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DEFENDING CHAMPS SINNER, SABALENKA MAKE WINNING STARTS IN CINCINNATI

INBRIEF
HM GREETINGS TO CHAD PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mahamat Idriss Deby, President of the Transitional Military Council in the Republic of Chad, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Mahamat Idriss Deby further success in achieving the Chadian people's aspirations for stability, progress and prosperity.

PEAK OF PERSEID METEOR SHOWER



MUSCAT: The skies of Oman are currently graced by the Perseid meteor shower, visible to the naked eye across various governorates — particularly in dark locations away from light pollution.

The phenomenon, which continues until August 24, will reach its peak from Tuesday evening until the early hours of Wednesday morning. It is one of the most captivating astronomical events for stargazers and astrophotography enthusiasts worldwide.

The Perseid meteor shower is one of the most prolific meteor showers of the year. The shower is active from mid-July until late August and will peak on the night of August 12, before dawn on August 13.

UN SAYS ISRAEL 'S GAZA PLAN RISKS ' ANOTHER CALAMITY '

A UN official on Sunday warned the Security Council that Israel's plans to control Gaza City risked "another calamity" with far-reaching consequences as Benjamin Netanyahu insisted his goal was not to occupy the territory.

The United Nations Security Council held a rare emergency meeting after Israel said its military would "take control" of Gaza City in a plan approved by Prime Minister Netanyahu's security cabinet that sparked a wave of global criticism.

"If these plans are implemented, they will likely trigger another calamity in Gaza, reverberating across the region and causing further forced displacement, killings, and destruction," UN Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenca told the Security Council.

Britain warned the Israeli plan risked prolonging the conflict.

"It will only deepen the suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. This is not a path to resolution. It is a path to more bloodshed," said British deputy ambassador to the UN James Kariuki. **SEE ALSO P6**



A Palestinian man carries aid supplies he collected from trucks that entered Gaza through Israel, in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, on Sunday.

— Reuters

ID card validity for Omanis and expats extended

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 10

A decision No 78/2025 was issued by the Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, to extend the validity period of ID cards for Omanis to 10 years, and for expatriates, with three options: one, two and three years, with different fee.

This decision was based on the Civil Status Law issued by Royal Decree No 66/99 and the Executive Regulations of the Civil Status Law issued by Decision No 40/2007, subject to the approval of the Ministry of Finance. Based on what the public interest requires, the decision extends the validity of ID cards for Omanis for 10 years and the residence card is valid for a period not exceeding three years from the date of issuance or renewal. The cardholder must renew it within 30 days of the expiration date.

The fee for issuing or renewing ID cards for Omanis is RO 10, valid for 10 years. The fee for issuing a replacement ID card for a damaged or lost card is RO 10. There are three options available for issuing or renewing a residence card for expatriates: a fee of RO 5 valid for one year from the date of issuance or renewal, RO 10 valid for two years, and RO 15 valid for three years. The fee for issuing a replacement card for a damaged or lost card for residents is RO 20. **TURN TO P4**

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SHORT TAKES



Thani bin Mohammed al Amri with his award

RAO BAND WINS TOP PLACES IN SCOTLAND INTL CONTEST

EDINBURGH: Warrant Officer Thani bin Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri, member of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) band, won 6th place in the baton-bearing competition at Grade 5 of the World Music Competition in Scotland. The competition, held in the Scottish city of Perth, saw the participation of 147 bands from different countries around the world, within 3B category, in preparation for the World Championship that will be held later in Glasgow, Scotland. Grade 5 included bagpipe and drum competitions, the performance of musical pieces, military discipline and individual baton competitions. — ONA

RAFO TRIUMPHS AT EUROPEAN PIPE BAND MEET



EDINBURGH: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) band made a remarkable appearance at the European Pipe Band Championships in Perth, Scotland. The band secured first place in the drums category for Grade Four and sixth place overall in the same category, triumphing over 147 bands from around the world. This achievement is a result of the band’s outstanding performance and high level of discipline during the competitions, reflecting its advanced artistic level and professionalism. — ONA

FOURTH EDITION OF RESEARCH SKILLS FORUM KICKS OFF

MUSCAT: The fourth edition of the Research Skills Forum kicked off on Sunday at the Arab Open University in Muscat. The forum is organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in cooperation with the Arab Open University in Muscat. The forum, which runs until August 21, is being attended by students from universities and



The forum seeks to enable students to develop their research skills in different spheres

colleges in the Sultanate of Oman. The forum seeks to enable Omani students to develop their research skills in different spheres of knowledge. It includes workshops and interactive sessions on the applied aspects of ‘Mixed Methods Research’, including the designing of studies, managing research stages, collecting and analysing data and publishing scholarly findings. — ONA

Training held for specialists to handle child abuse cases

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 10

THE Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), through the Technical Office of the National Committee for Family Affairs, recently organised a specialised training programme focused on conducting interviews with children. The programme aims to qualify and empower specialists to effectively handle cases involving child victims and witnesses of abuse. Attended by experts from the MoSD and the Public Prosecution, the training focused on equipping participants with the skills to conduct interviews using scientific methodologies and approved protocols. These protocols are carefully designed to consider the age and psychological differences of children, aiming to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation and reduce the likelihood of children reliving the abuse during interviews. Dr Jalal bin Yousef al Mukhaini, Director of the Technical Office of the National Committee for Family Affairs, described the programme as a pivotal step forward in developing Oman’s child protection system. He emphasised that the initiative reflects the national commitment to enhancing the capabilities of specialists working with child victims and witnesses in criminal cases, thereby strengthening national capacity to protect children’s rights.



The training covered ways to ask questions that safeguard the child’s psychological well-being.

The training focused on conducting interviews using scientific methodologies and approved protocols

The training also covered essential topics such as child developmental stages and their impact on communication, memory, suggestibility and the appropriate ways to ask questions that safeguard the child’s psychological well-being. Participants gained practical experience through realistic simulation scenarios, learning criminal interview protocols, and techniques to psychologically prepare children for court appearances. Additionally, the programme

addressed the identification of various abuse forms, family assessment, and the development of tailored support plans. It also discussed common challenges specialists face during interviews and provided guidance on handling these challenges professionally. This comprehensive training underscores Oman’s ongoing dedication to advancing child protection and ensuring that child victims receive sensitive and effective support throughout the justice process.

EA advises caution for trekkers heading to Jabal Samhan

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUG 10

Jabal Samhan, one of Oman’s most significant nature reserves, is increasingly attracting trekking enthusiasts. However, the Environment Authority (EA) in Dhofar Governorate has launched a safety campaign to alert visitors about the extreme temperatures and challenging conditions of the Jabal Samhan trail, which lies outside the Khareef season area. With trail signs still under construction and the terrain marked by rough, blocked multi-directional paths, the EA stresses the importance of having an experienced local guide and making thorough preparations before embarking on the trek.



Ahmed bin Said al Mashikhi, Supervisor, with his team members

Ahmed bin Said al Mashikhi, Supervisor of the team responsible for the metal compass installation at the summit of Jabal Samhan, explained, “When driving to the metal compass, trekkers can view landmarks such as Tawi Atair city,



Taiq Cave, and the expansive Jabal Samhan range. From the starting point in the Qayrut area, trekkers must obtain a permit from the Jabal Samhan Reserve Administration and come fully prepared with supplies and water.”

The trek to the metal compass spans approximately 14 kilometres through a biologically diverse trail where trekkers may encounter Nubian ibex, rock hyrax, and native frankincense and wild pistachio trees. The metal compass at the summit features a directional map highlighting key landmarks including the Salut area, the frankincense caravan passage (Kharsh Afidhuq), Wadi Ain, and views of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Al Mashikhi noted the increasing number of visitors from Dhofar and across Oman, remarking that while the trail offers breathtaking views, it remains one of the most challenging treks in the region. In collaboration with the

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the EA is working to improve the trail by installing clear signage and directions to ease access for visitors. The EA urges all hiking groups to strictly follow guidelines and regulations, including reserving an entry permit before arrival. It recommends consulting experienced locals or guides, ensuring physical fitness for the demanding climb and carrying sufficient water supplies, as natural water sources are unreliable. Due to unmarked paths, trekkers are advised to use navigation tools such as compasses, GPS devices and maps, and to inform a trusted person of their planned route and expected return time to enhance safety.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The participants discussed the governorate’s promising economic sectors. — ONA

WORKSHOP EXPLORES OPPORTUNITIES IN STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governor’s Office on Sunday organised a workshop on strategic analysis as part of steps to draft Al Dhahirah Governorate’s comprehensive development plan. The workshop was attended by representatives of government departments and private sector establishments, as well as members of the local community. The workshop began with a review of key outcomes of the earlier stage of work on drafting the governorate’s strategy. Then, the participants held sessions on analysing the governorate’s core competencies that offer it a competitive advantage over other areas. The participants discussed the governorate’s promising economic sectors, including mining, agriculture and logistics. They also engaged in analysing the external environment using the PESTEL model and reviewed market gaps and possible investment opportunities. — ONA

ID CARD VALIDITY FOR OMANIS AND EXPATS EXTENDED

FROM PAGE 1

The 2021 year was the last amendment to the Executive Regulations of the Civil Status Law, when the Inspector General of Police and Customs issued a decision to add a new category for which ID cards will be issued for the first time for all Omanis and residents aged 10 and over. It is also permissible to issue ID cards to those under 10 years of age, subject to the regulations. Social media was abuzz with the decision, particularly regarding the extent to which the ID cards would maintain their original appearance for 10 years. Citizens and residents alike responded with a mixture of relief and apprehension. Sultan al Balushi emphasised the need to clarify the decision, particularly for expatriates, regarding the impact of the duration of residency card renewal or issuance based on the number of years available on the visa’s validity period and other legal matters related to a residence card’s validity. According to the Royal Oman Police’s social media page, the decision to extend the validity of ID cards to 10 years is consistent with the validity period of the Omani passport, saving time and effort and facilitating procedures.

AL BATINAH SOUTH WITNESSES REMARKABLE GROWTH



AL RUSTAQ: The construction sector in Al Batinah South Governorate witnessed remarkable growth during the first half of 2025, reflecting an accelerating pace of urban development and real estate investment across the governorate’s wilayats. The total number of major building permits issued during this period reached 3,289, compared to 2,188 in the first half of 2024 — marking a 50-per cent growth rate, one of the strongest indicators of the sector’s rising activity. Al Batinah South Municipality revealed positive trends in issued permits and completed projects, confirming the effectiveness of development plans and the advanced level of services provided. — ONA

ISC OMAN TO CELEBRATE INDIA’S 79TH I-DAY WITH GRANDEUR

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman is delighted to announce its 79th Independence Day celebrations, to be held on August 15, at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel’s Oman Auditorium. The event will be honoured by the presence of G V Srinivas, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, who will attend as the chief guest, accompanied by distinguished dignitaries. The evening’s festivities will commence with a soul-stirring medley of patriotic songs, performed by ISC’s talented Open Mic singers,

accompanied by a synchronised visual background performance. This immersive tribute to the motherland will set the tone for a memorable evening. This will be followed by a spectacular array of cultural dance performances presented by various linguistic wings, showcasing the vibrant and diverse cultural heritage of India. These performances will embody the true spirit of ‘Unity in Diversity,’ highlighting the rich cultural tapestry of the nation. The evening will also feature the

prestigious ‘Indian of the Year’ award, which would be conferred upon Dr Avirat Vaishnav, recognising his outstanding service and significant contributions to the Indian community in Oman. This grand celebration promises to be an unforgettable evening of pride, culture and community spirit, honouring the legacy of India’s independence and celebrating the strong bonds between the Indian diaspora and the Sultanate of Oman. The event will begin at 7 pm and doors will open at 6:30 pm. The entry will be strictly by invitation only.

A quest for path between heritage and modernity

The Sultanate of Oman is striving to develop smart cities that align with contemporary demands while fostering a connection between the past and present, embodying national identity and its imperatives as part of urban transformation. The vision for the construction sector emphasises enhancing the harmony between heritage and modernity through innovative and distinctive approaches. National identity and its requirements are evident in projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040. Sultan Haitham City stands as a prime example of smart cities, striking a balance between modernity and cultural distinctiveness while serving as a model for future urban development and a promising investment destination. Hassan bin Ali al Shukri, an architect at the Executive Office for Smart City Projects in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, states: “Smart cities in Oman are not merely digital infrastructures but tools for revitalising identity and improving quality of life. They draw inspiration from traditional Omani architecture and its deep understanding of the environment and societal behaviour. Oman adheres to timeless architectural principles that seamlessly integrate with modern technologies, such as smart sensing systems, lighting control and climate simulation.” Al Shukri added that traditional Omani architecture offers an advanced functional model, utilising local building materials that reduce emissions and provide natural thermal insulation. Windows and mashrabiyas (lattice screens) intelligently regulate ventilation and lighting, while compact urban planning incorporates shaded pathways to encourage walking and reduce street heat. He explained that Oman’s smart cities take cues from history to shape a future rooted in people’s environment and culture, transforming heritage concepts into sustainable, practical solutions. Omani heritage — including systems



Smart cities in Oman are not merely digital infrastructures but tools for revitalising identity and improving quality of life. — ONA

like aflaj (traditional irrigation), earthen buildings and narrow alleyways — provides a scalable design framework for smart cities. These elements become effective tools for reducing energy consumption, improving air quality, guiding pedestrian movement, and enhancing visual and urban harmony. Dr Haitham bin Najim al Abri, an architect and researcher specialising in Omani architecture and urbanism, noted that Oman possesses a unique distinctiveness in building arts and urban planning, reflecting the ingenuity of Omanis in harmonising with nature and respecting resources. The wisdom and skills of ancestors have laid a solid foundation passed down through generations. He explained that Omanis have long understood how to build cities adaptable to diverse terrains — from mountains to coasts, deserts to oases — while preserving identity and sustainability.

Al Abri stated that smart cities are not mere replicas of global models but an extension of ancestral ingenuity, where technology enriches rather than erases identity. Meanwhile, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, a property owner in Sultan Haitham City, highlights how heritage values are integrated into the technical infrastructure of smart cities, blending modern technology with authentic Omani principles. There is a clear respect for privacy in neighbourhood and home designs, ensuring family spaces remain protected, while the social fabric is maintained through mosques, communal gathering spaces (majlis) and parks that encourage social interaction. He adds that the visual and design character of Omani smart cities creates a living experience rooted in authenticity yet open to innovation. — ONA

Khawr Jirama: Oman’s coastal jewel of history

TEXT & PHOTO BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Oman’s topographical nature offers a great diversity of tourist destinations. Despite high temperatures and humidity in some areas, other regions experience moderate climates, particularly those located in mountainous areas or along the eastern coast of the Arabian Sea. ‘Khawr Jirama’, which extends along the eastern coast, is considered one of Oman’s most important wetlands. This site is distinguished by its mountainous bay formations and the tranquillity and cleanliness of its turquoise beaches. The site’s importance extends beyond this. Media sources note that this ‘Khawr’ has deep historical value, having been and continues to be a haven for large and small ships sailing toward the Gulf States, India and East Africa.



Traditional fishing boats

Historical sources indicate that the area was considered a natural anchorage for unloading goods from ships, due to its distance from the sea waves, especially in the summer when the waves and winds reach their highest levels. Sailors then find safety, comfort, and peace of mind in ‘Khawr Jirama’. For these combined reasons, Khawr Jirama has gained a good reputation due to its strategic location and its pioneering

role in the prosperity of trade in Oman and neighbouring countries. Due to the warm and calm waters of the ‘Khawr’ and the growth of hundreds of mangrove plants, ‘Al Seera Island’ which is located in the middle of the creek, hosts large flocks of seabirds. The depths of the water are home to dozens of species of small fish, especially sardines, in addition to shrimp and sharks. This is in addition to the influx of large numbers of sea turtles that search for nesting places on the warm sands of the ‘Khawr’. The people of Ras Al Hadd built a tower on the outskirts of the ‘Khawr’ to mark its entrance. This tower had guards, and there was a maritime law that regulated the entry and exit of ships docked in this place. The ‘Khawr’ is a beautiful fishing area with a unique natural

formation. It is frequented by many tourists from all over the world who enjoy its beautiful, tranquil atmosphere, play sports, go fishing, and enjoy leisure activities. Official authorities are continuing their efforts to develop the site into an exceptional area that attracts tourism and entertainment investments. To promote ecotourism programmes, a number of floating chalets have been built over the past few years. The construction of these chalets complies with the environmental requirements issued by the Environment Authority. ‘Khawr Jirama’ floating chalets are located in a quiet area with a moderate climate and distinctive sea terrain. Surrounded by mountains, they are protected from strong winds and high waves.

SHORT TAKES



The camp’s diverse activities aimed to build self-reliance and develop leadership skills

GULF SCOUT CAMP WRAPS UP, EMPOWERS YOUTH

SALALAH: The Gulf Scout Summer Camp for Advanced Scouts concluded at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah. Organised by the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides at the Ministry of Education, the camp was held under the theme: ‘Community Partnership: Leadership and Responsibility to Build the Future.’

Bringing together around 350 scouts and leaders from across the Sultanate of Oman and GCC countries, the camp saw representation from all Gulf states, with eight participants from each.

In his concluding remarks, Ahmed bin Abdullah al Humaimi, Commander-in-Chief of the camp, highlighted the goals achieved during the camp – chief among them, shaping well-rounded, capable young individuals ready to contribute to national development. He noted that the camp’s diverse activities aimed to build self-reliance, enhance responsibility, and develop leadership skills through hands-on scouting techniques and community engagement.

“The camp embodied determination and a forward-looking spirit,” Al Humaimi said, “preparing a conscious generation that understands its national role, values teamwork and volunteering, and proudly embraces patriotism.”

The closing ceremony featured a visual presentation showcasing key moments and activities from the week-long camp. This included leadership training workshops, specialised scouting courses, and various events designed to foster community service and team spirit. — ONA

‘HEALTH PARK’ DRAWS CROWDS FOR WEEKEND FITNESS

SALALAH: Every weekend, Salalah Public Park transforms into a vibrant hub of sports and family activities under the ‘Health Park’ initiative, part of the Khareef Dhofar Season 2025.

Organised by Dhofar Municipality, the programme features children’s games every Friday from 4–6 pm, followed by adult competitions on Saturdays at the same time. Visitors can enjoy walking tracks, tennis and basketball courts, and inclusive fitness zones designed for all ages – including seniors and people with disabilities.

Running from June 21 to September 20, the Health Park aims to promote wellness, encourage community bonding and bring families together in the refreshing monsoon breeze.

OMANI-BAHRAINI FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION HOSTS POETRY EVENING

SALALAH: The Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association organised a poetry evening titled ‘In Love with Oman and Bahrain’ at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

The evening featured prominent poets, including Omani poet Kamel al Bathari and Bahraini poet Abdullah al Marri.

The event celebrated the strong bonds of brotherhood between the peoples of Oman and Bahrain and highlighted their shared cultural



The event celebrated the strong bonds of brotherhood between the peoples of Oman and Bahrain

and literary heritage through poems reflecting themes of belonging, love and unity.

Radina al Hajri, Chairwoman of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, said the evening is part of the association’s ongoing efforts to promote cultural diplomacy,

which serves as a vital bridge for deepening relations between the two nations.

She noted that exchanging artistic and literary creativity strengthens fraternal ties and reflects the shared values between Oman and Bahrain. — ONA

Wadi Darbat: Where waterfalls, heritage meet

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 10

At dawn, mist clings to Wadi Darbat’s green slopes. Waterfalls spill into pools, their sound a familiar rhythm of Khareef Dhofar Season.

Tourists gather for photographs, families picnic beneath ancient trees. But for those who knew the valley half a century ago, Darbat’s story is more than scenic beauty – it is one of survival, community, and an enduring link between nature and legend.

One of those voices is Khayar bint Salem Mahad, 85, regarded as a living witness to the valley’s past. She remembers when Darbat was the “food basket” for its people and for travellers passing between neighbouring regions.

“The land here was generous,” she recalls. “It gave bananas, papaya, lemons, wild olives – many fruits and vegetables that sustained life.”

Sweet potatoes and date palms were staples. There were no cars, no paved roads. People lived by barter – exchanging crops for grain, fruit for drink – keeping households and travellers nourished.

Among the families rooted in Darbat’s legacy was that of the late Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Maashani. His household, Khayar says, often supported local residents in times of scarcity.

But Darbat’s memory is not only agricultural. It carries strands of folklore – and the enduring belief in djinns. Khayar recounts a tale from the late 1940s:

A man from Al Shahri tribe, considered among the valley’s earliest inhabitants, claimed ownership of Darbat. When farmers refused to share their harvest, he allegedly appealed to djinns said to dwell there. According to the story, he told them: if the valley was truly



Darbat is one of Oman’s most visited natural attractions, drawing thousands from across Oman and the Gulf.

his, let them take its water.

By morning, villagers say, the waterfalls had stopped, the water level dropping overnight. Whether coincidence or supernatural act, the event remains embedded in local oral history – a tale blending land disputes, community bonds and nature’s mysteries.

Half a century ago, seasonal rain and natural springs sustained farming. Generations planted what the land and climate allowed – bananas, citrus, root vegetables, palms – ensuring food security for surrounding communities.

Today, Darbat is one of Oman’s most visited natural attractions, drawing thousands from across Oman and the Gulf. Tourism fuels the economy but also strains the valley’s fragile ecosystem.

Authorities, including the

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Dhofar Municipality, are working to protect native vegetation, rehabilitate farmland and safeguard biodiversity. Efforts include planting wild olive trees, managing water use and reducing seasonal overcrowding.

“Darbat is more than a picture-perfect view,” says one conservationist. “It is a living memory. If we lose its balance, we lose its soul.”

As khareef’s mist settles once more over Dhofar’s highlands, Wadi Darbat continues to flow through Oman’s heritage – a place where elders recall days of barter and self-sufficiency, where legend speaks of spirits guarding its waters and where its future depends on careful stewardship.

Salalah Free Zone secures RO 187m in investments in H1 2025

SALALAH: Salalah Free Zone (SFZ), a prominent subsidiary of Asyad Group, has successfully attracted new investments, amounting to RO 187 million during the first half of 2025. This milestone brings the total cumulative investments in the zone to an impressive RO 4.9 billion, highlighting its growing prominence as a key destination for industrial and logistics activities in the region.

The zone’s warehouse occupancy rate has climbed to 87 per cent, while land occupancy has reached 51 per cent, demonstrating a steady rise in demand for its state-of-the-art infrastructure and comprehensive services.

These figures underscore the zone’s strategic importance and its ability to cater to the evolving needs of businesses seeking a competitive



Salalah Free Zone offers an integrated and investor-friendly environment.

edge in the global marketplace.

In addition to these achievements, seven strategic projects have

recently progressed into pilot or construction phases, with investments exceeding RO 80

million. This level of activity reflects robust confidence from international investors in Salalah Free Zone’s business environment and the attractive incentives it offers.

Situated at a unique crossroads that links three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe – Salalah Free Zone benefits from an unrivalled geographic advantage. Its seamless integration with the nearby Port of Salalah and Salalah International Airport further enhances its logistical capabilities, enabling it to function as a vital hub that supports Oman Vision 2040 goals for economic diversification and sustainable growth.

Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabuk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, emphasised that the impressive

investment figures reflect the success of a carefully crafted strategy focused on attracting value-added projects. These projects not only contribute to broadening Oman’s economic base, but also promote sustainable development by fostering innovation and creating new job opportunities.

He further explained that Salalah Free Zone offers an integrated and investor-friendly environment, combining advanced infrastructure, cutting-edge logistics solutions and a wide range of competitive incentives. These include streamlined administrative procedures, significant tax reductions and continuous logistical support, all designed to enhance the overall ease of doing business in the zone. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A general view of a makeshift oil refinery in Hasaka countryside, Syria. — Reuters

JORDAN TO HOST SYRIA-US MEETING ON RECONSTRUCTION

AMMAN: Jordan will host a meeting between the United States and Syria to discuss the situation in the war-ravaged country and explore reconstruction efforts, Amman’s foreign ministry said on Sunday. The meeting on Tuesday, which will be attended by Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani and US special envoy for Syria Thomas Barrack, “will discuss the situation in Syria and ways to support the process of rebuilding Syria on foundations that guarantee its security, stability and sovereignty”, according to a statement.

It is a continuation of discussions held between the officials in Amman on July 19 about deadly clashes in the Syrian province of Sweida. The violence between Druze fighters and Bedouins in July ultimately drew the intervention of government forces and tribal fighters who came to support the Bedouins, as well as the Israeli military, which carried out strikes in support of the Druze. A ceasefire put an end to the week of bloodshed — which killed 1,400 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights — but the situation remained tense, flaring into violence again in August. — AFP

OVER 600 PEOPLE HOSPITALISED DUE TO GAS LEAK IN IRAQ



People walk through the Shalamcheh border crossing heading to Karbala, in Iraq. — Reuters

KARBALA: More than 600 people in Iraq were briefly hospitalised with respiratory problems after inhaling chlorine as the result of a leak at a water treatment station, authorities said on Sunday. The incident took place overnight on the route between the two cities of Najaf and Karbala, located in the centre and south of Iraq, respectively.

In a brief statement, Iraq’s health ministry said “621 cases of asphyxia have been recorded following a chlorine gas leak in Karbala”. “All have received the necessary care and left hospital in good health,” it said. Security forces charged with protecting pilgrims said the incident had been caused by “a chlorine leak from a water station on the Karbala-Najaf road”. Much of Iraq’s infrastructure is in disrepair due to decades of conflict and corruption, with adherence to safety standards often lax. In July, a massive fire at a shopping mall in the eastern city of Kut killed more than 60 people, many of whom suffocated in the toilets, according to authorities. — AFP

SEVERE FAMINE

Malnutrition in Sudan kills 63 in a week



Malnutrition has claimed the lives of at least 63 people, mostly women and children, in just one week in Sudan’s besieged city of El Fasher, a health official said on Sunday. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the figure only included those who managed to reach hospitals, adding that many families buried their dead without seeking medical help due to poor security conditions and a lack of transportation. — AFP

WORK RESUMPTION

Chile copper mine to restart operations



The world’s largest underground copper mine was set to resume operating, after a deadly cave-in suspended work for more than a week. Chile’s Mining Ministry ordered El Teniente to halt activity to allow rescuers to search for five miners trapped after a “seismic event” caused the collapse of a tunnel the day before. One worker was killed in the collapse, while five others were left missing and later found dead. — AFP

NECESSARY ARRESTS

Mali arrests two dozen soldiers



Mali has arrested around 20 soldiers suspected of wishing to overthrow the junta, which itself took power in the west African country in a coup. Three days ago, there were arrests linked to an attempt to destabilise the institutions. There have been at least 20 arrests. A separate source within the army confirmed an “attempt at destabilisation”, adding: “We have gone ahead with the necessary arrests”. — AFP

JAPAN SCHOOL EXITS HUGELY POPULAR EVENT OVER BULLYING

TOKYO: A Japanese high school hit by a bullying scandal has withdrawn from the country’s hugely popular summer baseball tournament after a social media frenzy, officials said on Sunday. The two-week “Koshien” high school tournament is watched by millions on national television each year and has launched the careers of many of Japan’s leading players.

An outcry over alleged violence earlier this year at the baseball team of Koryo High School in the

Hiroshima region prompted calls on social media for their withdrawal. “We have decided to pull out, and will swiftly conduct an overhaul of our education method,” Masakazu Hori, the principal of the school in western Japan, told reporters. It is reportedly the first time that a school has exited mid-tournament over a scandal related to player violence. Koshien tournament co-organiser, the Japan High School Baseball Federation, on Sunday described Koryo High’s decision as

“extremely regrettable” and vowed to continue efforts to “eradicate violence, bullying and irrational hierarchical relationships”. Koryo High said that an internal investigation had found a first-year student on the baseball team had been assaulted by four of his senior team-mates at their dormitory in January. Acts of violence included shoving him in the chest and slapping him in the face, with the victim then transferred to another school in March. — AFP

Israel faces growing calls to scrap new Gaza plans

ISRAEL'S

far-right finance minister has demanded Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu scrap his plan to seize Gaza City in favour of a tougher one, while Italy said on Sunday the plan could result in a “Vietnam” for Israel’s army. Netanyahu’s security cabinet, of which the minister, Bezalel Smotrich, is a member, approved the plan by majority to expand military operations in the shattered Palestinian enclave to try to defeat Hamas. The move drew a chorus of condemnation within Israel, where thousands of people protested in Tel Aviv on Saturday, calling for an immediate ceasefire and release of hostages, as well as abroad. The United Nations Security Council was expected to meet to discuss the plan, with many countries expressing concern that it could worsen already acute hunger among Palestinians.

The new plan, he said in a video on X late on Saturday, was intended to get Hamas back to ceasefire negotiations. The prime minister and the cabinet have decided to do “more of the same” he said, referring to the fact that Israeli troops have entered the city before and failed to defeat Hamas. He and other far-right members of Netanyahu’s coalition argue that the plan does not go far enough while the army, which opposes military rule in Gaza, has warned it would endanger remaining hostages held by Hamas as well as Israeli troops. Smotrich stopped short of delivering a clear ultimatum to Netanyahu.



Protesters wave flags as they march during a rally against the war in Gaza, in Amsterdam. — AFP

Italy said Israel should heed its army’s warnings. “The invasion of Gaza risks turning into a Vietnam for Israeli soldiers,” Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said in an interview. He reiterated calls for a United Nations mission to “reunify the Palestinian state” and said Italy was ready to participate. The Security Council is likely to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the prospect of its worsening if the Israeli plan goes ahead but there has so far been little appetite among Arab states to send their troops in.

Israel has already come under mounting pressure over widespread hunger and thirst in the enclave, prompting it to announce a series of new measures to ease aid distribution. The Israeli military said on Sunday that the contents of nearly 1,900 aid trucks were distributed last week from the

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Gaza sides of the Kerem Shalom and Zikim border crossings. A spokesperson was not immediately available to comment on the reported figure but the United Nations has said Gaza needs far more aid to come in.

Medics said that a 14-year-old boy was killed by an aid airdrop that fell on a tent encampment in central Gaza. A video, verified by Reuters, that went viral on social media, showed the parachuted aid box falling on the teenager who, among many other desperate Palestinians, was awaiting food.

The Gaza government media office said the new death raised the number of people killed during the airdrops to 23 since the war began, almost two years ago. Five more people, including two children, died of malnutrition and starvation in Gaza in the past 24 hours. — Reuters



MONKS MOVE FOR LASTING PEACE

BANGKOK: Buddhist monks take part in a march for peace, following a border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Bangkok and Phnom Penh have quarrelled for decades over undemarcated parts of their 817-km land border.

The July 24-28 clashes, the worst fighting between the countries in more than a decade, involved exchanges of artillery fire and jet fighter sorties that killed at least 43 and left over 300,000 people displaced on both sides. The fragile ceasefire has been holding since Thailand and Cambodia agreed to let observers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations inspect disputed border areas to ensure hostilities do not resume. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Liu Jianchao

SENIOR CHINESE DIPLOMAT TAKEN IN FOR QUESTIONING

BEIJING: A senior Chinese diplomat considered a contender for future foreign minister has been detained by authorities for questioning, the Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday. Liu Jianchao, head of a department under the ruling Communist Party that oversees relations with foreign political parties, was “taken away” after returning to Beijing from a work trip abroad in late July, according to people familiar with the matter, the report said. The reason for his detention could not be determined, it added.

Liu, 61, has previously served in key diplomatic roles including ambassadorships to the Philippines and Indonesia and foreign ministry spokesperson. He has also led various national and regional bodies tasked with implementing President Xi Jinping’s signature crackdown on corruption. His detention represents the highest-level inquiry into a Chinese diplomat since Qin Gang, who was removed as foreign minister in 2023 following reports of an extramarital affair.

Liu has been widely viewed as a rising figure in the Chinese diplomatic world. In early July, he accused the United States’ defence chief of “inciting confrontation and conflict” by urging American allies to bolster their militaries to counter China.

— AFP

2 DEATHS AFTER CARBON MONOXIDE LEAK



A second person has died from the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning in an incident in a garden allotment in the Bavarian capital Munich, officials said on Sunday. Four other men suffered minor injuries at the private party in an allotment in the north of Munich, while one man remained uninjured. According to initial findings by the police, a generator in the basement of a shed on the plot was the cause of the injuries after it emitted carbon monoxide. The two deceased men had apparently been in the basement for a longtime during the party on the plot within a larger shared garden complex in the Fasanerie area.

— dpa

SOUTH KOREA’S MILITARY HAS SHRUNK AS MALE POPULATION DROPS

SEOUL: South Korea’s military shrank by 20% in the past six years to 450,000 troops, largely due to a sharp drop in the population of males of enlistment age for mandatory service in the country with the world’s lowest birthrate, a report said on Sunday. The dramatic decline in the pool of available males for military service is also causing a shortfall in the number of officers and could result in operational difficulty if it continues, the defence ministry said

in the report.

The report was made to the ruling Democratic Party member of parliament Choo Mi-ae, whose office released it. South Korea’s military has steadily declined since the early 2000s when it had about 690,000 soldiers. The pace accelerated during the late 2010s and there were about 563,000 active-duty soldiers and officers in 2019.

In the period between 2019 and 2025, the population of 20-year-old

males declined by 30% to 230,000, according to government data, the age when most men who pass a physical exam enlist for military service, which is now 18 months long.

The military has cited improved capabilities as a key reason for shortening service periods, made possible by a military alliance with the United States and the development of a defence industry that has become a major exporter of arms.

— Reuters

Zelensky thanks EU, seeks place with Trump, Putin

UKRAINIAN

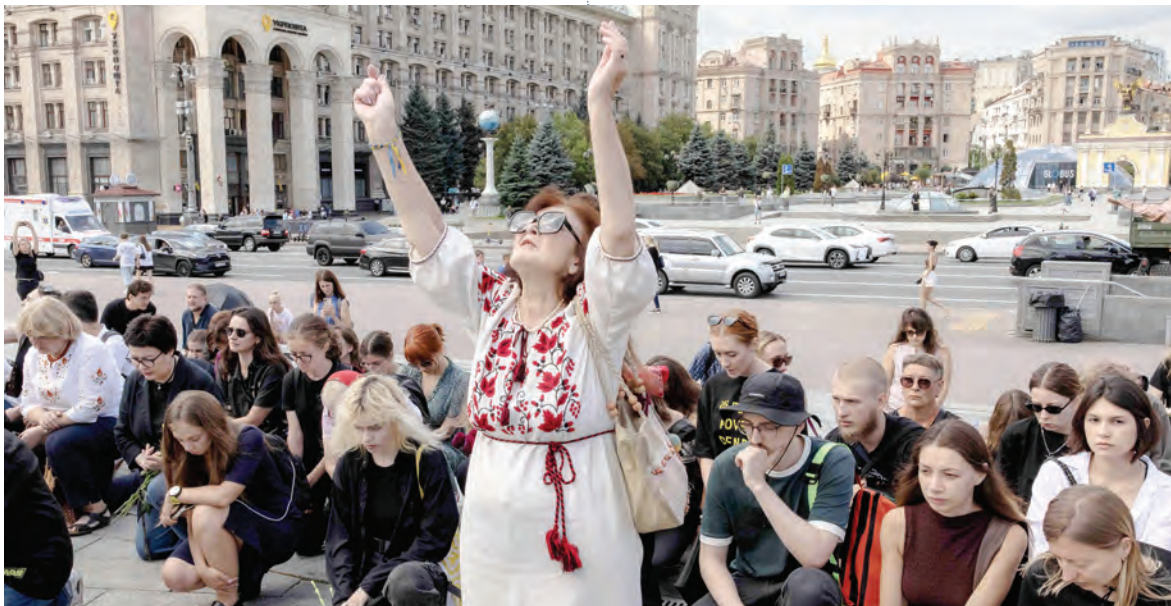
President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked European

leaders on Sunday for backing his demand for a seat at the table as Russia and the United States prepare for a summit this week where Kyiv fears they could seek to dictate terms to it for ending the Three-and-a-half-year war. US President Donald Trump, who for weeks had been threatening new sanctions against Russia for failing to halt the conflict, announced instead last Friday that he would hold an August 15 summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska.

A White House official said on Saturday that Trump was open to Zelensky attending, but that preparations currently were for a bilateral meeting with Putin. The Kremlin leader last week ruled out meeting Zelensky at this point, saying the conditions for such an encounter were “unfortunately still far” from being met. Trump said a potential deal would involve “some swapping of territories to the betterment of both (sides)”, a statement that compounded Ukrainian alarm that it may face pressure to surrender more land.

Zelensky says any decisions taken without Ukraine will be “stillborn” and unworkable. On Saturday the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Finland and the European Commission said in a joint statement that any diplomatic solution must protect the vital security interests of Ukraine and Europe. “The path to peace cannot be decided without Ukraine”, they said, demanding “robust and credible security guarantees” to allow Ukraine to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Zelensky said on Sunday: “The end of the war must be fair and I am grateful to everyone who stands with Ukraine and our people today for the sake of peace in Ukraine, which is defending the vital security interests of our European nations”.

A European official said Europe had come up with a counter-proposal to Trump’s, but declined to provide details. Russian officials accused Europe of trying to thwart Trump’s efforts to end the war. “The Euro-imbeciles



People kneel down during the funeral ceremony for Victoria Roshchyna, a Ukrainian journalist who died while in captivity in Russia, on Independence Square in Kyiv.

— AFP

are trying to prevent American efforts to help resolve the Ukrainian conflict”, former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev posted on social media on Sunday. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a vituperative statement that the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union resembled “necrophilia”.

Roman Alekhin, a Russian war blogger, said Europe had been reduced to the role of a spectator. “If Putin and Trump reach an agreement directly, Europe will be faced with a fait accompli. Kyiv — even more so”, he said.

No details of the proposed territorial swap that Trump alluded to have been officially announced. Russia, which mounted a full-scale attack of Ukraine in February 2022, holds about a fifth of the country and has claimed the regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia as its own, although it controls only about 70% of the last three. Russia has also taken pockets of territory in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions and said in recent weeks it has captured villages in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Ukraine says it holds a sliver of the Kursk region in western Russia.

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin analyst,

said a swap could entail Russia handing over 1,500 sq km to Ukraine and obtaining 7,000 sq km, which he said Russia would capture anyway within about six months. He provided no evidence to back any of those figures. Russia took only about 500 sq km of territory in July, according to Western military analysts who say its grinding advances have come at the cost of very high casualties.

Ukraine and its European allies have been haunted for months by the fear that Trump, keen to claim credit for making peace and hoping to seal lucrative joint business deals between the US and Russia, could align with Putin to cut a deal that would be deeply disadvantageous to Kyiv.

They had drawn some encouragement lately as Trump, having piled heavy pressure on Zelensky and berated him publicly in the Oval Office in February, began criticising Putin and expressing disgust as Russia pounded Kyiv and other cities with its heaviest air attacks of the war. But the impending Putin-Trump summit, agreed during a trip to Moscow by Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff last week, has revived fears that Kyiv and Europe could be sidelined.

— Reuters

‘Challenging day’ for firefighters battling huge blaze in France

FONTJONCOUSE: Firefighters have contained a massive wildfire in southern France but local officials warned on Sunday that scorching heat and dry conditions could reignite the blaze, as parts of the Mediterranean region face a heatwave. The fire has ravaged a vast area of France’s southern Aude department at the peak of the summer tourist season, killing one person and injuring several others.

Authorities said that hot, dry winds on Sunday — similar to those on the day the blaze began — and a heatwave would make the work of firefighters more difficult. “It’s a challenging day, given that we are likely to be on red alert for heatwave from 4:00 pm, which will not make things any easier”, said Christian Pouget, prefect of the Aude department.

The fire is no longer spreading but is still burning within a 16,000-hectare area, said Christophe

Magny on Saturday, chief of the region’s firefighter unit, adding it would not be under control until Sunday evening. But the blaze will “not be extinguished for several weeks”, he said. Some 1,300 firefighters were mobilised to prevent the blaze from reigniting amidst fears that the tramontane wind, which officials said picked up overnight Saturday to Sunday, could fan lingering hot spots.

Temperatures this weekend are expected to hit 40 degrees Celsius in some areas and Monday is forecast to be the “hottest day nationwide”, according to national weather service Meteo France. In Saint-Laurent-de-la-Cabrerisse, a 65-year-old woman was found dead on Wednesday in her home, which was devastated by flames. Authorities said one resident suffered serious burns and four others were lightly injured, while 19 firefighters were hurt, including one with a head



People walk through a burnt-out farm following wildfires in France.

— AFP

injury.

Experts say European countries are becoming ever more vulnerable to such disasters due to intensifying summer heatwaves linked to global

warming. The blaze — the largest in at least 50 years — tore through 16,000 hectares of vegetation, disaster officials said. For livestock farmers in Fontjoncouse, the fire

has ravaged grazing land and wiped out much of their flocks, fuelling outrage among those who said they did not have time to evacuate their herds.

Emmanuelle Bernier said she was “extremely angry” when she returned to a devastating scene, finding the pen that had housed her herd of goats in ruins, with 17 animals — some close to giving birth — lost in the fire. “I will definitely change jobs. This will change my whole life”, she said. Bernier’s property now holds only a few geese and two sick goats after she had to temporarily entrust her surviving sheep to a local winemaker, as the damage to the farm was so extensive that they could no longer stay. French firefighters said on Saturday that the country’s biggest wildfire in at least half a century was contained but would not be brought under control before Sunday evening.

— AFP

OPINION

Why colleges must equip students for freelance economy



SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

The writer is
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EVERY day, we hear stories of school dropouts who are now running start-ups worth millions of dollars. While there may be a few success stories that make headlines, it is worth considering that freelancing is now an important career option and that colleges must introduce it to students throughout their academic careers.

According to Upwork, a popular website for freelancers, freelancing can be defined as ‘doing specific work for clients without committing to full-time employment’. They are usually seen to be self-employed for tax purposes.

At a time when lifelong professional careers are seeing a downward trend, freelancing is becoming a very important choice that should be seriously entertained.

According to Price Waterhouse, the typical career trajectory is 4-5 years in a single organisation today, especially in the IT industry.

This means that people are having to consider job changes almost every half-decade. This includes undergoing the entire process of creating CVs, attending interviews

and facing potential rejections. It also means getting accustomed to a new work environment and workforce every once in a while.

An option to avoid such disruptions is to engage in lifelong freelancing. Today, this is more possible than it would have been earlier, as there is a rise in the need for consultants, media handlers and content creators, not to mention other fields like architects, interior and landscape designers.

What we currently lack, however, is the knowledge of how such a freelancing career could be launched and how to prepare oneself for it.

This is where schools and colleges can help.

It is imperative now that all educational institutions offer sustained help in the form of courses, workshops and invited lectures on careers in freelancing.

Courses would have to include components of identifying core market demands, building a relevant and edgy portfolio, as well as learning the legalities of contracts. It would also have to include soft skills like time management and client communication.

Other important skills in freelancing

Freelancing can be challenging as jobs are not always constant, neither is the payment and there is always the fear of a lull period and of losing clients

include financial literacy and managing accounts. Networking, engaging with the community and leveraging the college alumnus are equally important.

Of course, this is not an easy ride. Many individuals prefer the comfort of a traditional job with set timings and predictable work. For others, it could be exciting and fulfilling.

Freelancing can be challenging in this sense: jobs are not always constant, nor is the payment. There is always the fear of a lull period and of losing clients. Projects also require capital that may be difficult to accumulate.

Courses in freelancing need to equip future entrepreneurs to face these realities and strategies of coping with them. This is why courses need to be embedded with short real-world situations and case studies, including setting up mock projects with the possibility of getting feedback from the market.

Being a business owner seems to be a more attractive option than working for somebody, no matter how big an organisation may be. But this does not come easily. Equipping future students with the skills necessary to stand on their own business feet should be one of the major purposes of education today.

GREEKS COUNT
COST OF WILDFIRE
‘TRAGEDY’

IMRAN MARASHLI

In the municipality of Palaia Fokaia, an hour’s drive south of Athens, a typical bucolic Greek landscape of olive groves and hamlets was transformed by a raging wildfire into a dystopia of blackened land and incinerated homes.

A howling wind ripped through the settlement, spread dust and the bitter smell of ash coming from the surrounding hills, where fires and smouldering embers continued to burn.

The ground shuddered as low-flying helicopters and water bombers weaved through the steep terrain to release water onto the remaining blazes and retrieve sea water.

Hours earlier, over 200 firefighters had battled to keep the fire that erupted in the rural region of Keratea, some 43 kilometres southeast of Athens, from threatening the coastal resorts dotting the coast of Attica.

At one gutted home — its caved-in roof nothing more than a tangle of warped metal — mask-wearing residents returned to retrieve whatever belongings survived the inferno. A despondent woman named Dimitria was more fortunate: the flames spared her home but razed the nearest forest, leaving it a desolate terrain of roasted trees and ash.

“From last night, there were very few reinforcements from the fire brigade,” she lamented, describing how help arrived after the advancing fire threatened “many houses” near the forest. “My house is OK, but my forest is burned. And that is the pity,” she said with a trembling voice, her eyes welling up as she left to survey the damage.

Firefighters with hoses combed through a copse of trees to douse any embers and prevent reactivations, scorched twigs and debris crunching under their boots.

Observing them from his unscathed house was a relieved Kostas Triadis.

Despite the damage dealt to the landscape, he hailed the work of firemen and volunteers, “otherwise it would be very bad.”

“It is regenerated by itself, I hope it will be the natural future,” the 75-year-old added, referring to the devastated vegetation.

“It is a very good, small forest, we always knew it was dangerous.”

His wife Eleni, 71, added that “everybody did their utmost to save the area, but the real tragedy is that the forest is lost. It was very old.”

But she pointed to the many trees that were relatively unharmed because the fire burned itself out quickly in the short grass that residents had cut in June. — AFP

Facebook and its siblings
are spying on us

WHILE reading a recent article on Rai Al Youm titled ‘What Does Facebook Really Know About You?’, I was reminded of an incident years ago at our old radio workplace.

A colleague claimed our phones could record conversations even when switched off. To prove it, he powered his device down, left the room, and asked us to talk freely. Upon returning, he restarted the phone — and to our surprise, our voices and images had been recorded.



ZAHIR
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political affairs

Facebook employed external firms to transcribe voice chats on Messenger, fuelling concerns about the platform’s reach into users’ private lives

friends, and detects the type of content that draws attention.

These insights are processed through sophisticated AI systems that can recognise faces in photos, read text in posts, determine exact locations, and even predict future interests.

This surveillance extends beyond Facebook to its associated platforms — WhatsApp and Instagram — forming a unified user profile for targeted advertising and content delivery.

Perhaps most concerning is Facebook’s Pixel tool, introduced in 2015. It’s a piece of code embedded in third-party websites to monitor users’ shopping habits and link them to their Facebook accounts, even if users are not active on the app itself. This data powers an advertising system that exploits human behaviour in unprecedented detail.

But does Facebook actually listen to conversations? Officially, the company denies using microphones for surveillance. However, a 2019 investigation by Bloomberg revealed that Facebook employed external firms to transcribe voice chats on Messenger, fuelling concerns about the platform’s reach into users’ private lives.

This brings us to a larger question: is this all just for marketing, or is something deeper at play?

In my view, reducing these practices to mere commercial targeting is a gross oversimplification. The real objective seems far more expansive.

The reality is that digital surveillance has become effortless. Every tap, website visit, and voice note contributes to a growing digital file — a mirror of our lives — that algorithms use to build psychological and behavioural profiles.

Although users can view some of their activity logs, Rai Al Youm

notes that a large portion of the data collected remains hidden and is used for internal analysis. This raises serious questions: Are tech companies part of a larger surveillance mechanism? Can users be blamed for agreeing to unread terms of service? And even if they do read them, can they refuse without losing access?

The article also asks: Can Facebook be stopped from tracking you? The answer appears to be no. Simply using the platform requires granting it extensive permissions. This creates a profound dilemma.

When social media platforms monitor every move and generate highly detailed digital profiles — including users’ political leanings and psychological states — it becomes clear that privacy, as we once knew it, is vanishing.

Interestingly, the rise of social media has rendered traditional public surveys nearly obsolete. Why commission a questionnaire when user behaviour online offers real-time insights into public sentiment?

Governments that genuinely care about their citizens could use this information to understand people’s needs, rather than surveil and punish them for harmless posts — as often happens in parts of the Arab world.

Social media has, without question, reshaped society. Some now speak more boldly behind screens than they ever would in person. Others chase viral fame more than meaningful engagement. Yet these platforms have also empowered previously unheard voices and raised global awareness of human rights issues — Gaza being a prime example.

Translated by Badr Al Dhafri

The original version of the article was published in the print edition of Oman, the Arabic daily newspaper, on August 4

Explore the symphony of humanity



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

IMAGINE walking into a grand concert hall. The lights dim, the audience gets quiet, a maestro lifts his stick, and then, a single instrument begins to play. After that, the same notes start to echo, looping over and over again. Now, just imagine a full orchestra, violins, cellos, flutes, drums, trumpets, voices singing in many languages. But together, they weave a wonderful symphony, rich and alive. That is what cultural diversity is, a symphony of humanity.

Think of the world as a beautiful garden. If it were filled with only roses, it would still be lovely, but eventually, we would start to wonder about tulips, or jasmine, or sunflowers. Diversity is what gives the garden its beauty and its surprise. When we bring together different languages, beliefs, rituals and worldviews, we create a garden that thrives. Hence, the world thrives because of the complexity, and so does humanity.

Of course, living with diversity is not always easy. It is not just music and food festivals. Sometimes, it is disorganised, cultures clash, misunderstandings arise and history carries wounds that haven't fully healed. But that doesn't mean we stop taking care of the garden. It means we water it with empathy and plant seeds with policies that protect and involve.

Imagine a world with only one melody, one language, one flavour and one rhythm!

It would be neat, boring and lifeless. But our world thrills with thousands of drums, whispers in a thousand dialects and sings in a thousand voices. The world is a child learning to say hello in five different languages at school and realising that every language holds a soul. Dialogue is a bridge made of words.

A handshake in one culture may be a bow in another. Both say: I see you. I acknowledge you.

One person's comfort food might be another's brave first bite. Both say: Welcome to my table.

There is always something heartening about meeting someone whose way of living is different from your own. It challenges your assumptions and provokes your curiosity. Sometimes, it worries you, but most often, it attracts you.

In every corner of the globe, people laugh, love, grieve and hope. The details vary, but the emotions are universal. Cultural diversity encourages us to learn the many ways humans live their truth.

When we embrace diversity, we don't just create jobs or boost tourism. We build resilience, heal wounds and rewrite the future. Cultures learn from each other as they share new ideas, and they grow stronger together.

To tell the truth, you don't need a passport to explore another culture. You just need curiosity. Cultures shape identity, influence

Diversity is what gives the garden its beauty and its surprise. When we bring together different languages, beliefs, rituals and worldviews, we create a garden that thrives

perspectives and define how communities interact with one another. With thousands of languages spoken worldwide and countless traditions, belief systems and expressions of art and heritage, human diversity is both a resource and a responsibility.

In a world increasingly connected through technology, travel and trade, the importance of embracing cultural diversity cannot be overstated.

Cultural diversity enhances social cohesion among humans. It encourages respect and mutual understanding, helping to prevent conflicts and bridge gaps. When societies value their cultural richness, they are more likely to promote inclusive governance, human rights and sustainable economic models.

Cultural diversity is not a project to complete. It is a rhythm to keep playing, a song that is constantly evolving. We each hold an instrument, our voice, our stories, our willingness to listen. The symphony of humanity needs every note, even yours! So let us keep composing it together.

When people of different cultures sit down, not to debate, but to listen, learn and collaborate, something extraordinary happens. Misunderstandings dissolve, common dreams emerge and innovation sparks. Dialogue is not just conversation; it is creation. So, let us sing in every language with every accent in harmony, not despite our differences, but because of them.

AFTER BUSY FIRST 100 DAYS, GERMANY'S MERZ FACES DISCORD

FRANK ZELLER

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has driven sweeping changes in security, economic and migration policy during his first 100 days in office, but faces widening cracks in his uneasy coalition.

On election night in February, a jubilant Merz promised to bring a bit of "rambo zambo" to the post - using a colloquialism that can evoke a wild and joyous ride, or chaos and mayhem.

Having achieved his life's ambition at age 69 to run Europe's top economy, Merz lost no time to push change, mostly in response to transatlantic turbulence sparked by US President Donald Trump.

"Germany is back," Merz said, vowing to revive the economy, the military and Berlin's international standing after what he labelled three lacklustre years under his centre-left predecessor Olaf Scholz.

Even before taking office, Merz's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and their governing partners from Scholz's Social Democratic party (SPD) loosened debt rules and unlocked hundreds of billions of euros for Germany's armed forces and its crumbling infrastructure.

Merz vowed to build "Europe's largest conventional army" in the face of a hostile Russia and keep up strong support for Ukraine in lockstep with Paris and London.

A promise to ramp up Nato spending endeared Merz to Trump, who greeted him warmly at a White House meeting in June, only weeks after a jarring Oval Office showdown with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. When Israel bombed Iranian targets, Merz, with a penchant for strong and often controversial one-liners, praised it - but last Friday he took the bold step of freezing arms exports to Israel over its Gaza campaign.

On the home front, Merz has pressed a crackdown on irregular migration, a sharp departure from the centrist course of his long-time party rival Angela Merkel.

He has said he must address voter concerns about immigration to stem the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which won a record 20 per cent in February's election.

Merz's heavy focus on global events has earned him the moniker of "foreign chancellor" - but trouble looms at home, where his SPD allies have often felt overshadowed or sidelined.

To many of them, Merz's right-wing positions have been hard to swallow in the marriage of convenience they entered following the SPD's dismal election outcome of 16 per cent.

German voters have not yet fallen in love with Merz either. His personal approval rating slipped 10 points to just 32 per cent in the latest poll by public broadcaster ARD.

In an early sign of trouble, Merz's inauguration on May 6 turned into a white-knuckle ride when rebel MPs opposed him in the first round of the secret ballot. — AFP

Where is the global resistance to Trump?

AMERICA'S critics have always depicted it as a selfish country that throws its weight around with little regard for others' well-being. But President Donald Trump's trade policies have been so misguided, erratic and self-defeating as to make even the most cartoonish of such descriptions seem flattering. Still, in a twisted way, his trade follies have laid bare other countries' failures as well, by forcing them to consider what their responses say about their own intentions and capabilities.

It is said that one's true character is revealed in the face of adversity, and the same goes for countries and their political systems. Trump's frontal assault on the world economy was a shock to everyone, but it also gave Europe, China and various middle powers an opportunity to make a statement about who they are and what they stand for. It was an invitation to articulate a vision of a new world order that could overcome the imbalances, inequities and unsustainability of the old one, and that would not depend on the leadership - for better or worse - of a single powerful country. But few rose to the challenge.

In this respect, the European Union has perhaps been the greatest disappointment. In terms of purchasing power, it is almost as large as the United States - accounting for 14.1 per cent of the world economy, compared to 14.8 per cent for the US and 19.7 per cent for China. Moreover, despite the recent rise of the far right, most European countries have avoided backsliding into authoritarianism. As a collection of democratic nation-states whose geopolitical ambitions do not threaten others, Europe has both the power and the moral authority to provide global leadership. Instead, it dithered and then submitted to Trump's demands.

Europe's ambitions were always narrowly parochial; but in folding to Trump, it is not even clear that it served its own immediate interests. The July handshake deal between Trump and European Commission



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva has emerged as the rare exemplary leader who refuses to grovel at Trump's feet.



DANI RODRIK

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is Past President of the International Economic Association and the author of the forthcoming Shared Prosperity in a Fractured World: A New Economics for the Middle Class, the Global Poor, and Our Climate

President Ursula von der Leyen leaves 50 per cent tariffs on European exports of steel and aluminium, places 15 per cent tariffs on most other exports, and commits Europe to ridiculously high levels of energy imports from the US. Rarely has the EU's structural weakness as a confederation of countries without a collective sense of identity been on starker display.

China has played a tougher game, retaliating forcefully with its own tariffs and restricting exports of critical minerals to the US. Trump's vindictive, self-defeating foreign policies have helped China extend its influence and enhance its credibility as a reliable partner for the developing world. But the Chinese leadership has also failed to articulate a practical model for a post-neoliberal global economic order. Notably, China has shown little interest in addressing the two global imbalances that it has caused with its own large external surplus and excess of domestic savings over investment.

Meanwhile, smaller countries and middle powers have mostly played the quiet game, pursuing independent bargains with Trump and hoping to limit the damage to

their own economies. The exception is Brazil, whose president, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, has emerged as the rare exemplary leader who refuses to grovel at Trump's feet. Despite facing punitive 50 per cent tariffs and pointed personal attacks, he has proudly defended his country's sovereignty, democracy and independent judiciary. As the New York Times puts it, "There is perhaps no world leader defying President Trump as strongly as Mr Lula."

Such leadership has been sorely lacking around the world. In India, the political commentator Pratap Bhanu Mehta points out that many business and political elites are searching for ways to accommodate Trump. But in doing so, Mehta argues, they are misreading him and the world he is creating. At any other time in recent history, the Trump administration's behaviour would immediately be called out for what it is: imperialism - plain and simple.

Imperialism must always be challenged - not accommodated - and that requires both power and purpose. Of course, America has held the reins of the world economy for a very long time.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



STRONG START AT SCHOOL BEACH GAMES CHAMPIONSHIP IN DHOFAR

SPORTS REPORTER
SALALAH, AUG 10

The opening round of the 4th School Beach Games Championship, organised by the Oman School Sports Association in Dhofar Governorate, kicked off in strong style, delivering high-energy action and fierce competition in both boys' beach volleyball and beach handball events. The tournament began amid an enthusiastic atmosphere and strong crowd support for the participating teams.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL ACTION

Six matches took place in the first round of the volleyball competition. Al Sharqiyah South beat Dhofar in straight sets, while Al Dakhiliyah secured a similar 2-0 win over Al Sharqiyah North. Al Batinah North cruised past Musandam with a 2-0 scoreline, and Muscat defeated Al Batinah South by the same margin. Al Sharqiyah South returned for their second win of the day, overcoming Al Sharqiyah North 2-0, before Al Dakhiliyah capped off the round with a 2-0 victory against Al Wusta.

BEACH HANDBALL EVENT

The handball courts witnessed intense and closely fought encounters, with some games decided by penalty shootouts. Al Batinah North edged Al Batinah South 2-1 in a thrilling match, while Al Sharqiyah South beat Al Sharqiyah North 2-0. Muscat also overcame Musandam 2-0, and Al Dakhiliyah secured a 2-0 win over Dhofar. Al Sharqiyah South maintained their strong form with another 2-0 victory against Al Batinah North, before Al Batinah South clinched a narrow 2-1 penalty shootout win over Al Sharqiyah North to close the round.

The second round of the volleyball competition will be held on Monday morning with six scheduled matches, including: Muscat match against Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah to take on Musandam, Al Batinah North to play against Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South to face Al Batinah South, Muscat to take on Al Dakhiliyah and Musandam to play against Dhofar.

Monday will feature ten beach handball matches. The morning session will see Al Sharqiyah South facing Al Wusta, Al Sharqiyah North to meet Dhofar, Al Batinah North to play against Al Batinah South, Muscat to play Musandam, Al Sharqiyah South to take on Al Dakhiliyah, and Al Wusta to meet Dhofar. The evening session will include four games, including Al Batinah North to compete against Muscat, Al Batinah South to play against Musandam, Al Sharqiyah North to take on Al Wusta and Dhofar to meet Al Dakhiliyah.



Crystal Palace win Community Shield on penalties



Crystal Palace's Mateta, Chris, Lerma and Daniel celebrate after winning the Shield. — Reuters

CRYSTAL PALACE twice came from behind to stun a new-look Liverpool and win the Community Shield for the first time on penalties after a 2-2 draw at Wembley on Sunday. New signings Hugo Ekitike and Jeremie Frimpong scored for the Premier League champions, but Palace responded through Jean-Philippe Mateta and Ismaila Sarr before winning an error-strewn shootout 3-2. Mohamed Salah blazed over from the spot, while Alexis Mac Allister and Harvey Elliott were denied by an inspired Dean Henderson as Palace built on winning their first ever major trophy by beating Manchester City in May's FA Cup final.

The traditional curtain-raiser to the English football season was given extra significance after a summer marked by tragedy for Liverpool. Forward Diogo Jota was killed in a car accident alongside his brother Andre Silva. Reds legend Ian Rush and Palace chairman Steve Parish laid wreaths on the side of the pitch before kick-off, while the Liverpool end was awash with banners and flags paying tribute to the Portuguese international. A minute's silence, however, had to be cut short due to disturbances in the crowd. Jota's death has dampened the excitement over Liverpool's transfer spending spree to build on a squad that romped to a record-equalling 20th league title last season. All

four of their new signings at a cost of \$350 million — Ekitike, Florian Wirtz, Frimpong and Milos Kerkez — started. Ekitike's role this season could depend on whether Liverpool are successful in their pursuit of Newcastle striker Alexander Isak. But the Frenchman — signed from Eintracht Frankfurt last month for an initial £69 million — did his case to be Slot's preferred number nine no harm at all. Wirtz also bagged his first assist for the Reds when Ekitike spun onto the German's pass and fired into the far corner just four minutes. Palace were making their first ever appearance in the fixture but the Eagles again showed their ability to match one of the Premier League's giants over 90 minutes. — AFP

Ittihad edge Seeb, Ahli Sidab hold Masirah in Hockey League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 10

Al Ittihad secured a valuable 2-1 victory over Seeb in their match at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat, as part of the third round of the final stages of the U-18 Hockey League.

The match began at a balanced pace in the first quarter, with Abdullah bin Salem standing out for Al Ittihad through several attacking attempts, while Seeb's most notable chance came from Al Yazan al Balushi. The first quarter ended goalless.

In the second quarter, Al Ittihad asserted their dominance, controlling the flow of play. Seeb had a few attempts to score but were unable to convert. In the 29th minute, Al Ittihad was awarded a penalty corner, which Yassin Medhat Mohammed converted to give his side the lead. The quarter ended with Al Ittihad ahead 1-0.

The third quarter saw Seeb repeatedly try to equalise, the closest being a shot from Laith al Nabhani that went just wide of the right post. However, Al Ittihad capitalised on a



quick counterattack, earning a second penalty corner. Once again, Yassin Medhat found the net in the 39th minute, doubling the lead to 2-0. Early in the final quarter, Laith al Nabhani gave Seeb hope by scoring to make it 2-1. The game intensified in the closing minutes as Seeb pressed hard for an equaliser, but Al Ittihad's defence and goalkeeper held firm to seal an important win. Ahli Sidab and Masirah played out a dramatic 2-2 draw. The first quarter began at a fast pace with both sides exchanging attacks. Ahli Sidab's danger came mainly through Saad al Fazari and Maytham al Wahaibi, while Masirah's most threatening

moves were led by Al Qasim al Shaidi and Fadh1 al Noufali. Both defences and goalkeepers were solid, keeping the score 0-0 at the end of the quarter. In the second quarter, Ahli Sidab took clear control of possession and limited Masirah's attacks. In the 21st minute, Saad al Fazari converted his team's dominance into the opening goal with a smart finish inside the circle. Masirah tried to level the score through counterattacks, but the half ended with Ahli Sidab leading 1-0. The third quarter saw Masirah's coach, Ahmed al Noufali, implement a tactical shift that quickly paid off. His side earned a penalty corner

in the 32nd minute, which Fadh1 al Noufali converted to equalise. Masirah maintained their pressure, and just two minutes later, Khazraj bin Sbeit al Mashrafi scored to put them ahead 2-1 at the end of the quarter. In the final quarter, Ahli Sidab pushed forward relentlessly for an equaliser, while Masirah defended with determination. In the dying seconds, Masirah's defence committed a foul that led to a penalty corner. Maytham al Wahaibi executed it perfectly to secure a late equaliser, ending the match 2-2 in a dramatic fashion that kept both teams in contention for the title. At the end of the third round, Al Ittihad topped the standings with 6 points, followed by Ahli Sidab in second place with 5 points, Masirah in third with 4 points, and Seeb in fourth with 1 point. Based on these results, the first semi-final will see Al Ittihad face Seeb, while the second semi-final will feature a strong clash between Ahli Sidab and Masirah, with both matches deciding the finalists for the championship.

SHORTTAKES



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez reacting. — Reuters

LIVERPOOL’S
URUGUAY STRIKER
NUNEZ JOINS
AL HILAL

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool’s Uruguay forward Darwin Nunez has joined Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal from the Premier League champions on a three-year deal, both clubs said on Saturday.

Financial details of the transfer were not disclosed but British media reported that the Saudis paid 53 million euros (\$61.69 million) plus add-ons that could take the final price tag up to 56.6 million pounds for the 26-year-old.

“Al Hilal Club Company is pleased to announce the signing of Uruguayan striker Darwin Nunez from Liverpool FC on a three-year contract,” the Saudi club said on their website.

“Nunez has just joined the squad during the current pre-season training camp in Germany,” Al Hilal added.

Nunez joined Liverpool in June 2022 from Benfica for an initial fee of 75 million euros but struggled for consistency, with 40 goals and 26 assists in 143 games in all competitions.

The striker found himself on the fringes of the first team during Liverpool’s title-winning campaign last season, starting only eight league matches and netting five times.

His departure will help finance Liverpool’s outlay of almost 300 million pounds so far for the 2025-26 season.

They have already signed Germany playmaker Florian Wirtz for a club-record fee of up to 116 million pounds and French forward Hugo Ekitike for 69 million plus add-ons.

Al Hilal, under former Inter Milan manager Simone Inzaghi, became the first Asian club to defeat a Premier League side in an official match when they beat Manchester City at the Club World Cup last month.

Inzaghi’s new side is aiming to secure a record-extending 20th league title this season, having finished second in the Saudi Pro League last term. Their other high-profile signing of the transfer window was Theo Hernandez from AC Milan.

— Reuters

Son Heung-min shines in
Los Angeles FC debut

SOUTH KOREA star Son Heung-min made his Major League Soccer debut for Los Angeles FC Saturday, providing a burst of energy as a second-half substitute in a 2-2 draw with the Fire in Chicago.

Son was brought down for a penalty in the 77th minute that Denis Bouanga converted to clinch a draw in the 81st minute -- VAR confirming the spot-kick after the referee had allowed play to continue.

“It was a great pass. Obviously, it was definitely contact and it was definitely a penalty, I have no doubt about it,” said Son, who was sent sprawling by Carlos Teran after racing on to a through ball with the goal in his sights.

“A bit disappointed not getting three points, but I think everybody put in a lot of effort. (I’m) happy I made my debut and I hope the goals come soon.”

The former Tottenham captain also had a string of shots on goal, including one blocked in second-half injury time.

Son signed with LAFC on Wednesday for a reported MLS record \$26 million after a decade with Premier League club Spurs, where he became a household name.

The South Korea captain had announced the previous on Saturday in his homeland that he would be leaving the north London club and departed as Tottenham’s fifth-highest goalscorer of all time with 173 goals in 454 appearances.

Son will not get a chance to play in front of home fans in Los Angeles until August 31, when Western Conference leaders San Diego will be the visitors.

But around the Fire’s SeatGeek Stadium, there were a lot of fans wearing his jerseys, waving South Korean flags and holding up signs welcoming Son to MLS.

Cheers greeted his entry in place of David Martinez in the 61st minute with the teams level at 1-1.

Jonathan Bamba put Chicago 2-1 ahead in the 70th minute and they were pressing again when Brian Gutierrez’s shot bounced off the post and LAFC seized the rebound.

Nathan Ordaz played the ball forward for Son to race away. He had a first MLS goal in his sights when he was brought down.

The penalty allowed LAFC to level for a second time.

Carlos Teran had opened the scoring for the Fire in the 11th minute with a header from a corner.

Eight minutes later Ryan Hollingshead nodded in to make it 1-1.

Son had said at his introductory press conference — attended by luminaries including Los Angeles mayor Karen Bass — that he felt fighting fit and wanted to get on the pitch “as soon as possible.”

He will have his next chance when LAFC, who moved up a spot to fifth in the Western Conference, visit the New England Revolution next Saturday.

“It was a decent 30 minutes in my legs, so, yeah, getting ready for next week,” Son said.

“So we’ll see how I progress with the training sessions and with the players and we’ll see (if) next week I can start the game and make a big impact.” — AFP



Son Heung-Min (7) and Chicago Fire goalkeeper (1) battle for control of the ball. — Reuters

David’s 83 powers Australia to first T20 win over South Africa in Darwin

DARWIN: Tim David crunched eight sixes in a blistering 83 from 52 balls to help Australia beat South Africa by 17 runs in their opening Twenty20 clash in Darwin on Sunday.

After being sent in, the hosts were all out for 178 on the final delivery of their 20 overs in the first game of international cricket in Australia’s tropical north for 17 years.

Cameron Green (35 off 13) was the only other batsman to get going, with left-arm quick Kwen Maphaka bagging 4-20 as South Africa bowled out Australia for the first time in a T20. But David’s phenomenal innings proved enough, with the Proteas restricted to 161-9 in reply.

That was despite a battling 71 from Ryan Rickelton, who fell to a spectacular Glenn Maxwell catch on the boundary.

Josh Hazlewood took 3-27 and Ben Dwarshuis 3-26.

“Great way to start the series,” skipper Mitchell Marsh said after Australia’s ninth T20 victory in a row.

“Certainly, we want guys like David to come out and bat the way he did, he was the difference.”

Backing up from a recent 5-0 series sweep against the West Indies, Australia signalled their intent early with Marsh slamming a six off the first ball.

But he lost opening partner Travis



Head (two) and Josh Inglis (golden duck) in the space of three deliveries and then skied Kagiso Rabada on 13, with Maphaka taking a tricky catch before Green and David let loose.

They put on a quickfire 40 for the fourth wicket before Green was undone by a slower ball from Lungi Ngidi.

Australia were in trouble on 75-6 when Mitch Owen was out for two and dangerman Maxwell went for one. But David dug in and, with Dwarshuis (17), added 59 for the seventh wicket.

David was dropped by Tristan Stubbs on 56, although Stubbs made amends by holding the catch that finally removed the big Australian

after a power-packed knock.

South Africa’s chase started badly with skipper Aiden Markram out to Hazlewood in the first over, and they had lost three wickets for 48 by the sixth over.

Rickelton and Stubbs (37) knuckled down in a threatening 72-run stand but Hazlewood struck again with two wickets in an over to shatter their momentum.

South Africa’s hopes were all but over when Adam Zampa matched Hazlewood’s feat in the next over.

“It got close, but we were pretty far from our best tonight,” Markram said. The second of the three-game series is in Darwin on Tuesday.

— AFP

SPORTS



It's always a tough match against her. She pushed me to the limit. If you lose focus even a little bit, it can cost you a set. I had to fight for every point against her.

ARYNA SABALENKA

JANNIK SINNER and ARYNA SABALENKA got their title defences off to smooth starts as they powered into the third round of the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open on Saturday. The men's and women's top seeds, each ranked number one in the world, were both competing for the first time since Wimbledon, where Sinner lifted the title and Sabalenka bowed out in the women's semifinals. Sinner crushed Colombian Daniel Elahi Galan 6-1, 6-1 in steamy afternoon weather while Sabalenka beat 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova 7-5, 6-1 under the lights of the night session. Sabalenka needed 54 minutes and a service break in the final game to clinch the opening set with a

stinging winner. The second set was more of a grind than the score suggested as she saved five break points for a 4-1 lead and recovered from 0-30 down in the final game before securing the win. "It's always a tough match against her," Sabalenka said of the Czech opponent she has faced nine times. "She pushed me to the limit. If you lose focus even a little bit, it can cost you a set. I had to fight for every point against her," added Sabalenka, who next faces Britain's Emma Raducanu, a 6-3, 6-2 winner over Olga Danilovic. Meanwhile, Sinner outclassed Colombia's Galan with 17 winners and just four unforced errors. Sinner won the opening five games in 15 minutes as he allowed his 144th-ranked opponent, who came through qualifying, little

breathing room. The victory in 59 minutes was the fastest of Sinner's ATP career, beating his previous quickest by one minute. Sinner claimed his 22nd consecutive win on hardcourt, last losing the Beijing final in September to rival Carlos Alcaraz. "I didn't know what to expect," Sinner said of his return to tournament action. "I'm happy because it's not easy to play here. "Today I was finding my spots, but there is still a little room to improve. For a first match, it could not have gone better." After snapping up the first set, Sinner broke to start the second before Galan clawed out a hold in a seven-minute game in which he fought off five break points. But it was only a momentary reprieve. Sinner fired three aces to

hold for 3-1 as he roared away again for the victory. Fourth-seeded American Taylor Fritz eased past qualifier Emlilio Nava 6-4, 6-4 and seventh-seeded Holger Rune won his opener 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) over Russian Roman Safiullin. But eighth-seeded Lorenzo Musetti and 11th-seeded Casper Ruud bowed out to French opponents. Benjamin Bonzi defeated Musetti 5-7, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) while Artur Rinderknech beat Ruud 6-7 (5/7), 6-4, 6-2 - taking full advantage of Ruud's 34 unforced errors. Rinderknech was pleased with his success so far at his Cincinnati debut. "I stayed aggressive throughout the match," he said. "You cannot let Casper start to dictate." **SWIATEK ADVANCES** In other women's action, reigning

Wimbledon champion Iga Swiatek earned an efficient opening win over Anastasia Potapova 6-1, 6-4. Poland's Swiatek has reached the final four at the last two editions, but Cincinnati remains one of the two 1000-level tournaments — along with Canada — where she has never played a final. The third seed moved into the third round in just 74 minutes, saving four of the five break points she faced. "I wanted to play solid - but intense as well," Swiatek said. "It was up and down in the second set. But in the important moments, I got my level up to close out the win." Australian Open winner Madison Keys needed more than two hours to advance with a 1-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) over German Eva Lys, saving two match points at 5-6 in the deciding set. — AFP



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SHORTTAKES



The MoC was signed by Salalah Port with the Ministry of Labour on Sunday.

Salalah Port backs Labour Ministry partnership to boost Omani workforce skills

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 10

Salalah Port Services Company signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with the Directorate-General of Labour in Dhofar Governorate to help advance cooperation between the public and private sectors. The MoC was inked during the opening of the Government Transformation and Sustainable Leadership Conference, which commenced in Salalah yesterday under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Royal Court Affairs.

The MoC also affirms the strategic role played by the Ministry of Labour in developing the human resources sector in the State's administrative apparatus and supporting employment in the private sector.

It also reinforces the active role of Salalah Port Services Company in employing job-seekers in the private sector and developing human resources, thereby achieving the principle of partnership in a manner that serves the public interest.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed bin Aufait al Maashani, Director of Corporate Affairs at Salalah Port, said the company's partnership with the Ministry of Labour will open new avenues for training and qualifying national talent, enhancing the port's role in supporting the local economy and improving the labour market in Dhofar Governorate.

He affirmed the port's continuous commitment to social responsibility by investing in people and developing their skills, enabling them to become active partners in Oman's sustainable development journey.

Rules issued for Promising Companies Market

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 10

THE Financial Services Authority (FSA) has announced the issuance of regulations for the Promising Companies Market, a dedicated sub-market within the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) created under Royal Decree No 18/2025. This initiative is part of broader efforts to strengthen Oman's capital market framework, open new financing channels for national companies and prepare them for a smooth, phased integration into the main market.

The regulations aim to create a well-defined legal and operational structure for listing promising enterprises — particularly start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and private or family-owned businesses — within a regulatory environment tailored to their needs.

The framework provides financial and operational incentives to help such companies grow, improve governance and achieve long-term sustainability.

Under the new rules, companies can join the Promising Companies Market via two pathways: direct listing or indirect listing.

Direct listing involves a company entering the market without raising capital or offering a portion of its shares for private subscription. To qualify, a firm must have recorded net profits over the past three years, achieved an average annual revenue growth of at least 14.4% during that period, and have a shareholder base of at least 20.

Indirect listing entails raising capital or offering at least 20% of the company's shares through a private subscription.

This method requires a minimum of two years of operational and financial performance.

Notably, companies still in the establishment phase can opt for indirect listing without meeting the two-year requirement or submitting audited financial statements, provided they fulfil other stipulated conditions.

The listing process has been designed for efficiency. Once all requirements are



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met, the FSA must respond to applications within three business days; if no reply is issued in that time, the application is deemed approved.

However, the MSX reserves the right to delist companies that breach the regulations, following established procedures.

Participation in the Promising Companies Market is limited to specific categories of qualified investors, including securities firms, insurance companies, the Social Security Fund, investment funds, and high-net-worth individuals with significant financial or market expertise. Companies listed on the market must comply with the International Financial Reporting Standards for Small and

Medium-sized Enterprises (IFRS-SME).

This includes disclosing unaudited semi-annual financial statements within 30 days of the half-year's end and audited annual statements within 90 days of the fiscal year's close. They must also adhere to rules governing the disclosure of material information.

To maintain market stability, founders' shares are subject to restrictions. For established companies, founders cannot sell shares for one year after listing, though up to 10% may be withdrawn under MSX guidelines.

For companies under formation, share sales are prohibited until one fiscal year after registration, with possible extensions at the FSA's discretion.

The regulations also outline service fees for listing and issuance, designed to minimise financial burdens on eligible firms.

According to the FSA, this framework is a milestone in implementing the Royal Decree and reflects national goals to empower the private sector, foster value-added enterprises and create an attractive investment climate that broadens Oman's economic base. — ONA

Oman Endowment Foundation unveils maiden real estate initiative

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 10

IN ITS first major action since being established by Royal Decree last November, the Oman Endowment Foundation (OEF) has invited local and international real estate developers to submit their pre-qualification credentials for potential partnerships in the development of awqaf properties in the Sultanate of Oman.

OEF was created under Royal Decree No 28/2024 with the objective of maximising returns on endowment and Bayt Al Mal assets through sustainable and innovative investments.

Announcing its first real estate initiative, the Muscat-based Foundation said: "In line with its strategic objectives, OEF invites qualified local and international real estate developers, alliances and specialised investors to submit their pre-qualification documents for potential partnerships.

"This initiative includes select



OEF's initiative focuses on real estate projects that can be developed efficiently to generate significant returns and societal benefits.

investment lands designated for real estate development."

According to the Foundation, future partnerships and investment models will be structured to suit different project needs. One approach is the Usufruct or Long-Term Lease Model, in which the developer is granted the right to use the endowment land for a defined

period without any transfer of ownership.

The developer assumes full responsibility for financing, developing and operating the project, as well as bearing all associated commercial and financial risks. In return, OEF secures a fixed or escalating income stream, such as annual rent, while retaining complete ownership of the land both during and after the usufruct period.

Another is the Sweat Equity Model, where the developer receives an equity stake in exchange for providing full project funding, technical management and development expertise, and for assuming all operational and financial risks.

In this model, the land remains under the Foundation's ownership or may be contributed as an equity stake if mutually agreed.

OEF also offers an Equity Partnership, or Musharakah Model, based on a joint partnership between the Foundation and the investor. Here, OEF contributes the land as an in-kind share valued at fair market

price at the start of the venture, while the investor contributes cash capital of equal or complementary value.

The project is implemented jointly, with profits and losses shared in proportion to each party's capital contribution. Both partners retain rights in strategic decision-making, and any exit or termination is governed by the partnership agreement.

"OEF's initiative focuses on real estate projects that can be developed efficiently to generate significant returns and societal benefits," the Foundation explained.

"This initiative is a core component of OEF's long-term vision and its strategy for endowment growth. OEF expects selected partners to conduct comprehensive highest-and-best-use analyses and detailed financial assessments for each land parcel during the subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) stage."

The deadline for submission of qualifications is August 24, 2025, with the shortlist of qualified firms expected to be announced on September 7, 2025.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The new branch is designed to serve all segments of society.

BANKDHOFAR OPENS NEW BRANCH AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to strengthening relationships with customers and delivering best-in-class banking services, BankDhofar has opened a new branch at the Royal Academy of Management.

The new branch is designed to serve all segments of society, particularly employees of government institutions and nearby private sector establishments.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Brigadier Jamal bin Said al Taie, Director General of Financial Affairs at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and attended by several BankDhofar officials.

Ghada bint Mohammed al Raisiyah, Acting AGM & Head of Capital Branches and call Centre at BankDhofar, remarked: “Our presence at the Royal Academy is not limited to delivering banking services.

It also reflects our commitment to supporting students, academic and administrative staff; and fostering a financial environment that enables them to achieve their goals”.

Al Raisi added that BankDhofar is focused on bringing the bank closer to its customers, placing their needs at the heart of its operations.

The bank continuously enhances service levels by reducing waiting times to no more than 10 minutes, listening attentively to customers and addressing their diverse requirements efficiently.

Through its extensive network of branches, BankDhofar offers a wide range of banking solutions tailored to different customer segments, including women, youth, children and high-income clients — particularly Al Riadah and Al Rifaa cardholders.

The bank also provides specialised wealth management services for high-net-worth individuals and their families, delivered in a secure, discreet and professional manner.

Its product offering includes clear investment and savings plans, such as fixed and recurring deposit accounts. Among these is a long-term deposit account designed to support parents in saving for their children’s higher education.

Additionally, another product supports employees in developing retirement savings plans, helping them secure long-term financial stability and peace of mind.

As part of its ongoing innovation, BankDhofar recently launched a “Mobile Branch” — a fully integrated banking unit that brings services to customers across the Sultanate of Oman, including remote areas.

This mobile branch is equipped with secure digital terminals, integrated systems and private consultation areas, offering convenience and flexibility while maintaining customer privacy and comfort.

ANNUAL NBO KIDS CARNIVAL CELEBRATES COMMUNITY, CREATIVITY AND LEARNING

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) hosted its Annual Kids Carnival at the bank’s Head Office in Muscat, celebrating its employees and their families in a vibrant day of connection and community.

The event reflects NBO’s commitment to fostering a workplace culture that values wellbeing, belonging and togetherness. Launched in 2017, the carnival has become a cherished tradition, bringing families together and offering employees an



opportunity to connect beyond the workplace.

More than a day of fun, it serves as an investment in NBO’s community and the next generation. Held ahead of the new

school year, the event blends play, learning and entrepreneurial spirit to spark curiosity, nurture creativity and develop essential life skills. The 2025 edition featured a diverse line-up of activities for all ages, from financial literacy stations and interactive shows to arts and crafts corners and live entertainment.

Designed to inspire imagination, these experiences encouraged teamwork, financial awareness and critical thinking in a fun, engaging environment.

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For decades, the Prado has been a trusted name in durability and performance.

two powerful engine options, a 2.4L Turbo Petrol or a 2.8L Turbo Diesel, both paired to an efficient 8-speed automatic transmission.

These powertrains deliver a refined balance of strength, responsiveness and fuel economy, ideal for both everyday drives and long-distance travel. Inside, the Prado’s seven-seat cabin is built for comfort and versatility.

Whether it is a regular drive

to school, a grocery stop, or a country-side road trip, passengers enjoy generous space, intuitive features and premium finishes throughout.

Toyota Safety Sense, Toyota’s latest suite of intelligent driver assistance technologies, provides added peace of mind, making every trip safer and less stressful.

The Prado’s bold, retro-inspired exterior turns heads wherever it goes, while its

intelligent technology and safety systems ensure it remains a leader in practicality and innovation.

With Oman’s landscapes offering everything from mountain escapes and desert drives to serene coastal highways, the Prado stands ready to adapt and excel. It is a vehicle for those who want strength, style, safety and the freedom to explore without compromise.

AHLIBANK LAUNCHES ‘BACK TO SCHOOL’ CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its ongoing commitment to delivering value-driven propositions and meaningfully rewarding its credit cardholders, ahlibank has launched its ‘Back to School’ campaign.

As part of this initiative, credit cardholders can enjoy 5% cashback on tuition fee payments made for the upcoming academic year. The offer is valid until September 10, 2025, providing customers with a timely benefit while managing education expenses.

This campaign underscores the bank’s dedication to supporting families during the back-to-school season, while reinforcing its



Credit cardholders can enjoy 5% cashback on tuition fee payments made for the upcoming academic year.

broadier mission to ease financial commitments and enrich the overall banking experience.

As part of this limited-time offer, ahlibank credit cardholders will receive 5% cashback in the form of Pearl Reward Points when using their cards to pay for tuition fees.

To qualify, a minimum spend of RO 500 is required, with the cashback capped at RO 50 in Pearl Points per customer.

Eligible Pearl Points will be credited within 60 days after the campaign concludes, offering customers the flexibility to redeem them as cashback to their accounts or credit cards, or use them for flight bookings with select partner

airlines, hotel stays and purchases at a wide network of partner merchants — transforming everyday spending into lasting value.

Commenting on the exclusive offer, Qais al Hasani, AGM — Head of Retail Business Support at ahlibank, remarked, “At ahlibank, we remain closely aligned with the evolving needs of our customers and this understanding continues to shape the design of our seasonal, value-driven offerings. As families prepare for the return to school, our Back to School campaign is a reflection of our commitment to easing financial pressures during this time”.

Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund announces first interim dividend distribution

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announces that the Fund Management Body of Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund has approved the first interim dividend distribution of 1% to the Fund’s unitholders within less than one year of commencement of operations.

The record date for the dividend distribution is August 19, 2025 and investors will have the choice to receive their dividend proceeds in cash or reinvest in Al Tharwa Fund



Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund was launched in September 2024.

at the ex-dividend date Net Asset Value (NAV) per unit of August 19, 2025. Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund was launched in September 2024 as an open-ended fund regulated by the Financial Services Authority in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Fund is the first of its kind in Oman providing a unique combination of growth and income to investors by actively investing in two key asset classes, ie, equity and fixed income.

The allocation to these asset classes is dynamically managed

by Bank Muscat’s experienced asset management team, based on prevailing market conditions and objectives of the Fund.

Accordingly, the Fund aims to provide regular dividend distributions along with capital appreciation to unitholders over the medium to long term.

Al Tharwa Fund provides an opportunity to invest in both equity and fixed income securities across local, regional and international markets.

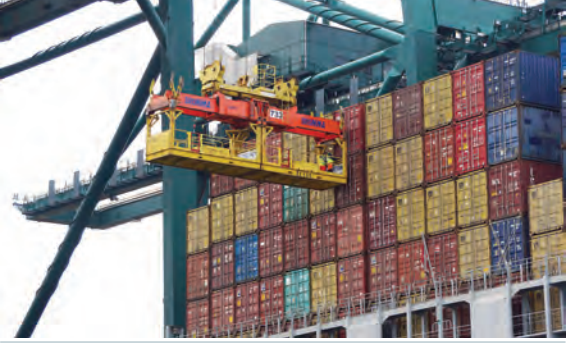
The Fund offers daily liquidity

with no minimum holding period.

Investors can subscribe to the Fund with a minimum subscription amount of RO 50 and there is no maximum limit for investment.

The subscription and redemption from the Fund are available through Bank Muscat’s Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms for the Bank’s individual customers.

Corporates and government institutions may approach their relationship managers at Bank Muscat for mutual fund investments.



Total UK imports from Oman experienced an increase of 12% or £48 million, amounting to a total of £447 million.

UK-OMAN TRADE FALLS 4.6% TO £1.6 BILLION

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 10

Total trade in goods and services between the United Kingdom and Oman fell by £76 million (RO 37.24 million approximately) or 4.6% over the 12 months ending Q1 2025, based on current prices amounting to £1.6 billion (RO 784 million), according to the latest UK government trade and investment factsheet.

Total UK exports to Oman experienced a decrease of 9.9% or £124 million (RO 60.76 million) compared to the previous year, totalling £1.1 billion (RO 539 million).

Of this, goods exports made up 41.7% of exports amounting to £470 million (RO 230.3 million), representing a decline of 17.5% or £100 million (RO 49 million).

Services exports made up 58.3% of exports, amounting to £657 million (RO 321.93 million), representing a decline of 3.5% or £24 million (RO 11.76 million).

In contrast, total UK imports from Oman experienced an increase of 12% or £48 million (RO 23.52 million), amounting to a total of £447 million (RO 219.03 million). Goods imports represented 69.4% of total imports, valued at £310 million (RO 151.9 million), marking a 16.1% increase valued at £43 million (RO 21.07 million).

Service imports, which made up 30.6% of total imports, amounted to £137 million (RO 67.13 million), marking an increase of 3.8% or £5 million (RO 2.45 million).

According to the factsheet, the UK recorded a total trade surplus of £680 million with Oman in the four quarters to the end of Q1 2025, down from £852 million in the previous year. This included a goods trade surplus of £160 million, compared to £303 million the year before and a services trade surplus of £520 million, compared to £549 million in the previous year.

Oman ranked as the UK’s 77th largest trading partner in the four quarters to the end of Q1 2025, accounting for 0.1% of total UK trade. It was the 60th largest services export market (0.1% of UK services exports) and the 90th largest import market (accounting for less than 0.1% of total UK imports).

CEO TALK

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUG 10

In a nation defined by transformation, few individuals have done more to shape Oman’s private sector and national identity than Dr Siham al Harthy. Entrepreneur, reformer and board member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Dr Al Harthy has carved out a path of leadership rooted in integrity, resilience and purpose.

As Chair of OCCI’s Tourism Committee and CEO of Siham Development & Investment, she is not only steering economic initiatives but reimagining what development looks like — infused with cultural relevance and long-term impact. Her journey, as she tells it, began not with power, but with a problem.

“Early in my career at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, everything was still on paper”, she recalls. “There was no digital archive of land records. Retrieving data could take weeks”.

Rather than accept a flawed system, Dr Al Harthy led a nationwide digitisation effort, mobilising experts, forming cross-governorate taskforces and persuading wary officials to embrace digital solutions.

“That experience taught me that real leadership means solving the problems others avoid — and doing so with purpose”.

It was a pivotal moment. Rather than stay within the system, she chose to build new ones. Founding her own firm, Siham Development & Investment, she sought to deliver projects that went beyond profitability, marrying economic viability with national values.

“I saw a gap in developments that balance returns with cultural identity — so I created a company to close it”.



Girls need to grow up seeing women lead forums and shape strategy. That’s when ambition becomes natural, not radical.

DR SIHAM AL HARTHY
Chair of OCCI’s Tourism Committee and CEO of Siham Development & Investment.

Her portfolio spans smart infrastructure, tourism assets and real estate. But beyond the balance sheets, her work is driven by a deeper mission: ensuring Omani development tells an Omani story.

CHALLENGING THE NORMS
Being one of the first two women elected to the OCCI Board did not come without resistance. Dr Al Harthy faced persistent questions about her ability to lead, manage partnerships, or represent Oman on the international stage.

“I focused on delivering results”, she says. “I even founded the first women’s association in the Wilayat of Al Qabil, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, back in the 1990s — not because it was popular, but because it was necessary”.

Her success, over time, has spoken for itself. She believes it is time for women in leadership to become the norm — not the exception.

“Girls need to grow up seeing women lead forums and shape strategy. That’s when ambition becomes natural, not radical”.

PRIVATE SECTOR AS ENGINE OF OMAN VISION 2040
At the core of Dr Al Harthy’s work is a firm belief in the role of the private sector in advancing Oman Vision 2040. “It’s not a government vision — it’s a national one. And the private sector is its engine”. Through her role in OCCI, she has helped local firms access global markets — such as through digital marketing agreements with UK-based platforms. These steps, while modest in scale, have significant systemic impact.

“We’re aligning entrepreneurship with policy and investment. The goal is not just to grow companies — but to grow capacity”.

When it comes to tourism, Dr Al Harthy sees storytelling — not sales — as Oman’s most strategic asset. “Oman isn’t a product to sell; it’s a story to tell. But stories need infrastructure”.

She points to Dhofar’s monsoon season (Khareef Dhofar Season), which draws thousands of visitors but leaves few long-term economic benefits. That’s changing. Her team is now working on tourism projects that blend eco-tourism, youth training and community inclusion — transforming seasonal booms into sustainable cycles. “Investors today want value with values”, she explains. “Green resorts, heritage trails, integrated tourism zones — those are what we’re seeing more of. Oman’s authenticity is our edge”.

INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION
Dr Al Harthy’s message to young Omanis is clear: start now. “Don’t wait for permission. Don’t wait for perfection. I began many of my initiatives with little more than clarity of purpose and the courage to try”. She encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to start small, solve real problems and stay

grounded in their values.

“That’s where resilience comes from”. When asked about the principles guiding her leadership, Dr Al Harthy answers without hesitation: “Integrity. I’ve slowed down major projects to protect long-term national interests. But I sleep peacefully knowing my decisions are value-driven — not ego-driven”.

Inclusive leadership is also central to her philosophy: listening deeply, mentoring youth and building coalitions. “I believe in leaving space for others to rise”.

As for her legacy?

“I don’t want to be remembered just as a builder of projects — but as a builder of people and institutions. Someone who showed that women can lead boldly — without losing their values”.

She’s currently working on a green hospitality model that blends youth training, local capital and cutting-edge construction tools such as 3D printing — a scalable initiative aimed at redefining sustainable tourism in the region.

“It’s not just about building a hotel — it’s about building a model others can replicate”.

CLOSING THOUGHTS
Dr Siham Al Harthy is not merely participating in Oman’s development — she is shaping it. With every initiative, every boardroom discussion, every community project, she brings purpose to the forefront of progress.

Her story is a blueprint for a new kind of leadership — one rooted in national pride, global fluency and unshakable integrity. In a time when vision alone is not enough, Oman has in Dr Al Harthy a builder who leads with both clarity and conviction. And through her, a new generation sees that Oman’s future is not only possible — it’s already under construction.

FSA appeals ruling acquitting some board members in Sweets of Oman suit

MUSCAT: The Financial Services Authority (FSA), regulator of Oman’s capital market and insurance sector, has announced that it has appealed a Primary Court ruling in Muscat that effectively acquitted three board members of publicly listed Sweets of Oman SAOG, while imposing a substantial financial penalty on one board member and several executive management staff in an embezzlement case.

The appeal, filed on July 29, 2025, is in response to the ruling of the Primary Court issued on June 30, 2025 in the suit



brought against members of the Board of Directors of Sweets of Oman SAOG for their term of office from 2017 to 2019, along with a number of the company’s executive employees.

The case concerned a criminal matter

related to serious violations that caused financial harm to the company and its shareholders, committed by one board member in collaboration with several executive management employees.

The Primary Court, in its verdict, ordered certain members of the board and executive management to return an amount of RO 5 million in favour of the company and its shareholders, in addition to bearing court fees and expenses.

It however acquitted three board members from liability, citing the lack of a causal link between them and the

proven damages, as determined in the court’s reasoning.

This acquittal now been contested by the Authority through its appeal filed recently. The court’s ruling followed reports confirming that the company’s losses and damages resulted from gross negligence in fulfilling the Board’s legal and oversight duties, with major shortcomings in five key areas: failure to oversee bank loans, including obtaining loans without assessing their feasibility or impact and recording them at non-genuine values in the financial statements; approval of financial

statements without internal audit review and confirmation of fictitious inventory at a branch; addition of financial assets without legal approval, a board resolution, or clear funding sources; failure to apply policies for writing off doubtful debts in accordance with International Accounting Standards; and suspicions of collusion by certain executive employees in inflating revenues and understating liabilities, coupled with the Audit Committee’s failure to fulfil its duties in line with corporate governance principles for public joint-stock financial companies.

UTILITIES COVERAGE

GCC achieves universal access



All households in GCC countries now have full access to safe drinking water and electricity, surpassing the global average of 91%, according to GCC-Stat.

Primary schools adapted for students with disabilities also reached 100%, double the global rate of 50%. Healthcare coverage stands at 72%, above the global 68%, though individual country rates vary across the region. — ONA

MONETARY SHIFT

Fed leans towards rate cuts



Federal Reserve officials are signalling increased concern over the US labour market, opening the door to a possible interest rate cut in September.

The change follows the Fed’s recent decision to keep rates steady and may align with President Donald Trump’s calls for lower rates. New data shows the labour market weakening, a trend Trump has controversially described as “rigged”. — Reuters

ENERGY EXPANSION

Norway plans new drilling permits



Norway will soon launch its first oil and gas licensing round for unexplored frontier regions since 2021, Energy Minister Terje Aasland announced.

The move aims to secure Norway’s role as a long-term supplier to Europe and maintain economic value and jobs from the continental shelf. The new round reflects continued investment in the nation’s energy sector despite global energy transitions. — Reuters

OPINION

A trending opportunity: AI error correction



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

BUSINESSES from every industry are leveraging AI to automate repetitive tasks that humans traditionally performed. Turning to AI-driven solutions is helping companies to cut costs and improve efficiencies. Despite the accelerated adoption of AI, it often yields flawed outputs with factual inaccuracies, biased information and sometimes even security vulnerabilities, leading to significant rework. Interestingly, this flawed AI performance has created a niche opportunity for humans to correct these mistakes. This has not only created opportunities for skilled human resources, but in many cases, people are charging substantially higher than what they would have charged if they had handled the original work. These days, AI adoption is spreading rapidly, with nearly all companies incorporating AI into their processes or replacing human workers with automated systems. In this frenzy, many businesses are hastily jumping onto the AI bandwagon without proper readiness or foresight. Most companies rely on AI for customer service, content creation, coding and data analysis. AI-generated code has crashed many websites, necessitating that companies pay developers to repair them. A recent study highlights that AI can reduce human errors

by up to 85%. Still, it can also introduce other errors, such as biases, a lack of nuance, context and creativity, which would require human intervention. The World Economic Forum states that 92 million jobs will disappear in 2025, but 170 million new roles will be created. Nowadays, humans have to find new ways of working in the digital world. The demand for these jobs is emerging across multiple industries and platforms, including freelance and remote work opportunities. Fiverr, Upwork, Outlier and Appen are some sites that offer AI-generated content rewriting services. According to the leadership of the Associated Press in the USA, it utilises AI to write approximately 40,000 stories per year. Still, it relies on human editors for fact-checking and refining the content. Now, the human-in-the-loop has become a new essential requirement for companies. The combination of human skill and AI is transforming jobs in many fields and creating new opportunities for humans. New careers will include AI monitoring, ethics auditing, model debugging, AI compliance, workflow optimisation and model training supervision. Many agencies in the UK have reported that fixing AI bugs or security risks costs more and takes longer than hiring an initial human developer. Nowadays, the specialisation that ensures

A recent study highlights that AI can reduce human errors by up to 85%. Still, it can also introduce other errors, such as biases, a lack of nuance, context and creativity, which would require human intervention.

a steady income stream is debugging AI-generated code. In other industries, such as finance and manufacturing, companies are combining AI chatbots with human agents to handle complex queries. As AI integration across industry verticals deepens, the scope for humans in AI correction looks promising. Many freelancers and graduates are already working in the field of AI correction as a side hustle, commanding rates of \$100 per hour, as the work requires expertise and urgency. In sectors such as healthcare and finance, errors can be very costly; hence, human correction will remain essential. It is predicted that by 2030, AI will be able to handle up to 90% of proofreading and data entry tasks. This is increasing the demand for humans in verification. This emerging trend has opened opportunities for freelance pathways and also boosts productivity in high-skill sectors. The imperfections of AI have become a powerful catalyst for humans worldwide. In conclusion, although AI is rapidly advancing, it will be challenging to eliminate the “human-in-the-loop” approach in the years to come. More than competing in the future work ecosystem, it is expected that humans and AI will collaborate. This emerging technology-driven trend is about embracing the synergy between Humans and AI. Investing in a hybrid work model is required to thrive in today’s AI-driven world.

AUTOMAKERS’ \$13 BILLION TARIFF HIT IS SHOT IN THE DARK

KATRINA HAMLIN

Efforts to quantify US President Donald Trump’s tariff hit on automakers feel like a bad joke. Japan’s Toyota Motor and Honda Motor now expect more than a \$12.5 billion impact combined for the year. But moving parts and shifting assumptions mean those forecasts could easily change again. That makes decisive action, such as raising prices, harder to commit to. On Wednesday, Honda raised its operating profit forecast to 700 billion yen (\$4.76 billion) for the twelve months to March 2026 — still some 40% below last year’s earnings — as US tariffs on Japanese goods came in lower than feared. Larger rival, the \$237 billion Toyota, on Thursday also offered its estimates for the current period and now expects annual operating profit to fall by a third. Shares of both automakers barely reacted on the news, implying the impact of US tariffs, while painful, was largely in line with expectations. Problem is, the companies are filling in some big blanks to come up with these projections. The US-Japan trade agreement, which pinned the tariff on auto imports from the Asian country at 15%, down from 27.5% previously threatened, isn’t yet laid out in writing, so the fine print might change.

Those too may change: US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said last month that the president is “absolutely” going to renegotiate the United States-Mexico-Canada agreement. That makes responding to tariffs — whether by tweaking production lines, shifting supply chains or raising prices — extra perilous. Honda is considering steps like ramping up US production capacity by adding factory shifts, per management, or outsourcing to Nissan Motor’s stateside facilities, according to reports from the Nikkei. But that would probably result in higher manufacturing costs and increase the urgency to find alternative sources for key Japan-made components such as batteries and motors. It’s understandable CEO Toshihiro Mibe wants to take his time before taking the plunge. — Reuters

IMF changes tune on growth as tariffs ease

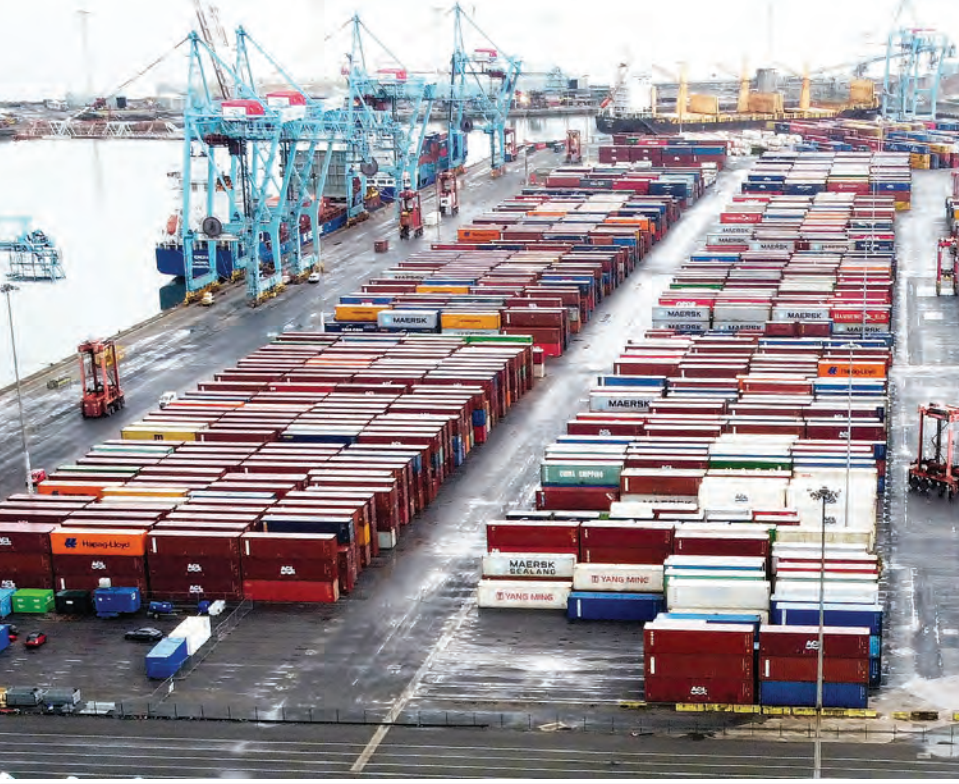
THE world economy will not suffer as badly from President Trump’s tariffs as previously thought, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has predicted. Global growth is set to be three per cent this year, the IMF said, which is higher than its previous 2.8 per cent forecast made in April. The world economy will grow by a further 3.1 per cent in 2026, which is also slightly higher than its three per cent growth forecast made earlier this year. Economists at the UN agency said it upgraded its growth forecast due to “front-loading” before Trump’s Liberation Day, where businesses and customers imported goods before tax increases came into effect. But they warned that this burst of activity risked creating “exposures” that could leave firms vulnerable from having too much stock or holding on to additional costs. The lower-than-expected average tariff rate and improvements in financial markets are also set to benefit the world economy, allowing forecasts to be revised. Deals struck between Trump and his counterparts in China and the EU, which agreed to invest hundreds of billions in US oil in exchange for a reduction in tariffs to 15 per cent, have reflected easing trade war tensions since April. The IMF said tariffs remained a threat given looming deadlines on the expiry of additional tariffs could hamstring activity and unnerve business owners. Despite Donald Trump’s trade deal with the UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, to limit tariffs on carmakers and wipe out taxes on aerospace manufacturers, the IMF did not upgrade its growth forecast for the UK. The major forecaster said in April it expected UK GDP to inch up 1.2 per cent this year and 1.4 per cent next year. Chancellor Rachel Reeves said: “The IMF’s forecasts show that the UK remains the fastest growing European economy in the G7 despite the global economic challenges we are facing. “I am determined to



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Despite Donald Trump’s trade deal with the UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, to limit tariffs on carmakers and wipe out taxes on aerospace manufacturers, the IMF did not upgrade its growth forecast for the UK. The major forecaster said in April it expected UK GDP to inch up 1.2 per cent this year and 1.4 per cent next year.



A general view of stacked shipping containers at Peel Ports Liverpool docks in Liverpool, Britain. Image for illustration only. — Reuters

unlock Britain’s full potential, which is why we are investing billions of pounds through our Plan for Change — in jobs through better city region transport, record funding for affordable homes, as well as backing major projects like Sizewell C to drive economic growth and put more money into people’s pockets”. Shadow Chancellor, Mel Stride said: “Labour promised growth but the IMF has confirmed what Britain already knows: under Labour, growth is going nowhere”. The US economy received a larger upgrade to its growth forecast for 2026, with its economy now set to expand by two per cent next year. IMF officials also emphasised the importance of the independence of central banks in what appeared to be a comment aimed to address Trump’s attack on Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell. Meanwhile, top business executives are set to receive briefings from the Foreign Office on global risks including conflicts and trade tensions as part of a wider strategy to help UK firms expand

overseas. Representatives, of Lloyds Bank, PwC and Premier League are among those attending a first-of-its-kind event at Lancaster House where leading diplomats are set to provide advice on doing business in countries across the world. The government’s new advisory service, which has been titled the Geopolitical Impact Unit, has been created to give firms “straight from the source” insight on global tensions and expanding abroad, tying up the government’s growth mission with foreign policy amidst “turbulent geopolitical times”. Officials also hope it can replace “expensive” private consultants, allowing companies to spend less on mitigating costs of risks. Chief diplomat, UK foreign minister, David Lammy said the initiative can help provide businesses with expertise on new areas of interest to the UK and link up business leaders across the world. “We are helping to equip British business with the insights and contacts they need to compete and win in global markets”, Lammy said.

BUSINESS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 10

THE Government Transformation and Sustainable Leadership Conference commenced in Salalah yesterday under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Adviser at the Royal Court Affairs. The 3-day conference, held as part of the 2025 Labour Forum organised by the Ministry of Labour, is attracted broad participation from experts and specialists from within the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The conference programme includes a number of panel discussions and workshops focusing on key issues related to labour market transformations and future skills. The first session, entitled Modern Organizational Structures: From Bureaucracy to Institutional Agility, featured working papers addressing: institutional challenges in administrative bodies, tools for organisational restructuring, re-engineering of procedures, in addition to case studies from certain countries.

TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP FORUM KICKS OFF IN SALALAH

Over the coming days, the conference will feature several sessions on behavioural engineering, governmental leadership, competencies and talent empowerment, smart management, in addition to a number of international experiences.



The 3-day conference began under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Adviser at the Royal Court Affairs.

Over the coming days, the conference will feature several sessions on behavioural engineering, governmental leadership, competencies and talent empowerment, smart management, in addition to a number of international experiences. The conference aims to stimulate innovation and professional development, and to showcase the latest modern technologies and innovations in the labour market to increase productivity, open new horizons, enhance social dialogue and foster professional communication to create constructive cooperation among specialists and those interested in the labour market. This is in order to create a decent work environment and improve regulatory labour policies, thereby enhancing the labour market's regulatory framework in line with economic, technological and social developments, as well as to promote international and regional cooperation by expanding partnerships with international and regional counterparts to exchange experiences, practices and knowledge.

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Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

SIT. WANTED

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

INDIAN female BSC graduate and Internship Python. Presently in family visa. Seeks suitable placement as admin. Contact: 94942510

EXPERIENCED Indian Female dentist with strong clinical and administrative background. Actively seeking any suitable role in the medical, dental or healthcare field, including insurance coordination and medical scribing. Holding a valid Oman Resident Card. Available for immediate joining. Ph:79424264, Email: nancydas055@gmail.com

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

Chief accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

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

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

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

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Sale of components of Al Maabaila camp and stores. The components of Al Maabaila labour camp are for sale, including:
1. Mobile Houses (caravans)
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Kindly call 99207728 (Issam)

SIT. WANTED

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

PASSPORT LOST

YATHEENDRAN Jayendran Nair has lost Indian Passport No S5493052 Finder please handover to ROP.

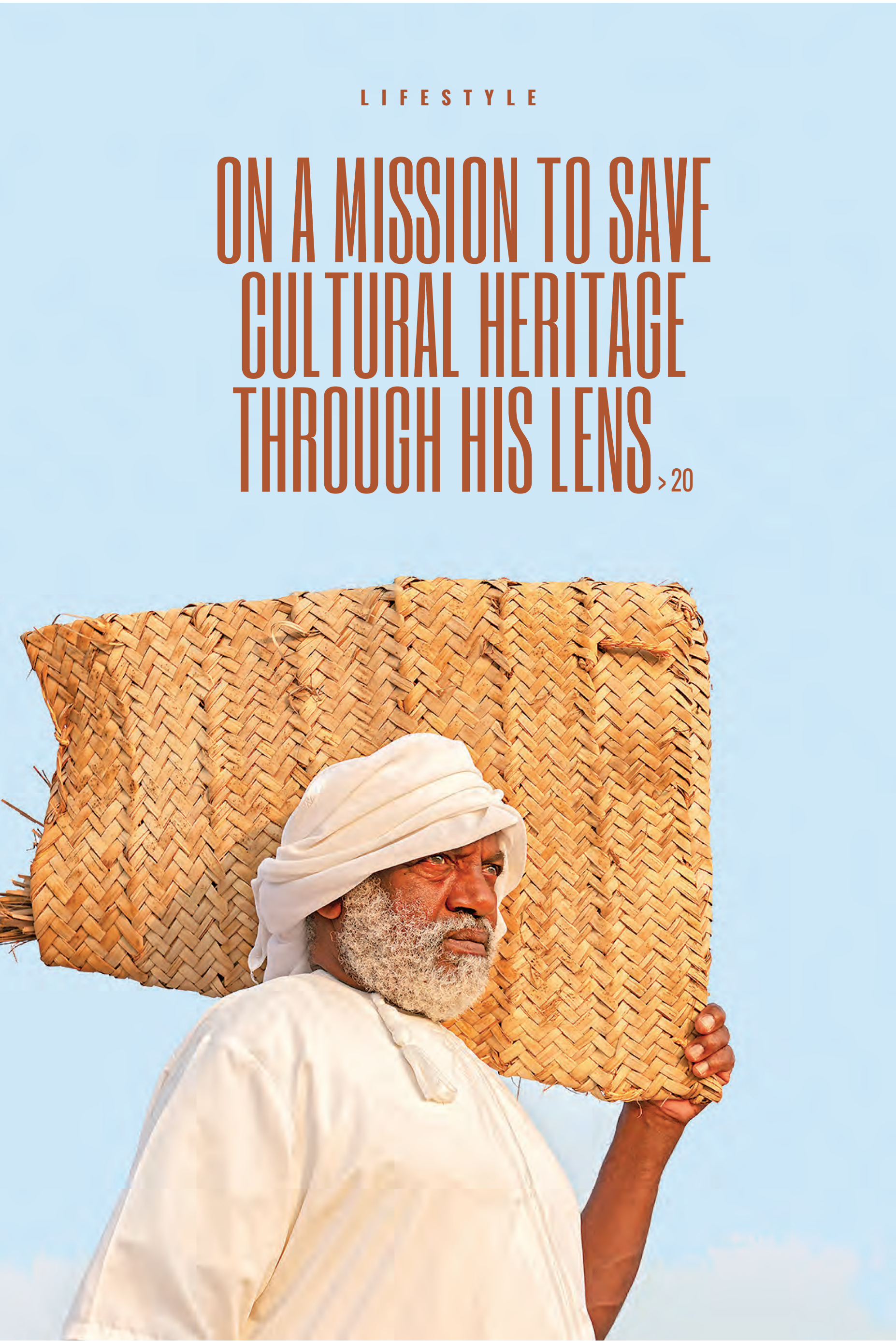
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ENTERTAINMENT

Dolly Parton named Guinness World Records icon



US COUNTRY star Dolly Parton has been named a Guinness World Records icon for holding 11 record-breaking titles.

As part of its 70th anniversary celebrations, the company — which lists world record achievements — has honoured the “Jolene” singer, 79, with an Icon certificate, presented to her at her studios in Nashville, Tennessee.

Her record titles include most consecutive decades with top 10 album entries on the Billboard country chart, most studio albums released by a female country singer and most Grammy nominations for a female country artist.

She was also the first country singer to be nominated for the EGOT — an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony — aka the “Grand Slam of showbusiness”. Craig Glenday, editor-in-chief at Guinness World Records, said: “Dolly is undoubtedly one of the most celebrated writers and performers in the history of country music, as reflected in her many Guinness World Records certificates, but her reach and influence extend far beyond the musical world.

“There are so many projects close to her heart — poverty relief, education, medical research and of course the Imagination Library free-books campaign — and it’s these important, life-changing initiatives that propel Dolly into a different league. She truly is a living legend and it’s an honour to bestow GWR Icon status upon her”. Guinness World Records published its first book in London in 1955 and has sold more than 143 million copies in over 100 countries since then.

The Icon certificate has previously been awarded to stars including Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Drake, Paul McCartney and Elton John.

Parton, who is from Tennessee, released her debut album, “Hello, I’m Dolly”, in 1967 and had a string of hits in the 1970s.

By the 1980s, she was a huge star and made her movie debut in the screwball comedy “9 to 5”. Her most recent album was “Rockstar”, released in 2023 and she recently featured in a version of Sabrina Carpenter’s “Please Please Please”.

She is also the co-owner of the Dollywood Company, which operates Dollywood, a theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. — PA Media/dpa

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



FILM

Bollywood actors Raashii Khanna (R) and Farhan Akhtar attend the teaser launch of their Indian Hindi-language war drama film ‘120 Bahadur’ in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

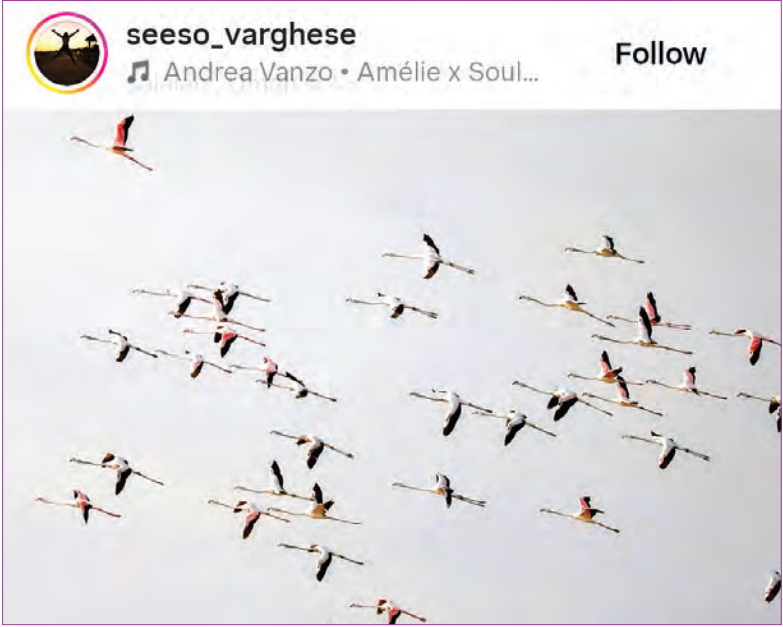
Joe Jonas of the Jonas Brothers performs during NBC’s “Today” show at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. — AFP



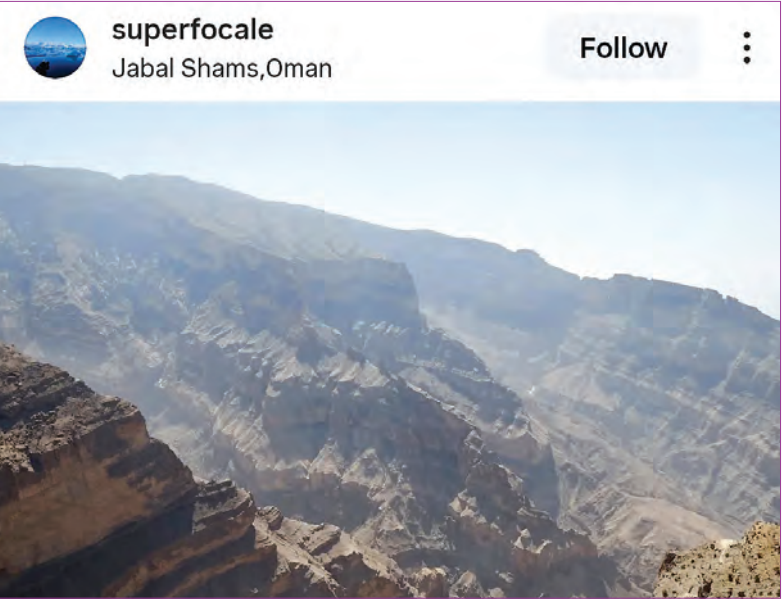
ART

Two women look at a woodblock print called “Under the Kanagawa Wave” by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai from the year 1831 during an exhibition called “Japan from Myth to Manga” in Mexico City. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Annual Flight



Beauty of Remote Places

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Darth Vader lightsaber expected to sell for \$3m on display in London



A LIGHTSABER used by Darth Vader in the original Star Wars films has gone on display in London ahead of an auction where it is expected to sell for millions.

The primary duelling lightsaber, featured in the climactic battles in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), could fetch up to \$3 million.

It is being sold as part of an auction comprising more than 1,000 lots of film-used props and costumes that carry an estimated total value of \$10 million. Top items being sold include the Spider-Man suit worn by Tobey Maguire in the 2002 superhero film and the batsuit worn by Michael Keaton in 1989's *Batman*.

Maguire's suit carries a pre-sale estimate of between \$100,000 and \$200,000, while the batsuit could fetch up to \$500,000.

Chris Evans' Captain

America shield in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) is also being sold, as is Ryan Reynolds' mask in *Deadpool* (2016) and Jane Fonda's *Barbarella* costume from the 1968 film.

Elsewhere, Harrison Ford's eight-foot bullwhip, belt and whip holster from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) are expected to fetch between \$250,000 and \$500,000.

Props from a range of other popular films and TV shows also feature, including the flamethrower used by Sigourney Weaver's character Ellen Ripley in *Aliens* (1986) and the stunt Longclaw sword used by Kit Harington's Jon Snow in HBO series *Game of Thrones*.

The Star Wars lightsaber went on display as part of a private exhibition at The Dorchester in London on Wednesday ahead of Propstore's auction in Los Angeles, taking place between 4 and 6 September. — PA Media/dpa



Mexico wants Adidas to pay up after Mexican-American designer launches Indigenous-inspired shoe



IN RECENT years, the global fashion industry has come under increasing scrutiny for its apparent tendency to misappropriate and copy traditional Indigenous designs from regions around the world, often without credit or compensation to the communities of origin. This ongoing issue has prompted several countries, including Mexico, to take a stand against multinational companies accused of exploiting cultural heritage for commercial gain.

The latest controversy involves an incident between the Mexican government, its local artisans and the footwear giant Adidas. Mexico has formally sought action against Adidas following a dispute over a product developed in collaboration with US-based Mexican-American designer Willy Chavarria. Chavarria's "Oaxaca Slip-On" shoes, a sneaker model featuring the woven pattern of traditional huarache sandals from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, have sparked widespread controversy.

According to authorities, the design closely reinterprets a traditional Indigenous huarache, specifically originating from Villa Hidalgo Yalalag, a region renowned for its Indigenous artisans and

craftwork. Critics in Mexico argued that although Chavarria's design aimed to celebrate Oaxacan culture, it failed to provide credit or economic benefits to the local artisans who originally created the traditional footwear. Moreover, the shoes were manufactured in China, further fueling claims of cultural exploitation and economic injustice.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum expressed her government's stance during a recent press conference, emphasising that "big companies often take products, ideas and designs from Indigenous communities". She announced that Mexico is exploring legal avenues to ensure proper restitution and protection of its cultural heritage, referencing previous actions against fashion giants such as Zara's parent company, Inditex and Louis Vuitton.

Deputy Culture Minister Marina Nunez confirmed that Adidas had contacted Oaxaca officials to discuss "restitution to the people who were plagiarised", marking a step towards resolving the dispute. Chavarria, who was born in the United States to an Irish-American mother and a Mexican-American father, issued a heartfelt statement on Saturday, expressing regret over the situation. He stated that he was "deeply sorry that the shoe

was appropriated in this design and not developed in direct and meaningful partnership with the Oaxacan community". He clarified that his intention was to honour Oaxaca's vibrant cultural and artistic spirit, but acknowledged his approach fell "short of the respect and collaboration the community deserved". Chavarria, known for his work bringing Latino issues to light — including a controversial collection addressing gang violence at El Salvador's notorious CECOT prison — had previously explained that his collaboration with Adidas was meant to celebrate his cultural heritage. However, the controversy highlights the broader issue of fashion brands leveraging Indigenous motifs without appropriate recognition or benefits.

The Mexican government emphasised its commitment to defending its cultural patrimony, with President Sheinbaum stating, "It's collective intellectual property. There must be compensation. The heritage law must be complied with". This case underscores the ongoing fight by Mexico and other nations to protect their traditional arts and designs from unauthorised commercial use, with previous complaints filed against brands like Shein, Zara and Carolina Herrera. — Reuters

FEATURES



ON A MISSION TO
SAVE CULTURAL
HERITAGE THROUGH
HIS LENS

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

IN A WORLD saturated with countless images and fleeting stories, Omani photographer Abdullah al Mushaifri emerges as a dedicated steward of cultural preservation. Through his camera, Abdullah captures not only images but the soul of diverse communities, highlighting their traditions, their people and their environments with unwavering honesty and respect. His work stands as a testament to the enduring power of visual storytelling in safeguarding the richness of human experiences and cultural identities that risk being overshadowed by rapid modernisation.

Abdullah's photography is more than just a pursuit of aesthetic beauty; it is an active mission to serve as a visual historian, documenting the intricate details of life often overlooked — structured in facial expressions, the intricacies of traditional attire, relational bonds, rituals, daily routines and the subtle subtleties of human interaction. Every photograph, for him, reveals a vital fragment of the narrative that defines a community. These spontaneous and authentic moments serve as windows into a world that is rapidly transforming, offering future generations a chance to connect with their roots.

Rooted in Oman, Abdullah's perspective is deeply influenced by his own cultural heritage. Yet, his work extends far beyond his homeland, capturing the essence of communities around the globe. His camera is both a mirror of his identity and a bridge that links different cultures through genuine dialogue. Whether he is exploring the ancient alleyways of Omani villages or engaging with strangers in distant markets, Abdullah always seeks the stories that breathe within everyday life — those fleeting expressions, customs, or routines that

typify the true character of a place.

“My belief in photography is rooted in its profound ability to tell stories without words”, Abdullah explains. “It’s a powerful form of expression and documentation. I see my role as a visual archivist, preserving the small, seemingly insignificant details that define a community for generations to come. These images preserve memories, evoke emotions and create a dialogue between identities, past and present”. This deep-seated curiosity about different cultures and histories fuels Abdullah's relentless pursuit of authenticity. “My interest comes from a genuine human curiosity — a desire to understand and connect with others”, he says. “Through my lens, I aim to bridge gaps of understanding, building connections rooted in respect and curiosity rather than superficial tourism. Each photograph captures not just an external scene but a story about the people and their environments”. While some of his images appear minimalistic or straightforward at first glance, they reveal layered meanings upon closer inspection. Abdullah's approach is not to seek visual spectacle but to evoke contemplation and human connection. His images subtly reflect emotion, cultural context and the quiet strength of individuals living their daily lives with dignity.

One of his most poignant journeys was during a trip to Northeast India in April. Abdullah immersed himself in

Abdullah states. “Every individual has their ‘red lines’ — limits that must not be crossed — and ‘green lines’ — those that help build a genuine relationship. Recognising and respecting these boundaries through empathy makes the process of photography a shared moment of trust and understanding”. He approaches elders with reverence, treats children as friends and recognising the importance of privacy, he respects those who prefer not to be photographed. He regards responsible documentation as a moral obligation, not merely the pursuit of an exotic scene.

For Abdullah, photography is ultimately about storytelling. “I am especially drawn to stories rooted in everyday life because they reflect genuine human emotions — moments everyone can relate to,” he says. One of his most acclaimed images, titled “Never Let Go”, taken during a traditional horse race in Al Sharqiyah North & South Governorates, exemplifies this philosophy. The scene appears intense: two riders engaged in fierce rivalry, one reaching out with an outstretched arm. But the story behind the shot is far richer. Abdullah explains, “The rider on the left was overwhelmed by adrenaline and nearly fell off his horse. The other rider, instead of exploiting the moment or challenging him, instinctively reached out to help, to steady him. It’s a human moment of kindness and solidarity — an act of courage that speaks louder than



the existence of the Naga tribe, one of the world's most endangered indigenous peoples. Known historically as “headhunters”, much of their unique culture has now faded — only a few elders remain from the original generation, with younger members migrating to cities in search of modern opportunities. Abdullah was compelled to document this fragile heritage, living among the Naga for nearly a week, sharing in their rituals, celebrations and everyday routines. “I wanted to create a visual record of their beauty and resilience”, he recalls. “My aim was to convey the depth of their culture and the importance of these traditions that might soon be lost”. His commitment to authentic representation was unwavering. “I fully engaged with their world”, Abdullah explains. “Living close to them, I listened and observed — documenting moments of significance and ordinary life alike. My photographs are not just records but visual messages — testaments to their spirit and identity that need safeguarding.” His images act as cultural bridges, inspiring interest and fostering empathy among viewers worldwide.

Abdullah firmly believes that photographs can ignite curiosity and appreciation for the diversity of human life. “I don't claim that every image I take immediately changes perceptions”, he admits. “But I do notice reactions that show a growing curiosity — people asking how they might visit, learn more about these communities, or connect with their stories”. Portraiture also remains central to Abdullah's craft. In natural settings and among ordinary people, his ability to earn trust allows him to capture honest expressions. “Respecting personal boundaries is essential”,

words”. This photograph, Abdullah believes, is a testament to the spirit of community and empathy entrenched in local traditions. “It reminds us that true strength isn't just about winning or competition; sometimes, it's about lifting each other up when it matters most”, he says softly.

International recognition has bolstered Abdullah's efforts to showcase the world's cultural riches. He has won the Sony World Photography Awards six times in the National Awards category — an achievement unmatched by any other photographer to date. His recognition has led to his becoming an ambassador for Sony and his work has been exhibited in leading galleries and platforms across continents. This global exposure not only fosters appreciation for Oman's remarkable cultural landscape but also helps to amplify the stories of communities he works with.

For aspiring photographers passionate about documenting cultural life, Abdullah offers valuable advice. “Be honest with your camera”, he advises. “Don't chase images that merely catch the eye — seek what genuinely moves you. Respect the people, their environment and their stories. Cultivate patience, learn about their cultures and approach photography as a form of respectful storytelling, not just as tourism. Your sincerity will resonate in your images, making a real impact”. He also urges beginners not to seek validation through social media metrics alone. “A photograph that touches someone's soul — regardless of how many likes it receives — is far more meaningful than numerous viral images lacking depth or authenticity”, Abdullah emphasises.