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D A I L Y

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INBRIEF

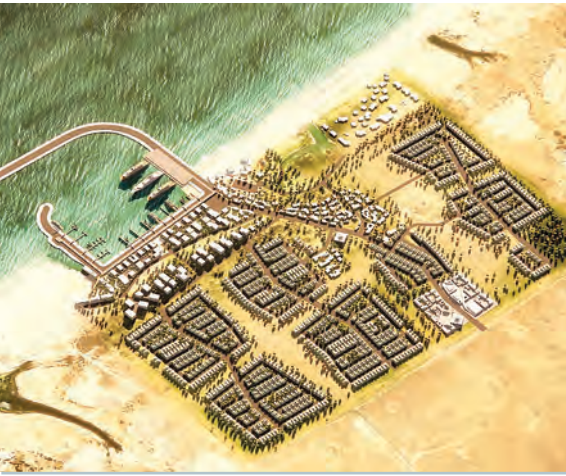
LABOUR STATUS
CORRECTION GRACE
PERIOD EXTENDED

The Ministry of Labour on Monday officially announced an extension to the grace period for correcting legal employment status in the Sultanate of Oman. Originally set to conclude on July 31, the adjustment period will now continue until December 31, in response to overwhelming requests from individuals, employers and workers seeking more time to complete the required legal procedures. The extension follows an earlier circular issued on July 8, 2025, which confirmed the end date for the grace period. However, the ministry has now decided to grant additional time to allow the largest possible number of beneficiaries to benefit from the exemptions and regularise their legal standing without facing fines or penalties. **DETAILS ON P2**

OMAN ATTENDS
SECOND UN FOOD
SYSTEMS SUMMIT

The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the second United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS+4) being held in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The summit, which concludes tomorrow, is jointly organised by the governments of Ethiopia and Italy. Oman’s delegation is led by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The summit will review global progress in transforming food systems in a manner that contributes to the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The summit seeks to enhance joint action, assess national and international efforts and mobilise resources to support the establishment of comprehensive, sustainable and resilient systems that provide food security and nutrition for all. **DETAILS ON P2**

RO 80 MILLION TOURISM COMPLEX



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Monday celebrated the laying of the foundation stone for an integrated tourism complex in the Junuf area of Salalah, with an estimated investment of RO 80 million, as part of efforts to develop tourism infrastructure in the Dhofar Governorate. The project is considered a landmark tourism venture due to its prime location and comprehensive facilities in tourism and hospitality. **SEE P13**

Educational qualification diploma for 1,000 Omanis

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and accredited universities, has announced the availability of 1,000 opportunities to obtain an “Educational Qualification Diploma”. This initiative aims to prepare candidates to later compete for the post of a teacher at the Ministry of Education.
The Ministry of Labour clarified that applicants must meet the

following conditions: Be an Omani (male), hold a Bachelor’s degree from a higher education institution from Oman or abroad, obtained through full-time study, have a graduation GPA of at least 2.3 out of 4.0 or its equivalent in other grading systems, for degrees obtained outside Oman, the Bachelor’s certificate must be accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, with no fewer than 60

credit hours for humanities and individual skills majors or 45 credit hours for applied disciplines.
The conditions also state that applicants must pass the specialised subject test, be medically fit for the teaching profession, be registered as a job-seeker in the Ministry of Labour’s system and haven’t previously received government-funded training.
The ministry confirmed that the programme will be fully funded

by the government, with trainees receiving a monthly allowance of RO 120 for nine months under a training contract.
The programme will last one academic year (two semesters) and includes practical training (teaching practice) in Omani schools.
Upon completion, trainees will undergo examinations to qualify for teaching positions at the Ministry of Education. — ONA

STOP WHOLESALE
DESTRUCTION OF GAZA

N O A L T E R N A T I V E T O T W O - S T A T E S O L U T I O N : F R A N C E

UNITED NATIONS Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday said that Israel’s creeping annexation of the West Bank is illegal and the wholesale destruction of the Gaza Strip is intolerable and both must stop. “Let’s be clear: The creeping annexation of the occupied West Bank is illegal. It must stop. The wholesale destruction of Gaza is intolerable. It must stop,” he told a conference at the UN on a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

“Unilateral actions that would forever undermine the two-state solution are unacceptable. They must stop,” Guterres said.
Meanwhile, France told a UN conference co-chaired with Saudi Arabia that there is “no alternative” to a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

“Only a political, two-state solution will help respond to the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. There is no alternative,” French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said at the start of the three-day meeting.
Days before the conference, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would formally recognise a State of Palestine in September.
In an interview with French weekly La Tribune Dimanche, Barrot said that other European countries will confirm “their intention to recognise the State of Palestine” during the conference,



A Palestinian boy reacts as he waits to receive food from a charity kitchen, amid a hunger crisis, in Gaza City on Monday. — Reuters

without confirming which.
“All states have a responsibility to act now,” said Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa at the start of the meeting, calling for an international force to deploy to help underwrite Palestinian statehood. “Recognise the state of Palestine without delay.”
France is hoping that Britain will take this step. More than 200 British members of parliament last Friday voiced support for the idea, but Prime Minister Keir Starmer

reiterated that recognition of a Palestinian state “must be part of a wider plan.”
According to an AFP database, at least 142 of the 193 UN member states — including France — now recognise the Palestinian state proclaimed by the Palestinian leadership in exile in 1988.
For several decades, the vast majority of UN member states have supported the idea of a two-state solution, Israelis and Palestinians living side-by-side. — Agencies

According to a database, at least 142 of the 193 UN member states — including France — now recognise the Palestinian state

Oman sees success in breeding and protecting Arabian leopard

MUSCAT: The Royal Court Affairs has successfully bred and protected a number of Arabian leopards from extinction by providing healthcare, proper nutrition and a suitable environment for their reproduction.
One of the most notable births at the Wildlife Breeding Centre is the female Arabian leopard named “Al Muzn”, now approximately two and a half years old, which is in excellent health after receiving continuous

monitoring by specialists at the centre. The centre, affiliated with the Directorate-General of Veterinary Services at the Royal Court Affairs, has also successfully bred and cared for two other leopards — a male and a female — both over three months old.
The Arabian leopard requires heightened care during its first few months, as this is a critical phase during which many cubs face



The Arabian leopard requires heightened care during its first few months.

mortality risks, including potential maternal rejection. The centre has succeeded in early intervention to rescue, nurture and stabilise the health of these leopards.
The centre is currently caring for several Arabian leopards originally from Samhan Mountain in Dhofar Governorate, with the goal of increasing their population, protecting them from extinction, and eventually reintroducing them

into the wild after ensuring their ability to survive and reproduce. Additionally, the centre exchanges expertise, knowledge and research with other breeding centres in the region.
It is worth noting that the centre also breeds and conserves various other species native to Oman’s environment, such as the Arabian gazelle, the Arabian tahr and other wildlife. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting brought together representatives from various government entities and the private sector. — ONA

PUBLIC-PRIVATE FOLLOW UP MEETING HELD

SALALAH: A meeting was held on Monday at the Directorate-General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate to follow up on work progress during the Khareef Dhofar Season and complement ongoing efforts to serve visitors to the governorate.

The meeting, chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, brought together representatives from various government entities and the private sector.

The under-secretary emphasised the importance of continued provision of essential goods and products, alongside intensified market and commercial outlet inspections to ensure adherence to pricing and service quality. He also stressed the importance of promoting the use of electronic payment methods across various commercial outlets to facilitate shoppers.

Regarding fuel stations, he urged petroleum marketing companies to monitor stations’ readiness daily and ensure the availability of all services to meet the increasing demand during the khareef season.

He emphasised that the unique nature of the khareef season necessitates continued joint action and an accelerated pace of work, even outside official working hours, to ensure the comfort of visitors and residents from both within and outside Oman. — ONA

DRUG SMUGGLING FOILED AGAIN AT SALALAH AIRPORT



SALALAH: The Directorate-General of Customs, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Control, foiled an attempt to smuggle 6.5 kilogrammes of marijuana through Salalah International Airport.

The quantity was seized in the possession of a traveller of Indian nationality, after he hid it within his luggage. Last week, an attempt to smuggle 11.65 kilogrammes of marijuana through Salalah International Airport was foiled by the same authorities.

The quantity was seized in the possession of two Indian nationals, who had professionally concealed it within their luggage.

OMAN ATTENDS UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT IN ETHIOPIA

ADDIS ABABA: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the second United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS+4) being held in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The summit, which concludes on Tuesday, July 29, is jointly organised by the governments of Ethiopia and Italy.

Oman’s delegation is led by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries



and Water Resources.

The summit will review global progress in transforming food systems in a manner that contributes to the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The summit seeks to enhance joint action, assess national and international efforts and mobilise resources to support the establishment of comprehensive,

sustainable and resilient systems that provide food security and nutrition for all.

The summit is being attended by heads of state and governments, ministers, representatives of United Nations agencies and international organisations, representatives of civil society institutions, researchers, youth and agricultural producers from around the world. — ONA

Labour status correction grace period till Dec 31

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

THE Ministry of Labour on Monday officially announced an extension to the grace period for correcting legal employment status in the Sultanate of Oman.

Originally set to conclude on July 31, the adjustment period will now continue until December 31, in response to overwhelming requests from individuals, employers, and workers seeking more time to complete the required legal procedures.

The extension follows an earlier circular issued on July 8, which confirmed the end date for the grace period. However, the ministry has now decided to grant additional time to allow the largest possible number of beneficiaries to benefit from the exemptions and regularise their legal standing without facing fines or penalties.

This measure is part of a broader labour market reform initiative first introduced in January 2025. The initiative, which began on February 1, 2025, includes waivers and exemptions amounting to more than RO 60 million.

These include the cancellation of fines for expired labour cards that have been inactive for over seven years, waivers for repatriation ticket obligations dating back to 2017 and earlier, and the removal of financial liabilities against liquidated companies where workers have been repatriated or transferred.

With this final extension in place, the



The Ministry of Labour has reiterated that no further applications will be accepted after the new deadline of December 31.

ministry is urging all concerned parties to take advantage of the remaining time to renew expired labour cards, cancel work abandonment reports, transfer worker services, and settle outstanding obligations. The ministry stressed the importance of utilising this opportunity to comply with existing laws and regulations.

All departments and entities have

been directed to ensure the effective implementation of the extension in alignment with public interest. The ministry has reiterated that no further applications will be accepted after the new deadline of December 31. Beneficiaries are advised to complete their procedures through the ministry’s official website and approved service delivery channels.

WIDESPREAD RAINS SOAK AL SHARQIYAH NORTH



AL MUDHAIBI: Several villages in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate received rains of varying intensity associated with strong downdraft, on Monday. The villages of Al Rawdah, Al Wariyah and Al Akhdhar in the Niyabat of Samad Al Shan witnessed heavy to moderate rainfall. — ONA

Oman to participate in World Conference of Speakers of Parliament

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will take part in the 6th World Conference of Speakers of Parliament scheduled to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from July 29 to 31.

Oman’s delegation to the conference is led by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash-Shura. The conference is organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in cooperation with the United Nations under the theme “A world in

turmoil: Parliamentary cooperation and multilateralism for peace, justice and prosperity for all”. The event explores ways to consolidate parliamentary partnerships amid the rapid pace of global challenges.

Oman’s participation in the event affirms its commitment to pluralism and highlights its active role in promoting dialogue and understanding among peoples and its support for international initiatives aimed at



achieving sustainable peace and comprehensive development. It undertakes this role from the point of view that global challenges

require legislative and diplomatic efforts.

It is worth noting that the World Conference of Speakers of Parliament has become the largest global parliamentary gathering of parliament speakers. The event brings together more than 300 parliament speakers from 170 countries, along with high-level participation from international organisations, civil society institutions, academics and media

professionals.

The conference gains significance from its status as an international parliamentary platform whose first round kicked off in 2000 at the Millennium Summit in New York.

The conference aims to integrate the ranks of national parliaments within the context of a joint global governance system and to bridge the international democratic gap by activating legislative institutions’ role in devising global decisions.

SHORT TAKES



Al Ashkharah Waterfront is envisioned as a modern tourism destination

Foundation stone laid for Ashkharah waterfront project

AL ASHKHARAH: The foundation stone for the much-anticipated Al Ashkharah Waterfront Project was laid on Sunday in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, marking a major milestone in the governorate’s push to enhance its tourism potential and infrastructure.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, stated that the project forms part of the governorate’s broader strategy to boost natural and tourism resources, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Aimed at achieving sustainable and integrated urban development, Al Ashkharah Waterfront is envisioned as a modern tourism destination that respects environmental sensitivity while elevating the area’s appeal for both residents and visitors.

Spanning an area of 74,172 square metres, with 4,140 square metres of built-up space, the project includes a 1,860-metre main promenade and 1,800 metres of designated walking, running and cycling paths.

It also features green zones harmoniously integrated across the site. The project will offer a wide range of service and recreational amenities including sea-facing restaurants and cafes, shaded seating areas, a dedicated children’s play zone, watchtowers, guard rooms and multi-use canopies of varying designs. Reflecting Omani cultural and architectural character while incorporating modern lighting and accessibility, the development is expected to stimulate local economic activity and provide investment opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs. — ONA

DBS breakthroughs highlighted at int’l conference



MUSCAT: An International Medical Conference on Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) was held in Muscat on July 26, bringing together leading experts and practitioners in the field of neurology and neurosurgery.

The event was jointly organised by the Muscat Family Physicians Group, in association with the Parkinson’s Disease and Movement Disorders Research Centre, Yashoda Hospital, Hitech City, Hyderabad, India, and Global Treatment Services and held at the Intercity Hotel, Al Khuwair.

The conference focused on the theme: “The Role of Deep Brain Stimulation in Alleviating Symptoms of Movement Disorders, Especially Parkinson’s Disease and Dystonia”. These conditions continue to place a heavy burden on patients and their families, and the conference aimed to shed light on cutting-edge therapeutic approaches.

Dr Rukmini, Senior Consultant – Neurology, provided an overview of DBS and discussed its various indications.

Prof Dr Rupam, Senior Consultant – Neurology, shared valuable insights into the long-term benefits of DBS in improving the quality of life for Parkinson’s patients and their caregivers.

Dr Rajesh, Senior Consultant – Neurosurgery, emphasised the remarkable improvement in symptoms of dystonia through DBS.

The distinguished team from Yashoda Hospital, with over 25 years of experience and more than 1,000 DBS procedures performed, also highlighted their contribution to international training and fellowships.

MOHT INAUGURATES METEORITE CORNER IN MUSCAT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) launches the Meteorite Corner at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Muscat Governorate.

This initiative aligns with the ministry’s efforts to utilise geological heritage and enhance the tourism and cultural experience in the Sultanate of Oman.

The corner features a collection of rare meteorite samples, offering guests a unique opportunity to view them up close and learn about their history and scientific value. It also highlights Oman’s commitment to preserving these meteorites as an



The display of meteorites aims to educate hotel guests about the scientific and historical value of meteorites

important cultural legacy. Among the exhibits is a distinctive sample from Jiddat Al

Harasis 091, which represents the largest meteorite fall discovered in Oman to date. Its strewn field extends approximately 52 kilometres, with over 700 collected pieces totalling around 4,600 kilogrammes.

Documented scientific studies indicate that this fall at its original site occurred over 12,600 years ago.

The corner also includes a meteorite sample from Jiddat Al Harasis 073, classified as an L6 chondrite stony meteorite. This is considered the second-largest meteorite fall discovered in Oman so far. — ONA

UTAS students return from academic tour in Beijing

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

THE first student delegation from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) has returned to Oman after a successful academic journey to Beijing. This pioneering trip was part of the prestigious Royal Grant Programme for Student Trips, launched under the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The initiative aims to foster innovation and global exposure among Omani students through hands-on, international learning experiences.

This year’s itinerary spans three key destinations — Beijing and Shanghai in China, and Russia. The Beijing leg served as the inaugural chapter of the journey, offering a dynamic blend of scientific, technological and cultural immersion designed to broaden students’ horizons and introduce them to global innovation landscapes.

A key highlight of the visit was a field trip to the headquarters of Huawei, a global leader in information and communication technology. Students explored state-of-the-art developments in artificial intelligence, 5G networks, cloud computing, smart cities and e-learning platforms.

Real-world tech projects from various global markets provided students with practical insights into the transformative power of modern technology.

The delegation also experienced China’s renowned high-speed rail by travelling to Tianjin aboard the iconic bullet train — cutting a two-hour journey to just 30 minutes through stunning scenery.

Student Taqwa al Rawahi described it as ‘an unforgettable experience’, highlighting the fusion of nature and urban beauty.

Raghad al Ajeeli added: “Tianjin blends modernity and heritage - from Italian Culture Street to the illuminated Joliang Bridge. Its use of smart technologies makes it a model for sustainability.”

In Tianjin, the group toured the Airbus A320 assembly plant and the BYD-D Space



This year’s itinerary spans three key destinations - Beijing and Shanghai in China, and Russia

Center, delving into the realms of aircraft manufacturing and electric mobility.

“Visiting both factories deepened my appreciation for China’s technological prowess,” said Firas al Zadjali.

Cultural exposure was equally central to the program. At Beijing’s historic Summer Palace, students were captivated by ancient Chinese architecture and serene landscapes.

“Walking through the Summer Palace felt like entering another era,” said Reem al Nabhani.

The delegation also visited the Olympic Park — home to the 2008 Summer Olympics — where they explored iconic landmarks such as the Bird’s Nest Stadium and Water Cube.

Dr Janan al Eisa, Media and Documentation Officer, noted: “Seeing these venues in person brought the Olympic legacy to life — it was truly inspiring.”

Another key stop was a visit to a leading AI and voice recognition tech firm, where

students interacted with experts on cutting-edge applications in speech and artificial intelligence.

“This visit gave me fresh ideas for applying AI in engineering,” said student Al Muntasir al Kalbani.

Mohammed al Mayahi, Sports Activity Specialist and delegation supervisor, emphasised the long-term impact of the programme: “These experiences help students align with Oman Vision 2040 by building innovation-driven skills. We hope they return as role models for their peers.”

To balance academics with leisure, students also explored Universal Studios Beijing and local markets, gaining a holistic taste of Chinese culture.

Following the success of the Beijing leg, UTAS is preparing to send student delegations to Shanghai and Russia, continuing its commitment to global engagement and transformative learning under the Royal Grant Programme.

Al Mouj’s Learning Centre benefits over 3,600 users

MUSCAT: The Learning Centre at Al Mouj Muscat, affiliated with the National Museum, represents a strategic step towards expanding community outreach and enhancing the museum’s cultural presence outside its headquarters.

The Learning Centre constitutes an advanced model in the field of ‘museum education’ and the development of vibrant cultural environments capable of responding to the aspirations of individuals and strengthening their connection to the cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman.

The centre’s programmes are in line with the Sultanate of Oman’s vision to make culture an integral part of comprehensive development.

Besides helping citizens



The centre provides an exceptional educational experience for visitors

become more associated with their cultural roots, the centre also makes users open to the global community, by utilising interactive methods inspired by the museum’s collections.

The exhibits are designed

to combine education, art and entertainment to meet the needs of diverse segments of the local community and international visitors alike.

Amina al Abri, Head of the Learning Centre Department,

said that the centre provides an exceptional educational experience for visitors of different nationalities.

To expand the volume of the audience, the Learning Centre hosts a variety of activities and programmes, including art workshops for adults, training sessions for students from university and college, and theatrical performances for children, said Amina, noting that the educational and cultural experience offered by the Learning Centre meets the expectations of families and other community members.

As many as 3,657 users benefited from the activities and programmes of the Learning Centre’s branch at Al Mouj Muscat, since the centre’s establishment in 2023 until the end of July 2025. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



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WRITING IS
NOT DYING BUT
TRANSFORMING IN
THE DIGITAL AGE

●

AI TOOLS
ENHANCE, DON'T
REPLACE HUMAN
CREATIVITY

●

THE MEDIUM
HAS SHIFTED BUT
THE MESSAGE
ENDURES



IS THE PEN MIGHTIER IN THE DIGITAL ERA?

“We now write and share in real-time. The tools may have changed, but our desire to express and connect through language is eternal”

LUBNA AL BALUSHI
Poet and author

KABEER YOUSUF

IS the art of writing — our age-old method of preserving thought through language — fading in the era of Artificial Intelligence and ChatGPT?

In the rush of modern life, is the once-vital skill of communicating through written symbols slowly disappearing?

Traditionally, written language grew from spoken word. Yet today, as speech is often replaced by emojis and visual shorthand, the once-familiar feel of pen on paper is becoming rare.

Oman's literary voices argue that while modes of expression have evolved, writing as a form of connection endures. Typing messages or composing emails is simply a new version of what began with ink and parchment.

Acclaimed Omani writer Zakaryia al Muharrami, who began his literary journey by typing rather than writing by hand, says his process hasn't changed over decades: he still drafts on a desktop, prints it, edits manually— sometimes over ten times — until satisfied enough to send to the press.

“AI helps us critique and refine our writing, making it richer and more expressive. It's a tool, not a replacement,” says Al Muharrami.

Dhanya Manoj, educator and regular contributor to children's creative development in Oman, notes that although AI tools may be taking over content generation, the essence of writing remains.

“Writing is still central to communication, creativity and cognitive growth. The digital world has simply reshaped it,” she says.

Poet and author Lubna al Balushi shares a similar sentiment, viewing the digital age not as a threat, but a transformation.

“We now write and share in real-time. The tools may have changed, but our desire to express and connect through language is eternal.”

While some worry that handwriting and traditional composition may be in decline, others believe creativity always finds new outlets. Writing isn't dying — it's evolving. Whether through keystrokes or calligraphy, the impulse to articulate, reflect and imagine will always live on.

SHORT TAKES



Dr Ishaq al Sharyani led the training workshop on ‘How to Create an Investment Opportunity’

LIWA WORKSHOP
INSPIRES YOUTH
ENTREPRENEURS

SIHAM AL SAIDI
LIWA, JULY 28

As part of a strategic effort to foster entrepreneurial thinking and empower the next generation of innovators in Oman, the Office of the Wali of Liwa organised a training workshop titled ‘How to Create an Investment Opportunity’.

The workshop, held in Liwa, attracted a diverse group of participants, including job-seekers and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

The workshop was led by Dr Ishaq al Sharyani, an expert in entrepreneurship and economic feasibility.

Dr Al Sharyani guided the participants through an intensive programme designed to instil the knowledge and mindset needed to identify and cultivate meaningful investment projects.

The training focused on four key pillars: understanding what makes a viable investment opportunity, exploring sources of opportunity generation, using creative thinking tools and applying practical steps to turn ideas into reality. The participants engaged in interactive sessions that combined theory with real-world case studies.

Dr Al Sharyani emphasised the untapped potential that exists within Oman’s local economy. “Oman is full of opportunities, but they must be discovered and harnessed through creative problem-solving and a deep understanding of the challenges around us,” he noted. “We must shift from being ‘factories of excuses’ to becoming ‘factories of ideas’ capable of generating solutions anytime, anywhere.”

The participants also explored how to evaluate local challenges and reframe them as potential business ideas. The workshop placed special emphasis on key sectors such as tourism, logistics, agriculture and renewable energy.

One of the participants, Rahma al Ajmi, a budding entrepreneur, shared her experience. “This workshop opened my eyes to the many untapped opportunities in our local market. I’ve learned how to look at problems as business possibilities,” she said. “By the end of the programme, we had learned how to professionally plan projects, bring creative ideas into our communities and add real value to what we do.”

The event concluded with a renewed sense of purpose among participants, many of whom left with fresh ideas, practical tools and a clear road map to begin their entrepreneurial journeys.

FUTURE PIONEERS
CAMP BEGINS IN
AL BATINAH NORTH



The camp aims to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among students

SUHAR: The third edition of the ‘Future Pioneers’ camp kicked off on Sunday at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar, with the participation of 50 students from the Directorate-General of Education in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The five-day camp aims to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among students.

The initiative aligns with national efforts to prepare youth for the knowledge economy by equipping them with the tools and mindset to launch technology-driven start-ups and address real-world development challenges. — ONA

Blowholes draw huge
crowds at Al Mughsail

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 28

THE iconic Al Mughsail Beach and the natural blowholes of Al Marnif Cave are roaring back to life this khareef, with a surge in visitor numbers driven by the cool monsoon weather and Dhofar’s lush transformation.

Tour operators, local vendors and road officials report a sharp increase in footfall compared to last year. Oman Observer field observations confirm that traffic to western Salalah has surged in recent days, with parking lots near the site reaching full capacity by early afternoon.

Families, adventure seekers and tourists from across Oman, the Gulf and beyond are flocking to witness the dramatic sea geysers — water columns erupting from underground rock chambers — alongside sweeping cliff views.

“I’ve travelled across the Gulf, but I’ve never seen anything like this,” said Yousif Ali, a Kuwaiti visitor. “It feels like the Earth is alive.”

In response to growing numbers, authorities have ramped up facilities at the site. Roads now have clearer signs and improved safety turns. New shaded viewing decks and railings have been installed near Al Marnif Cave, while municipal teams ensure cleanliness and smooth crowd movement.

The Royal Oman Police and Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority have increased their on-ground presence, especially during peak hours, ensuring visitor safety.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Dhofar Municipality are enhancing multilingual signage and visitor



Al Mughsail stands as a shining example of Dhofar’s sustainable tourism future

Tour operators, local vendors, and road officials report a sharp increase in footfall compared to last year

materials.

Al Mughsail’s fame soared earlier this year after Condé Nast Traveler named it the 5th best beach in the world. The international recognition has boosted Dhofar’s profile among eco-tourists, photographers and nature lovers, and is now central to Oman’s seasonal tourism campaigns.

The blowholes, which can erupt as high as 30 metres during high tide, create a thunderous roar that resonates along the cliffs. The adjacent Al Marnif Cave provides the best viewing point, now upgraded with accessible walkways and smoother paths.

Beyond the blowholes, visitors can explore khareef gems like Wadi Darbat, Ayn Jarziz, Old Salalah’s heritage souqs and Unesco-listed Frankincense sites.

While Al Mughsail’s wild beauty draws crowds, officials remind the

public that swimming is prohibited at the beach between June 21 and September 21 due to strong currents and high waves.

Tourism experts are calling for sustained, responsible development. Their main recommendations include highlighting seasonal and natural uniqueness, strengthening eco-friendly infrastructure, improving waste management and emergency response and training local guides and supporting small tourism businesses.

“This place doesn’t need malls or towers — it just needs to be protected and shared,” said Yousif. “Everyone should see this part of Oman at least once.”

As visitor numbers climb, Al Mughsail stands as a shining example of Dhofar’s sustainable tourism future, combining raw natural power with thoughtful stewardship.

Al Haffa: A monsoon haven for frankincense lovers

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 28

Step into Al Haffa Market during Salalah’s monsoon season and you’re instantly transported — where the scent of frankincense lingers in the air, the charm of age-old trade fills the alleys, and the past blends beautifully with the present.

“It’s like stepping into a storybook,” said Salim al Balushi, visiting from Muscat with his wife and two children. “The smell of frankincense, the sound of traders calling out, the colours, the history — you feel like you’re part of something real and timeless, yet it’s so warm and welcoming.”

His wife added, “We were surprised to see the new seafront area — it’s beautifully done. After shopping, we sat at a cafe overlooking the sea and watched the sunset. It was the perfect end to the day.”

Their children, meanwhile, enjoyed exploring the market’s winding paths and picking up handmade souvenirs. “It’s not just about shopping,” Salim added. “It’s about connecting with our culture. I hope my children remember this experience for a long time.”

Nestled along Dhofar’s coast, Al Haffa Market is more than a marketplace — it’s a living expression of Omani heritage. Especially during the khareef, it draws locals and tourists seeking not only goods but a glimpse into the stories, scents and traditions.

Shops brim with Omani frankincense — locally known as ‘white gold’ — handmade perfumes, embroidered fabrics, silver jewellery and incense crafted through centuries of tradition. For many visitors, Al Haffa is both the first and final stop in Salalah, with memories carried home in the form of



Frankincense from Boswellia trees in Dhofar and a few other regions has shaped civilisations

fragrant treasures.

A gentle transformation is underway at Al Haffa. A new seafront promenade is emerging, with cafes, restaurants and a coastal walkway enhancing the visitor experience — without sacrificing the soul of the place. Thoughtful development ensures that while the facilities grow, the spirit remains intact.

During monsoon months, the market is alive from 8 am to 10

pm, especially in the evenings when families and travellers mingle under the soft glow of lights and gentle drizzle.

Frankincense from Boswellia trees — found only in Dhofar and a few other regions — has shaped civilisations. Once carried in caravans to Egypt, Mesopotamia and Rome, this resin continues to be harvested the traditional way and remains a symbol of Oman’s enduring legacy.

Unesco-listed sites like Wadi Dawkah, Al Baleed and Shisr (Ubar) are silent yet powerful witnesses to Dhofar’s historic role in global trade. Today, they attract visitors who seek to connect history, scent and story.

As Oman advances towards Vision 2040, Al Haffa Market stands as a beacon of cultural continuity and meaningful tourism — where every visitor can feel the heartbeat of a land rich in memory and meaning.

Over 60 bird species recorded in Al Jazir coastal survey

AL JAZIR: In a continued effort to protect ecosystems and monitor biodiversity across the Sultanate of Oman, the Environment Authority has carried out extensive field surveys in the Wilayat of Al Jazir in Al Wusta Governorate, focusing on three key coastal creeks: Khor Ghawi, Khor Qaised and Khor Ghadisir.

According to Abdullah bin Salim al Wardi, Head of the Department of Environment



The findings reveal the presence of over 60 species of resident, migratory and rare birds

Conservation in Al Wusta, the surveys aimed to document seabirds and migratory bird populations while assessing the environmental health of these biodiversity-rich areas.

The findings revealed the presence of over 60 species of resident, migratory and rare birds.

Among the notable species recorded were the great white heron, grey heron, green-backed

heron, black tern, sandwich tern, roseate tern, black ibis, Siberian gull, greater flamingo, water curlew, red-legged sandpiper, common mynah, bulbul and house crow.

Al Wardi emphasised that such field surveys are crucial for accurate biodiversity monitoring, documenting endangered and rare species, and evaluating the status of coastal ecosystems. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A man inspects a vehicle that was reportedly torched by Israeli settlers, northeast of Ramallah. — AFP

ISRAELI SETTLERS
ATTACK WEST BANK
CHRISTIAN VILLAGE

TEL AVIV: Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian Christian village of Taybeh in the occupied West Bank overnight, torching cars and spray-painting threatening graffiti, the Palestinian Authority said. Jeries Azar, a Taybeh resident and journalist, said that his house and car were targeted in the pre-dawn assault. “I looked outside and saw my car on fire, and they were throwing something at the vehicle and in the direction of the house,” Azar said.

The Palestinian Authority issued a statement blaming “Israeli colonial settlers” for the attack on Taybeh. Israeli police and the military said in a joint statement that a unit was dispatched to Taybeh and reported “two burned Palestinian vehicles and graffiti”. The Palestinian Authority’s foreign ministry condemned the attack, calling it “settler terrorism”.

Germany’s ambassador to Israel, Steffen Seibert, also condemned the action, writing on X: “These extremist settlers may claim that God gave them the land. But they are nothing but criminals abhorrent to any faith”. Settlers have attacked neighbouring communities in recent months, resulting in three deaths, damage to Palestinian water wells and the displacement of at least one rural herding community. — AFP

MARCOS ADDRESSES
FLOODING IN STATE
OF NATION SPEECH

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos blasted “useless and crumbling” flood control projects in a state of the nation address on Monday that focused on domestic issues after a months-long feud with his vice-president. Marcos repeated his recent warning that the nation faced a climate



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos delivers his speech, at the House of Representatives in Manila. — AFP

change-driven “new normal”, while pledging to investigate publicly funded projects that had failed. “Let’s not pretend, the people know that these projects can breed corruption. Kickbacks... for the boys,” he said, citing houses that were “swept away” by the floods. “Someone has to pay for the grave damage and corruption,” he said, adding he would

demand a full list of failed flood control projects and make it public. After months dominated by a feud with his vice-president that left many voters disillusioned, Marcos’s speech leaned heavily into bread-and-butter concerns. “The people feel a sense of defeat and dismay at the government, especially when it concerns basic services,” he said, referencing disappointing mid-term election results in May. “The lesson for us is very simple. We need to do better. We need to work faster.” — AFP

IRAN REJECTS
TALKS WITH
WEST ON
‘DEFENCE
CAPABILITIES’

TEHRAN: Iran said on Monday that its military capabilities were not up for negotiations, after France called for a “comprehensive deal” with Tehran that covers its missile programme and regional influence. “Regarding matters related to our defence capabilities, there will absolutely be no discussion,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told a regular press briefing. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told CBS News show “Face The Nation” that Western

governments were seeking a “comprehensive agreement” with Iran, in part to avert the “risk” that it could covertly pursue a nuclear weapon — an ambition Tehran has consistently denied. Barrot said such an agreement would include “the nuclear dimension” as well as the “ballistic component” and “the regional destabilisation activities that Iran has been conducting”, referring to armed groups backed by Tehran across the Middle East. His remarks followed a meeting on Friday between Iranian diplomats

and counterparts from France, Germany, and Britain. Baqaei on Monday said: “One cannot expect a country to remain in the treaty while being deprived of its stated rights, particularly the peaceful use of nuclear energy.” Baqaei said the Istanbul meeting with the European powers focused solely on “the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions”. Raising any other “unrelated topics... is merely a sign of confusion on the part of the other side”, the spokesman said. — AFP

Thailand, Cambodia agree
to ceasefire after 5-day war

CAMBODIA and
Thailand agreed
to an

“immediate and unconditional ceasefire” from midnight on Monday, in a bid to halt their deadliest conflict in more than a decade after five days of fierce fighting that has displaced more than 300,000 people. After days of efforts by Malaysia, chair of the ASEAN regional bloc, the United States and China to bring both sides to the table, the two countries’ leaders agreed to end hostilities, resume direct communications and create a mechanism to implement the truce. At least 36 people have been killed in the fighting, mostly civilians.

Following more than two hours of talks at his official residence in Putrajaya, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, flanked by Thai and Cambodian leaders, said he was ready to deploy a team to observe and ensure implementation. “This is a vital first step towards de-escalation and the restoration of peace and security,” he told a press conference. “All parties shared a commitment to peace.”

The Southeast Asian neighbours have wrangled for decades over border territory and have been on a conflict footing since the killing of a Cambodian soldier in a skirmish late in May, which led to a troop buildup on both sides. A full-blown diplomatic crisis brought Thailand’s fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse.

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Malaysia’s Prime Minister Ibrahim, Cambodia’s Prime Minister Manet and Thailand’s acting Prime Minister Wechayachai take part in mediation talks, in Putrajaya. — Reuters

They accuse each other of starting the fighting last week, both quickly deploying heavy artillery at multiple points along their 800-km land border. Thailand flew air raids with an F-16 fighter jet. US President Donald Trump called both leaders at the weekend, warning he would not conclude trade deals with them unless they ended the fighting. Both sides are facing a steep import tariff of 36% on their goods in the U.S., their top export market.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet thanked his acting Thai counterpart Phumtham Wechayachai for what he said was a positive role and said he deeply appreciated Trump’s “decisive mediation” and China’s constructive participation. “We agreed that the fighting will stop immediately,” he

said, expressing confidence that both sides could rebuild trust and confidence. “The solutions proposed by Prime Minister Anwar will set the conditions for moving forward with bilateral discussions, returning to normalcy, and forming the foundation for future de-escalation.” Responding to the ceasefire, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said Trump “made this happen”. “Give him the Nobel Peace Prize!” Leavitt posted on X. Tensions boiled over last week after Thailand recalled its ambassador to Phnom Penh and expelled Cambodia’s envoy, in response to a second Thai soldier losing a limb to a landmine that Bangkok alleged Cambodian troops had recently laid. — Reuters



TÜRKİYE BATTLES WILDFIRES, HEATWAVE

ISTANBUL: Firefighters battled blazes across Türkiye on Monday, as the country sweltered in a summer heatwave, officials said. Wildfires over the past week have led to at least 14 deaths in Türkiye and sparked the evacuations of 19 villages and more than 3,500 people elsewhere from their homes. The latest heatwave peaked with temperatures above 40C across much of the country last week and even reached a record 50.5C on Friday in the far southeast, in Silopi, near the Iraqi and Syrian borders. Firefighters battled blazes around the city of Bursa in the northwest, the Karabuk region in the north and the Kahramanmaraş region in the south. “Five fires have been brought under control in four provinces,” said Agriculture and Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli. But he said the efforts were hampered by strong winds that are fanning the flames. — AFP

EXPRESSING SORROW

Pope prays for victims of DRC church attack



Pope Leo XIV expressed his “profound grief” on Monday over a deadly attack on a church in the DR Congo’s northeast, saying he was praying for the victims and their families. Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) fighters raided a Catholic church in the town of Komanda, killing 43 people. “His Holiness Pope Leo XIV learned with consternation and profound grief about the attack perpetrated against the Bienheureuse-Anuarite parish in Komanda,” wrote Cardinal Pietro Parolin. — AFP

HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES

New aid convoy enters south Syria province



A new humanitarian aid convoy reached southern Syria on Monday, as the United Nations warned the humanitarian situation in Sweida province was critical after deadly violence. State television said Monday’s Syrian Red Crescent convoy was the third of its kind to reach the province, publishing images of trucks crossing into the region. It said the 27-truck convoy “contains 200 tonnes of flour, 2,000 shelter kits, 1,000 food baskets” as well as medical and other food supplies. — AFP

SCORCHING SUMMER

Blazing heat as Baghdad tops 50 degrees C



Iraqis grappled on Monday with searing heat in the capital Baghdad and parts of the country’s south, where the weather service said temperatures reached 51C in the shade. On central Baghdad’s bustling streets on Monday, people sought respite from the sweltering heat in front of swirling mist fans set up near restaurants and shops. The national weather service said the temperature reached 51C in Baghdad and in areas to the capital’s southeast. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and Caracas mayor Carmen Melendez gesture to the crowd after results were released in Caracas. — AFP

MADURO’S PARTY SWEEPS VENEZUELA MAYORAL VOTE

CARACAS: Venezuela’s ruling party won the majority of mayoral seats in elections boycotted by the main opposition, coinciding with the anniversary of President Nicolas Maduro’s re-election last year. The ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won 285 of 335 mayoralties, according to Maduro’s own projections, which he celebrated with supporters early on Monday in Caracas’s Bolivar Square. “Victory, popular victory!” Maduro shouted. “Democracy and peace, the unity of the people, have triumphed.”

Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, whose candidate lost to Maduro in the presidential election last year, said on X: “What happened between July 28, 2024, and today?” “That day, 70 per cent of the country voted for EDMUNDO GONZALEZ, and today, 90 per cent said NO to MADURO,” referring to what she said was the abstention rate.

A dissident wing of Machado’s movement participated in the elections and, according to Maduro, won 50 mayoralties. “The new opposition,” the president declared, while the opposition leader branded them Maduro collaborators. Maduro plans to lead a demonstration on Monday to celebrate the anniversary of his victory, which the United States and a dozen other countries did not recognise. — AFP

GUNMAN KILLS 5 IN BANGKOK SHOOTING



A gunman killed five people at a market in Thailand’s capital Bangkok on Monday, attacking security guards and a merchant before fatally turning the gun on himself, a Thai police official said. The gunman initially killed three security guards, and then a fourth with whom he had a personal quarrel, Siam Bunsom, commander-in-chief of the Metropolitan Police Bureau said. — AFP

FRANCE PETITION AGAINST BEE-KILLING PESTICIDE TOPS TWO MILLION BACKERS

PARIS: A student-led petition against a chemical deadly to bees reached more than two million signatures in France on Monday, increasing pressure on the president not to sign a bill allowing its use into law. The legislation was adopted on July 8, but without a proper debate to bypass gridlock in a bitterly divided parliament. On July 10, a 23-year old master’s student launched a petition urging the French government to drop the law allowing the reintroduction of acetamiprid, a pesticide that is harmful to ecosystems but popular with many

farmers in Europe.

Banned in France since 2018, the chemical remains legal in the European Union. The insecticide is particularly sought after by beet and hazelnut growers, who say they have no alternative against pests and face unfair competition.

The petition on France’s lower house National Assembly’s website had garnered more than 2,009,000 signatures on Monday morning. Backers at the height of summer include 400 people from the culinary world, including Michelin-starred chefs, who have criticised

the “blindness of our politicians”. According to a poll published in La Tribune Dimanche on Sunday, 64 per cent of people surveyed hope Macron will not sign the bill into law but will instead submit it to a new debate in parliament.

Macron has said he is waiting to hear the verdict of the Constitutional Council, which is expected to rule on the constitutionality of the law on August 7. The contested legislation is dubbed the Duplomb law, after its author, Laurent Duplomb, a senator for the right-wing Republicans party. — AFP

Russia’s Aeroflot cancels flights over cyberattack

RUSSIAN national flag carrier Aeroflot was forced to cancel dozens of flights on Monday after a crippling cyberattack claimed by a shadowy pro-Ukrainian hacking group, which one lawmaker called a wake-up call for Moscow. The Kremlin said the situation was worrying and prosecutors confirmed the disruption was the result of a hack and opened a criminal investigation. Senior lawmaker Anton Gorelkin said that Russia was under digital attack. “We must not forget that the war against our country is being waged on all fronts, including the digital one. And I do not rule out that the ‘hacktivists’ who claimed responsibility for the incident are in the service of unfriendly states,” Gorelkin said in a statement.

Aeroflot did not say how long the problems would take to resolve, but departure boards at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport turned red as flights were cancelled at a time when many Russians take their holidays. A statement purporting to be from a hacking group called Silent Crow said it had carried out the operation together with a Belarusian group called Cyberpartisans BY, and linked it to the war in Ukraine. “Glory to Ukraine! Long live Belarus!” said the statement, whose authenticity Reuters could not immediately verify. There was no immediate comment from Ukraine.

Silent Crow has previously claimed responsibility for attacks this year on a Russian real estate database, a state telecoms company, a large insurance firm, the Moscow government’s IT department and the Russian office of South Korean carmaker KIA. Some of those resulted in big data leaks. “The information that we are reading in the public domain is quite alarming. The hacker threat is a threat that remains for all large companies providing services to the population,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Aeroflot, the transport ministry and the aviation regulator did not immediately



People wait outside after many flights were cancelled or delayed, at Sheremetyevo international airport outside Moscow. — Reuters file photo

respond to requests for comment on the hack. The airline said it had cancelled more than 40 flights — mostly within Russia but also including routes to the Belarusian capital Minsk and the Armenian capital Yerevan — after reporting a failure in its information systems. At least 10 other flights were delayed. “Specialists are currently working to minimise the impact on the flight schedule and to restore normal service operations,” it said.

The statement in the name of Silent Crow said the cyberattack was the result of a year-long operation which had deeply penetrated Aeroflot’s network, destroyed 7,000 servers and gained control over the personal computers of employees, including senior managers. It published screenshots

of file directories purportedly from inside Aeroflot’s network and threatened to shortly start releasing “the personal data of all Russians who have ever flown Aeroflot”.

Since Russia launched its war in Ukraine in February 2022, travellers in Russia have become accustomed to flight disruptions. However, those delays have usually been caused by temporary airport closures during drone attacks.irate passengers vented their anger on social network VK, complaining about a lack of clear information from the airline. Malena Ashi wrote: “I’ve been sitting at Volgograd airport since 3:30!!!! The flight has been rescheduled for the third time!!!! This time it was rescheduled for approximately 14:50, and it was supposed to depart at 5:00!!!!” — Reuters

Intense rains lash China swelling waterways, rivers; landslide kills four

HONG KONG: Swollen rivers, waterways and reservoirs across China exacerbated flooding and landslides on Monday which killed at least four people, as authorities warned of more intense rains and heightened disaster risks in coming days. Forty-one rivers across the country have flooded, state broadcaster CCTV said, citing China’s Ministry of Water Resources. The ministry said it had issued flood warnings for small and midsize rivers and mountain torrents.

Heavy rains intensified around Beijing and surrounding provinces on Monday, including those in central China such as Hunan and northern Inner Mongolia. Four people died in a landslide in northern Hebei and eight people were missing. In the suburban area of Miyun in Beijing, more than 4,400 people had been resettled after flash floods and landslides inundated many villages, CCTV reported.

At an elderly care centre in Miyun, some people were trapped as water levels rose close to the roof, the broadcaster said. Emergency rescue services swam into the building and used ropes to rescue 48 people. Images circulated on China’s WeChat app showed areas of Miyun where cars and trucks were floating on a flooded road where water levels had risen so high that part of a residential building was submerged. Electricity cuts were also affecting more than 10,000 people, in the area, CCTV said.

Northern China has seen record precipitation in recent years, exposing densely populated cities, including Beijing, to flood risks. Some scientists link the increased rainfall in China’s usually arid north to global warming. China’s Central Meteorological Observatory said that heavy rainfall would continue to drench northern China over the next three days. Beijing issued its highest level flood alert on Monday, and its



Rescue workers set up a barrier to cover a manhole in the middle of a flooded road, in Miyun district of Beijing. — Reuters

meteorological observatory said rain would intensify after 8 p.m. (1200 GMT), particularly in the second half of the night. Most areas of the city would have more than 150 mm of rainfall in six hours and some areas could reach more than 300 mm, it added.

The storms are part of the broader pattern of extreme weather across China due to the East Asian monsoon, which has caused disruptions in the world’s second largest economy. Xiwanzi Village in Shicheng Town, near Miyun Reservoir, was severely affected, CCTV said on Monday, with an additional 100 villagers transferred to a primary school for shelter. It comes after the maximum flood peak flow into the Miyun reservoir reached a record high of 6550 cubic metres per second, Beijing authorities said on Sunday. Two high risk road sections were closed off in Beijing’s Pinggu district, authorities said. — Reuters

OPINION

Rewarding employees a necessity in today’s world



EDITORIAL

WORKING in the public sector in Oman and elsewhere typically involved climbing the career ladder gradually, with longevity and perseverance being the reward system. On the other hand, private sector employees often faced unpredictable challenges within their organisations, such as profitability concerns, biased evaluations and a lack of social security nets.

Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, a transformation has been occurring in the labour market, including the public sector, making them more attuned to the needs and challenges of the global economy.

The new performance-driven reform is pushing employees to think bigger and act bolder by emphasising accountability through self-appraisals and personal goals.

Employees are encouraged to explore beyond their roles, pursue innovative ideas and understand how their contributions impact the broader success of the country. While not perfect, this shift is an important step towards promoting meritocracy and healthy competition in the workplace.

The private sector is also adapting, with a recent decision confirming that annual increments for Omanis will be based on evaluations or performance reports rather

than a flat salary hike across the board.

This ensures that the efforts of private sector employees are recognised, with raises directly tied to performance. Excellent evaluations will result in a five-per cent hike, followed by four per cent for very good evaluations, three per cent for good evaluations and two per cent for acceptable evaluations. Poor performance will not result in a raise, emphasising the importance of accountability and discipline.

This shift is significant as it focuses on making the job market competitive not only for the local economy but also at regional and global levels to attract more foreign investors.

Incentives are beneficial as they boost morale, increase productivity and enhance job satisfaction. By rewarding employees for achieving goals, companies motivate them to perform better, benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

Incentives do not always have to be financial; gestures like recognising employee achievements in meetings, providing resources for training and development, and offering flexible work options can also improve morale and work-life balance.

As the labour market evolves, it is important to adapt to new challenges and uncertainties, such as advancements in technology like Artificial Intelligence, to

Incentives do not always have to be financial; gestures like recognising employee achievements in meetings, providing resources for training and development, and offering flexible work options can also improve morale and work-life balance.

ensure continued success and growth.

Oman has undergone significant labour reforms under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, primarily through the promulgation of the new Labour Law (Royal Decree No 53/2023) and the Social Protection Law (Royal Decree No 52/2023).

These legislative changes, unveiled in July 2023, aim to modernise the labour market, enhance worker protections, promote Omanisation and establish a more comprehensive social security framework, aligning with the broader objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

A significant focus of the reforms is on Omanisation, the national policy to prioritise Omani citizens in the workforce.

The new Labour Law stipulates that employment is a right for Omanis and restricts non-Omani employment to specific conditions. Employers are now required to submit annual plans for Omanisation and workforce replacement, detailing Omani worker numbers, salaries, gender and job vacancies.

Further reforms include the implementation of a Wage Protection System. This electronic system, developed with the Central Bank of Oman, ensures that private sector employers transfer workers' wages directly to their bank accounts within seven days of the due date, aiming to prevent delayed or non-payment.

Artists, scientists breathe life into prehistoric woman

STEPHANIE HAMEL & KATE GILLAM

With her clear blue eyes and slightly nervous gaze, the reconstructed bust of Mos'anne — a woman who lived around 10,500 years ago — is uncannily lifelike.

Reborn via a close partnership between science and art, Mos'anne's bust was created at Belgium's Ghent University as part of a project to explore how the region's last hunter-gatherers lived during the Mesolithic era.

“Part of the project is also understanding the genetics of these people, figuring out their kinship and so on, and to be able to really translate the science that we do to a wider audience,” the project's lead researcher, Isabelle de Groote, said.

Scientists chose the skull of Mos'anne — named by public vote in reference to Belgium's Meuse Valley — for reconstruction, as it was exceptionally well-preserved. The bones held a large amount of preserved DNA, making it possible to reconstruct the woman — aged between 35 and 60 at her death — with remarkable realism. “We also know that in the Mesolithic times, she is genetically part of the Western hunter-gatherer group,” said de Groote.

Using genetic testing, researchers were able to determine the Mesolithic woman's skin and eye colour. “This group is known for having very dark skin and blue eyes, a bit like Cheddar Man in Britain,” she said, referring to the man who lived in Britain around 10,000 years ago, whose skeleton was discovered in 1903.

Mos'anne's DNA revealed valuable clues about her appearance but it was the unique skills of Dutch “paleo-artists” Alfons and Adrie Kennis that brought her back to life.

After receiving guidance from the researchers — including instructions to use ochre pigment on Mos'anne's headband — the twins began their work, from moulding the skull to the final decorative feather, meticulously sculpting each facial muscle in clay.

“The biggest part of the reconstruction is forming a character,” Alfons Kennis said from their Darwin-esque studio in Arnhem.

“You can make a forensic reconstruction... use the data, apply the muscles, apply the skin, but you get no character,” Kennis said of their artistic process.

The Kennis brothers — whose surname means ‘knowledge’ in Dutch — take about six months to complete a reconstruction. — AFP

Repentance’s raw power

THERE was a time when I believed that the two most powerful sentences in the English language were “I love you” and “I’m sorry”. I now know that those words can wound, deeply, when they’re contradicted by our actions. “I’m sorry” can even insult our intelligence if regret never leads to repentance.

I was reminded of this by an unlikely source, a television show — specifically, “The Bear”, FX’s hit drama about a Chicago restaurant and the small community of cooks and servers who are trying to transform a family-owned sandwich shop into a Michelin-starred culinary showcase.

“The Bear” is one of those shows that launched a thousand essays. But for those who don’t know it, the series is centred on a young, talented chef named Carmen Berzatto.

If you’ve spent any time in food service yourself, you’ve probably seen exactly what’s depicted on “The Bear”. At the tables, the customers enjoy a wonderful meal and a good conversation. They bask in the hospitality. But in the kitchen, the pace is brutal, emotions are raw and even the best of friends will occasionally be nose-to-nose.

Mostly, the anger is quickly forgotten. Mostly, everyone is able to push through the stress, to retain their bonds of family and friendship. But not always. Sometimes people go too far. Sometimes the chaos is too great.

And sometimes a boss crosses the line from pushing an employee to breaking one. Sometimes friends do more than test friendships. They fracture them.

That’s what “The Bear” is really about: How do we live together when someone always seems to be going too far? It’s hard to watch “The Bear” without seeing ourselves, without seeing echoes of the primal anger that is ripping our families and nation apart. In Season 3, we can clearly see the damage Carmy has



DAVID FRENCH

French is Opinion columnist for The New York Times, where he writes about law, culture, religion and armed conflict

done. He has made something great, but each person in the restaurant — each person in his family — is still under terrible strain.

Normal human failings create persistent frictions, and unless we learn to deal with and ameliorate that friction, even the best of friendships can sometimes fade.

But we’re living through something else, a furious anger in which it seems people actually want to end friendships, where they want to inflict pain with their words.

It’s one way to demonstrate your commitment, your great and high ideological, religious or political calling. The cause demands it, and you serve the cause.

We create relational rubble and find that it’s hard to live in the ruins.

In Season 4, Carmy lives in those ruins, but he decides to rebuild. And he does so through the most powerful of human reactions to sin and loss: He repents.

Let’s pause here for a moment and talk about the difference between regret and repentance. Regret is the sorrow we feel for the pain we cause or the consequences we experience. Repentance, by contrast, is active. It happens when we turn away from the behaviours that caused our regret.

Rarely has a television show more clearly demonstrated the difference than “The Bear”. Time and again, the words, “I’m sorry” — the expression of regret — are met with scepticism, at best. Carmy says those words over and over again, and you can see his friends’ faces barely change. They want more than an apology.

If you haven’t watched Season 4, you might want to stop reading now, but there is a single moment in the show that demonstrates the difference between regret and repentance.

Carmy realises that he is the problem. Yes, other members of his family and other people at the restaurant have their own problems, but Carmy is at the epicentre of the

chaos. And in a single, extended scene in the finale, he makes that clear not just by saying he’s sorry, but by turning, by changing.

He gives the restaurant back to his family, to his most valued colleague and to his closest friend — to the people he has harmed the most. The star decides to fade so that other people can shine. For a time, he seems to say, I must diminish. I must become less so that you can become the more that you are supposed to be.

At first they can’t see what Carmy is doing. The mistrust is so great and the pain so deep that they can see Carmy’s actions only as another betrayal — this time abandoning them when the restaurant needs his talents the most. When Carmy tells his friend and co-worker, Richie, that he’s leaving, Richie feels angry, abandoned and hurt.

As clarity dawns on everyone — as they understand what Carmy is doing — warmth and love start to spread across their faces like a slow-breaking dawn.

“I missed you,” Richie says to Carmy. And when Richie knows the new partnership is real, he nods, agrees to the deal and says — using words for emphasis that we can’t print in a family newspaper — “Yes. It is an honour.” I’m such a fallen person that when I saw that scene, I admit that my first thought was of the people who needed to repent to me.

But thankfully that moment passed. Instead, I came to feel a profound sense of conviction. I asked myself, “Who have I harmed?” and — more important — “How can I change?” At a time of extraordinary fury, we all live in a degree of pain. We all live with regrets. But hope can come from unexpected places — and perhaps a show that features scallops, pastries and Chicago beef can also teach us that only repentance can heal our broken hearts. — *The New York Times*

Dear AI, how am I doing?



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THE ever-growing role of AI reminds one of the time when the word ‘automatic’ came into existence, and it was the word most used to describe everything from watches to vehicles. If one had to wind the watch in the past, it was an automatic quartz now. If it is a device, then the term automatic would indicate that it could switch off automatically without human interference, just like a microwave with a timer or a kettle. Of course, the word automatically also means spontaneously. From all that became automatic, which has been great for industrialisation, Artificial Intelligence is not just making work easier but might be taking away jobs. So the debate goes on. What we may not realise is how much people might already be depending on AI in their mobile phones and tablets. A friend of mine could not solve her skin ailment even after seeing a few skin specialists. The next thing she did seems to have given her comfort. She asked the AI what she should do, and there she was given suggestions, including lifestyle changes. She felt, finally, that someone was giving her hope and not just prescriptions and medications. The sentiment seemed similar to another

friend who likes to ask AI how she is doing once in a while. So AI functions as a counsellor. The journal app on the phone often prompts, “Want to reflect on your day?” It is quite fun, actually, until we begin to wonder who else could be reading the journal. After all, the AI apps read everything that is available online to summarise or come to an opinion. There is another friend who likes to ask the AI what it has to say about him. He is often amazed at the details the AI has on him, including his gym membership. So does it mean our online lives are all recorded as data science continues to grow in importance, just like AI’s role in global communication and interconnectivity in the business world? AI has made it all easy, whether it is natural language processing or image and audio recognition. The world of media has changed so much that we are at times confused about the authenticity of the videos. AI videos and images can be intriguing, but they have also opened doors to fake news, and validity is debatable. AI has definitely made us smarter in the way we operate our lifestyle, such as applying energy efficiency measures as well as saving time.

From all that became automatic, which has been great for industrialisation, Artificial Intelligence is not just making work easier but might be taking away jobs

And now it might just be able to break into loneliness. But is there a danger of being overdependent on AI? One obvious concern would be the lack of emotional intelligence. The AI might be able to provide the probabilities and logical answers, but emotion is very much human. No technology can substitute that. Time is so precious that it is probably the most expensive commodity that people may not have enough to spare. Maybe it is this lack of time that makes others turn towards technology to have a quiet conversation. Spare some time for someone who is seeking someone to listen to - it might be too much to ask while we rush through the daily challenges of life. But maybe it is time to consider giving time for others as an act of kindness. In today’s world, everything has to make sense - especially economic sense. Wages are based on hours spent working, and I wonder if that is when time became a precious commodity. The reality, though, is that time became the most precious commodity because even money cannot buy time. Time lost is gone forever. As a friend put it, now is the time to start. To start, everything you have kept for tomorrow.

Ireland’s ‘economic miracle’ at risk from Trump’s trade tariffs

OLIVIER DEVOS

The deal between the United States and the European Union may have averted a transatlantic trade war, but worries persist in Ireland, where crucial sectors are dependent on US multinationals. Attracted primarily by low corporate taxes, huge pharmaceutical firms like Pfizer, Eli Lilly, and Johnson & Johnson, and tech giants like Apple, Google, and Meta have based their European headquarters there. The US investor influx has boosted Irish tax coffers and fuelled record budget surpluses in recent years. But Trump’s tariffs — a baseline rate of 15 per cent on EU exports will apply across the board — present a stress test for the Irish economic model. Once one of Western Europe’s economic laggards, Ireland became known as the “Celtic Tiger” thanks to a remarkable turnaround in the 1990s. A model built on low corporate tax and an English-speaking workforce in an EU country proved seductive to foreign investors, particularly from the US. Their presence drove rampant economic growth and would later help Ireland rebound from the financial crash of 2008. The transition was an “Irish economic miracle,” said Louis Brennan, professor of business studies at Trinity College Dublin. “Ireland has advanced in a matter of decades from being one of the poorest countries of northwestern Europe to being one of the most prosperous,” he said. Last year, Ireland hiked its corporate tax rate from 12.5 to 15 per cent after pressure from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), but still anticipates a budget surplus of 9.7 billion euros for 2025. Ireland’s “spectacular transformation “may have been too successful because we are very dependent in many ways on American companies,” says Dan O’Brien, director of the IIEA think tank in Dublin. Spared from the first round of Trump’s tariffs, pharmaceutical companies are now being targeted by the American administration, keen to repatriate production to home soil. Earlier this month, the US president threatened a 200 per cent levy on the sector. Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin expressed mixed feelings at Sunday’s 15 per cent deal, welcoming that “punitively high tariffs” were avoided. But “higher tariffs than there have been” will make transatlantic trade “more expensive and more challenging,” he added. The new 15 per cent levy will be “particularly unwelcome in Ireland,” O’Brien said. “The pharmaceutical industry is very large relative to the size of the economy, and in recent times, around half of its exports have gone to the United States,” he said. Pharma employs about 50,000 people and accounted for nearly half of Irish exports last year, reaching 100 billion euros, up by 30 per cent year-on-year. — AFP

Race for critical minerals pose risks to suppliers

THE world’s superpowers have developed a seemingly insatiable appetite for the critical minerals that are essential to the ongoing energy and digital transitions, including rare-earth metals (for permanent magnets), cobalt (for batteries), and uranium (for nuclear reactors). The International Energy Agency forecasts that demand for these minerals will more than quadruple by 2040 for use in clean-energy technologies alone. But, in their race to control these vital resources, China, Europe, and the United States risk causing serious harm to the countries that possess them. As it stands, China is leading the pack, having gained ownership or control over an estimated 60-80 per cent of the critical minerals that are needed for industry (such as for magnets) and the green transition. This control extends across the supply chain: China is heavily invested in mining across Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America, and has been building up its processing capabilities. For Western powers, China’s quasi-monopoly over critical minerals looks like an economic and national-security threat. This fear is not unfounded. In December 2024, China restricted exports of critical minerals to the US in retaliation for US restrictions on exports of advanced microchips to China. Since then, US President Donald Trump has forced Ukraine to relinquish a significant share of its critical minerals to the US in what he presents as repayment for American support in its fight against Russia. Trump also wants US sovereignty over mineral-rich Greenland, to the dismay of Denmark. And he has suggested that Canada, with all its natural resources, become America’s 51st state. The European Union, for its part, has sought its own mining contracts, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). From the Scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century to Western attempts to claim Middle Eastern oil in the twentieth century, such resource grabs are hardly new. They reflect a fundamental



RABAH AREZKI

The writer is a former vice-president at the African Development Bank, is Director of Research at the French National Center for Scientific Research



The International Energy Agency forecasts that demand for these minerals will more than quadruple by 2040 for use in clean-energy technologies alone.

asymmetry: less industrialised developing economies tend to consume fewer resources than they produce, whereas the opposite is true for developed economies – and, nowadays, China. In principle, this asymmetry creates ideal conditions for mutually beneficial agreements: industrialised economies get the resources they desire, and non-industrialised economies get a windfall, which they can use to bolster their own development. But, in reality, vast natural-resource endowments have proven to be more of a curse than a blessing, with resource-rich countries often developing more slowly than their resource-poor counterparts. A key reason for this is that developed economies have more economic clout, advanced technology, and military might – all of which they bring to bear to acquire the resources they seek. For example, European imperial powers used steam-engine technology to help them explore and exploit Africa for resources like copper, tin, rubber, timber, diamonds, and gold in the nineteenth century. This, together with more advanced weaponry and other technologies, meant that, far from offering local communities fair compensation for their valuable resources, European powers could subjugate those communities and use their labour to extract and transport what they wanted. But even countries that are exporting their resources for a

profit have often struggled to make progress on development, not only because of imbalanced deals with more powerful resource importers, but also because their governments have often mismanaged the associated bonanzas. It does not help that resource-rich countries and regions often grapple with internal and external conflicts. Consider the mineral-rich provinces of the DRC, such as Katanga and North Kivu, which have long suffered from violence and lawlessness, fuelled by neighbours such as Rwanda and Uganda. Today, the advance of the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels is fuelling bloodshed in eastern Congo – and creating an opportunity for outside powers to gain access to critical minerals. The DRC-Rwanda peace agreement brokered by the Trump administration promises precisely such access to the US, in exchange for security guarantees. But the resource curse is not inescapable, especially for countries with strong outward-facing institutions to manage the economy’s external relations, including its resource sector’s ability to attract investment and generate revenues for the state, and inward-facing institutions to govern how those revenues are used. If a country is to translate its resource endowments into economic development and improvements in human well-being, both have a critical role to play. @Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

INTELLECTUALSPORT



The celebration took place at the Al Araimi Boulevard in Seeb.

CHESS ENTHUSIASTS CELEBRATE WORLD CHESS DAY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Chess enthusiasts and players from across the Sultanate of Oman gathered in Muscat to mark the World Chess Day recently and exchanged their experiences and knowledge in the intellectual sport.

The celebration, which took place at the Al Araimi Boulevard in Seeb, provided a great opportunity for the public to get to know the world of chess while igniting curiosity among the children to the world of chess.

The events were organised across the country last week with the aim of highlighting the importance of the game of chess and increasing interest in the game among the people, especially the younger generation.

The International Fide Classic Tournament, held as part of the World Chess Day celebrations at Al Araimi Boulevard Mall in Seeb, under the leadership of the Chess Masters Academy, a leading chess institution in Oman, in collaboration with the Oman Chess Committee, was the main attraction this time. The tournament, which was attended by talented players from various countries, witnessed exciting moments. Chess matches, simultaneous exhibitions and chess quizzes were also held for children and adults on July 20.

The Blitz Chess competition organised for parents as part of the day, was very exciting and impressive for many of those who never played on the 8x8 checkerboard or moved any piece or attempted to checkmate the opponent, were given an opportunity to try their first hand in the game. The active participation of parents was an asset to the success of the event. And, the prominent chess players shared their experiences and gave classes on chess strategies.

The organisers noted that chess is more than just a pastime, it is a tool that helps in enhancing mental skills, improving concentration and problem-solving skills. Organisers said that the celebration of World Chess Day is expected to give a new impetus to the growth of the game of chess in Oman.

Khareef tourney begins as Al Nahda, U23 team win

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

THE 2025 Khareef Club Tournament, organised by the Oman Football Association, kicked off at the Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium on Sunday, featuring five clubs along with the Oman Olympic team, divided into two groups. Group A includes Dhofar, Al Nahda and Al Shabab, while Group B consists of Al Nasr, Seeb and the Olympic team. The tournament will run until August 3.

The opening round witnessed two intense matches. The first brought together Dhofar and Al Nahda in Group A, where Al Nahda secured a 2-1 victory. The match started with high intensity from Al Nahda, who applied constant pressure through the midfield and flanks. In the 13th minute, Mohammed al Ghafri received a precise pass and fired a strong shot past goalkeeper Mazin al Kasbi to give Al Nahda the lead. Just two minutes later, Azzan al Tamtemi appeared to double the score with a powerful strike, but the goal was overturned after the referee reviewed the play on VAR and ruled it offside.

Dhofar gradually gained more control of the ball and managed to equalise in the 40th minute when Fahd al Hajri broke through Al Nahda's defence, went on one with goalkeeper Faiz al Rashidi, and slotted the ball into the net, ending the first half 1-1.

In the second half, Al Nahda regained momentum with organised possession and bold attacking moves. In the 60th minute, they were awarded a penalty after a strong challenge from a Dhofar defender. The decision was confirmed by VAR, and Ahmed al Kaabi converted from the spot with a well placed shot to the left of Mazin al Kasbi, restoring Al Nahda's lead. In the closing minutes, both coaches made tactical substitutions, with play mostly concentrated in midfield. Dhofar made some late attempts to equalise, but Al Nahda held firm until the final whistle to claim their first win of the tournament with a 2-1 scoreline.

In the second match of the Khareef Championship, the Olympic team earned a deserved 2-0 victory over Al Nasr. The match began with pressure from both sides, and Al Nasr nearly opened the scoring in the eighth minute when Awad al Shahri launched a swift counter attack, but goalkeeper Ibrahim al Kindi made an excellent save. In the 24th minute, the Olympic team responded with a well-organised play that ended with Masoud al



Al Nahda's Mohammed al Ghafri celebrates after scoring against Dhofar.

Bahri firing a powerful shot into the net, putting the Olympic team ahead.

Al Nasr pushed for an equaliser, with their best chance coming in the 29th minute when Al Mutasim al Noubi's shot went narrowly wide. Another opportunity came before half-time through Jassim al Noubi, but the Olympic defence intervened at the last moment, ending the first half with the Olympic team leading 1-0.

The second half saw both teams maintain the same line-ups and continue exchanging attacks. The Olympic team doubled their lead in the 70th minute through substitute Yasar al Balushi, who unleashed a superb strike into the net. Al Nasr tried to reduce the deficit in the closing stages, but the Olympic defence handled the pressure well, sealing a 2-0 win.

The tournament continues on Tuesday with two key matches: Al Shabab versus Dhofar at 5 pm, and Seeb versus Al Nasr at 8:30 pm. Al Shabab, led by national coach Hassan Rustam, will aim to maintain their positive momentum after winning the Super Cup, while Dhofar, under Musbah al Saadi, seeks to recover from their opening loss.

The Seeb-Al Nasr clash is expected to be closely fought, with Seeb looking to bounce back from their Super Cup defeat, and Al Nasr hoping to improve after their loss to the Olympic team.

The tournament will proceed as scheduled, with the second round on July 29 and the third round on July 31. The competition will conclude on August 3 with the final match between the group leaders to determine the Khareef Club Championship winner.

Oman placed in Pot 1 for AFC U17 Asian Cup qualifiers draw

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Oman Under-17 team was placed in the first pot for the upcoming AFC U17 Asian Cup qualifiers draw which is scheduled to take place on August 7 at the headquarters of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Being seeded in Pot 1 was based to the national team's results in the last edition of AFC Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia besides the 2023 edition of the same event.

The top-seeded teams in Pot 1 included: Oman, Australia, Yemen, Iran, Thailand, China and Vietnam. These teams are considered regional powerhouses based on their recent performances and rankings at the continental level. The draw will also include teams placed in other pots according to their seeding as Pot 2 featured teams of



Oman's U17 side showed solid performance during the AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2025 in April.

Afghanistan, India, Malaysia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Laos and Kuwait.

Bahrain are placed in Pot 3 besides Myanmar, Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Palestine. Pot 4 comprised Syria, Mongolia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Jordan, Chinese Taipei and Brunei while Pot 5 saw teams of Nepal, Bhutan, Mariana Islands, Guam, Maldives, Timor-Leste and Lebanon. The last and concluding Pot 6 included: Macau, Sri Lanka and Pakistan teams.

The qualifying matches are scheduled for November 2025 as the top teams will book their tickets to the AFC U17 Asian Cup finals while it is expected to be opportunities for the best runners up to join the teams in the Asian finals.

In preparation for the qualifiers, the Oman Football Association (OFA) is expected to announce a new coaching team soon following the replacement of coach Anwar

al Habsi, the former head coach. The announcement will be part of the OFA's wider plan to enhance technical readiness and ensure optimal performance during the qualifiers.

Oman's U17 side showed solid performance during the AFC U17 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2025 which was held earlier in April. Despite the top performance by Oman team boys, the team narrowly missed out on qualification to the Fifa U17 World Cup. Oman began their campaign with a 2-1 loss to Tajikistan, but bounced back impressively with a historic 2-1 win over Iran, followed by a 2-2 draw with North Korea. Unfortunately, the result against North Korea meant Oman finished third in Group D with four points, just one short of North Korea's five points, who advanced as group runners-up. Tajikistan topped the group after stunning Iran 3-1 in the final group match.

DOMINANT DISPLAY



Leylah Fernandez celebrates with the trophy after winning DC Open title. — AFP

FERNANDEZ DOMINATES KALINSKAYA TO WIN DC OPEN

WASHINGTON: Canada's Leylah Fernandez produced a dominant performance to defeat Russia's Anna Kalinskaya in straight sets and win the WTA Tour's DC Open in Washington on Sunday. The 22-year-old bagged the first WTA 500 victory of her career and her first title since 2023 to win 6-1, 6-2 in just over an hour.

The win completed a fairytale week for Fernandez, the 2021 US Open finalist who had beaten top seed Jessica Pegula and former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina on her way to the fourth title of her career.

Fernandez said she had grown in belief throughout her campaign.

"In the beginning of the tournament (there) was still a lot of doubt, but as the tournament progressed, I was starting to play better," Fernandez said.

"I have gone through so many different challenges this week. I think it has just made me stronger in a way, that if I can get through this week — through the cramps, through the long matches, through the heat and humidity — I can get through anything."

Fernandez got off to a blistering start, dominating Kalinskaya's serve to take the opening set in just 30 minutes.

After three holds left Fernandez 2-1 up, the breakthrough came in the fourth game with Kalinskaya's serve looking increasingly vulnerable.

The Russian was soon in trouble at 15-40 down, and then double faulted to hand Fernandez the break and a 3-1 lead.

Fernandez was having no such difficulty on serve and held comfortably for a 4-1 lead before going on to attack Kalinskaya's serve in the sixth game.

The Canadian held two break points at 15-40 and duly converted the second for a 5-1 lead, lasering a backhand return to leave Kalinskaya rooted to the spot.

A delicate drop shot at the net gave Fernandez the set in the next game.

The second set mirrored the first, with Fernandez grabbing an early break to seize the initiative at 2-1 before breaking again soon afterwards for a 4-1 lead.

The next two games went with serve but Fernandez made no mistake when serving for the match, converting the second of two match points.

Fernandez will head to Canada for this week's WTA 1000 Canadian Open in Montreal, where she is anticipating a tougher test.

"Montreal is a whole different monster," she said. "It's a bigger draw, longer tournament. It's going to be start from zero." — AFP



England players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Uefa Women's Euro 2025. — Reuters

England clinch Euro 2025 with shoot-out victory

CHLOE KELLY fired in the decisive spot kick as England beat Spain 3-1 in a penalty shoot-out to win Euro 2025 on Sunday, successfully defending the title they won three years ago after an enthralling game that ended 1-1 after extra time.

It was another spectacular turnaround from Sarina Wiegman's side, who came back from two goals down to beat Sweden in a shoo-tout in the last eight and beat Italy in the semifinals with another extra time goal from Kelly.

World and Nations League champions Spain made the breakthrough in the 25th minute as Ona Batlle crossed and caught the England defence flat-footed, allowing Mariona Caldentey to head the ball past goalkeeper Hannah Hampton. With Lauren James suffering an ankle injury, England were struggling, but Kelly came off the bench to replace her just before the break and it proved an inspired substitution.

Kelly helped close down England's porous left flank and provided the cross for Alessia Russo to level in the 57th minute, the forward heading home her inch-perfect assist.

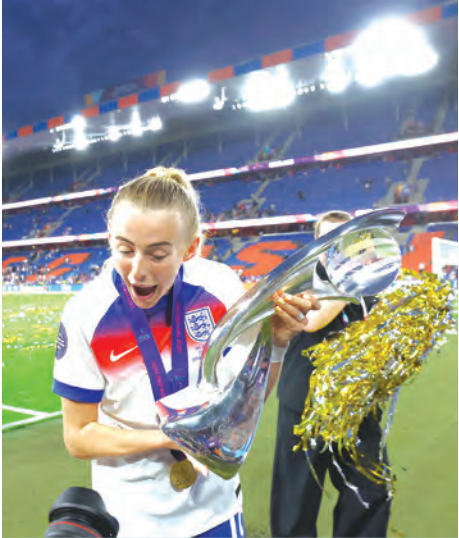
Spain continued to monopolise the ball but could not find another goal before the end of normal

KELLY'S PENALTY FIRES ENGLAND TO EURO 2025 TITLE

CALDENTEY HEADER PUTS SPAIN AHEAD

RUSSO LEVELS FOR ENGLAND

I'M SO PROUD OF THIS TEAM', SAYS KELLY



England's Chloe Kelly celebrates with the trophy after winning the Uefa Women's Euro 2025. — Reuters

time, and the story continued through extra time as they pressed and probed, but could not break the English defence as the game finished 1-1. The Spaniards got the shootout off to a great start when Cata Coll stopped Beth Mead's effort, but England keeper Hannah Hampton saved from Caldentey and from Aitana Bonmati to put England in the driving seat.

Coll got Spain back into it with another one-handed stop to block Leah Williamson, but Spain

substitute Salma Paralluelo hit her kick wide of the target. That set the stage for Kelly to repeat her 2022 heroics, when she scored the extra time winner over Germany that won them the title at Wembley.

PRANCING KELLY Kelly made her trademark prancing run-up before smashing the ball into the net and peeling away in ecstasy to celebrate with her teammates in front of the England fans.

"I'm so proud, so proud of this team, so grateful to wear this badge, and I'm so proud to be English ... I was cool, I was composed and I knew I was going to hit the back of the net," Kelly said.

The final was the first time since the inaugural edition in 1984, in which England were beaten by Sweden, that the game was decided by a penalty shoot-out. "Unbelievable, incredible, showing throughout this tournament we can come back when we go a goal down, and we have that grit," an elated Hampton said.

"We've got English blood in us, so we never say die and we just keep going, and we did that today."

For Spain's Bonmati, the defeat was bitter. "I don't have much emotion left to be honest. I have emptied myself of emotion. We are all exhausted," she said. — Reuters

De Minaur defeats Davidovich to lift Washington Open title

WASHINGTON: Alex De Minaur rallied from a set down and saved three match points to claim the Washington Open title with a 5-7 6-1 7-6(3) win over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the final of the ATP 500 event on Sunday. The Australian number one, who lost the 2018 final to Alexander Zverev, felt he rode his luck to secure his 10th career title and ensure he will enter the top 10 in the world rankings ahead of next month's US Open. The two 26-year-olds exchanged breaks early in the opening set before Spain's Davidovich Fokina seized control by breaking again and closed out the set with the help of some

crisp forehand winners. De Minaur responded emphatically in the second set, converting two of four break-point opportunities while holding serve throughout, wrapping up the set in just over 30 minutes with an ace to level the contest. The Spaniard looked on course for his first career title when he broke to grab the lead in the decider but he failed to serve out the match at 5-3, sending a forehand long to hand the break back to seventh seed De Minaur. Davidovich Fokina's frustration mounted as the 12th seed squandered three match points on De Minaur's serve, and the



Alex De Minaur celebrates with the trophy after winning the Washington Open title. — Reuters

Australian then capitalised on a series of unforced errors in the tiebreak to edge the contest. "I came here in 2018 and it gave me so much confidence, so I'm so happy that I was able to come back and end up winning the title," De Minaur said at the trophy presentation. "Alejandro, you're way too good not to have one of these, it's coming for sure," he added, gesturing to the trophy. "You deserved it today, I just got lucky. You are a hell of a competitor, hell of a player. No one on the tour wants to play you. And this is not the end, this is only going on for you."

Davidovich Fokina recalled that he had required a wild card to play in the US capital last year and was pleased to have at least guaranteed a rise to a career high world number 19 when the rankings are updated on Monday. "He deserved the win, he was fighting every ... ball, he was always pushing through my limits," Davidovich Fokina said. "We had a job to do before we started the year, to be at the middle of the year in the top 20. This week we did it, just not with the trophy. But for sure, we will keep going, pushing our limits, pushing harder." — Reuters



TADEJ POGACAR completed a supreme performance to win the Tour de France in a rainy Paris on Sunday, crushing his rivals to collect a fourth title.

Wout van Aert triumphed in the final day cliffhanger around Montmartre, but Pogacar was spared any late challenge to his overall lead when the weather forced organisers to neutralise times to avoid accidents on the slippery cobbled roads.

However, Pogacar more than played his part in a thrilling finale before Belgian rider Van Aert pulled away on the last climb.

“I was really happy they neutralised the times of the GC (general classification),” Pogacar said. “Then it was more relaxed to race and you just had to have good legs to be in front. I tried but hats off to Wout, he was incredibly strong. It was a really nice race.”

The Slovenian has now won the Tour four times in six years and finished runner-up twice. “It’s six years in a row on the podium and this one feels especially amazing,” he said.

POGACAR WINS
FOURTH TOUR
DE FRANCE

SLOVENIAN
FLAWLESS OVER
THREE-WEEK
RACE

THIS ONE FEELS
ESPECIALLY
AMAZING, SAYS
POGACAR



Tadej Pogacar wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, Jonathan Milan wearing the best sprinter's green jersey, Florian Lipowitz wearing the best young rider's white jersey celebrate on the podium after the 21st and final stage of the 112th edition of the Tour de France cycling race. — AFP

Second placed Jonas Vingegaard was unable to contend with Pogacar, but the winner paid tribute to the Dane. “I spoke to Jonas today. We’ve been racing each other for five years now and we have raised each other to a higher level,” he said. Despite the rain, tens of thousands of spectators packed Montmartre to follow Pogacar’s progress through

the narrow streets of the popular tourist spot.

He played to the delighted crowds by racing to the head of the peloton near the Moulin Rouge cabaret at the foot of the climb before Van Aert produced a well-timed attack to drop Pogacar and charge to the finish line on the Champs Elysees avenue.

Pogacar was fourth on the day but after wins in 2020, 2021 and 2024, he again proved untouchable in the world’s greatest bike race.

Vingegaard, the champion in 2022 and 2023, suffered two shocking off days and ended second overall, 4min 24sec adrift. “I had some of my worst days here and some of the best,” he said after the race, adding he would turn his attention to the Tour of Spain.

Breakout German star Florian Lipowitz, 24, took third on his debut, rounding out the podium a distant 11 minutes off the pace in third.

TURNING THE SCREW

Defending his title, Pogacar embarked from the start in Lille as clear favourite and won four stages along the way.

In the first week, he struck on rolling runs in the north and west at Rouen and the Mur de Bretagne. He then turned the screw on the slopes of the Pyrenees in week two with his rivals as good as vanquished.

Vingegaard suffered on the stage five time trial, and again in the second week at the Hautacam mountain, leaving the Dane in shock as his form abandoned him. — AFP



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RAPID PROGRESS



The refinery has exported 304,388 MT of LPG

DUQM REFINERY MARKS 500TH EXPORT SHIPMENT

AL DUQM: Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company LLC (Duqm Refinery, OQ8) has marked the export of its 500th shipment of petroleum products via the Duqm Export Terminal, underscoring its rapid progress and pivotal role as a strategic energy hub. The milestone reaffirms the refinery’s operational excellence and its commitment to the safe, consistent delivery of high-quality fuels to global markets.

Eng Abdullah al Ajmi, CEO of Duqm Refinery, stated that since the first shipment in May 2023, the refinery has exported more than 19 million tonnes of refined products worldwide while maintaining an exemplary safety record. This achievement reflects the company’s agility, efficiency and growth driven by strong operational momentum.

He remarked that achieving the 500th vessel milestone demonstrates what is possible when vision, collaboration and performance align. The refinery has set new benchmarks in operational excellence, including exceptional loading rates of 130,000 barrels per hour across five berths simultaneously — an indicator of advanced logistics and operational precision.

Al Ajmi noted that the refinery has also demonstrated logistical capabilities by exporting 304,388 metric tonnes of LPG and efficiently handling vessels ranging from small tankers to large LR2 carriers.

Notably, it has managed petroleum coke loadings of up to 50,000 tonnes in under 120 hours per shipment. — ONA

RO 80 million tourism complex in Salalah

THE Ministry of Heritage and Tourism celebrated on Monday the laying of the foundation stone for an integrated tourism complex in the Junuf area of Salalah, with an estimated investment of RO 80 million, as part of efforts to develop tourism infrastructure in Dhofar Governorate.

The project is considered a landmark tourism venture due to its prime location and comprehensive facilities in tourism and hospitality.

It is being implemented in partnership with Al Wathba Hospitality Company under a usufruct agreement signed in February 2025.

The first phase of the project, scheduled for completion within 30 months, includes the construction of a five-star hotel with 124 guest units, a fully equipped marina with restaurants and cafes, a beach club, a health club and a main entrance gate for the complex.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, emphasised the project’s importance in supporting small and medium enterprises, generating direct and indirect job opportunities, enhancing local content, and providing training and qualification programmes for Omanis in tourism and hospitality.



The project is considered a landmark tourism venture due to its prime location and facilities in tourism and hospitality.

He added that the project represents a qualitative addition to efforts aimed at developing tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly in Dhofar, which boasts rich natural and environmental diversity.

He noted that such projects reflect the government’s commitment to economic diversification through investment in the tourism sector.

On his turn, Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, stated in his speech that the new tourism project is among the most prominent in the governorate in terms of investment volume and diversity of components.

He explained that the first phase will include a five-star hotel and a yacht marina, one of the largest in Oman, along with a fully integrated beachfront, contributing to the enhancement of the governorate’s tourism infrastructure.

He highlighted the efforts made by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in recent years to promote Dhofar as a tourist destination by opening new tourism markets and direct flight routes, which contributed to a 9% increase in visitor numbers during the 2024 khareef season and an 18% rise in the winter season compared to the previous year.

The ceremony featured a promotional video showcasing Dhofar Governorate and another presenting the project’s components, followed by the laying of the foundation stone by the under-secretary.

The project represents a significant addition to Oman’s tourism sector, offering integrated facilities, promising investment opportunities and strengthening public-private partnerships, all of which contribute to boosting tourism activity in Dhofar Governorate. — ONA

Omani start-up targets onboarding of 5,000 drone pilots

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 28

OMANI drone start-up SERB, backed by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) through Future Fund Oman (FFO), plans to onboard 5,000 drone pilots as part of its mission to build a comprehensive drone management ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

One of the most prominent drone-based service providers in the country, SERB is currently partnering with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the development and operation of the ‘SERB Platform’, a centralised system for drone registration and management. Formally unveiled by the CAA on January 28, 2025, the platform aims to enhance air navigation safety, regulate drone usage and streamline the permitting process for drone operators.

On the first anniversary of its launch, FFO highlighted its partnership with SERB as a model



SERB aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040 — aiming to enhance airspace safety, foster innovation in drone technology and support the broad use of drones across the economy.

of high-impact economic growth.

“SERB is leading the transformation of drone management in Oman. With support from FFO and strategic collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority, SERB aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040 — aiming to enhance airspace safety, foster innovation in drone technology and support the broad use of drones across the economy,”

FFO noted in an Impact Report compiled by Oxford Business Group.

As part of its strategic goal to foster skills development and industry growth, SERB aims to initially onboard around 5,000 drone pilots.

It has also laid the groundwork for collaboration with 13 government entities to build the regulatory framework

underpinning the platform. Once fully operational, the SERB Platform will offer a range of services including safe zone identification to help drone operators locate authorised areas for activities, a registration portal to simplify drone registration and permit acquisition, air traffic management capabilities to ensure safe integration into existing airspace, and environmental protection compliance mechanisms to uphold safety standards for people, property and the natural environment.

Looking ahead, SERB has ambitions to expand its regional footprint. “SERB aims to extend its operations to regional markets, including Abu Dhabi, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. It plans to onboard major players in drone delivery, broaden the platform’s capabilities, and position itself as a leader in technological innovation and ecosystem acceleration,” FFO added.

Oman’s domestic drone industry

has seen strong momentum in recent years, attracting tens of millions of dollars in investment.

A wave of start-ups and tech ventures now specialise in areas such as aerial inspection, precision agriculture, logistics, environmental monitoring and infrastructure surveying. An increasing number of government ministries, oilfield operators and logistics companies are partnering with local drone firms to implement innovative services — for example, deploying pesticide-spraying drones in date farms.

Regulatory bodies, including the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, have introduced technical standards and frameworks to nurture innovation within the sector.

The continued growth of the drone ecosystem also supports youth entrepreneurship and the integration of advanced technologies — such as AI-powered logistics and smart agriculture — into national development strategies.

ADVERTORIALS

SIMPLIFYING PAYMENT



The bank offers a full spectrum of merchant payment solutions.

NBO EMPOWERS BUSINESSES IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) continues to support business owners through an integrated suite of merchant payment services designed to simplify payment acceptance, processing and enhance customer convenience.

The bank offers a full spectrum of merchant payment solutions, including Point of Sale (POS) terminals, an E-Commerce Payment Gateway and Merchant QR Codes. These services cater to a wide range of businesses, applicable to all registered and licensed entities such as home and microbusinesses, retail stores, corporate entities, small and medium-sized entities (SMEs) and government entities.

Commenting on this, Dr Ali al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager — Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said, “As Oman’s economy becomes increasingly digital, we believe it is essential to equip every business with the means to thrive.

Our merchant payment solutions reflect this belief by helping businesses accept payments securely while staying competitive, connected and ready for what comes next”.

The POS terminals support local and international card schemes including Visa, MasterCard, American Express, UnionPay, Discover and Diners Club. The features include POS system integration with electronic cash registers, kiosks and vending machines.

In addition, it supports converting transactions to Easy Payment Plans, paying in local currency with Dynamic Currency Conversion, paying using rewards points and real-time data synchronisation as sales data from the POS is automatically reflected in the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, ensuring accurate inventory levels, financial records and reporting.

The E-Commerce Payment Gateway supports 3D secure online payments and offers a secure and seamless checkout experience.

The solution offers link payments, recurring payments and batch payments options, as well as smart routing of transactions through a single application programming interface. E-commerce payment gateways are compatible with ERP systems, websites and mobile apps.

The Merchant QR code allows customers to scan, pay and complete transactions instantly.

This solution is particularly well-suited for home and microbusinesses.

No terminal is required and merchants can simply use the Merchant Static QR provided by the bank to complete transactions, providing a contactless, easy-to-use alternative to traditional payment methods.

AL MADINA TAKAFUL WINS INSURANCE COMPANY OF THE YEAR AWARD

MUSCAT: Al Madina Takaful, one of Oman’s leading Takaful insurance providers, has been named Insurance Company of the Year at the prestigious Oman Leadership Awards 2025 by CMO Asia.

The award ceremony took place at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Muscat, on July 23 and brought together top industry leaders and institutions from across the Sultanate of Oman.

This recognition highlights Al Madina Takaful’s consistent

commitment to innovation, customer-centric solutions and operational excellence in the insurance sector.

Commenting on the win, Usama al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer of Al Madina Takaful, said:” We are truly honoured to receive this award, which reflects the trust our customers and partners place in us.

At Al Madina Takaful, we are committed to creating value-driven insurance solutions that uphold the principles of Takaful while driving

industry standards forward. This recognition motivates us to continue our journey towards sustainable growth and meaningful impact”.

Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy CEO, added: “This award is a testament to the strength of our strategy, the dedication of our team and our relentless focus on digital transformation and customer satisfaction. We thank CMO Asia for this honour and reaffirm our commitment to continuous innovation and service excellence”.

Explore more, worry less with the Ford Expedition

THE Ford Expedition is a perfect SUV that can be a trusted partner for life’s everyday moments and spontaneous escapes. From weekday school runs and busy errands to cross-country adventures and scenic countryside drives, the Expedition is designed to deliver fun, flexibility and freedom with every drive.



The Expedition is designed to deliver fun, flexibility and freedom with every drive.

With ample space for up to eight passengers, this full-size SUV is built to keep families, friends and baggage all comfortably in tow. Its clever cabin layout includes a sliding second-row seat that provides effortless access to the third row, even with a child safety seat in place.

Comfort travels with you no matter where you sit, thanks to reclining third-row seats and generous legroom that make long journeys feel like a breeze.

When adventure calls, the Expedition answers with best-in-class towing capability. Whether towing a trailer for a weekend camping trip or hitching up a boat for a beach getaway, the standard Trailer Tow Class IV system makes it all feel easy.

Loading up is just as smooth with the available hands-free power lift-gate. Beneath the hood lies a muscular 3.5-litre EcoBoost® engine delivering up to 380 horsepower and a robust 637Nm of torque. Paired with a 10-speed automatic

transmission, the Expedition offers refined, responsive power that adapts seamlessly to city streets, highways, or winding off-road trails—while still offering impressive fuel economy. The Expedition is equipped with advanced safety

and traction technologies to handle whatever lies ahead. From Collision Avoidance Detection and Blind Spot Information System to the rugged confidence of Control Trac with Electronic Limited Slip Differential, rest easy, backed by systems designed to protect and empower.

Inside, the Ford Expedition is a hub of modern convenience and cutting-edge technology.

The SYNC® 4 system with a vibrant 12-inch LCD touchscreen keeps you connected and in control. Multiple USB ports, a wireless charging pad and a 220-volt outlet keep everyone powered up, while Tri-zone Electronic Temperature Control ensures custom comfort for all passengers. And with the expansive Panoramic Vista Roof, every ride becomes a scenic experience, no matter the destination.

Whether navigating the school run or blazing new trails on a weekend escape, the Ford Expedition is engineered to elevate every drive. Bold, capable and thoughtfully designed, it is the SUV that makes the journey just as exciting as the destination.

National Finance wins brand excellence award

MUSCAT: Reflecting its distinguished reputation as the financing partner of choice across the Sultanate of Oman, National Finance — the country’s leading finance company — has been awarded the prestigious ‘Brand Excellence in the Banking, Financial Services & Insurance (BFSI) Sector’ title at the Oman Leadership Awards 2025, organised by the World HRD Congress.

This esteemed recognition reinforces the company’s position as a market leader and a trusted brand delivering value-driven finance solutions. The award was received on behalf of National Finance by Ahmed al Maawali — AGM, Head of Retail and SME, whose leadership



continues to drive excellence across the company’s operations.

The Oman Leadership Awards 2025 celebrate visionary individuals and organisations across a range of industries for their exceptional performance, leadership excellence,

operational achievements and inspiring impact.

The awards are presented by the World HRD Congress, a globally respected platform that champions excellence in human resources, leadership, branding and sustainability.

Guided by a Global Advisory Council of esteemed industry leaders, the Congress convenes over 2,000 professionals from more than 130 countries each year, fostering dialogue and recognition at the highest level.

Commenting on the occasion, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, remarked, “We are truly honoured to receive the

‘Brand Excellence in the Banking, Financial Services & Insurance (BFSI) Sector’ award.

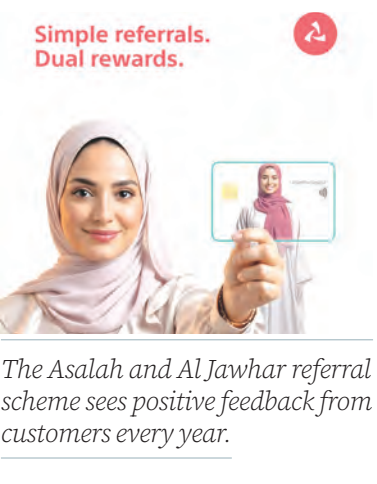
This recognition is a testament to the trusted brand that National Finance has carefully built and reflects our unwavering commitment to being a true Partner for Growth for all. It is the result of the relentless dedication and hard work of our entire team, as well as the enduring trust of our valued customers.

This accolade inspires us to continue strengthening our brand presence and to deliver world-class finance solutions that are thoughtfully tailored to the evolving needs of our individual and corporate customers”.

Bank Muscat relaunches Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched its highly popular Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme for the year 2025 after the great success of the campaign.

The current referral scheme is a continuing programme that offers cash rewards when referring new customers to the Bank to enjoy an extraordinary banking experience. It is worth noting



The Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme sees positive feedback from customers every year.

that the current scheme is cross-referral between the two segments, “Asalah Priority Banking” and “Al Jawhar Privilege Banking”.

Asalah customers may refer Al Jawhar customers to the Bank, while Al Jawhar customers may also refer customers to open a new Asalah salary account and avail the advantages of this year’s campaign.

The Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme sees positive

feedback from customers every year. The scheme offers Asalah customers and new customers a chance to win RO 100 for every successful referral after the referees meet the eligibility criteria.

The referees should have a monthly salary of RO 3,500 or transfer and maintain a deposit of RO 30,000 in their savings accounts.

Customers may transfer the deposit to a new Bank Muscat account or an existing account

within a maximum period of 30 days from the date of referral. Both the referrer and referee get a sum of RO 100 if the referee successfully meets all eligibility criteria after opening the new Asalah account.

For Al Jawhar customers, the referrer and the referee will win RO 50 per successful referral once the referees successfully meet all eligibility criteria, including having a monthly salary of RO

1,000 — 3,499 or maintaining a deposit of RO 10,000 — 29,999 in their Bank Muscat Al Jawhar savings accounts.

Customers may transfer the deposit to a new or an existing Bank Muscat savings account within a month from the date of successful referrals. The referrer and referee win RO 50 per successful referral, if the referee successfully meets all eligibility criteria after opening the new Al Jawhar account.

BUSINESS

ZONE TARGET

SEZAD OPENS DUQM SUMMER SERIES WITH AI FOCUS

BUSINESS REPORTER
AL DUQM, JULY 28

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) launches its Duqm Summer Series on August 5 with a focus on AI and automation, targeting the zone’s growing business community.

The opening session features Saeed Abdul Ghafoor, whose company Star Drones built TARIQ — Oman’s first domestically manufactured drone using local materials.



ENG AHMED
AKAAK
CEO, SEZAD

Star Drones has deployed their AI-powered drones over 19,000 acres of agricultural projects while developing applications spanning environmental monitoring to manufacturing. Abdul Ghafoor’s experience is relevant to SEZAD-based companies who are implementing

AI solutions throughout their operations but need practical guidance on expanding these initiatives. “SEZAD-based companies are already successfully deploying AI solutions, but the real challenge lies in scaling these initiatives effectively”, explains Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO, SEZAD.

“The Duqm Summer Series connects our tenant community with practitioners who have successfully made this transition — people who can share what worked, how they achieved it and what obstacles they overcame”.

The potential for greater impact is substantial. The World Economic Forum’s Global Lighthouse Network — 189 production facilities that have implemented AI — shows what systematic deployment can achieve: network members report 53% higher productivity and 26% lower costs. Beyond operational efficiency, AI implementation delivered 50% reductions in new product introduction times and substantial environmental benefits including 30% to 50% reduction in emissions and an average 30% reduction in material waste.

For SEZAD, positioned between Europe, Asia and Africa, such results create both opportunity and urgency. UNIDO research indicates that every manufacturing job generates more than two additional positions in other sectors, making technology adoption about broader economic development, not just efficiency.

This focus on broader economic development shapes the Duqm Summer Series format. “When a logistics manager learns supply chain strategies from someone in fisheries, or a renewable energy company shares workforce solutions with manufacturing executives, that’s when real innovation happens”, notes Eng Akaak.

Each session runs for an hour starting at 1:00 pm, combining presentations with discussions. Other sessions in the series continue this practical approach: workforce development with Development Bank’s Auf al Aufi (August 12), supply chain resilience featuring the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s Nabeel al Balushi (August 19) and workplace culture and wellbeing with Sultan Qaboos University’s Dr Aziza al Sawafi (August 26).

With SEZAD attracting RO 6 billion (\$15.5 billion) in cumulative investment commitments — a 55% increase on 2023 — the Duqm Summer Series addresses the day-to-day practical challenges facing the zone’s businesses.

“Our tenants aren’t just seeking cost advantages, they’re tackling the key questions facing modern industry today: How do you move beyond AI pilots to systematic deployment?” explains the SEZAD CEO.

To attend Duqm Summer Series, please register: <https://shorturl.at/uKJ0a>

POSSIBLE EXTENSION

Oil rises after US-EU trade deal



Oil prices rose on Monday as investors assessed a trade deal between the United States and the European Union that averted 30% tariffs on most EU goods. Brent crude futures were up 76 cents, or 1.1%, to \$69.20 a barrel, while Light crude stood at \$65.90 a barrel, up 74 cents, or 1.1%. The trade deal and a possible extension of the US-China tariff pause are supporting global financial markets and oil prices. — Reuters

FRESH NEGOTIATIONS

US, China to launch new tariff talks



Top US and Chinese economic officials will resume talks in Stockholm on Monday to try to tackle longstanding economic disputes at the centre of a trade war between the world’s top two economies. The negotiations will begin on Monday afternoon local time at Rosenbad, the Swedish prime minister’s office in central Stockholm, a source familiar with the talks said. — Reuters

SOURCE CHIPS

Tesla, Samsung sign \$16.5 bn chip deal



Tesla CEO Elon Musk said the US automaker had signed a \$16.5 billion deal to source chips from Samsung, a move expected to bolster the South Korean tech giant’s loss-making contract manufacturing business. Samsung shares soared nearly 7% after news of the deal which comes as the world’s top memory chip maker faces pressure in the race to produce artificial intelligence chips. — Reuters

Pact signed to develop hydrogen value chain

SOHAR

Port and Freezone has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with HYNAT SA, a pioneering Swiss company specialised in the research, exploration and exploitation of hydrogen, to advance the development of a comprehensive natural hydrogen value chain in the Sultanate of Oman.

This partnership marks a significant step towards establishing a robust hydrogen ecosystem in SOHAR Port and Freezone, with a focus on natural hydrogen as an emerging low-carbon energy source.

The collaboration will focus on the identification and assessment of natural hydrogen production areas, development of logistics corridors and the creation of dedicated storage and processing infrastructure.

It will also encompass demand mapping across industry, mobility and logistics, while exploring export potential for this low-carbon energy source. The agreement builds on an earlier MoU signed between HYNAT and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) in February 2025, which granted HYNAT the rights to conduct feasibility studies. The joint road map includes defined operational targets and a development timeline aligned with Oman’s broader clean energy transition strategy.



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The collaboration will focus on the identification and assessment of natural hydrogen production areas, development of logistics corridors and the creation of dedicated storage and processing infrastructure.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port and Freezone, commented: “This agreement reinforces SOHAR Port and Freezone’s commitment to advancing Oman’s clean energy vision by supporting the exploration and development of natural hydrogen. Through

this partnership with HYNAT SA, we are laying the foundation for a future hydrogen economy, positioning SOHAR Port and Freezone as a key gateway for low-carbon solutions and sustainable industrial growth.

Stéphane Aver, Chairman of HYNAT SA, said: “The signing of this agreement demonstrates our commitment to further developing natural hydrogen as a renewable and low-carbon resource. Together with SOHAR Port and Freezone, we aim to accelerate the energy transition and unlock a new

pillar of economic value and sustainability”.

SOHAR Port and Freezone continues to play a leading role in supporting Oman Vision 2040 by promoting investments in renewable energy, industrial decarbonisation and sustainable logistics. With HYNAT SA’s advanced geological expertise and cutting-edge AI-powered detection technologies, this partnership is set to explore the untapped potential of natural hydrogen as a critical component of the global energy mix.

Oman’s refinery output edges up 1.6%

MUSCAT: The total refinery output in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 1.6 per cent by the end of June 2025, according to preliminary statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Despite this modest overall increase, automotive fuel production fell sharply by 17.1 per cent in June 2025 compared to the previous month.

Production of regular motor fuel (91) increased by 11.5 per cent to 8,659,500 barrels, up from 7,767,900 barrels during the same period in 2024. Sales rose by 2 per cent to 6,964,500 barrels, while exports climbed 6.1 per cent to 1,494,600 barrels.

In contrast, premium motor fuel (95) production declined by 2.2 per cent to 6,418,400 barrels from 6,559,500 barrels a year earlier.

However, sales edged up by 0.9 per cent to 6,469,600 barrels and exports surged by 20.6 per cent to 690,700 barrels.

Gas oil (diesel) production saw a 3.8 per cent rise, reaching



Production of regular motor fuel (91) increased by 11.5 per cent to 8,659,500 barrels, up from 7,767,900 barrels during the same period in 2024.

16,621,400 barrels, compared to 16,166,600 barrels last year.

Sales increased by 5.8 per cent to 7,213,700 barrels, although exports dropped by 5.5 per cent to 8,550,600 barrels. Jet fuel output decreased

by 13.1 per cent to 4,945,800 barrels, while sales fell 6.4 per cent to 1,867,600 barrels. Exports also declined by 16.3 per cent to 3,019,000 barrels.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) production remained

almost steady, registering a marginal increase of 0.2 per cent to 3,764,500 barrels.

However, sales rose significantly by 22.2 per cent to 1,944,400 barrels. Exports of LPG dropped sharply by 60.3 per cent to 111,500 barrels, down from 280,700 barrels a year earlier. In the petrochemicals segment, benzene production rose by 3.1 per cent to 86,000 metric tonnes.

Paraxylene output increased by 6.8 per cent to 283,000 metric tonnes, while polypropylene production recorded the highest growth, jumping by 73.4 per cent to 176,600 metric tonnes. Despite this rise, polypropylene sales dropped by 9.2 per cent to 15,400 metric tonnes.

On the export front, gasoline exports were up slightly by 0.4 per cent to 81,900 metric tonnes. Paraxylene exports recorded a strong growth of 22.8 per cent, reaching 312,700 metric tonnes.

Polypropylene exports soared by 61.6 per cent to 131,200 metric tonnes, indicating robust international demand for these products. — ONA

OPINION

Be aware of fake consumer protection authority calls



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

TWO days ago, my dad informed me about a spooky incident that occurred to a very close relative. Basically, the relative received an engaging long phone call from a person impersonating an official from the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA). Later, I learnt that a few more of the people I know have also received a similar phone call. My article today will shed light on how the incident plays out so as to share guidance on how one should handle such a situation. At about 11:20 am, a phone call was made to our relative from an official-looking +968 prefix number. The caller spoke confidently in Arabic and also knew the name in full. The caller introduced themselves as an official from the Consumer Protection Authority and went on to provide details about a recent complaint that was logged at the Authority's office by the relative. Upon confirming details of the logged complaint (and of course trusting the caller), an attempt to request the bank name, account number, etc, was made by the caller, stating that this information is required in order to refund payments requested by the relative. The relative received an SMS with an actual one-time password (OTP) from the bank.

The caller then urgently stated, "Share the number received" with a pressing voice. Being vigilant and from an industry that practices due diligence, the relative hung up, called the bank on the back of her card and learnt it was all a scam. This, however, was not the case with a few others I know who were scammed and lost their money as an unfortunate result. Scammers impersonating Oman's Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), banks and even the Royal Oman Police (ROP) are escalating their game. In 2024, the CPA and ROP's e-crime unit recorded a significant surge in impersonation and phishing calls, with victims losing thousands of rials. A large percentage of these frauds involved victims unknowingly sharing OTPs or card details over the phone, exactly what banks and regulators repeatedly warn never to do. These scams work because of a dangerous mix of psychology and technology. People instinctively comply when someone claims to be from a government body. Scammers often have partial information like your name or phone number, which makes them sound even more convincing. Adding to the illusion, they use number spoofing to make the call appear to come from a local or official-looking number. One

Scammers impersonating Oman's Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), banks and even the Royal Oman Police (ROP) are escalating their game. In 2024, the CPA and ROP's e-crime unit recorded a significant surge in impersonation and phishing calls, with victims losing thousands of rials.

needs to be aware that no legitimate authority or bank will ever ask for your OTP, full card details, or CVV over the phone, or even an email or other form of communication such as social media/networks or an instant messaging application (such as WhatsApp or FB Messenger) per se. The safest response is to simply hang up and even better, report it to ensure others don't get scammed. Our close relative was almost scammed. Luckily (Alhamdulillah), she didn't lose a single rial because she paused, verified and refused to share her OTP (one-time password). I am aware of a number of people who were taken for a ride with similar scams, unfortunately. These scammers continue to find sinister ways to evolve and scam vulnerable people. The best way to fight back is to talk about these scams and report them (as I had illustrated in my previous articles). If this article opened your eyes, share it with your family and friends, as it could save them from losing their financial savings. The more we talk about these scams, the less power fraudsters have over our community. As it's known, sharing is caring. Until we catch up again next week, keep your eyes and mind wide open.

EU'S LOPSIDED TRUMP TRADE DEAL WILL BE SHORT-LIVED

PIERRE BRIANCON

European Union trade negotiators may promptly celebrate the success they have achieved by clinching a deal with Donald Trump. If so, the question should be: If that passes for success, what would failure have looked like? Financial markets and European captains of industry will doubtless heave a sigh of relief at the agreement, announced on Sunday by the US president and his European Commission counterpart Ursula von der Leyen. The continent's main exporters can base their investment and commercial plans on the 15% levy on US imports accepted by the Commission. That's much lower than the 30% charge on European goods Trump had promised to impose on August 1 in the absence of a deal, which in turn was less than a previous 50% threat. Importantly, the rate applies to European cars, which join Japanese-made vehicles in escaping the 25% charge on US auto imports and to the continent's pharmaceuticals and semiconductors, which may have otherwise faced punitive sector-specific treatment. The deal also enables the Europeans to shelve counter-tariffs and other measures they had lined up. Some degree of uncertainty has at least been dispelled. Nevertheless, the tariff level still amounts to capitulation by Brussels. It must be compared not to Trump's threats, but to the 1.47% average rate previously applied to European goods crossing the Atlantic. Only two months ago, several EU governments were warning that a 10% across-the-board charge, similar to what the UK had obtained, would be a red line that should trigger some form of response. In addition to the added trade friction, the EU has also promised to import more energy — spending \$250 billion a year on American oil and gas — and could invest some \$600 billion stateside. That, at least, is Trump's interpretation of the deal. It's unclear whether these figures represent incremental amounts, or what time frame the president had in mind. Fuzzy as they are, these EU pledges at least do not look very binding. Yet the vague agreement also suggests Sunday's announcement is unlikely to be the last word. Even at the lower rate, the tariffs will hurt the US economy. They will either bring much-needed revenue — a source of pride for Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent — or shrink imports. But they cannot achieve both at the same time. And if EU businesses do crank up investment in the US, the resulting capital flows will be to the detriment of the trade balance. All this means the EU's trade surplus with the US, which reached 198 billion euros in goods last year, partly offset by a 109 billion euro deficit on services, may not shrink much in the coming years. When the impulsive and unpredictable president can no longer deny the destructive impact of his tariffs, he will be tempted to yet again blame US trade partners. — Reuters

Oman's FDI: A gateway for the region's prosperity



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

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



Oman has emerged as a regional leader in greenfield FDI growth.

OMAN is moving forward with confidence in its economic journey — one that is full of promise, transformation and global opportunity. At the heart of this transformation is foreign direct investment, better known as FDI. For many, FDI might sound like just financial inflows from abroad, but it's much more than that. It brings innovation, advanced technologies, international expertise and, most importantly, jobs. Together, these elements enable nations like Oman to transition from traditional oil dependence towards a diversified, future-ready economy. The world economy, however, hasn't made this journey easy. According to the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects published in June 2025, global economic growth is projected to decelerate to 2.3% this year — the lowest pace since 2008 outside of full-blown recessions. At the same time, global FDI flows have been under strain due to rising trade barriers, geopolitical tensions and a general sense of economic uncertainty. The World Bank notes that FDI inflows into emerging and developing economies have now dropped to less than half their 2008 peak and will likely remain subdued unless governments introduce smart reforms. Amidst this difficult global

environment, the Middle East has shown remarkable resilience and Oman has become a standout success story. According to the FDI Trends Report — July 2025 by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, greenfield FDI capital expenditure in the Middle East rose by 30.7% from January to May 2025 compared to the same period in 2024. Project numbers also went up by 14.5%, thanks to long-term planning, strategic diversification and investor-focused policies across the region. Oman has emerged as a regional leader in greenfield FDI growth. The same report highlights that Oman witnessed a staggering 4,402% increase in greenfield FDI capital spending during the first five months of 2025, alongside a 36% increase in the number of investment projects. This growth has been driven by strategic investments in renewable energy, ICT, real estate and the expansion of special economic zones. Oman now ranks first in the region in terms of year-on-year growth in FDI, showing that the country is fast becoming a serious investment destination in the Gulf. These growth numbers are not just impressive — they're real proof of investor trust. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman's total FDI stock reached \$79.6 billion (equivalent to RO 30.6 billion) by the end of the first quarter of 2025, marking a 20.6% increase from the same period last year. While the oil and gas sector continues to take the lion's share — roughly \$64.2 billion — other sectors are quickly catching up. Manufacturing has attracted \$7.1 billion in foreign investment and financial services have brought in \$3.4 billion, all pointing towards meaningful economic diversification. Oman is also drawing interest from global partners. South Korea leads the way, investing over \$3.45 billion in Oman during early 2025. This includes a major project by LUPRO — a green ammonia facility in Al Duqm, built in partnership with Bait Muscat. This facility is expected to produce 5 million tonnes of green ammonia and is supported by a 200 MW power plant and a 2 GW renewable energy complex. China has also made its mark with a \$564 million solar cell manufacturing plant in SOHAR Port and Freezone. Egypt, too, has committed to projects in ICT and manufacturing, making Oman a preferred destination across Asia and Africa. All this progress is no coincidence — it is driven by vision and leadership. Oman Vision 2040, the country's blueprint for economic and

social transformation, is guiding this shift. This vision aims to reduce the contribution of oil and gas to just 8.4% of GDP by 2040 and boost the share of non-oil sectors to 91.6%. Other goals include producing 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030 and generating 35% to 39% of electricity from renewable sources by 2040. These are not just numbers; they reflect Oman's strong commitment to sustainable growth and future-ready industries. To attract more investors, Oman has introduced a host of reforms. The Foreign Capital Investment Law, introduced in 2019, allows 100% foreign ownership in most sectors and removes minimum capital requirements. There are also generous tax breaks in free zones, zero VAT, duty-free imports and more relaxed Omanisation policies within special zones. Platforms like "Invest in Oman" make it easy for investors to set up by offering a smooth and transparent approval process. Another crucial piece of the puzzle is talent. Attracting the right kind of FDI requires skilled professionals — especially in government agencies that promote investment. These professionals must understand not just local rules and sectors but also global market trends, international finance, taxation, logistics and real estate. Soft skills are equally important. The ability to market Oman's opportunities, build relationships and negotiate deals is essential for success. Recognising this, Oman is investing in its human capital. Investment promotion agencies like "Invest Oman" are working to develop teams that combine technical expertise with strong interpersonal skills. According to experts cited in the FDI Trends Report, investment promotion today is not just about facts and figures — it's about communication, collaboration and creativity.

BUSINESS

TURNBERRY, Scotland: The US struck a framework trade agreement with the European Union on Sunday, imposing a 15% import tariff on most EU goods - half the threatened rate - and averting a bigger trade war between the two allies that account for almost a third of global trade.

US President Donald Trump and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the deal at Trump's luxury golf course in western Scotland after an hour-long meeting that pushed the hard-fought deal over the line, following months of negotiations.

"I think this is the biggest deal ever made," Trump told reporters, lauding EU plans to invest some \$600 billion in the United States and dramatically increase its purchases of US energy and military equipment.

Trump said the deal, which tops a \$550 billion deal signed with Japan last week, would expand ties between the trans-Atlantic powers after years of what he called unfair treatment of US exporters.

Von der Leyen, describing Trump as a tough negotiator, said the 15% tariff applied "across the board", later telling reporters it was "the best we could get."

Trump said the deal, which tops a \$550 billion deal signed with Japan last week, would expand ties between the trans-Atlantic powers after years of what he called unfair treatment of US exporters.



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in Turnberry, Scotland, Britain. — Reuters

"We have a trade deal between the two largest economies in the world, and it's a big deal. It's a huge deal. It will bring stability. It will bring predictability," she said.

The agreement mirrors key parts of the framework accord reached by the US with Japan, but like that deal, it leaves many questions open, including tariff rates on spirits, a highly charged topic for many on both sides of the Atlantic.

The deal, which Trump said calls for \$750 billion of EU purchases of US energy in the coming years and "hundreds of billions of dollars" of arms purchases, likely spells good news for a host of EU companies, including Airbus, Mercedes-Benz and Novo Nordisk, if all the details hold.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed the deal, saying it averted a trade conflict that would have hit Germany's export-driven economy and its large auto sector hard. German carmakers, VW, Mercedes and BMW were some of the hardest hit by the 27.5% US tariff on car and parts imports now in place.

The baseline 15% tariff will still be seen by many in Europe as too high, compared with Europe's initial hopes to secure a zero-for-zero tariff deal.

— Reuters

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ENTERTAINMENT

Ozzy Osbourne’s music re-enters British music charts



THE BACK catalogue of Ozzy Osbourne and his band Black Sabbath has surged in Britain’s charts following the rockstar’s death.

Black Sabbath’s signature song “Paranoid”, a number four hit in 1970, has returned to the Top 40 (at number 32) for the first time in nearly 45 years, the Official Charts Company said.

Osbourne, 76, died on Tuesday and Black Sabbath’s “The Ultimate Collection” returned to the album chart, climbing 129 places to number 22.

It is one of six Black Sabbath and Osbourne releases inside this week’s wider top 200, with Black Sabbath’s 1970 album “Paranoid” at number 52, Osbourne’s 2014 hits collection “Memoirs of a Madman” at 60, his “Prince of Darkness” at 71 and Sabbath’s “Mob Rules” at number 107.

Meanwhile, US singer Justin Bieber has achieved his eighth UK number one single with “Daisies” — his first number one in six years.

Last week’s number one, “Dior” by producer MK, known as Marc Kinchen, featuring singer-songwriter Chrystal, slips to second place, while US singer Alex Warren scores the highest new entry with “Eternity” at number three.

Netflix musical movie “KPop Demon Hunters” continues to make an impact by placing three songs in the top 20. “Golden” by HUNTR/X, EJAE, AUDREY NUNA and REI AMI leads the way at number four.

US singer Sabrina Carpenter takes fifth place with her chart-topper “Manchild”. Meanwhile, Oasis continues to dominate the charts as they play their reunion gigs in the UK.

“Wonderwall”, released in 1995, has re-entered the singles chart at number 27, joining other anthems “Don’t Look Back in Anger” at 22 and “Live Forever” at 23.

And they also have three albums in the top five: “Time Flies 1994–2009” at number three, “(What’s the Story) Morning Glory?” at four and “Definitely Maybe” in fifth place.

Topping the album chart is Warren’s “You’ll Be Alright, Kid” — his first UK number one album.

In second place is American rapper Tyler, The Creator, with “Don’t Tap the Glass”. — dpa

QUICK FEATURES

LIFESTYLE

Revellers line dance during the International Cowboy Day at Ngong race course in Nairobi. Country music has a loyal fan base in Kenya and the popularity of the music continues to grow. — AFP

FILM

Canadian-US actress Pamela Anderson poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the German Premier of “The Naked Gun” in Berlin. — AFP

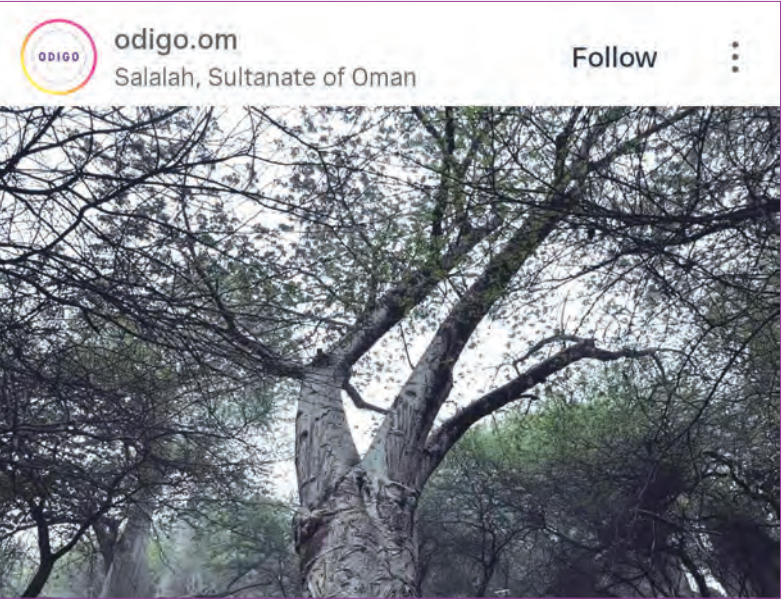
MUSIC

Tunisian singer Latifa Arfaoui performs at the 59th edition of the Carthage International Festival at the Roman Theatre in Carthage in Tunis. — AFP

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Benedict Cumberbatch to receive Golden Eye Award at Zurich Film Fest



BRITISH ACTOR Benedict Cumberbatch will be honoured with the Golden Eye Award at this year’s Zurich Film Festival. The festival said Cumberbatch has “charisma, intelligence and an unmistakable voice”, highlighting in particular his role in the new drama “The Thing With Feathers”, which he also produced. In the film, Cumberbatch plays a father of two sons coping with the death of his wife. “Benedict Cumberbatch is one of the most versatile character actors of his generation”, said the festival’s director, Christian Jungen, in a statement on Thursday. Cumberbatch rose to fame in part through the British TV series “Sherlock”, which reimagined the classic detective stories in a modern setting. In “The Hobbit” trilogy, he provided the voice and, through motion-capture technology, the movements and expressions of the dragon Smaug.

The Golden Eye Award has previously been awarded to notable figures such as Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Kathryn Bigelow, cementing its status as a mark of cinematic excellence. This award is considered a significant honour because it not only celebrates artistic brilliance but also elevates the global profile of the recipients, opening doors for international recognition and increased influence within the industry. The Zurich Film Festival is renowned for its cultural significance and for showcasing innovative films from around the world, making the Golden Eye Award a highly coveted prize that underlines a recipient’s impact on contemporary cinema. The festival runs from September 25 to October 5. Cumberbatch is set to accept the award, which honours outstanding achievements in cinema, in person on September 29. The honour went last year to Swedish actress Alicia Vikander. — dpa



SCULPTING TREES; TEACHING PATIENCE AND FOCUS

TOPIARY, the practice of training plants into defined shapes, might evoke fantastical scenes from “Alice in Wonderland” or the formal gardens of Versailles. Michael P Gibson believes its lessons extend well beyond the aesthetic. “Topiary forces you to learn how to be patient, because once you’re trimming, you have to wait for that new growth to happen”, he explained from the top of a ladder propped against a 20-foot holly tree. “I teach people that doing topiary can reduce anxiety. It helps you to stay focused”. In other words, it’s healthy for the plant and the human. To that end, Gibson focuses on educating and serving communities (he holds a certificate in therapeutic horticulture). In Columbia, South Carolina, a capital city of about 140,000, he’s creating a sensory garden at a neighbourhood park. He also spends time travelling to take on new installations and maintain existent sculptures. The prospective clients who approach him — whether they found him through his online presence, word of mouth or his 2021 appearance on the HGTV competition show “Clipped” — tend to give him creative freedom, since they’re aware of his distinctive style. It’s built on what he calls “the Gibson method”, which has five approaches: storytelling; sacred geometry, which brings balance and harmony to his sculptures; the Japanese style of pruning called niwaki, opening up a tree to reduce energy and create structure; illusion; and directional trimming. (Like brushing hair, trimming in one direction allows for a smoother look). All five need to be present for the design to be a Gibson creation. Gibson, 38, started developing his signature method early in his life, though he didn’t know it at the time. His mother is a licensed beautician who taught him to cut hair and his father is a Navy veteran and artist who showed him the fundamentals of art — geometric shapes, proportional faces, 3D images. He started working in the yard



early, emulating his father, who took a pair of shears away from him when he was 6 and told him he was too young to handle them. By the next summer, he had practiced enough to prune the hedges himself. When he moved out around 19, Gibson brought those shears with him. He cut grass and hair to make money, often drawing designs on paper beforehand: “It got me thinking — what if I sketched out a design and put it in the shrubs? Because the shrubs are just like hair”. Topiary became his side hustle as he worked a variety of sales jobs. Eventually, he found people who saw his vision. Their neighbours would catch on and, soon, the whole block did, too. By 2021, that had transformed into a career. That year, he moved down to South Carolina to become the artist in residence at the award-winning

Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden in Bishopville, about an hour from Columbia. “I’d never seen a Black man doing topiary, especially at this scale”, Gibson said, referring to Fryar, now 85. “He’s the GOAT of topiary”. Seeing Fryar work on his whimsical designs helped unlock his own creativity. When Fryar’s health declined and he was no longer able to maintain the garden, Gibson lent a hand to help restore it. Gibson thinks that people need plants in their lives, even if they don’t become topiary artists. “It’s a stress reliever”, he said. “It gives you a sense of accomplishment”. After a plant is trimmed, new growth needs time to fill in: The more you shear, the more dense it becomes. A design can take years before coming into true focus. Depending on the plant variety and the growing zone, a single tree can take five to 10 hours to complete; a larger project for a client might take 20 to 30 hours initially and then need to be maintained two or three times a year in colder climates. At home in South Carolina, he retrims his topiaries every six to eight weeks. “I don’t try to force it to be anything it doesn’t want to be”, he added. “I want to do something that’s so natural, but complex, so you look at it and think: Wait, does it grow like that? Is it supposed to look like that?” At Edisto Discovery Park in Columbia, Gibson is in the first phase of building out a therapeutic sensory garden, supported by funding from the IDEA Center for Public Gardens and the US Botanic Garden’s Sowing Excellence programme. He’s redoing the landscaping and just starting to plant, but the vision is already there, rooted in creating a space that feels inviting to the neighbourhood. Gibson wants to make a place both children and adults keep returning to and he hopes to leave them with information about horticulture they can apply to their lives. “When we’re throwing away dead wood and branches we don’t need anymore, think of those as bad habits, right?” he said. “You need to cut off the bad habits so they don’t affect your design later down the road. That’s a life lesson”. — NYT

FEATURES



OMANI TEENS TURN CAR POLLUTION INTO INDUSTRY GOLD

ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN A LIVELY classroom at Nua'im bin Masood School in Suhar, two young Omani students were busy turning heads — and changing the game. Omar bin Issa al Barmani and Tamim bin Yousuf al Maamari weren't just your average schoolkids; they had a brilliant idea that could shake up how we tackle pollution. Their invention? A device designed to feed on car exhaust fumes and turn them into a solid stuff that can be reused industrially. Yes, you read that right — pollution turned into something useful.

The spark for their project came from something very local: Oman's own abundant rock called peridotite. Tamim, who's fascinated by remote-controlled aircraft and Omar, a science whiz who scored an impressive 99.6% at school, started exploring how to use Oman's natural resources to solve a global problem —



reducing harmful car emissions.

Their device attaches to a car's exhaust pipe and contains peridotite, which, when heated and exposed to the gases, chemically reacts to form calcite — a crystalline mineral also known as calcium carbonate.

Now, what's calcite? Think of it as a fancy form of limestone, a mineral you might find in caves or even used to make cement, paper and paint. In industry, calcite is prized for its versatility: it can be crushed into powder for construction materials, used in paper manufacturing, or in plastics and paints. The idea isn't just to stop pollutants from escaping into the air, but to create something that can be repurposed, turning waste into a resource rather than a problem.

This isn't just a random idea. It builds on research from Sultan Qaboos University, where scientists explored how injecting CO₂ (carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas) into underground rocks like peridotite causes the gas to be absorbed and turn into solid minerals. Omar and Tamim made this complex science practical, applying it to everyday vehicles. Their approach could help curb emissions at a global level — since transport is a major contributor to climate change, with millions of cars emitting pollutants worldwide.

Their dedication paid off after two years of hard work, guided by their teacher, Majid al Maqbali and boosted by support from their school and government bodies. They even bagged first place in

the environmental category at the international ITEX competition in Malaysia, beating stiff competition from hundreds of projects around the world. They also earned an encouragement award from Saudi Arabia's Tuwaiq Academy — proof that young minds have what it takes to make a difference on the global stage.

Of course, the journey wasn't without hurdles. Juggling school and supervision, sourcing funding and conducting experiments was no walk in the park. Their teacher, Majid, recalls long days and nights spent at school, balancing responsibilities like a pro. But he believes Omar and Tamim are “national treasures” — future innovators who need nurturing and support.

Right now, the project is in the early stages of being picked up by companies, but no one has yet committed to rolling it out at scale. Still, their invention has huge potential. Imagine a world where car exhausts aren't just pollutants, but sources of useful materials — in construction, manufacturing and beyond. It's an exciting glimpse into a greener, more resourceful future.

As Majid and the students look ahead, they urge more young talent across Oman to dive into innovation. The tools are out there — online resources, summer programmes and government support — all waiting to turn bright ideas into reality. Omar and Tamim's story isn't just about fixing cars; it's about proving that with the right mindset, young minds can drive meaningful change.