violation’

SYRIA CONDEMNED an Israeli strike southwest of Damascus that wounded one person on Saturday, the second such attack in a week. “This attack constitutes a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and the integrity of its territory, and a blatant breach of international law, and comes in the context of repeated Israeli attacks on Syrian territory,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Syria said a strike in the country’s south on Saturday wounded one person as Israel’s army said it targeted a militant, the second such attack in a week. Syrian state television said the man was wounded when an “Israeli occupation drone” targeted a vehicle in the village of Beit Jinn, located southwest of Damascus near the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights. It published an image of a damaged truck.

Israel’s military said that its forces “fired in southern Syria towards a person who advanced attacks in the final stages of preparation”, without identifying the target or saying whether they were affiliated with any particular group. “The... activity posed an immediate threat” to Israeli soldiers, the statement added.

Since the December 2024 overthrow of longtime ruler Bashar al Assad, Israel has carried out



An Israeli tank stands in position near the ceasefire line between the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syria. — Reuters

Syria said a strike in the country’s south wounded one person as Israel’s army said it targeted a militant, the second such attack in a week. The man was wounded when an “Israeli occupation drone” targeted a vehicle in the village of Beit Jinn, located southwest of Damascus

hundreds of strikes in Syria and has sent troops into a UN-patrolled buffer zone that for decades had separated Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan. It has also carried out repeated incursions deeper into Syrian territory and has vowed to keep troops in a so-called “security zone” in southern Syria, where it seeks a broader demilitarised area.

This week, Israeli army chief Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir told troops in southern Syria that “we are monitoring the changes on the Syrian front. We will not allow hostile forces to establish themselves on our borders.” In Beit Jinn last November, Israeli forces killed 13 Syrians in an operation that they said targeted a militant group. That exchange of fire also left six Israeli soldiers wounded.

Israel captured most of the Golan from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and later annexed the areas under its control, in a move only recognised by the United States and, this month, also Colombia.

Also this week, Syria and the United States said Israel bombed a disused military air base in northwest Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tacitly acknowledged the strike and said that Türkiye, an ally of the new authorities in Damascus, had been looking to establish a military presence there. Ankara has denied any visit to the site.

Netanyahu and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have traded barbs since the incident, and Ankara announced it was seeking an international arrest warrant for Netanyahu, accusing him of “genocide” linked to the interception of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla. Netanyahu’s office called Erdogan an “antisemitic dictator” while Erdogan’s office called the remarks “outrageous ravings” and accused Netanyahu’s government of “seeking to evade accountability”.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz on Saturday condemned US ambassador Tom Barrack, who is also Washington’s point man on Syria, after he criticised an Israeli strike on a Syrian military base near Türkiye. — AFP

DRC CAPITAL WARY OF EBOLA NIGHTMARE

MALUKU: The Ebola virus has spread across Democratic Republic of Congo at a frightening speed and one of the authorities’ biggest fears is that it reaches the teeming capital of Kinshasa. More than 16,000 doses of the Ervebo vaccine arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) late Friday, an AFP journalist saw, as the country faces the deadliest Ebola outbreak in its history.

The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak, which has killed thousands of people, was declared on May 15 but is thought to have been spreading for several weeks prior. It has hit regions in the north and east where the presence of the state is weak, health infrastructure is largely lacking and myriad armed groups have roamed for decades.

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Thursday that the DRC would receive a total of 70,000 doses of the Ervebo vaccine, produced in Germany. The vaccine, developed by the pharmaceutical company Merck, is approved against the Zaire strain of the virus, but not against the Bundibugyo strain currently circulating in the country. WHO experts still do not know whether Ervebo protects humans against the Bundibugyo strain, but early data, notably from animal trials, suggest it could offer some protection. — AFP

DRIVING ACCIDENTS

12 dead in UK, Irish ‘wrong-side’ crashes



Twelve people have died in less than a week in accidents in England and Ireland involving cars being driven the wrong way on major roads, amid a social media trend for “wrong-side” driving. Seven people, including two serving police officers, died on Saturday in a crash on the main A66 road near Middlesbrough in northeastern England. Authorities are investigating the exact circumstances but said the collision followed a pursuit of a suspicious vehicle. — AFP

VIOLENT GANGS

Gunmen abduct 60 from Nigeria mosque



Armed men abducted over 60 worshippers from a mosque in Nigeria’s north-central Niger state during Friday prayers, police said on Saturday. Police spokesperson Wasiu Abiodun said the attackers stormed Kpenya Mosque in the Dekara district of the Borgu local government area at about 2 pmon Friday after first attacking Gidan-Zana and Kpenya villages. “The developing report indicated that no life was lost, while joint security detachment has been deployed”. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Swedish PM Ulf Kristersson and Social Democratic Party leader Magdalena Andersson visit a makeshift memorial outside a school in Fagersta. — Reuters

SWEDISH POLICE PROBE ONLINE NETWORKS AFTER TEENAGE KILLED

STOCKHOLM: Swedish police are investigating whether an 18-year-old man who attacked students at a high school with a sword on Friday, killing one, was involved in online communities promoting school violence, a police source said. The attacker struck at a school in the central Swedish town of Fagersta, also severely injuring two teenage boys before being arrested by police. The parents of a 17-year-old girl told local newspaper Fagersta-Posten that their daughter was killed in the attack.

Police are investigating whether a TikTok account that posted a picture of a sword 20 minutes before the assault belonged to the suspect, the source said. According to the Dagens Nyheter newspaper, the image appeared to have been taken in a restroom at the school. Before it was taken down, the month-old account contained videos that referred to two episodes of mass violence in Sweden and to Norwegian far-right mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik. One of the videos referenced a 2015 attack in which a masked swordsman killed a teaching assistant and two boys at a school in Trollhättan, western Sweden, before being shot dead by police. — Reuters

ROMANIA PLANS TO BOOST DANUBE



Romania's National Committee for Emergency Situations approved new measures to boost the water level of the River Danube and ensure cooling of the Cernavoda nuclear power plant, the government press office said on Saturday. The plant remains shut due to historically low Danube levels, and the country has declared a state of emergency throughout August stemming from a decline in electricity production. Emergency dredging of the Danube course in the plant area is planned. Along the Old Danube channel, a groyne will be built to divert water towards the area of the water intake for the cooling systems of the plant. — Reuters

N KOREA: RECORD JAPAN DEFENCE BUDGET WOULD RISK ‘TURMOIL’

SEOUL: North Korea slammed Japan's reported plans to increase its defence budget, accusing Tokyo on Saturday of preparing for a “war of aggression” as its US ally pursues talks with Pyongyang.

Japan has been gradually moving away from its post-World War II pacifist stance, increasing military spending, ramping up defence pacts and deploying missile launchers to its outer islands. The Japanese defence ministry is now seeking a “record-high” budget for the upcoming fiscal year, broadcaster NHK and other media outlets reported this week, putting the sum at 8.9 trillion yen (\$56 billion).

The budget request “will once again break all-time records”, a commentary carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said. While not yet finalised, the move “clearly signifies a dangerous expansion of the war budget that will bring new turmoil to the region and the

world”, KCNA said. “This massive increase in military spending will lead to a buildup of military power to complete preparations for a war of aggression”.

The United States, an old Japanese and South Korean ally, meanwhile seeks its own engagement with Pyongyang, with President Donald Trump scaling back annual military drills with Seoul aimed at countering potential threats from the nuclear-armed North. — AFP

Ukraine strikes back after Russia’s deadly mall attack



Rescuers with a dog work at the site of a shopping centre destroyed by a Russian drone attack in the city of Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk region. — Reuters

“This morning, civilian infrastructure and residential buildings in the Yeysk district came under a drone attack. As a result of yet another vile and cynical strike... two children were killed, and two adults are in the hospital

VENIAMIN KONDRATYEV

after Russian drones smashed into a busy shopping centre on Friday afternoon, the regional governor said. Sixteen people have been confirmed killed and more than 100 wounded. The strike set the mall ablaze and sent blood-covered victims running for the streets, only for a second drone to fly in around half an hour later — a double-tap attack blasted by Zelensky as “cynical and despicable”.

Mourners placed flowers and letters on the grass outside the mall in a makeshift memorial on Saturday. A reporter saw machinery piling up twisted and charred metal. Supermarket shelves stacked with products blackened from the fire were stacked up beneath a cratered ceiling and behind blown-out windows.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday announced Paris would deliver new interceptor missiles to Ukraine, with Kyiv's air defences running short after the latest round of deadly Russian attacks. “It is crucial

to provide Ukraine with all the necessary means to defend its skies and thwart this aggression,” Macron wrote on X, saying he had informed Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky in a telephone call of “the strengthening of our support with the delivery of interceptors and the continuation of our cooperation”.

Germany's foreign minister on Saturday sharply criticised Russian President Vladimir Putin for stepping up his “brutal war of aggression” in Ukraine and pledged more aid for Kyiv. Johann Wadephul's comments, during a visit to the Ukrainian capital, came a day after a Russian drone attack on a busy shopping centre in eastern Ukraine killed at least 16 people. “Russia's brutal war of aggression... has in no way abated,” Wadephul told a press conference alongside his Ukrainian counterpart Andriy Sybiga. “On the contrary, Putin has even increased the intensity of his war. He is deliberately terrorising civilians, attacking civilian infrastructure with rockets and swarms of drones.”

Russia has intensified its bombardments of Ukrainian cities, with the UN reporting that the civilian death toll in 2026 has risen to its highest level since the first months of the war. “I want to emphasise once again here: the people of Ukraine have our full support. Germany stands behind Ukraine,” Wadephul said. He announced an additional 50 million euros in humanitarian aid for Ukraine, which will go to UN agencies and NGOs that focus on supporting people in areas close to the frontlines. Germany will also pay a further 10 million euros into a Nato fund that provides financing to bolster Ukraine's energy networks and systems for defending against drones, Wadephul said. — AFP

Heatwave-hit Europe logs over 30,000 excess summer deaths

PARIS: Europe saw at least 30,000 excess deaths across a blistering summer of back-to-back heatwaves and drought which scientists have blamed on man-made climate change, according to provisional figures. Between mid-July and mid-August, the continent's EuroMomo monitoring platform estimates that Europe saw more than 32,000 excess deaths — with summer yet to come to an end.

While EuroMomo does not publish breakdowns of deaths by country, various national health authorities have published provisional tolls covering comparable periods stretching roughly between the end of May and August. A count of those tallies found 33,000 excess deaths or deaths directly linked to the heat across just eight countries: Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

According to EuroMomo's latest

weekly estimates, the last week of June appears to have been the summer's deadliest, with nearly 16,000 excess deaths recorded. The first week of July follows in second place with some 8,000 deaths. Both weeks coincided with one of the recurring exceptional heatwaves in which Europeans baked this summer, while widespread droughts provided ideal tinder-dry conditions for raging wildfires. As EuroMomo's most recent estimates will be refined over the next weeks, the total excess death toll is set to evolve. The monitor's model only includes official statistics from 23 European countries and excludes part of the continent's east.

Germany, the European Union's most populous country with 82 million people, saw 14,000 deaths linked to the heatwaves up until August 9, according to official figures. That tally is a record since such records began in 2016,



A man cools his head at water hoses spilling water to provide relief from the summer heat in Cologne, western Germany. — AFP

according to the Robert Koch Institute. Like in other European countries, people over the age of 75 suffered the most, the institute said.

France has already logged 7,300 excess deaths across the sweltering period between late May and July 22, according to the provisional toll from the public health authorities. The summer's tally is all but certain to rise, as the long heatwave which began in late July has just come to an end.

Nearly 4,500 deaths blamed on the heat were recorded in Spain between June 1 and August 19 — the highest for that time of year since 2022, according to the Carlos III Health Institute. July was mainland Spain's joint-hottest month since records began in 1961, tied with July 2022, according to the AEMET national weather agency.

The UK health and safety authority estimates that England saw 2,877 heat-related deaths

across May and June's heatwaves, threatening to topple the historic tally of 2,985 from the summer of 2022. It warned that the toll for 2026 as a whole could be substantially higher as a result of other periods of high heat.

Belgium's provisional tally is even more deadly relative to its small population. According to the Sciensano national public health institute's estimates, the country saw 2,570 excess deaths between June 18 and July 17.

The toll is set to be updated in September to take into account the period from July 25 to August 16, which saw the beginning of the country's worst wildfire in modern history, a spokeswoman said. Analysis of figures from the Netherlands' RIVM institute for public health and the environment puts the number of excess deaths in the country between June 22 and July 5 at 968. — AFP

OPINION

Trial by social media: the Lindsay Clancy case



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist, SQU Hospital

FOR THE past few weeks, psychiatrists have been in the spotlight, and for all the wrong reasons. The Lindsay Clancy trial has been posted on several social media platforms and is gaining public interest beyond the US. The 32-year-old former nurse strangled her three children in January 2023, then jumped from a window, sustaining injuries that left her paralysed. She has pleaded not guilty, and her lawyer argues that she is not criminally responsible because she suffers from postpartum psychosis. Lindsay then sued her psychiatrist for “failing to recognise bipolar disorder with postpartum onset and prescribing several medications.” Members of the public have been commenting on this story, some accusing psychiatrists of being incompetent and conspiring with drug companies to turn mothers into killers. I must declare that I have not examined this patient, nor have I read her medical notes. I am simply writing a reflection on this case as it was published in the media. What concerns me is the impact of this tragic incident on how patients relate to their psychiatrist, and how non-medical professionals would spin this to sell the

products that they claim to treat mental illness without medication. I have already come across videos of people giving their opinion on the case, only to end by promoting their doggy product that ranges from treating severe mental illness without medication to offering detox from psychiatric medication; many of these products are not registered or scientifically proven. I was discussing the above case with a group of colleagues who believed that those blaming the psychiatrist are more likely to be “psychiatric patients who refuse to accept their diagnosis or were detained against their will and never forgiven it.” This means the opinion they share is therefore “far from being neutral.” Also, satisfied patients do not tend to post their feedback on social media. On the other hand, some of the critics of mental health services are not all wrong. We often come across patients with rushed consultations that do not allow patients to give full details of their condition. We also see unjustified changes to medication when a patient demands improvement. This is not the first time a court case has attracted public interest; those of you old enough may recall the OJ Simpson criminal

What concerns me is how an incident can impact the way patients relate to their psychiatrist, and how non-medical professionals would spin this to sell their products

trial, which took place in 1994. Yet the question remains: should the public have a say in court proceedings? As we know, courts derive their authority from public confidence, and confidence requires that people can watch. But watching a trial and conducting one are different things, and social media has collapsed the distance. A jury sits under rules that exist for good reasons; evidence must be admissible, witnesses are cross-examined, and experts are challenged by other experts. But the discussion carried out in different chat groups can twist reality and possibly damage the public trust in mental health providers. As a psychiatrist, I come across people with severe mental illness who refuse to take medication despite the fact that their symptoms are causing them distress or even putting their lives in danger; therefore, biased propaganda can even worsen this situation, and we are likely to see a stable patient relapsing because they stopped medication. On a positive note, the Lindsay Clancy case teaches us a few lessons on how to organise mental health services to prevent similar incidents.

SWISS LIKELY TO VOTE NO TO TOUGHER NEUTRALITY: POLLS

Swiss voters appear set to reject a much-debated proposal to strengthen their country’s traditional neutrality, according to the first opinion polls ahead of a popular vote next month. An opinion poll published by the SSR public broadcaster suggested that 54 per cent of eligible voters oppose the initiative to enshrine a strict definition of Swiss neutrality in the Alpine nation’s constitution. Switzerland’s traditional position is one of well-armed military neutrality, but Russia’s war in Ukraine reopened questions over its non-engagement in foreign conflicts. The initiative, which would among other things bar Switzerland from imposing most economic sanctions, had the support of just 42 per cent of the more than 17,000 people surveyed by the gfs.bern institute, the poll showed. And four per cent said they remained undecided on which way to cast their ballot in the September 27 vote. A separate poll published by the Tamedia group this week meanwhile suggested an even bigger rejection of the initiative, with a full 62 per cent opposed and only 36 per cent in favour. It has, however, received praise from Russia - which has been harshly critical of Switzerland joining the European Union’s sanctions against Moscow.

Concerned over Bern’s decision to back the EU’s economic pressure, the pro-sovereignty Pro Switzerland organisation collected enough signatures to trigger a public vote under the country’s famed direct democracy system on better anchoring neutrality in its constitution. The initiative calls for the constitution to guarantee that Swiss neutrality is “armed and perpetual” and applied “permanently and without exception”. It would prevent Switzerland, whose neutrality traces its roots back to 1516 and has been internationally recognised since 1815, from establishing closer ties with Nato and would rule out any military alliance except if attacked. During a speech to Swiss ambassadors, Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis defended the concept of so-called active neutrality. Neutrality, he was quoted by the Keystone-ATS news agency as saying, “does not mean inaction or withdrawal from the world”, but is instead “an instrument in the service of the country’s freedom, security and independence”. Nearly all major political parties have also come out against the initiative, arguing it would weaken Switzerland’s security and foreign policy flexibility. — AFP

Omanisation should make upskilling mandatory

OMANISATION IS an excellent employment policy. It aims to ensure that citizens benefit directly from the country’s economic growth by increasing their participation in the private sector and preparing young Omanis for productive careers. However, for Omanisation to achieve its full potential, employment must be linked to meaningful training and education. A job on paper, without proper supervision or a structured plan for learning, does little to prepare a young Omani for the future. Some companies employ young Omanis simply to meet their legal quota while failing to give them the skills and experience needed to build a career. The purpose of Omanisation should not be merely to increase the number of Omanis listed on company payrolls. Its purpose should be to create a capable national workforce able to occupy skilled, managerial positions across the economy. There is a clear difference between genuine and nominal employment. In a genuine job, a young Omani is given real responsibilities, practical experience, guidance and an opportunity to develop. In nominal employment, the person is hired mainly so that the company can comply with the law. The employee may receive a basic salary but have no proper duties, no useful training and no realistic prospect of advancement. Such an arrangement is unfair to the young Omani and wasteful for the country. It leaves the employee unprepared for another job if the position ends and won’t develop the skilled workforce Oman needs. It is also demoralising for young Omanis who have been given employment but no clear



Omanisation places Omani citizens at the centre of the country’s economic future.



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

prospects. Companies that employ young Omanis under Omanisation requirements should therefore be obliged to provide relevant training for the jobs in which they are recruited. Training should not be treated as an optional benefit or left entirely to the goodwill of individual employers. It should be a clear legal responsibility connected to the employment itself. Every company recruiting young Omanis should be required by law to submit a detailed training course plan for government approval. The plan should include a precise job description, the employee’s duties, the skills and knowledge to be gained, the duration of the training, the identity of the trainers or supervisors, the practical experience to be provided and the method by which progress will be assessed. It should also explain what standards the employee is expected to reach and what opportunities may be available for further development or promotion. The training plan must be

relevant to the job. A short induction session or a few informal instructions should not be accepted as a proper training programme. The responsibility should apply to both employers and employees. Companies must provide the approved training, assign meaningful work and monitor the progress of their young Omani employees. Young Omanis, in turn, should be obliged to attend the training courses, complete the required work and meet the standards set out in the programme. The success of Omanisation should not be measured only by the number of Omanis employed. Perhaps a new government employment inspectorate could monitor the Omani employees’ progress and offer support and advice as needed to both employers and young Omanis. Inspectors could make regular visits to companies and ask relevant questions of the employers: do Omani employees have clear duties? Are they acquiring useful skills? Are they receiving proper supervision? Are they progressing into positions of greater responsibility? A government-approved training plan would make it more difficult for companies to employ Omanis merely to fill a quota. They would also give young employees a clear understanding of what is expected and what they can expect in return. Young Omanis do not need jobs that exist only on paper. They need genuine opportunities to learn and build lasting careers. Omanisation places Omani citizens at the centre of the country’s economic future. But to make it effective, every obligation to employ an Omani should be matched by an obligation to train that person properly.

Cambridge: ‘Think themselves wise, but are fools’



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WHERE NOW does Cambridge University turn? How can it ever recover the respect its 817 years of quality higher education have earned it? William Shakespeare, scholarly, but not of a university, is well-placed to ask, as in the Twelfth Night, “Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time, in you?” Having failed societal expectations indecently rushing to appoint Jason Arday as its ‘youngest ever black professor,’ to elevate itself within diversity, equality and inclusion, the excruciating ‘woke’ elements of today, we can paraphrase Joseph Heller’s ‘Catch 22,’ take on Shakespeare, for in supporting woke policies, maybe “some are born mediocre, some achieve mediocrity, while others have mediocrity thrust upon them.” Since 1209, this most respected of institutions, now confronted with the consequences of its folly, has found its ramparts threatened, like Jericho, by the clarion call of a public outcry as the consequences of the appointment, ridicule, resignation, and finally, the tragic demise of its “youngest ever black professor”. Even the most ardent calls for ‘reflection,’ in the wake of Arday’s demise, cannot assuage the remorse Cambridge, and the ‘woke establishment,’ like Lady MacBeth, rudely unaware, musing, “Here’s the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand,” as, among much hand-wringing, it remains like her,

unrepentent, with blood on their hands. The reality and manner of Arday’s passing should never appease earlier student concern about his lectures, their learning, and their academic ambitions, as he confused his students, while his student supervision, the one-to-one support that keeps students focused and productive, lacked scholarly aptitude and integrity. Yet, Cambridge ignored their complaints, so must be asked, as in Hamlet, “Oh shame, where is thy blush:” Jason Arday will now appear as a tragic fantasist to rival Walter Mitty, the character drawn from James Thurber’s short story, ‘My World – and Welcome to It,’ in which Mitty imagined himself as a fighter pilot, surgeon, and killer, before dying, bravely, in front of a firing squad. There was no firing squad for Arday, though he sought haven, again as in Hamlet, “the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns,” as his only way out. Trouble looms, as his failings have exposed Cambridge; so enthusiastic were they to achieve primacy in the ‘woke’ universe, they never completed elementary background, scholarly, and employment checks on him before Professor Hillary Cremin went rushing to the media with her gushing pronouncement that “we are so lucky to have you.” She must surely now explain the rationale behind his appointment, and their acceptance of a charlatan in a position of such importance and influence. Was it the piercing black eyes, the intricate dreadlocks, or his beatific complexion? Or was he so indelibly ‘woke,’ and

Since 1209, this most respected of institutions, now confronted with the consequences of its folly, has found its ramparts threatened, like Jericho, by the clarion call, a public outcry as the consequences of the appointment, ridicule, resignation, and finally, the tragic demise of its “youngest ever black professor”

‘ethnically desirable?’ Cambridge’s duty of care to Arday is not diminished by his demise; their failure is more pointed: All’s Well That Ends Well, as Helena says, “Oft expectation fails, and most often, where it promises.” Thus, Cambridge’s, like Romeo’s disappointment at their, “reputation stain’d,” a carbuncle on every thesis, a betrayal of every scholar, an interrogation of every ailment or special need, and the cynical scrutiny of every curriculum vitae, it is not only in academia that Cambridge faces ridicule and disrespect, but throughout academia and society, as in Hamlet, “Use every man after his desert, and who should ‘scape whipping.” Maybe, as an unattributed source has said, “sometimes we need fantasy to survive the reality,” and maybe this was Arday’s justification, but it is millions of student’s scholarly ambitions that have most unfairly suffered, and Shakespeare again proves apt, in Comedy of Errors, “A wretched soul, bruised with adversity, we bid be quiet when we hear it cry, but were we burden’d with like weight of pain, as much, or more, would ourselves complain.” All this from one man’s opus, greedily grasped by an institution with so little integrity as to perfectly deny, or at least mitigate, their role within scholarly ambition. From Richard III, Queen Margaret’s: “Foul shame upon you, you have (all) moved mine.” Maybe that’s just how the hard would see Cambridge University today.

STARS SELL GREECE TO A NEW WAVE OF US TOURISTS

MARINA RAFENBERG

The idyllic beaches of the Greek islands have long been a draw for European holidaymakers, but now a new wave of US tourists is waking up to their charms, driven by stars like Madonna, Katy Perry and Justin Bieber. Madonna celebrated her 68th birthday on Corfu, sharing a whirl of parties and boat trips against the backdrop of the island’s landscape with her 20 million Instagram followers - earning her rapturous thanks from Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. And experts say the huge popularity of Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster “The Odyssey” will only fuel the trend - though holidaymakers will be hoping for an easier trip home than the one endured by Matt Damon’s eponymous hero. While Madonna partied in Corfu, singer Bieber took his family to the Peloponnese. Perry and her partner, Canada’s former prime minister Justin Trudeau, sampled the delights of Mykonos. All of them chronicled their holidays on social media, giving the Greek tourism industry a massive hit of free advertising. “Celebrities are voting for the Greek summer!” public broadcaster ERT said, devoting a report to these stars from across the Atlantic. The newspaper To Vima hailed this “new wave” which “helps raise the country’s international profile”. It cited British singer and actress Rita Ora, who shared her holidays with “her millions of followers” on social media. Paris Tsartas, professor of tourism development at Harokopio University in Athens, said the deluge of celebrity endorsements gave Greece a powerful boost as a summer destination - particularly with the lucrative American market. After a decade of financial woes following the debt crisis of 2009, and the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic, Greece has pumped money into the sector, which accounts for nearly 30 per cent of GDP, according to the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE). Around 1.55 million Americans visited Greece in 2025. They represent the third-largest source of tourism income, behind Germans and Britons, according to SETE, with an average spend per tourist of \$1,300. To answer growing demand, the main US airlines have significantly stepped up services, with American Airlines increasing its total available seat capacity by 30 per cent compared with summer 2025. This year Greece has had its highest-ever number of direct flights, with 103 connections a week between Athens and the United States. Some of the new enthusiasm is driven by the phenomenon of “set-jetting” - people travelling to a destination after seeing it in a movie or TV series. In a study for online travel giant Expedia, 13 per cent of American travellers said they had booked a trip after seeing a destination on screen. — AFP

Three ways AI will change the course of humanity

OVER THE long sweep of history, three forces have driven humanity’s greatest transformations, for good and ill: disease, war, and economic growth. By reducing costs and increasing the availability and productivity of a vast array of goods and services, AI will have a profound impact on all three. History is littered with plagues and pandemics that altered the trajectory of human population growth. The Black Death, for example, killed 75–200 million people across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa between 1346 and 1353. Thanks to technological advances and medical innovations that helped prolong life expectancy and reduce infant mortality, the global population has grown from one billion in 1804 to two billion in 1927 to more than eight billion today. At the same time, however, the advent of effective contraceptives has helped contain population growth. AI promises to accelerate this progress, improving both the quality and quantity of human life through preventive diagnostics, faster drug discovery, and more personalised medical care. In doing so, it could reduce the human and economic costs of non-communicable diseases like cancer and neurodegenerative brain disorders, including Alzheimer’s. It could also enable faster responses to outbreaks of communicable diseases by predicting where viruses are likely to spread and how mutations might unfold. In fact, AI is already being used to combat antimicrobial resistance. Perhaps most notably, AI could drastically reduce health-care costs, which have been largely immune to past technological advances. As a 2022 American Enterprise Institute chart showed, US hospital-service costs rose more than those of all other goods and services over the previous quarter-century. Wars represent the second force that has repeatedly changed the course of human history.



Economic transformations can also bring enormous gains, even as they create disruption and despair.



DAMBISA MOYO
The author is an international economist

Whether or not these grim predictions prove accurate, widespread job displacement could upend the structure of economies and societies. It could also greatly expand the role of the state, as governments face growing pressure to provide income support

An estimated 70-85 million people died during World War II, nearly 30 million of them in the Soviet Union. These losses had far-reaching demographic and economic consequences for the USSR, especially since so many of those killed were working-age young men. More generally, armed conflicts destroy productive capacity, disrupt everyday life, and deter the investments needed to stimulate economic growth. Technological advances have of course made war far more destructive. World War I was the first large-scale mechanised conflict involving mass-produced guns, tanks, and aircraft. WWII, in turn, catalysed a massive military-industrial buildup, pulling the US economy out of the Great Depression and fuelling decades of postwar growth. AI is now ushering in a new era of technology-driven conflict as countries increasingly rely on drones and autonomous weapons. In Ukraine, drones account for 70-80% of battlefield casualties. AI-powered systems are also playing a growing role in the Iran war, from accelerating mine clearing in the Strait of Hormuz to tracking submarines and gathering intelligence. The third major driver of historical change is economic upheaval. In the aftermath of WWI, hyperinflation devastated the German economy, setting the stage for the rise of Nazism. Similarly, the 1929 stock-

market crash — together with 1930s banking panics and the Dust Bowl — plunged millions of Americans into poverty, with encampments of displaced people (“Hoovervilles”) springing up across the United States. But economic transformations can also bring enormous gains, even as they create disruption and despair. The Industrial Revolution unleashed rapid productivity growth, raised living standards, reconfigured societies, and propelled human development to new heights. Much of this was the result of rapid industrialisation and mechanisation, which continued to redefine the relationship between capital and labour well into the 20th century as workers moved from agriculture to manufacturing and then into the services sector. In the US, agriculture’s share of employment fell from more than 40% at the turn of the 20th century to less than 2 per cent today. Early studies suggest that AI will supercharge productivity, particularly in knowledge-based industries, though evidence of its direct contribution to economic growth remains inconclusive. Yet AI’s destructive potential is just as great. Warnings of an AI-driven “jobocalypse” have become increasingly common in recent years, with Silicon Valley venture capitalist Vinod Khosla predicting that AI will be capable of performing 80 per cent of existing jobs by the early 2030s, rendering traditional employment obsolete. Whether or not these grim predictions prove accurate, widespread job displacement could upend the structure of economies and societies. It could also greatly expand the role of the state, as governments face growing pressure to provide income support. To be sure, the AI super cycle is in its early stages. But even now, it seems inevitable that the technology will radically change how we combat disease, fight wars, foster economic growth, and, ultimately, how we understand what sets humanity apart. © Project Syndicate, 2026

SPORTS

FOUR POINTS



Oman's Hamood al Busaidi continued his strong campaign in the Open A section of the Abu Dhabi International Chess Festival.

Al Busaidi stays in contention at Abu Dhabi chess

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Oman national chess team player and Candidate Master Hamood al Busaidi continued his strong campaign in the Open A section of the Abu Dhabi International Chess Festival, collecting four points from his opening six rounds to remain in contention for the leading positions.

Al Busaidi, who has a Fide rating of 1,934, recorded four victories in six rounds to move into 22nd place in the overall standings among 133 players from different countries. His performance rating after six rounds stood at 2,022, highlighting the level he has produced against a competitive international field. The Omani player made a positive start by defeating the UAE's Abdulaziz Aidarous Mera, rated 1,597, in the opening round.

He faced a considerably tougher challenge in the second round against the tournament's top seed, Philippine International Master Richilieu Salcedo III, rated 2,298. Al Busaidi suffered his first defeat of the competition but responded strongly in the following round.

In round three, he returned to winning ways with victory over Russia's Aleksey Chernyshev, rated 1,691, before facing UAE International Master Ibrahim Sultan, rated 2,165, in the fourth round, where he suffered his second defeat.

Al Busaidi once again showed his ability to recover as he produced back-to-back victories in rounds five and six. He defeated the UAE's Ahmed Almheiri Sultan, rated 1,790, before overcoming UAE Woman Fide Master Anoud Eisa Mohamed, rated 1,804, to take his tally to four points.

The results have enabled Al Busaidi, who entered the tournament as the 45th seed, to climb to 22nd position after six rounds and remain within reach of the higher places with three rounds still to play. His next assignment will provide another major test as he faces Azerbaijan GM Mahammad Baghirov, rated 2,253, in the seventh round. The Open A competition is being played over nine rounds as part of the Abu Dhabi International Chess Festival, which runs from August 15 to 24 at the Radisson Blu Hotel & Resort.

Four teams chase Group 1 final spots in Junior League



Al Amerat beat Seeb 3-0 in the group stage of Junior Hockey League 2026.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

THE GROUP 1 semifinals of the 2026 Junior Hockey League will take place at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Sunday, with Qurayat facing Al Bashayer at 6 pm before Seeb meet Al Amerat at 8 pm.

The two winners will advance to the Group 1 final after a preliminary stage dominated by Qurayat, who finished top with a perfect nine points. Al Amerat placed second with six points, Seeb took third with three, while Al Bashayer finished fourth without a point.

The semifinal pairings were confirmed after Friday's final round of group matches, in which Al Amerat recorded a 5-0 victory over Al Bashayer, and Qurayat defeated Seeb 4-1.

Al Amerat began strongly against Al Bashayer and opened the scoring in the 14th minute through Al Abass Sulaiman, whose field goal gave his side a 1-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

They strengthened their grip on the match with two goals in quick succession during the second quarter.

Khazrag Sbit doubled the advantage in the 26th minute before Bader Salim made it 3-0 one minute later, giving Al Amerat a



Al Musannah defeated Masirah 3-0 in Group 2.

commanding lead at half-time.

Moheb Mohammed added the fourth goal in the 43rd minute, while Naif Ibrahim completed the scoring in the 52nd. Al Amerat also maintained their defensive discipline throughout the four quarters to register a second successive clean sheet.

THIRD WIN FOR QURAYAT

In the second match, Qurayat completed the preliminary stage with a third consecutive victory after overcoming Seeb 4-1.

Following a goalless opening quarter, Saad Salim Hamed al Fazari broke the

deadlock with a field goal in the 28th minute, sending Qurayat into half-time with a 1-0 advantage.

Qurayat then took control during the third quarter. Said bin Salim al Fazari converted a penalty corner in the 38th minute before Yaseen bin Hadeed al Alawi struck from open play one minute later to extend the lead to 3-0.

Said al Fazari scored his second goal of the match in the 51st minute to make it 4-0. Seeb continued pushing forward and were rewarded in the 59th minute when Mohammed Abdullah converted a penalty corner, but the late goal could not change the outcome. Qurayat enter the opening semifinal with a perfect record, while Al Bashayer will be aiming to respond after a difficult preliminary campaign.

The second semifinal is a rematch of the group-stage encounter won 3-0 by Al Amerat. Seeb will be seeking a stronger response, while Al Amerat will look to carry the momentum of two consecutive victories into the contest.

In Group 2, Al Suwaiq secured a 3-0 win over Saham, while Al Musannah defeated Masirah by the same scoreline. Both winning teams combined attacking efficiency with clean sheets as the competition continued across the league's different venues.

Oman claim three friendly wins in Dubai camp

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Oman's national basketball team is continuing preparations in Dubai after registering three wins from the opening three friendly matches as part of its build-up to the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers.

The national team has been in Dubai since August 16 as part of their final preparation programme ahead of the first round of the continental pre-qualifiers, with the coaching staff focusing on physical and technical readiness, tactical organisation and greater cohesion among the players.

Under national head coach Mohammed al Owaisi, Oman have so far played three friendly matches during the camp

and emerged victorious in all three.

The national team opened their friendly programme with a 56-52 win over Sharjah Club before edging Maxreem Academy 55-53 in a closely fought second encounter. Oman then maintained their perfect run with a 64-58 victory over JAM Sports Academy.

The friendly matches form a key part of the team's preparations, allowing the coaching staff to assess the players in competitive situations and experiment with different combinations and tactical approaches.

They have also allowed the players to improve their understanding on court and adapt to the demands of closely contested matches ahead of the official qualifiers.



Oman players test their preparations against JAM Sports Academy in Dubai, securing a 64-58 victory in their third friendly match.

FOURTH FRIENDLY ON SUNDAY

Oman will play their fourth friendly match of the Dubai camp on Sunday when they face Maxreem Academy for

a second time.

The encounter will provide another test for the squad and allow Al Owaisi and his technical staff to evaluate the progress made

during the camp, while addressing any technical areas that require further attention before the Asian campaign begins.

The team continues daily training in Dubai, focusing on improving collective performance, maintaining concentration and sharpening the tactics developed in earlier preparation. The Dubai camp follows a domestic training phase in which the coaching staff concentrated on improving the players' physical conditioning and technical abilities while building greater cohesion within the squad.

Oman's external camp is scheduled to conclude on August 24 before the team switches its full focus to the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers First Round.

Oman have been drawn in Group A of the Western

Region alongside hosts UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Nepal.

The group will be played in a single round-robin format in Dubai, with each team playing four matches and the top three progressing to the second round of the pre-qualifiers.

The Group A matches are scheduled from August 26 to 31 as Oman seek to secure one of the three qualifying places and continue their journey towards the FIBA Asia Cup 2029.

With three wins already secured during the preparatory camp, the national team will be aiming to make the most of Sunday's final friendly and the remaining training sessions before turning their attention to the competitive challenge ahead.

FIFA COULD TURN OMAN’S ‘SHAJJA FARIQAK’ INTO GLOBAL AMATEUR FOOTBALL MODEL



Action from the final match between Ittihad Fanja and Shabab Al Miragh.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

WITH more than 17,000 players, coaches and administrative staff, 402 teams from across the Sultanate of Oman and more than 150 referees involved, Oman’s 2026 Amateur League ‘Shajja Fariqak’ has grown into far more than a local football competition. The tournament, which concluded last week with Ittihad Fanja crowned champions, has created a large national platform for amateur football, bringing together players from different communities and giving young footballers, coaches, referees, media teams and volunteers valuable opportunities to gain experience.

The scale of the competition in this edition has also attracted international attention. Dr Belhassen Malouche, Fifa Regional Technical Consultant for North Africa and West Asia, who attended different stages after Fifa had followed reports on the tournament and its large participation. For Oman Football Association (OFA) board member and

chairman of the tournament’s main organising committee, Abdullah bin Ali al Rashdi, the Fifa interest could open a new chapter for the competition.

“Fifa’s visit is a clear indication that the tournament has attracted international attention. We have been communicating with Fifa and providing reports about the Amateur League, and the large number of participants was one of the main factors that drew their attention,” Al Rashdi told *Oman Observer*.

He added that Fifa’s interest goes beyond simply observing the tournament, with discussions and a workshop held in Oman focusing on the development of amateur leagues worldwide. “Today, we are competing with other countries to develop a model that could become an example for amateur football globally. We believe ‘Shajja Fariqak’ has the potential to reach this level with further development and support,” he said.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL PLATFORM
The tournament’s greatest strength is its ability to reach players who may otherwise remain outside the organised football system. Al Rashdi believes the

competition has become an important pathway for discovering young talent, improving the technical level of amateur teams and developing Omani coaches, referees and administrators. “The tournament is not only about winning the title. It gives us an opportunity to identify talented players who can later move into clubs and national teams. It also provides coaches and referees with valuable practical experience,” he said.

The OFA has supported the competition by providing training courses for coaches and officials at different levels. More than 150 referees participated throughout the three stages, giving young and newly registered referees an opportunity to officiate competitive matches and apply the laws of the game.

For Al Rashdi, this development of human resources could be one of the areas where Fifa can provide further support. The next step, according to those involved in the tournament, should be to transform ‘Shajja Fariqak’ from a successful national amateur competition into a structured amateur football development programme.



“
Fifa’s visit is a clear indication that the tournament has attracted international attention. We have been communicating with Fifa and providing reports about the Amateur League, and the large number of participants was one of the main factors that drew their attention.
ABDULLAH BIN ALI AL RASHDI
Organising Committee chief



ADIL AL HADABI
Ittihad Fanja assistant coach



AHMED AL SULAIMI
Media Committee chairman



MOHAMMED MOOSA
Shabab Al Miragh coach

Fifa could support the tournament in several key areas including talent identification and player pathways, coach and referee development, technical and performance analysis, digital transformation, grassroots football development and international exchange.

MORE THAN FOOTBALL
The tournament has also developed into a social and community platform. The competition provides young people with opportunities to participate in sport, volunteering, media production and community activities. Local businesses have also benefited, with young entrepreneurs opening food and commercial outlets around venues during the tournament.

Ahmed bin Said al Sulaimi, chairman of the tournament’s media committee, said the competition created a significant media movement that extended well beyond the football pitch. “‘Shajja Fariqak’ was not simply a football competition. It created an exceptional media movement, with cameras, programmes, interviews and social media coverage bringing the tournament closer to the public,” he said.

He believes one of the tournament’s important achievements has been the development of young media professionals. “Many young people gained practical experience in photography, content production, journalism and social media management. Some of these talents are now better prepared to work on larger sporting events in the future,” Al Sulaimi said.

YOUNG PLAYERS
Ittihad Fanja, the 2026 champions, also believe the tournament can play an important role in developing players. Assistant coach Adil bin Khalifa al Hadabi said the competition provides young footballers with an opportunity to compete, gain experience and attract the attention of clubs. “Our journey was difficult because of the strong competition at every stage. The players became more confident and more united with every match, and the support of the fans, families, club management and technical staff played an important role in our success,” he said.

He added that several young players from the champions have the potential to progress into club and national-team football if they receive the right opportunities.

DEVELOPING THE NEXT VERSION
Mohammed bin Moosa al Siyabi, coach of runners-up Shabab Al Miragh, believes the tournament has already demonstrated its value but can become even stronger. “We had managed to win the first title in 2019 and unfortunately we could not win this edition title after six years from the previous accomplishment. Our main focus is to get the right place for our young players in the national teams and clubs after their top efforts in the event,” he said.

He suggested that improving the recovery time between matches and creating stronger links between the competition and professional clubs would ensure talented players are not overlooked. The media committee has also proposed a number of improvements, including a unified media identity, a dedicated tournament studio, stronger sponsorship packages, fan activities, digital competitions, a central player database, live statistics, improved streaming and performance analysis. The objective should be to turn every match into a complete ‘Shajja Fariqak experience’ involving football, entertainment, media, technology and community engagement.

A POSSIBLE FIFA CASE STUDY
The combination of scale, geographical reach, community involvement and player development makes Oman’s amateur league an interesting project for Fifa. For Oman, the opportunity is equally important.

A competition involving more than 17,000 participants can become a powerful grassroots football network if its players, coaches, referees and volunteers continue to receive structured development.

GARRICK KEEPS CALM DESPITE MAN UTD MISERY

SAGE BEATEN IN FIRST GAME AS PALACE BOSS



Hull City's Nobel Mendy celebrates scoring their second goal against Manchester United at MKM Stadium, Hull, Britain. — Reuters



Hull City's Nobel Mendy scores their second goal against Manchester United at MKM Stadium, Hull, Britain. — Reuters



Everton's Thierno Barry celebrates scoring their second goal against Crystal Palace. — Reuters

MICHAEL CARRICK insisted he would not blast his Manchester United's flops despite a dismal 2-0 defeat at Hull in their opening game of the Premier League season, while Crystal Palace boss Pierre Sage suffered a debut loss against Everton.

Carrick's side were rocked by first half goals from Semi Ajayi and Nobel Mendy at the MKM Stadium on Saturday.

Hull, who are back in the Premier League for the first time since 2017, were without 10 players due to injury but still put woeful United to the sword with a vibrant display.

It was a chastening start for United, who are expected to mount a title challenge after finishing third last term.

There was scant evidence that United are capable of going toe to toe with champions Arsenal.

But the stoic Carrick was determined to keep his composure to avoid the kind of emotional outburst that doomed his sacked predecessor Ruben Amorim last season.

"We came here to win so to not take

anything away is hugely disappointing. It is not a nice feeling but it is not going to change our direction as a team or a club," Carrick said.

"It can happen, we can be better. There are issues playing against different systems and we have to find answers to that.

"You have to carry on as normal. We just don't all have to shout and scream and create some chaos. Calmness doesn't mean there is not emotion."

Sage, Palace's new French manager, endured a miserable start in a 2-0 loss at Everton.

Under Sage's predecessor Oliver Glasner, the Eagles won the FA Cup in 2025 and the Uefa Conference League last season.

But Glasner left for Nottingham Forest in the close-season, with Sage hired after leading Lens to a second-place finish in Ligue 1 and a French Cup triumph last season.

WOE FOR GLASNER

Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall gave Everton the lead against the run of play in the 42nd minute, dispossessing Daniel Munoz before lashing a powerful shot into the far corner of Dean Henderson's net.

Thierno Barry added to Sage's misery with a bullet header from Iliman Ndiaye's 53rd minute cross.

Glasner's first game as Forest boss ended in a 1-0 defeat against Leeds at the City Ground.

Anton Stach's 88th minute free-kick squirmed past Forest keeper Matz Sels to seal the points for Leeds, who face Glasner's men again in the League Cup second round on Tuesday.

Ipswich marked their return to the Premier League with a dramatic 2-1 win against Sunderland at Portman Road.

Emersonn put Ipswich ahead with a debut goal in the 24th minute, the Brazilian forward slotting home after Julio Enciso punished a mistake by Sunderland's Luke O'Nien.

Nilson Angulo equalised in the 39th minute with a fine free-kick that cannoned in off the crossbar. But Jack Clarke seized on Omar Alderete's wayward pass and curled home in the 90th minute, giving Gary O'Neil a victory in his first game as Ipswich boss after replacing Kieran McKenna.

Big-spending Tottenham make the short trip to west London to face Brentford in Saturday's late game.

On Sunday, Manchester City start life without Pep Guardiola when new boss Enzo Maresca takes charge for the first time against Bournemouth.

Liverpool, who parted with Egypt forward Mohamed Salah in the close-season, are also under new management as former Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola prepares for his first match against Newcastle.

Europa League winners Aston Villa travel to Brighton with a new-look side after selling several of their star players.

Arsenal opened their title defence with an emphatic 3-0 win at home to promoted Coventry on Friday. — AFP

English Premier League results on Saturday:

Hull 2 (Ajayi 17, Mendy 38) Manchester United 0

Everton 2 (Dewsbury-Hall 42, Barry 53) Crystal Palace 0

Ipswich 2 (Emersonn 24, Clarke 90) Sunderland 1 (Angulo 39)

Nottingham Forest 0 Leeds 1 (Stach 88)

Played Friday

Arsenal 3 (Havertz 15, Saka 23, Odegaard 49) Coventry 0

The Kia Tasman

Explore Khareef with Kia's pick-up



Movement that inspires





X-Trek & Rock Mode



Ground View Monitor



3,500 Kg Trailer Capacity

Built for every path, designed for every personality. The Kia Tasman adapts to your journey, no matter where it takes you.

- 277 HP@ 5800 rpm
- 4WD with Electronic Differential Locking
- Double Cabin

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKE



The efforts are expected to open up broader opportunities for future technologies and solutions that address the diverse needs of businesses across Oman

OTECH, REMEDY PARTNER TO LAUNCH AI-POWERED PLATFORM

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Otech, the technology arm of Omantel, has announced a collaboration with Remedy, a startup that emerged from Omantel Innovation Labs and is part of its investment portfolio, to launch an advanced enterprise platform designed to support strategic planning and enterprise performance management using artificial intelligence technologies.

The collaboration and the launch of the RISE Talent enterprise platform form part of Otech's commitment to adopting future technologies, strengthening Oman's national technology innovation ecosystem, supporting local content and enabling startups to develop their innovations into enterprise solutions. These efforts are expected to open up broader opportunities for future technologies and solutions that address the diverse needs of businesses across the Sultanate of Oman, while creating new avenues for growth in the digital economy.

Otech will collaborate on the development and deployment of RISE Talent within its enterprise environment to leverage the platform's advanced capabilities in enterprise performance and human capital management.

These include aligning strategic objectives through Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) and cascading them across different organisational levels, as well as talent management and the employee experience through competency framework management, recruitment, learning and development, performance management and career pathways.

Al Roofoof expands Arabica coffee cultivation in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 22

AL Roofoof is expanding coffee cultivation at Hairiti in Dhofar Governorate from a research base that dates to 1980. Its nursery has provided around 25,000 seedlings since the current investment phase began in June 2024, Project Director Eng Bakhit bin Mahad Tabook said.

In an exclusive interview at the farm, Tabook said the project deliberately began with the nursery because expansion depends first on reliable planting material.

“The nursery is the foundation of the cultivation”, he said. “From it, seedlings can be planted on the farm itself or supplied to farmers and interested growers”.

The project is still in an establishment phase and has not announced commercial coffee volumes. The nursery figure shows planting capacity; it does not, by itself, quantify commercial production or farm-level returns.

Tabook said Hairiti is working with five Arabica coffee varieties — Dawa'iri, Adaini, Khawlani, Hammadi and Matari — and is studying three Brazilian Arabica varieties.

He said the company is also using genetic testing in France to examine varietal identity, although final documentation has not been released.

The current investment builds on earlier government research at Qairoon Hairiti. Ministry records say 148 Adaini and Dawa'iri seedlings were brought from Yemen in 1980, with subsequent trials examining varietal performance, fertiliser, shade and elevation.

In October 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources launched a separate programme to expand Arabica



The Al Roofoof project is still in an establishment phase and has not announced commercial coffee volumes.

Project director Bakhit bin Mahad Tabook said that Hairiti has provided around 25,000 nursery seedlings since 2024 while preparing for a wider cultivation and market role.

coffee cultivation among farmers in Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat. The programme builds on earlier cultivation research at Qairoon Hairiti, including the successful adaptation of Adaini and Dawa'iri.

Tabook said Al Roofoof wants its role eventually to extend beyond nursery production and its own planting. He said the company is prepared to purchase Arabica coffee grown by Omani farmers in Dhofar once meaningful crops become available.

“The market should be in the farmer's mind from the beginning”, he said, noting that coffee requires several years of

care before a grower can expect a return.

No purchase price, grading system or detailed buying terms have been announced. The commitment therefore represents a proposed future route to market rather than a fully defined purchasing arrangement.

For Hairiti, the next phase is to turn planting capacity into field performance. Tabook's confidence is rooted in the research record, but the scale of the commercial opportunity will ultimately depend on mature-tree yields, quality, production costs and the returns growers can secure.

226.6 in credit limits approved by Credit Oman in H1 2026

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Statistics released by Credit Oman show that the total value of approved credit limits for domestic sales and exports reached approximately RO 226.6 million by the end of the first half of the current year, compared to RO 253.1 million during the same period last year.

In terms of distribution, the value of approved credit limits for exports stood at approximately RO 138.5 million, compared to RO 148.7 million last year, while the value of approved credit limits for domestic sales reached approximately RO 88.1 million, compared to RO 104.4 million.

As for the total value of insured sales for exports and domestic sales combined, it reached approximately RO 191.4 million by the end of the first half of the current year, compared to RO 211.4 million during the same period last year, a decline of 9%.

Insured export sales recorded approximately RO 100.9 million, compared to RO 118.1 million last year, a decrease of 15%. The value of insured domestic sales reached approximately RO 90.5 million, compared to RO 93.3 million, marking a slight decline of 3%.

The value of approved credit limits for exports stood at approximately RO 138.5 million, compared to RO 148.7 million last year.



Regarding the distribution of approved credit limits and insured sales by sector, the manufacturing sector led the results during the first half of the current year, with approved credit limits valued at RO 208.3 million, representing 92% of the total approved credit limits, while insured sales reached approximately RO 171.9 million, or 90% of total sales.

The wholesale and retail trade; and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles sector came in second

place, with approved credit limits valued at RO 13 million, representing 6% and total insured sales of approximately RO 11.3 million, representing 6% of the total. The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector ranked third, with approved credit limits of approximately RO 3.1 million, representing 1%, while insured sales reached approximately RO 6.2 million, representing 3% of total insured sales for exports and domestic sales.

The remaining sectors accounted

for limited shares, with approved credit limits for the mining and quarrying sector at approximately RO 988,000, the transportation and storage sector at approximately RO 871,500 and the construction sector at approximately RO 259,600. In addition, the administrative and support service activities, financial and insurance activities; and accommodation and food service activities sectors collectively recorded shares not exceeding 1% of total approved credit limits.

Credit Oman continues to provide its diverse insurance services and solutions aimed at enabling Omani exporters to execute their deals with greater confidence, by offering effective protection against non-payment risks associated with financial collections or buyer default. The role of these services is not limited to protection alone, but extends to supporting business continuity and encouraging exporters and manufacturers to pursue expansion, as having appropriate insurance coverage gives companies greater latitude to make well-considered business decisions whether in entering new markets or growing their existing sales volumes.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKE



SHELL OMAN JOINS V-POWER GAMES IN BUDAPEST

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) participated in the global Shell V-Power Games, held in Budapest from July 23 to 27. The programme brought together participants and content creators from markets around the world for an immersive experience focused on the performance, precision and technical expertise behind Shell V-Power, alongside Shell’s longstanding partnership with Scuderia Ferrari HP.

Through interactive activities and trackside experiences, the programme brought the Shell V-Power “Feel the Fuel” platform to life across the themes of connection, anticipation, precision, performance and thrill. Participants attended the opening ceremony and took part in the Shell V-Power Games.

As part of Shell Oman’s participation, Omani content creators Mohammed al Araiimi and Enaam al Ruwaidhi attended the programme and shared selected highlights with audiences in Oman. Their coverage offered a local perspective on the global experience and brought followers closer to the performance proposition and technical expertise behind Shell V-Power.

Commenting on the experience, Enaam al Ruwaidhi said, “The Shell V-Power Games offered an engaging way to experience the performance and precision behind the brand. Sharing moments from Budapest enabled me to bring audiences in Oman closer to the programme and the Shell V-Power story”.

Mohammed al Araiimi added, “The programme provided valuable insight into the technology and technical collaboration supporting Shell V-Power. Visiting the Shell Track Lab and experiencing the wider race weekend demonstrated the level of expertise and attention to detail that contribute to performance on the track”.

Through its participation in the Shell V-Power Games, Shell Oman connected audiences in Oman with a global brand experience that highlighted the expertise, collaboration and performance principles behind Shell V-Power.

MSX TRADING VALUE RISES 2.4 PER CENT TO 252.1 MILLION

MUSCAT: Trading value on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose 2.4 per cent last week to RO 252.1 million, compared with RO 246.1 million in the previous week, as investors diversified their portfolios ahead of expected dividend distributions by several companies in the coming weeks.

The exchange recorded gains across several indicators, with the number of executed transactions increasing 2.2% to more than 42,000. The market value of listed securities also rose by RO 140.3 million during the week to reach RO 38.33 billion.

The MSX main index gained 14 points to close at 7,522 points. Among sectoral indices, the



financial sector recorded the strongest gain, rising 93 points to 13,248 points, supported by gains in bank stocks and several investment companies. The services sector advanced eight points, driven by gains in OQ Gas Networks, Al Jazeera Services, OQ Exploration and Production, Abraj Energy Services and other companies. The

Sharia index gained three points. In contrast, the industrial sector index fell by more than 100 points, weighed down by declines in several industrial stocks, including Salalah Mills, Galfar Engineering and Contracting, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, Al Maha Ceramics, OQ Basic Industries and Voltamp Energy.

OQ Basic Industries was the most actively traded company during the week, with trading value reaching RO 47.5 million, accounting for around 19 per cent of total trading activity. The company recently announced plans to distribute performance-linked cash dividends estimated at 2.6 baisas per share, following strong financial results in the first half of the year. — ONA

Chery Tiggo 9 PHEV remains Oman’s top SUV

ACROSS Oman, the Chery Tiggo 9 PHEV continues to set a benchmark in the flagship SUV segment, blending an impressive 423 HP hybrid powertrain with a combined driving range of up to 1,050 km on a full tank and full charge under ideal driving conditions. Guided by Chery’s “Conquer with You, Guard for Love” philosophy, it delivers dynamic performance, advanced technology and exceptional comfort designed to meet the needs of modern families.

The Tiggo 9 PHEV is not just about numbers on a spec sheet — it is about giving families in Oman a flagship SUV that feels effortless on the highway and refined in the city.

Parked next to any SUV in its class, the Tiggo 9 PHEV is easy to pick out. A bold octagonal front grille and 20-inch multi-spoke alloy wheels give it a confident stance, while the overall design has been shaped to hold up across Oman’s varied terrain, from coastal highways to mountain routes.

The cabin carries that same intent inside. A 15.6-inch 2.5K HD centre touchscreen puts connectivity and controls within easy reach and premium 3D-stitched seating is finished with long journeys in mind. Together, they turn the interior into a spacious, tech-forward space that suits a school run just as well as a cross-country drive, keeping the whole family comfortable along the way.

The performance behind the Tiggo 9 PHEV comes from a 1.5T high-performance engine working alongside two electric motors and a Dedicated Hybrid Transmission (3DHT). Combined, they produce



The Tiggo 9 PHEV can travel up to 1,050 km on a combined charge and tank, which means families can cover long highway stretches with far fewer stops than a comparable SUV would require.

423 HP and 580 Nm of torque, yet the SUV still returns just 1.9 L/100 km on the WLTC cycle — an efficiency figure that is difficult to match at this level of output.

That efficiency is also what makes the range possible. Running on its Super Hybrid DHT system, the Tiggo 9 PHEV can travel up to 1,050 km on a combined charge and tank, which

in practice means families can cover long highway stretches with far fewer stops than a comparable SUV would require.

With its blend of craftsmanship, technology and efficiency, the Tiggo 9 PHEV keeps setting the standard for what a flagship SUV can offer — making every journey across Oman safer, greener and more enjoyable.

US hits Canadian goods with 50 per cent tariffs after trade talks fail

WASHINGTON/OTTAWA: The US imposed 50% tariffs on some Canadian goods on Saturday after the two longstanding allies failed to reach a trade deal, with each side accusing the other of derailing days of talks.

The tariffs that came into effect just after midnight (04:00 GMT) on some \$20 billion of Canadian goods — things like wooden ice hockey sticks that are rarely used anymore — are far from an economic game-changer for the largest US trading partner after Mexico. That represents just over 5% of Canada’s exports to the US.

But the new tariffs mark an increase in tensions between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Mark Carney; and



Carney said he had suspended trade negotiations and Canada would retaliate “dollar for dollar” on the new tariffs.

will likely make broader talks to renew the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement more difficult.

Carney said he had suspended trade negotiations and Canada would retaliate “dollar for dollar” on the new tariffs.

“I have decided to suspend trade negotiations with the US and have directed Canada’s negotiators to return to Ottawa”, Carney said in a statement.

“They (negotiators) have worked hard, in good faith, to defend the interests of Canadians throughout these negotiations up until the very last minute”, he said.

“However, last-minute changes in the US proposed terms were unfair, uneconomic and called

into question the reliability of any deal”.

Carney, the only person to ever run the central banks of two major economies, was elected last year on promises to stand up to Trump and remains broadly popular. Polls show most Canadians oppose making any concessions to Trump.

Hours earlier, the two sides had seemed close to an agreement that sources said would have lowered tariffs on steel, aluminium and autos and potentially brought American alcohol back to Canadian liquor stores. “Tonight, Canada declined to finalise the trade deal under the terms agreed earlier this week”, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said during a White House briefing. — Reuters

SHORTTAKE



The total length of single-lane roads reached 41,478 kilometres, while dual-lane roads amounted to 4,182 kilometres

TOTAL LENGTH OF ROADS IN OMAN EXCEEDS 45,000 KM

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

The road network in the Sultanate of Oman has continued its expansion over the past five years, with the total length of paved roads rising from 40,546 kilometres in 2021 to 45,659 kilometres by the end of 2025, reflecting the progressive development of the road infrastructure.

Data from the Statistical Yearbook 2026, issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, indicated that the total length of single-lane roads reached 41,478 kilometres, while dual-lane roads amounted to 4,182 kilometres. The total length of asphalted roads stood at 44,079 kilometres by the end of 2025.

In a separate context, statistics revealed that the total number of new and renewed vehicle driving licences in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of 2025 reached approximately 527,830, compared to 500,738 licences in 2024 and 338,990 licences in 2021.

The data showed that new vehicle driving licences numbered 136,491, against 391,339 renewed licences. The total number of driving licences issued to Omani nationals, both new and renewed, reached 227,718, compared to 300,112 licences issued to expatriates. — ONA

Oman tourism firms face Oct compliance deadline

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

HOTELS, restaurants, cafes and other tourism

establishments in Oman face an October deadline to bring their operations into compliance with a new regulatory framework governing the sector.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism issued Ministerial Decision 1152/2/1/141/2026 implementing the Executive Regulation of the Tourism Law, pursuant to Royal Decree 69/2023. The regulation came into force on April 17, 2026, replacing the previous regulations, with existing licensed establishments given six months to comply, effectively setting a deadline in October.

A key feature of the new rules is a more structured classification system for tourism and hospitality establishments. According to a legal commentary published by well-known law firm Trowers & Hamlins, hotels are classified according to the standard one- to five-star system, while hotel apartments are divided into “luxury” and “standard” categories. Other accommodation establishments have designated classifications, with rest houses assigned one star and lodges classified as “standard”. Establishments may apply for reclassification at any time.

The regulations also significantly widen the scope of tourism classification for restaurants and cafes, the law firm explained. They are automatically deemed tourist establishments if they are



A key feature of the new rules is a more structured classification system for tourism and hospitality establishments.

located in tourist areas or sites, situated on government tourist land, operating within a hotel establishment, or managed under a franchise agreement.

The franchise provision is particularly broad, applying regardless of where the restaurant or cafe is located. Thus, a food and beverage business operating under a franchise agreement is automatically subject to the tourism classification regime.

Classified restaurants and cafes must obtain a tourism classification certificate before commencing operations. The certificate is valid for three years and renewable for

successive three-year periods, with a fee of RO 200 (\$520) per period. Applications for renewal must be submitted at least 60 days before expiry, while operating without a certificate can attract a RO 500 fine.

The regulations also impose significant financial obligations on tourist and hotel establishments. Operators must collect a 4 per cent tourism fee on all facilities, which is remitted to the Ministry on a quarterly basis together with auditor-certified statements.

In addition, an 8 per cent service charge is levied on services provided and must

be distributed directly to employees, with operators required to submit a detailed statement to the Ministry. Failure to remit tourism fees for five consecutive months can lead to licence revocation, while failure to distribute the service charge attracts a fine of RO 1,000-3,000, doubled for repeat violations.

The regulations further require establishments to appoint a responsible manager, prominently display their licence and classification; and maintain electronic links with the Ministry and relevant authorities, Trowers & Hamlins added in its explainer.

Food, transport costs drive Oman’s July inflation to 3.2pc

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 22

The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman reached 3.2 per cent during July 2026 compared to the corresponding month of 2025, while the average inflation rate for the period from January to July of the current year stood at 2.9 per cent.

Data from the Consumer Price Index issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information showed that the Food and Beverages group recorded the highest year-on-year increase among the major groups, rising by 7.3 per cent, followed by the Transport group with 6.5 per cent, then the Miscellaneous Goods and



Al Dhahirah Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate across the Sultanate of Oman during July 2026, at 4.4 per cent.

Services group with 5.3 per cent, the Restaurants and Hotels group with 3.6 per cent and the Furniture, Household Equipment and Routine Household Maintenance group with 3.1 per cent. Prices for the Education group rose by 2.2 per cent, Health by 1.7 per cent; and the Culture and Recreation group by 0.4 per cent.

Meanwhile, prices for the Communications, Tobacco and Clothing and Footwear groups remained unchanged compared to July of the previous year, while the Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas and Other Fuels group recorded a decline of 0.6 per cent.

At the governorate level, Al Dhahirah Governorate recorded

the highest inflation rate across the Sultanate of Oman during July 2026, at 4.4 per cent, followed by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate at 3.7 per cent, then Muscat Governorate and Al Wusta Governorate at 3.4 per cent each, followed by Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and Musandam Governorate at 3.0 per cent each; and Al Buraimi Governorate at 2.8 per cent.

The inflation rate stood at 2.5 per cent in both Al Batinah North Governorate and Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, and 2.4 per cent in Al Batinah South Governorate, while Dhofar Governorate recorded the lowest inflation rate among the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, at 2.1 per cent. — ONA

SOCIAL MEDIA

TikTok agrees settlement over child privacy



TikTok and its Chinese parent company ByteDance on Friday agreed to a \$400-million settlement to resolve the US Justice Department’s allegations the short-video app violated children’s online privacy. The Justice Department sued TikTok and ByteDance in 2024 for allegedly failing to protect children’s privacy and illegally collecting their information. — Reuters

MARITIME HUB

Korean ship to test Arctic shipping route



A South Korean container ship sets sail on Saturday for Europe via the Arctic in the nation’s first commercial voyage on the route to test its viability, with the hope of turning the southeastern port of Busan into a global maritime hub. The PanStar Acro will sail north, hugging eastern Russia’s Kamchatka peninsula, cross the Bering Sea before returning on a journey expected to take 40 to 45 days. — Reuters

AUTOMAKERS

Tesla, others begin vehicle recall in China



Tesla and eight other automakers said on Friday they will recall a total of about 4.3 million vehicles in China over concerns that doors may be difficult to open in an emergency, marking the country’s largest automotive recall. The recall remedies range from software updates to warning labels and improved markings around door handles. — Reuters

OPINION

Turning tourism assets into national economic value



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

WITH ITS vision towards 2040, Oman has identified sustainable growth through tourism as a largely untapped sector. The impact of the sector cannot be quantified by only counting the number of visitors, constructed hotel rooms, or tourism projects. One should ask the question, how much of every Rial Omani spent by a tourist stays in the Omani economy?

That is where Local Content comes in. In the context of tourism, Local Content would include maximising economic value retained in Oman through Omani employment, locally produced goods and services, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), local suppliers, cultural products, transportation, food, agriculture and community-based tourism.

Let us take an international tourist who arrived in Oman. The tourist could check in to a hotel, dine at various restaurants, hire a local tour guide, pick a transportation method of their choice, purchase local products, visit historical sites and tour Nizwa, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Sur, Musandam and Salalah. There are many economic activity touch points along this entire travel route.

The endeavour should ultimately be to create a tourism value chain in which a larger part of the tourism spending benefits the Omani businesses and the Omani community.

An example of how hotels and resorts can strengthen their business would be if they bought more food, furniture, uniforms

and maintenance and transport services from Omani suppliers. Tourism operators have the opportunity to work together with Omani guides and photographers as well as entrepreneurs and small businesses. Restaurants have the opportunity to procure more locally sourced agricultural and fisheries products. Likewise, tourism destinations can offer more opportunities to artisans and producers of traditional Omani handicrafts.

This would have a positive multiplier effect. Tourism spending does not end at the hotel or the tourism operator, it supports farmers and fishermen; and the whole supply chain including SMEs and craftspeople.

Local Content can also support tourism opportunities in the various governorates of Oman. Oman has many tourism assets such as beaches, heritage villages, wadis; and coastal, desert and mountain tourism. Tourism development can create economic opportunities in the many areas outside the major cities of Oman. Community-based tourism is essential. Local families and entrepreneurs can open guesthouses and provide tourism experiences, traditional food services and adventure and cultural tour activities.

An important aspect is Omani employment and skill development. Tourism provides an opportunity to young Omanis in the hospitality and destination management fields and in digital marketing and tour operations. However, it is important to provide opportunities beyond employment

Tourism operators have the opportunity to work together with Omani guides and photographers as well as entrepreneurs and small businesses.

to build a career and develop Omanis in supervisory, management and entrepreneurial roles.

Oman has the option to reinforce its current strategy by framing measurable Tourism Local Content indicators. Large hotels and tourism development and operational sectors can report on inventory sourced from Omani firms, spending on small and medium enterprises, employment of Omani citizens, sourcing food locally, developing the workforce and retaining expenditure within the local community.

Policymakers would then have the means to ascertain not only the growth of the tourism sector, but the national economic value that this growth creates.

Oman's next phase of its tourism growth must combine investment, the growth of visitors and the development of destinations alongside a clear Local Content strategy. From the outset, large tourism development projects must detail Local Content strategies to include objectives pertaining to local procurement, small and medium enterprises, employment, skills development and benefits to the local community. Oman is rich in its natural beauty, cultural heritage and a strong tradition of hospitality. What is important now is that this nation turns its tourism potential into real sustainable economic value. Instead of only wondering, "How many tourists visited Oman?" we ought to ask, "How much economic value did the tourism of Oman create for its businesses and its people and communities?"

HARNESSING THE SUN TO KEEP OMAN COOL

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

For Oman, some of the country's greatest renewable-energy potential arrives at the same time as one of its biggest electricity demands. During the hottest months, air conditioning becomes essential across homes, offices, businesses and industrial facilities, while the sun is at its strongest. This creates an opportunity to use solar energy directly for cooling.

Cooling is a major contributor to Oman's electricity demand. The International Energy Agency has identified air conditioning as an important driver of summer peaks, with peak electricity demand rising from 6,060 megawatts in 2015 to 7,081 MW in 2021. As temperatures continue to place pressure on the power system, managing cooling demand will become increasingly important.

Solar-powered cooling can take several forms. Photovoltaic panels can supply electricity to conventional air-conditioning systems, while hybrid systems can combine solar power with the grid. Solar thermal technologies can also use heat from the sun to drive cooling processes.

The concept is not new in Oman. The Observer reported in 2022 on an Omani researcher who developed a solar-powered thermal air-conditioning system, demonstrating that local research has already explored the potential.

What makes the subject particularly relevant now is the rapid development of Oman's renewable-energy sector. Large solar and wind projects are being developed to increase clean electricity generation and support new industries. This raises a broader question about how renewable electricity can be integrated into everyday energy consumption.

Cooling is an obvious candidate. Solar generation and cooling demand naturally complement each other during the day. When solar output is high, buildings are often also experiencing strong cooling requirements. Using solar electricity for air conditioning can therefore help reduce the amount of electricity required from conventional generation.

For households and smaller businesses, rooftop solar could provide part of the electricity required for cooling.

Larger commercial buildings, hotels, shopping centres and industrial facilities could potentially combine larger solar installations with efficient cooling systems and energy-management technologies.

The opportunity extends beyond installing solar panels. Buildings themselves can be made less dependent on air conditioning through better insulation, external shading, reflective materials, efficient windows and improved building design. Reducing the amount of heat entering a building means less electricity is needed to remove it.

Banks in Oman urged to prioritise customer service

OMAN'S BANKING transformation can increasingly be measured in transactions rather than intentions.

Central Bank of Oman data shows that OmanNet processed almost 597 million transactions in 2025, while the Mobile Payment Clearing and Switching System handled more than 339 million. On June 16, 2026, the CBO announced zero charges on local digital transfers for retail customers and small and medium enterprises under reforms to national payment-system fees.

The direction is clear. Routine banking is moving rapidly from the counter to the screen.

That is a gain for customers as much as for banks. Digital services save journeys, reduce transaction costs and allow many financial tasks to be completed in seconds. But their success also raises the next question for Oman's banking sector: if transfers, payments and account management increasingly become standard digital functions, what distinguishes one bank from another when the customer actually needs help?

This is not an argument for returning to a branch-heavy banking model. Banks have valid reasons to reduce branch costs as customers migrate online. Some transactions also require time because of customer verification, fraud prevention, anti-money laundering controls and other safeguards.

A bank should therefore not be judged simply by how quickly it moves a queue. The more meaningful test is whether it solves the customer's problem.

As simple transactions migrate online, customers who still need a person are increasingly likely to arrive with cases that an application cannot resolve: an account restriction, disputed transaction, financing question, documentation requirement or a digital process that has reached its limit.

There are also customers who



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics dept at Observer

Routine banking is moving rapidly from the counter to the screen

remain less comfortable with digital banking, including some older people and those with limited digital skills. Their need for human assistance does not disappear because most transactions have moved online.

Banks measure their own efficiency extensively – capital, liquidity, profitability, operating costs, credit quality and transaction volumes. Yet one cost created by a banking transaction remains far less visible: the customer's time.

For an employee, hours spent resolving a banking problem can mean time away from work. For a small business owner, repeated visits carry an opportunity cost. For someone travelling from another wilayat, the cost may include transport and much of a working day.

A service can therefore carry no explicit fee and still impose a real economic cost.

The solution is not an arbitrary stopwatch. A complicated financing matter cannot reasonably be compared with a simple counter transaction and speed should never come at the expense of security.

Was the problem resolved at the first appropriate point of contact? Did the customer have to return because requirements were not explained clearly? Was the case repeatedly transferred between employees? When a digital process failed, was there an accessible route to someone capable of resolving it?

Oman already has a regulatory foundation for this. The CBO's Financial Consumer Protection Regulatory Framework requires licensed institutions to maintain complaint-handling systems and calls for complaints to be addressed effectively, promptly and fairly. The CBO also has a Financial Conduct and Consumer Protection Department and formal channels for customer complaints.

An IMF review of CBO transparency published in 2025 found that the central bank was analysing complaint information

and developing periodic statistical reporting. It recommended greater public disclosure of consumer-protection outcomes and suggested consideration of a dedicated consumer-protection report.

That recommendation deserves renewed attention as digital banking accelerates.

International experience offers useful guidance. Britain's Financial Conduct Authority increasingly focuses on customer outcomes rather than processes alone. In July 2026, it emphasised the need for firms to turn customer experience into measurable indicators and use them to identify where consumers encounter difficulty.

Australia has taken a transparency-based approach, launching a public complaints dashboard in March 2026 that allows users to examine complaints reported by financial firms and how they are handled.

A practical next step would be for the CBO, in consultation with banks, to develop a limited set of financial consumer outcome indicators and publish them periodically. These could include complaint-resolution times, repeat contacts over the same issue, first-contact resolution where appropriate, access to human assistance after a failed digital journey and selected measures of branch service.

Such indicators would need context. Larger banks may naturally receive more complaints, while complex cases may require longer resolution times. Public reporting could therefore begin at sector level rather than as a league table.

The objective should not be to name and shame institutions. It should be to identify where friction is occurring.

Digital banking will continue to expand and it should. But the strongest banking model is one in which routine transactions disappear seamlessly into digital channels while human expertise becomes easier to reach when the transaction is no longer routine.

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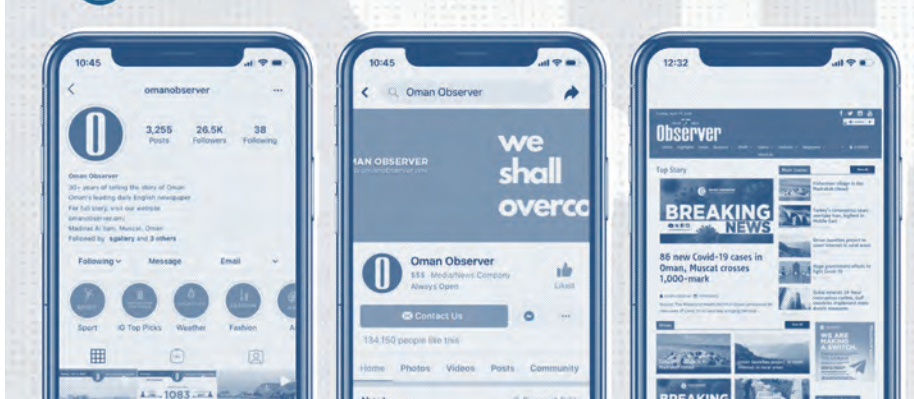
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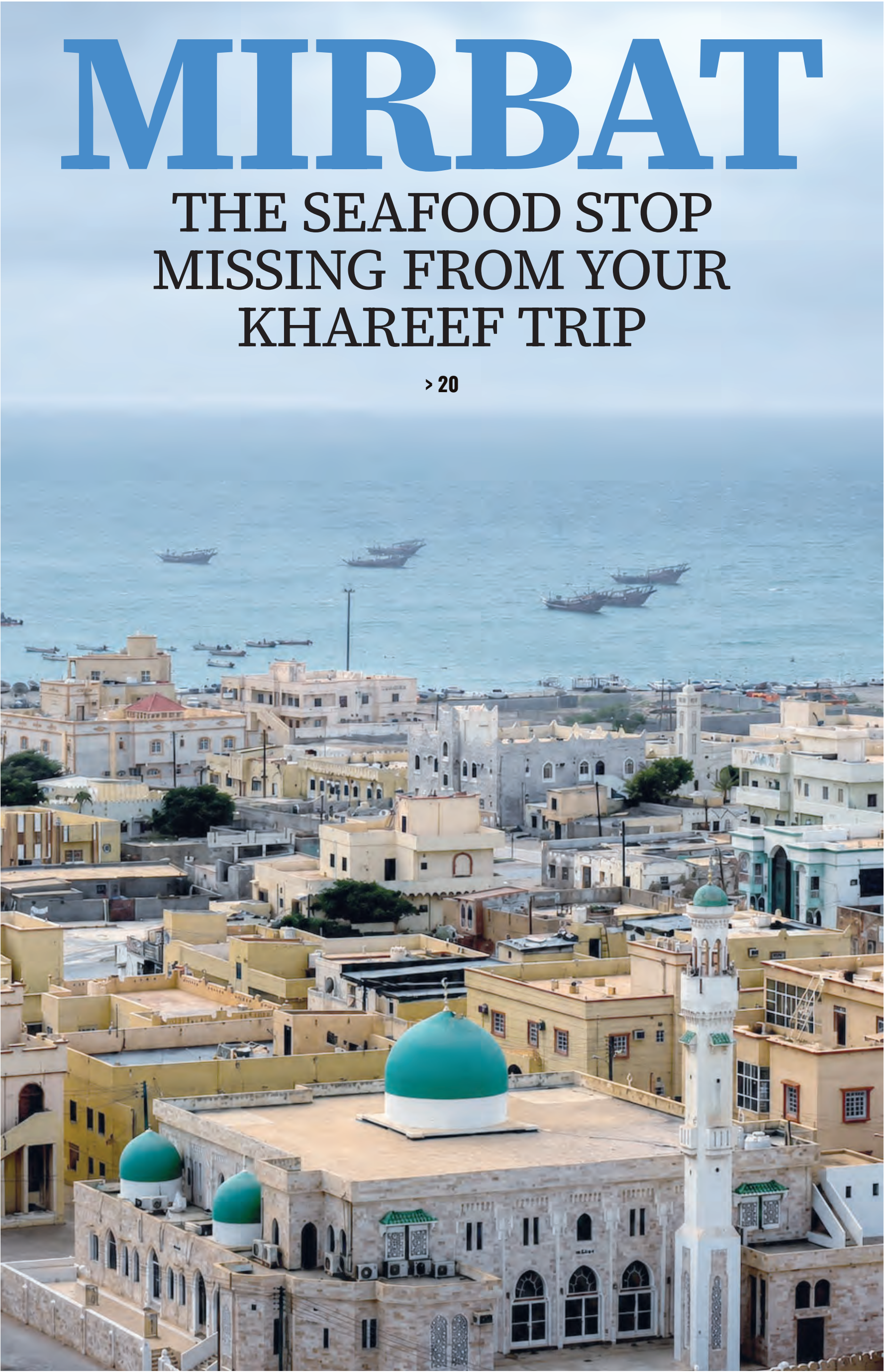


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MOVIEINSIDER

HOW DID A VIKING LONGSHIP END UP IN ‘THE ODYSSEY’?



The Draken Harald Harfagre (the ship used in the movie the Odyssey) is docked outside Oslo Opera in the Norwegian capital. — AFP

The eras of *The Odyssey* and the Vikings occurred about 2,000 years apart — so how did a Viking longship secure a starring role in this year’s blockbuster film?

The answer lies in director Christopher Nolan’s determination to create spectacle using real props and locations; and the Norwegian shipwrights and sailors who built the vessel.

With tar-soaked rigging, a creaking oak deck and 50 spruce oars, Draken Harald Hårfagre is the largest modern replica of a Viking ship.

Its Scandinavian origins mattered little when enlisted to represent a Greek mythological vessel, the anachronism accepted in service of Nolan’s trademark realism.

The Draken was stripped of its dragon figurehead — typical of the Viking era, from the eighth to 11th centuries — before sailing for cameras in Greek, Italian and Scottish waters.

“We found a Viking ship that had been built exactly according to those ancient specifications”, Nolan said. “It was very much the whole shape and the rig that we needed to do a Bronze Age ship”.

The sailors worked for months alongside Matt Damon, who plays Odysseus and other actors, teaching them to raise the sail, handle the rigging and row.

“One of the actors who was sitting in front of me got seasick and threw up over the rail. It blew back on me”, sailor Trammell Hudson said during a recent visit to Oslo.

“I thought that would be my big scene, because the IMAX camera was focused on him and me dodging the debris. But I didn’t see that scene in the film”.

Based on Homer’s epic, Nolan’s film follows Odysseus on his perilous journey home to Ithaca after the Trojan War in the 12th century BC.

Rather than use computer-generated imagery, Nolan wanted a real vessel capable of sailing the open sea with a crew aboard.

“Most of the scenes would be completely different if it wasn’t for us being there, doing the real thing with the real ship and the real crew in the real ocean and real weather”, said expedition director Emanuel Persson.

That practical approach defined Nolan’s vision. “I think the viewers can actually feel the genuine materials. I don’t know if you can really smell the tar, but you can tell it’s really genuine handicraft instead of being a digital creation”, Persson added.

Captain Bjorn Ahlander praised the actors for enduring long hours in cold, rough conditions without complaint.

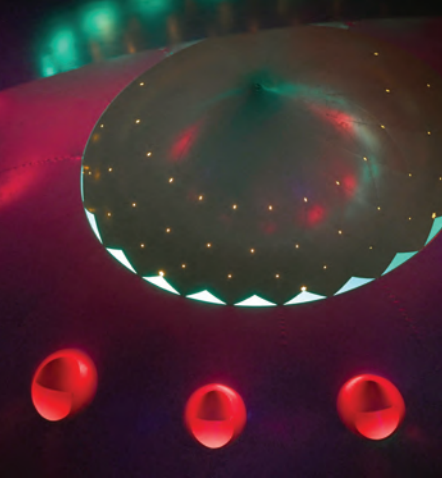
Rowing in sync, however, was difficult. Hudson recalled being thrown “a metre and a half into the air” with his partner when their oar struck a wave head-on. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



DANCE

An elderly dancing duo is now a viral sensation in Italy, something they hope will inspire other seniors to take up a more active lifestyle. — AFP



FESTIVAL

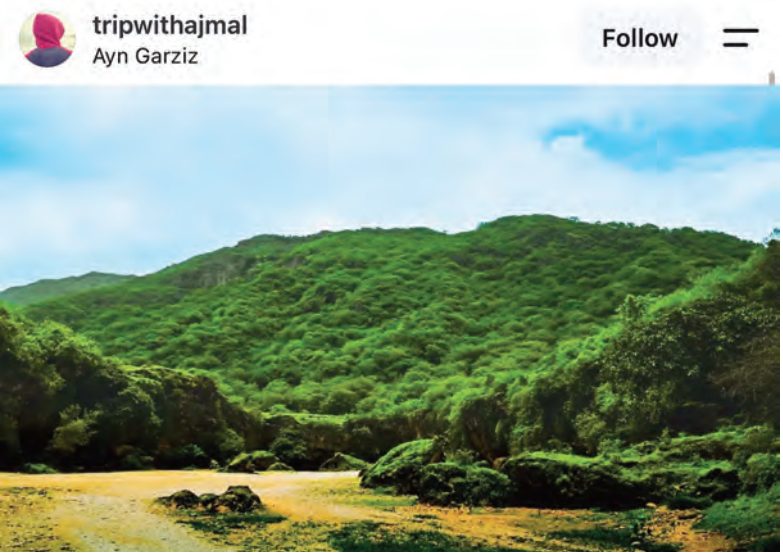
The Luminarium tent is seen during the Sziget Festival at Óbuda Island in Budapest, Hungary. — AFP



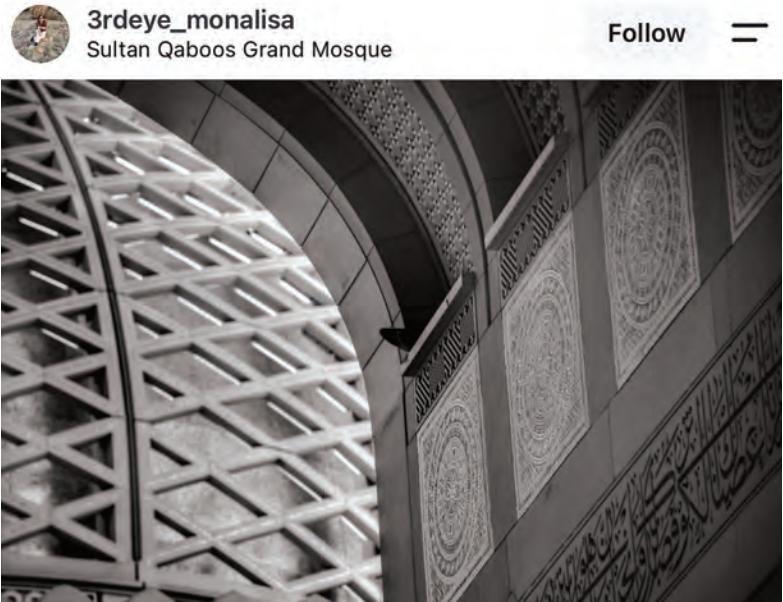
TECHNOLOGY

A robot band from UniX AI plays music during the 2026 World Robot Conference in Beijing. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



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MADONNA TOPS TAYLOR SWIFT IN NOMINATIONS



Madonna earned 11 nominations for next month’s VMA ceremony. — Reuters

Pop music veteran Madonna scored the most nominations for MTV’s Video Music Awards on Tuesday, four decades after the “Material Girl” singer put the event on the cultural map with a headline-making performance. Madonna earned 11 nominations for next month’s VMA ceremony, including nods for video of the year with “Confessions II — The Film” and artist of the year. That eclipsed the nine nominations received by Taylor Swift, who will compete for the video of the year honour with “The Fate of Ophelia” from her most recent album, “The Life of a Showgirl”. Both musicians already own several VMA Moon Person trophies. Madonna claimed her first in 1986 when she received the Video Vanguard Award for helping to pioneer the music video format. In 1987, she won best female

video for “Papa Don’t Preach” and has collected 20 VMAs throughout her career. It was her performance at the inaugural VMAs in 1984 that created one of the show’s most iconic moments. Madonna took the stage in a wedding gown adorned with a “Boy Toy” belt buckle and rolled on the floor as she sang “Like a Virgin”, pushing the boundaries of what was considered permissible on cable television at the time. This year, she faces off against Swift, who recently concluded the highest-grossing concert tour of all time. Swift is tied with Beyoncé for the most lifetime VMA wins, with 30 awards each. Other nominees this year include Ariana Grande, winner of last year’s VMA for video of the year and Sabrina Carpenter. Each received seven nominations. — Reuters

New ‘Insidious’ reflects the anxiety of being a new parent



Fans of the ‘Insidious’ franchise think of Lin Shaye as the heart of the movies. — AFP

When he sat down to write “Insidious: Out of the Further”, the sixth instalment of the blockbuster horror franchise, director Jacob Chase channelled his fears about a major life event: becoming a parent. “I became a dad for the first time and I was terrified of being a dad”, he said. “I was really nervous I would raise my child in the wrong way and I was thinking about parenting almost in opposition to how I was raised”. The resulting film, which opens in US theatres on Friday, promises to take audiences into the Further — and bring back the demons who live there. The main character is a woman who longs to be a good mother and protect her daughter from the terrible things that happened to her, but ends up becoming the worst version of herself in the process. “I wanted to create a character who was haunted by her past... a character who already had this trauma from her past and was trying desperately to outrun her own sins and those of her mom”. The result is an atmospheric film that gradually draws viewers to the other side, revealing the terror seeking to infiltrate the characters’ world. Starring Amelia Eve, Lin Shaye, Brandon Perea and Sam Spruell, “Insidious: Out of the Further” introduces new directions and characters to a franchise



‘Insidious Out of the Future,’ is an atmospheric film that gradually draws viewers to the other side, revealing the terror seeking to infiltrate the characters’ world

that has grossed more than \$740 million at the global box office. This chapter follows Gemma, played by Amelia Eve, a young single mother raising her daughter in the same home where she grew up — a house filled with traumatic memories. It is there that Gemma discovers she can not only enter the afterlife but also bring its shadowy inhabitants into the world of the living. The power makes her a target for terrifying entities and places her daughter in danger. For the 34-year-old British

actress, it was an exciting opportunity. “It’s one thing to be welcomed into this franchise and it’s a whole other blessing to then get to introduce a new aspect to this incredible world”, Eve said. To build that protective bond with her on-screen daughter, the actress drew inspiration from her relationship with her own sisters, whom she described as “the people you’d do anything for”. Eve shares the screen with Lin Shaye, who returns once again as Elise Rainier, a character fans consider the heart of the franchise. In the new instalment, Rainier represents a beacon of light for Gemma — a role that Shaye said continued to teach her a great deal. “It’s still completely evolving, which is very exciting to me”, said the 82-year-old actress. “You’d think it’s the same old, same old every time, but I feel that Elise is learning something new about herself”. The women and their allies in the world of the living face Cyrus, a new diabolical entity played by Sam Spruell of “ Fargo”, who commands the forces of evil. “I wanted a villain that was different”, said Chase, who sought to create a charismatic demon. “To me, a charming villain is so much scarier because I could see myself wanting to follow them”. — AFP

FEATURES



THE SEAFOOD STOP
WORTH DISCOVERING



YERU EBUEN

FAR from the greenery that draws most people to Dhofar, a coastal drive towards Mirbat has always been part of my Khareef trip. I do it for the seafood, something I think should be firmly established by now, especially for anyone visiting Dhofar for the first time.

The journey east from Salalah takes you past some of the season’s most familiar attractions. There is Taqah, followed by the turn towards Wadi Darbat, where green hills, waterfalls and long lines of vehicles have become part of the annual Khareef ritual. Continue along the coast, however and the scenery begins to change. The mountains remain green and misty in the distance, but the landscape closer to Mirbat becomes greyer, rougher and more exposed to the sea.

It is here that my attention usually shifts from the view to a more pressing question: what are we having for lunch?

I am hardly alone. In discussions about road trips through eastern Dhofar, seafood comes up repeatedly. Online, one visitor recommended stopping in Mirbat for “fresh seafood by the sea”, describing the weather and



food as equally memorable. Another reviewer called a local seafood restaurant a “great place to finish long trips around Salalah”. A family staying nearby returned to the same restaurant three times, praising the fresh fish, curries, sea view and prices compared with the international menu at their hotel.

These comments make sense once you reach Mirbat’s fishing port. This is not a waterfront designed purely for tourists. Boats still come and go, fishermen bring in their catch and the fish market provides a look at the working life of the town. Depending on the season and the day’s catch, the counters may carry hamour, shaari, tuna, squid, octopus, lobster, crab and other fish whose local names many visitors will be hearing for the first time.

There is also a belief among people who know Mirbat’s waters that Khareef can be tasted in the seafood. Local guide Raid Jouhar said that “during the monsoon season you get the best tasting fish”, adding that Mirbat residents who eat fish daily can notice the difference. It is an intriguing thought: that the season visitors normally experience through mist, rain and greenery might also reveal itself on a plate.

The best way to experience it is without overcomplicating things. Ask what was caught that morning, choose a fish and have it grilled or cooked in a local curry. Add rice, bread and a sharp sauce, then find a table overlooking the water. Mirbat also has its mishkak stalls, where skewers are grilled over charcoal and served with a dark, spicy tamarind sauce



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Lunch, however, should not be the end of the visit.

Mirbat was once an important maritime town, trading frankincense, horses, dates, ghee, leather and imported goods with ports across India, East Africa, Yemen and the Gulf. The horse statues at its entrance recall its reputation as a breeding and trading centre for Arabian horses.

Near the waterfront, Mirbat Castle overlooks the old port and historic market. From there, it is worth walking through the old quarter, where coral-stone houses, carved doors and weathered walls hint at the wealth once created by maritime trade. Some visitors call the area picturesque; others describe it as gritty or neglected. Both impressions are true. Mirbat’s old town is beautiful precisely because it has not been polished into a perfect tourism set, but its deterioration also makes current calls for restoration increasingly urgent.

The nearby old souq contains 53 shops and was once both a marketplace and a community gathering point. Proposals to restore it include cafés, craft outlets, seasonal markets and better connections between the souq, castle, mosque and waterfront. If handled carefully, the project could give visitors a reason to stay longer while creating opportunities for local families.

A visit can also include the distinctive twin-domed Bin Ali tomb, the cemetery and a slow drive along the coast. The beaches are hauntingly beautiful during Khareef, although the sea can be rough and swimming is often unsafe. This is a season for watching the waves rather than underestimating them.

Mirbat may not offer the lush spectacle people expect from Dhofar. What it offers is a different reading of Khareef: in the restless sea, the morning catch, the charcoal smoke and the remains of a town that once looked outward to the world.

For me, that is reason enough to keep making the drive and to arrive hungry.