

OMAN
عمان
DAILY
Observer

BE SAFE AS ALL
ROADS LEAD
TO DHOFAR

SUNRISE 05:33 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:09 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB 06:59 PM

ISHA 08:18 PM

2010000387405

INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETES
PRESIDENT OF EGYPT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Abdel Fattah al Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt on the occasion of the July 23 Revolution Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Abdel Fattah and the people of Egypt on this glorious occasion. His Majesty also lauded the depth of historical relations, cooperation and partnership between the two countries. His Majesty wished Egypt prosperity, stability and further realisation of developmental, economic and investment accomplishments.

TRUMP PULLS US
OUT OF UNESCO FOR
SECOND TIME



PARIS/WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the UN culture and education agency Unesco on Tuesday, repeating a move he had already ordered during his first term, which had been reversed under Joe Biden. The withdrawal from the Paris-based agency, which was founded after World War Two to promote peace through international cooperation in education, science and culture, will take effect on December 31, 2026. Unesco chief Audrey Azoulay said she deeply regretted Trump's decision, but that it was "expected and Unesco has prepared for it". The agency had diversified its sources of funding, receiving only about 8 per cent of its budget from Washington, she said. — AFP

21 KIDS DIE IN GAZA



A girl awaits food from a charity kitchen, amidst a hunger crisis, in Gaza City on Tuesday. — Reuters
REPORT ON P6



OVER 89,000
VISIT AL JABAL
AL AKHDHAR

The number of visitors to the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate from January to the end of June reached 89,780, compared to 84,869 visitors during the same period in 2024, marking an increase of 5.8 per cent.
REPORT ON P3

Oman sees decline in
violence, trafficking

OHOOD AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

THE Sustainable Development Goals Statistics Report published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the Sultanate of Oman attaches great importance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 16, which focuses on 'promoting peaceful societies'. The Sultanate of Oman ensures protection of all citizens and residents from all forms of violence through law and legislation. It has also developed numerous programmes and projects that provide protection for society members and reduce violence-related mortality. Within the framework of Goal 16, the report indicated that the Sultanate of Oman is making wide strides towards achieving remarkable progress in reducing all forms of violence and related mortality rates. Homicide rate decreased to 0.14 deaths per 100,000 of the population in 2023, a 46 per cent decrease compared to 2015.



Child Law protects children from being subjected to physical or psychological punishment by caregivers.

Oman on course to hit the 16th Sustainable Development Goal, which focuses on promoting peaceful societies

The rate of the population exposed to physical violence decreased to just 0.6 per cent while sexual violence dropped to 2.30 per cent in 2020. The percentage of the population who felt safe walking alone in their area after nightfall reached 90 per cent in 2023.

The Sultanate of Oman's Child Law protects children from being subjected to physical or psychological punishment by caregivers. In 2015, the percentage of children under the age of eighteen reported to be subjected to physical violence was 0.003 percent, while approximately 0.0001 percent were subjected to psychological violence. Data also indicates that the number of human trafficking victims has reached 0.2 per 100,000 of the population in 2023. SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated — they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritise progress for those who are furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.

Unesco status for Ahmed bin Majid's Al Nūniyya Al Kubrā

PARIS: The Sultanate of Oman has officially received the certificate of inscription for the manuscript Al Nūniyya Al Kubrā (The Great Ode) by the renowned Omani navigator Ahmed bin Majid into Unesco's Memory of the World Programme. The handover took place during a meeting between Amna bint Salim al Balushiyah, Oman's Permanent Delegate to Unesco and Dr Tawfik Jelassi, Unesco's Assistant Director-General for Communication and

Information, at the organisation's headquarters in Paris, France. This achievement crowns the joint efforts of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science; and the Permanent Delegation to Unesco, to highlight the manuscript's historical and scientific value. Al Nūniyya Al Kubrā is considered one of the most significant works in the



Amna bint Salim al Balushiyah receives the certificate from Dr Tawfik Jelassi in Paris.

fields of navigation and maritime sciences. The manuscript is distinguished by its advanced geographical vision, proposing a novel division of the Earth into fourteen regions encompassing both hemispheres — surpassing the traditional division limited to seven regions in the Northern Hemisphere alone. It also contains detailed descriptions of the meetings encountered by the author and his navigational crew,

alongside rich documentation of maritime life, including marine species and natural phenomena. It is worth mentioning that Unesco's Memory of the World Programme, launched in 1992, aims to safeguard humanity's documentary heritage from loss and oblivion. Its selection criteria emphasise authenticity, rarity, historical significance and cross-border cultural and social impact.
— ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The exhibition features 20 small and medium enterprises showcasing their diverse products. — ONA

BAZAAR INITIATIVE TO EMPOWER ENTREPRENEURS

SALALAH: The mobile “Omanoil Bazaar” exhibition, held in Atin Plain in Salalah, represents a marketing initiative to support and empower entrepreneurs, organised by Oman Oil Marketing Company in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in Dhofar Governorate. The event runs until August 31. The exhibition features 20 small and medium enterprises showcasing their diverse products and services as part of an initiative aimed at opening new avenues for direct marketing, enhancing their presence in the local market, and enabling them to reach a broader audience of visitors and consumers.

This initiative aligns with Oman Oil Marketing Company’s commitment to corporate social responsibility and its ongoing efforts to strengthen the role of SMEs in supporting the national economy. By empowering entrepreneurs and expanding their access to wider consumer segments, the exhibition also highlights their innovations as part of the activities accompanying Khareef Dhofar Season.

Khamis bin Nasser al Shuaibi, Director-General of Shared Services at Oman Oil Marketing Company, stated that the “Omanoil Bazaar” initiative reflects the company’s dedication to supporting entrepreneurs and providing them with a platform to reach a larger audience. He emphasised the significance of the mobile exhibition in opening promising opportunities for SMEs to promote their products and services, particularly during Khareef Dhofar Season.

For his part, Dr Imad bin Ahmed al Rowas, Local Value-Added Specialist at the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in Dhofar Governorate, explained that organising the exhibition comes as part of activating partnerships. — ONA

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES AMBASSADORS OF LEBANON, EGYPT

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Albert Samaha, Ambassador of the Lebanese Republic and, separately, Khalid Mohammed Abdul Halim, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to bid them farewell on the occasion of the end of their tenure, on Tuesday. — ONA



Forum showcases AI’s role in public service reform

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 22

THE Ministry of Labour inaugurated the Design Thinking Conference in Salalah on Monday, launching a two-day programme dedicated to exploring how artificial intelligence (AI) can enhance innovation, problem-solving and institutional development. Held under the theme “Redesigning the Future: Design Thinking to Solve Contemporary Challenges”, the conference brought together government officials, private sector executives, academic experts and innovation leaders to exchange ideas and solutions.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, who delivered remarks and honoured a number of keynote speakers and partners in recognition of their contribution to the event’s success.

Organised in collaboration with Al Marajea Centre for Conferences and Seminars, the conference seeks to mainstream design thinking as a core approach for driving institutional reform, improving service delivery and fostering a culture of creativity across Oman.



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

Speakers examined how AI technologies can be embedded into the design process to improve decision-making, personalise user experiences, streamline operations and support continuous service improvement

In his welcome address, Ahmed bin Aufait al Maashani, Director-General of Al Marajea Centre, described the conference as a strategic platform for experience sharing, knowledge transfer and the creation of meaningful partnerships. He emphasised that design thinking — particularly when integrated with artificial intelligence — offers a powerful set of tools to develop effective, human-centred solutions to contemporary challenges.

Also speaking during the opening session, Dr Ali bin Said Akaak, a consultant in sustainability and human resource development and a member of the conference’s scientific committee, noted that the conference programme was

carefully designed to reflect the breadth and depth of design thinking applications. He explained that the various themes aim to empower practitioners, leaders and policymakers with actionable methodologies for institutional advancement and service innovation.

Throughout the conference, the participants engaged in discussions on a range of timely topics, including strategies for managing cultural and social transformation, the role of innovation in achieving positive institutional change, and the importance of creative thinking in addressing operational and policy-related challenges. The sessions also explored techniques for analysing audience needs, developing executable project models, and applying sustainable design practices and marketing approaches.

Speakers also examined how AI technologies can be embedded into the design process to improve decision-making, personalise user experiences, streamline operations and support continuous service improvement. The emphasis was on using technology not as a replacement for human insight, but as an enhancer of it — enabling smarter, faster and more impactful solutions.



**Announcement**

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers to file their VAT and Excise tax returns for the second quarter of the year 2025 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-service portal

www.taxoman.gov.om

And attach all required documents to it no later than **:30 July 2025.**
We hope all taxpayers comply with the deadline.

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taxoman

1020

Licensing delivery drivers: A regulatory step or a new barrier for youth?

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

In today’s fast-paced life, ordering a meal via a mobile app has become a routine matter of minutes.

Behind that convenience are thousands of young Omanis who have taken up food delivery as a flexible and accessible source of income. But what some see as an easy job now stands at a regulatory crossroads.

Recent social media buzz suggests that a new government regulation is expected to require all food delivery drivers to obtain an official licence within the next two months. While some welcome this as a necessary step to organise the sector, others fear it could become a hurdle for youth seeking flexible work opportunities. The decision has sparked widespread debate about its potential impact on the growing delivery workforce — many of whom are students, part-timers, or recent graduates trying to make ends meet.

Sources indicate that the upcoming regulation aims to better organise the rapidly growing delivery sector. The licence is expected to include a security check, mandatory



Recent social media buzz suggests that a new government regulation is expected to require all food delivery drivers to obtain an official licence

While some welcome this as a necessary step to organise the sector, others fear it could become a hurdle for youth seeking flexible work

training courses and possibly a nominal fee. Authorities seek to ensure compliance with safety and health standards.

Mohammed al Kindi, a university student and part-time delivery rider, expressed his concern: “If the licence process involves high fees or complex procedures, I may no longer be able to continue working. This job helps me support myself and my education.”

Amal al Balushi, a home-based food entrepreneur, supports the move: “Some delivery drivers do not follow hygiene standards or arrive on

time. A licensing system could raise the level of professionalism and improve customer service.”

According to Dr Khalid al Maskari, Economics Professor, some form of regulation is essential. “However, it must be practical and inclusive. High costs or excessive requirements could drive young people away from the sector or encourage unlicensed, informal work,” he said.

The regulation could bring multiple advantages: better quality of services, consumer protection, fewer traffic incidents and centralised database of active drivers. However, these benefits will only materialise if the policy is implemented flexibly, with support mechanisms for low-income individuals and coordination with delivery platforms.

As the government works to improve the quality and safety of food delivery services, it must also protect the accessibility of this work for Oman’s youth.

Many believe that success will lie not only in the issuance of new policies, but in their fair and thoughtful execution. A constructive, inclusive dialogue between regulators, companies and workers is essential to make this policy a win-win.

SHORT TAKES



The session focused on networking and Internet configuration.

WORKSHOP FOCUSES ON HANDS-ON TECHNICAL ABILITIES

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SAHAM, JULY 22

Saham Vocational College recently completed a forward-thinking summer training programme designed to prepare skilled youth to meet the increasing demands of the job market.

Focused on developing hands-on technical abilities, the initiative offers practical workshops to school students in areas essential to Oman’s evolving economy.

Noura al Qamshuai emphasised the strategic goal behind the workshops. “We aim to cultivate a generation of skilled professionals who are prepared to contribute confidently and competently to the workforce. These programmes are tailored to meet real-world demands, not just theoretical knowledge,” she said.

One of the standout offerings this year was a workshop on home air conditioning and refrigeration, covering topics such as the mechanical systems of AC units, common technical failures and effective maintenance techniques. These skills are particularly relevant given the high demand for HVAC services in the local market.

Another engaging session focused on networking and Internet configuration, introducing students to the fundamentals of computer networks, router setup and troubleshooting connection issues. The workshop aimed to provide the participants with the foundational knowledge needed to assist households and small businesses in managing digital connectivity.

In preparation for future innovations, the programme also included a workshop on artificial intelligence, equipping the participants with smart and user-friendly AI tools that can be applied in various technical fields. The training encouraged students to think critically and creatively about how AI can be utilised in everyday problem-solving and future careers.

Saif al Saidi, a parent of one of the participants, commented on the initiative, saying, “These workshops have truly broadened my son’s perspective on future career opportunities. He came home discussing fixing devices, setting up networks and even using AI tools. It’s not just technical training; it’s helping our youth dream bigger, support their families and understand the professions they can aspire to.”

By focusing on vocational excellence and innovation, such programmes are not only addressing current labour market gaps, but also inspiring students to pursue technical paths crucial to national development.

SHARP DROP IN EXPAT WORKERS FROM ASIA, EXCEPT MYANMAR

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a significant drop in the number of expatriate workforce from Bangladesh and generally from the subcontinent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of expatriate workers from Bangladesh dropped by 637,152 to 621,048 in June 2025, compared to last year, while the Sri Lankan expatriate workers in the Sultanate of Oman have dropped from 24,156 in 2024 to 22,440 during the same period.



There has been a notable increase in the number of expatriates from Egypt

Among others, the number of Pakistani expatriates decreased from 317,296 to 312,105 and Filipinos from 44,913 to 44,438. The number of Indians increased marginally from 506,630 to 508,386.

There has been a notable increase in the number of expats from Egypt (from 45,921 to 47,613), Myanmar (from 33,110 to 36,375), Sudan (from 23,545 to 21,344), and Tanzania (from 23,530 to 26,206). It may be noted that there is a visa ban on nationals from Bangladesh from October 2023, except for family visas, visit visas for Bangladeshi citizens residing in GCC.

Milk, eggs in Oman safe for consumption: Research

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 22

A study titled ‘Evaluation of Antibiotic Residues in Available Milk and Egg in the Omani Market’, led by Dr Sumaiya al Kindi, Research and Studies Specialist at the College of Pharmacy, National University of Science and Technology, and funded by the Block Funding Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has confirmed that milk and eggs available in the Omani market are safe for consumption, with no harmful levels of antibiotic residues detected.

Dr Sumaiya stated that food safety is a growing global concern with direct implications for public health and food security. The presence of veterinary drug residues in animal-derived foods has raised widespread debate due to its association with increasing antibiotic resistance in humans. As part of the research, public awareness was also assessed. The findings revealed that 25 per cent of respondents were unaware that antibiotics are commonly used in animal farms, while 43 per cent did not know that residues of these drugs might remain in milk and eggs. These results highlighted the importance of further investigation into food safety and consumer knowledge.

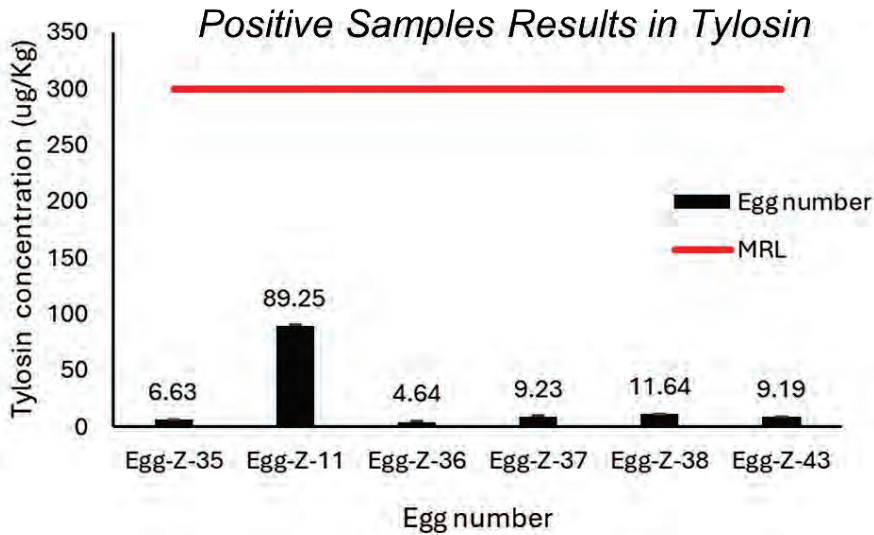
The study involved laboratory testing of three local brown egg brands and five fresh milk brands, including three imported and two local, screening for 35 veterinary drug compounds from five major antibiotic groups: tetracyclines, macrolides, quinolones, sulfonamides and beta-lactams.

Using Agilent QuEChERS extraction and LC-MS-MS analysis, a total of 124 fresh milk samples were tested, none of which showed detectable antibiotic residues.



DR SUMAIYA AL KINDI

The short-term objective of the research was to measure antibiotic residue levels in milk and eggs, both local and imported, and determine whether they exceeded the permitted safety thresholds.



The findings revealed that 25 per cent of respondents were unaware that antibiotics are commonly used in animal farms, while 43 per cent did not know that residues of these drugs might remain in milk and eggs.

According to Dr Sumaiya, the short-term objective of the research was to measure antibiotic residue levels in milk and eggs, both local and imported, and determine whether they exceeded the permitted safety thresholds. The long-term objectives included identifying the safest sources of imported products, providing a clear overview of antibiotic residues in local foods, evaluating their potential impact on public health and antibiotic resistance, and fostering scientific collaboration between academic and regulatory institutions working in the field of food safety.

Dr Sumaiya mentioned that the results showed that none of the milk samples contained any detectable antibiotic residues. In the egg samples, residues were not found except for six samples that contained trace amounts of tylosin, an antibiotic from the macrolide group.

However, all detected levels were well below the Maximum Residue Limit, indicating that

they pose no threat to consumer health. Dr Sumaiya and her team concluded that the tested milk and egg products currently sold in Oman meet international safety standards. They credited this outcome to the presence of a well-maintained surveillance system in local production farms.

In addition to confirming product safety, the project established a scientific procedure for investigating veterinary drug residues in collaboration with the Food Safety and Quality Centre.

The researchers emphasised the need for ongoing monitoring to include a wider range of brands and products. They also recommended efforts to raise public awareness about the use of antibiotics in animal farming and the potential health implications.

The research team consisted of Dr Sumaiya al Kindi, Prof Dr Alka Ahuja, Ph Mariya al Hilali, Razna al Maimani, Siham al Mamari and Bushara al Siyabi.

Over 89,000 visit Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in first half of 2025

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The number of visitors to the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate from January to the end of June 2025 reached 89,780, compared to 84,869 visitors during the same period in 2024, marking an increase of 5.8 per cent, according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

This rise in visitors during the first half of 2025 is attributed to the organisation of several events, such as the “Spring of the Mountain” event, which coincided with the rose harvest season. This is one of the most prominent annual events that contributed to attracting visitors and tourists from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The events, organised in collaboration between Al



Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the most prominent tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, known for its moderate summer climate. — ONA

Dakhiliyah Governorate Office, the Department of Heritage and Tourism, and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Department in the governorate, helped boost tourism and introduce visitors to the value of Omani roses, their associated agricultural practices and traditional industries, as well as highlighting the cultural and natural heritage of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Other notable events, such as the “Rumana” event, also played a role.

Statistics revealed that the number of Omani visitors to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the first half of 2025 reached 26,605, while visitors from GCC countries exceeded 6,000.

The data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information also showed that the number of visitors from other Arab

nationalities reached 4,998, while foreign nationals accounted for the largest share of visitors at 51,710.

It is worth noting that Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the most prominent tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, known for its moderate summer climate. The availability of numerous hotel facilities, rest houses and tourist lodges, along with the hosting of various events, has contributed to attracting tourists.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is also considered one of the most important destinations for ecotourism and adventure tourism. Visitors can enjoy various activities such as hiking through valleys, exploring caves and mountain climbing, which also provide opportunities to experience the local culture. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



BE SAFE AS ALL
ROADS LEAD
TO DHOFAR

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

AS the Khareef Dhofar Season unfolds, the Dhofar Governorate attracts tourists from both within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. Travellers should be prepared for the influx of visitors and plan accordingly to fully enjoy the unique atmosphere keeping in mind road safety that requires adherence to traffic rules and avoiding wrong practices to ensure everyone's safety.

Failure to adhere to traffic safety regulations can expose others to serious consequences. General guidelines have been issued that include adhering to the speed limit, leaving sufficient distance between vehicles, wearing a seatbelt and avoiding distractions while using mobile phones while driving. Drivers should also check the condition of their vehicles, the validity of their tyres and lights; and the condition of the road before setting off.

The Royal Oman Police is keen to provide increased security and safety for road users by deploying police patrols and speed control devices to enhance traffic safety, provide assistance and curb behaviours that pose a risk to road users.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology also announced the readiness of the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate, following the completion of preventive

maintenance and traffic safety work, starting from the border crossings and extending to the various tourist sites in Dhofar Governorate. The Sultanate of Oman's efforts in the field of traffic safety are based on the ongoing pursuit of achieving Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises community safety and providing a safe and sustainable environment. This vision affirms the Sultanate of Oman's ongoing commitment to improving the traffic environment, providing safe roads and developing road infrastructure. It also organises ongoing awareness and educational campaigns for drivers and pedestrians about the dangers of unsafe driving.

Community partnership considers as a fundamental pillar of the success of road safety efforts.

Citizens and residents play a vital role in supporting these efforts by adhering to traffic rules, actively participating in awareness campaigns and sharing responsibility with police officers to spread traffic awareness. It is worth noting that the number of deaths from traffic accidents in the Sultanate of Oman decreased by 35 per cent between 2013 and 2024. Therefore, let us work together to reduce the rate of traffic fatalities.

Fatigue and improper overtaking are among the most significant causes of traffic accidents.

Studies have shown that a driver falling asleep for just two seconds while driving at 100 km/h poses a significant risk, as they cover a distance of 60 metres without any control over the vehicle. Therefore, if a driver feels drowsy, they should immediately pull off the road to get some sleep or rest; and walk around their vehicle for a while to stimulate their blood circulation.

Scientifically proven, this simple break helps energise the driver for a few hours and reduces the risk of fatigue, although it does not completely solve the problem. Improper overtaking is also a major cause of many traffic accidents on two-way roads. Therefore, drivers should follow traffic rules when attempting to overtake and ensure that the driver in front of them does not intend to turn left. Despite the tireless efforts of the competent authorities to monitor and detect traffic violations, particularly those related to exceeding speed limits and committing other violations, some still persist.

"Adherence to traffic regulations reflects your awareness, concern and commitment to keeping roads safe for all", Royal Oman Police stated.

Driving remains an art, custom and a discipline that must be respected. When rights are respected, there is a commitment from everyone, which contributes to avoiding traffic obstruction, allowing everyone to reach their destinations safely and reassured.

SAFETY TIPS

- Avoid driving at night and never attempt to drive while tired
- Be aware that camels are frequently known to cross the roads
- Sandstorms, unpredictable weather can lead to fatalities
- It is safer to consider travelling by bus or flight

SHORT TAKES



FORESIGHT OFFICE
REVIEWS STRATEGIC
OBJECTIVES

MUSCAT: The Supervisory Committee of the National Foresight Office convened on Tuesday to review the proposed action plan, key milestones achieved during its establishment phase and the strategic objectives guiding the Office’s operations in the coming period.

Chaired by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Sagri, Minister of Economy and Committee Chairman, the inaugural meeting examined proposed initiatives for the Office’s 2026-2027 work programme. Key discussion points included forthcoming foresight studies, national capacity-building programmes to develop future-scoping methodologies and the development of reference materials to standardise foresight activities across government entities. The committee approved several future-thinking initiatives central to the Office’s mandate, including foresight workshops and public awareness on emerging trends. — ONA

OMAN AT HUMAN RIGHTS SESSION



CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 56th session of the Arab Permanent Committee on Human Rights, held in Cairo, Egypt. Oman’s delegation was represented by Saud bin Saleh al Maawali, Deputy Head of the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC). The session, held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo, discussed agenda items focused on adopting the recommendations of the 55th session. — ONA



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (22/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	2F/2025	Design, Implementation & Management of Various Events & Activities - Muscat Nights 2026	R.O. 25/-	10/08/2025	20/08/2025	31/08/2025
2	3F/2025	Design, Construction, Production & Sale of Omani Halwa at the 'Muscat Nights' Different Locations	R.O. 25/-	10/08/2025	20/08/2025	31/08/2025
3	4F/2025	Implementation & Management of Inflatable Games - Muscat Nights 2026	R.O. 25/-	10/08/2025	20/08/2025	31/08/2025
4	5F/2025	Design & Construction of Horror City - Muscat Nights 2026	R.O. 25/-	10/08/2025	20/08/2025	31/08/2025

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate as per the following procedures:

1. Company registration with Muscat Municipality must be valid to obtain the bid document.

2. Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat

0423010702710024

3. A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (SQ.QS@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name,office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commerical registration number of the company).

4. The tender document will be provided to the company via email.

5. 2:00 PM on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents.

6. Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and place in the box located in On the first floor of the Quantity Survey and Contracts Department building (A) in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

1. Companies which are not registred in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om).

2. For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).

3. If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (SQ.QS@mm.gov.om)

4. 10:00 AM on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.

5. Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Bids invited
for Nizwa–
Bahla
carriageway

MUSCAT: The Authority for Projects, Tenders and Local Content has floated Tender No 2025/64 (Local) for the implementation of the Nizwa–Bahla dual carriageway project (Marfa’ Daris–Jibreen section).

In addition, a separate tender has been floated for the construction of the Sur Youth Cultural Centre, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen infrastructure development.

It may be noted that this improvement is expected to bring relief to users of these roads due to frequent fatal accidents on this stretch, and the public has been demanding the dualisation of this road to reduce the number of fatal accidents.

A member of Majlis Ash’shura has called for urgent intervention to address the dangers of the Nizwa–Bahla road following a deadly accident.

Oman-China partnership
a model in the region

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE Oman-China strategic partnership has yielded fruitful results in pragmatic cooperation in all areas and the two sides have been strengthening each other in a broader spectrum of areas, according to Brigadier Wu Xinyan, the Chinese Defence Attaché.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 98th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, he said that the strategic relationship has stretched over various sectors covering oil and gas as well.

“The long-lasting strategic relations have been stretched over economic investments in oil, electricity, minerals and renewable energy which serve the common interests of both sides and realise the common development goals of the two countries,” he said.

The bilateral military relations are an important part of the strategic relationship between the two countries and the two sides have been strengthening military friendly cooperation in various fields, and have made comprehensive progress in military training, high-level mutual visits, exchange of experience, and joint exercises and training in the recent past.

“We also look forward to the deepening of cooperation between the two sides in the military and security fields, which will benefit both countries and contribute to regional peace and stability,” he added.

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army has played a crucial role in China’s national unification and has safeguarded its peace and stability for nearly 100 years. This occasion holds historical significance and

The bilateral military relations are an important part of the strategic relationship between the two countries and the two sides have been strengthening military friendly cooperation in various fields, and have made comprehensive progress in military training, high-level mutual visits, exchange of experience, and joint exercises and training in the recent past.

The long-lasting strategic relations between Oman and China have been stretched over economic investments in oil, electricity, minerals and renewable energy.

reflects the deep traditional and friendly relations between Oman and China.

“While we celebrate and commemorate the glorious journey of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, we also take this occasion to emphasise China’s long-standing friendship with Oman, which has spanned over a thousand years and has been strengthened and deepened in recent years, marked by remarkable achievements.”

“We firmly believe that the continuous expansion of cooperation in various fields and the opening up of broader prospects for cooperation between the two sides will achieve our respective and common goals,” he added.

Firas al Abduwani, Director-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Saleh al Anboori, Director-General of Exploration and Production of Oil and Gas, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Mohammed al Najjar, Director-General of the General Directorate of Training, Ministry of Labour, were also present at the event.

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

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

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
420/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 46	Supply of Pesticides for Date Palm Pest and Desert Locust Control for the years 2026 and 2027	Monday 30/6/2025	Sunday 20/7/2025	Sunday 10/8/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(80/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (16/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
433/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 47	Maintenance, Supply and Installation of Air Conditioning Units at the Fish Market in Ibbi	Monday 7/7/2025	Sunday 27/7/2025	Sunday 17/8/2025	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
440/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 48	Construction of Recharge Dam at Hana Village in Wilayat Khasab , Musandam Governorate	Tuesday 8/7/2025	Monday 28/7/2025	Sunday 17/8/2025	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Third, Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
441/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 49	Central Air Conditioning Maintenance for Fish Markets at (Yanqul - Bahla - Rustaq - Adam - Al Mudhaibi - Al Shuwaimiyah)	Tuesday 8/7/2025	Monday 28/7/2025	Sunday 17/8/2025	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
443/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 50	Construction of Surface Water Storage Basins in Wadi Bani Jabir in Wilayat Sur, South AL Sharqyah Governorate	Tuesday 8/7/2025	Monday 28/7/2025	Sunday 17/8/2025	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
448/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 51	Rehabilitation and Improvement of Falaj Al Khabat in Wadi Ahan, Wilayat of Sohar, North Al Batinah Governorate	Wednesday 9/7/2025	Tuesday 29/7/2025	Monday 18/8/2025	Specialized SMEs companies registered with Third, Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
457/2025/MAFWR/HQ- 52	Construction of Protection Wall at Al-Tawiya area (Wadi Al-Aq) Wilayat of Samayil, Dakhiliyah Governorate	Monday 14/7/2025	Sunday 3/8/2025	Sunday 24/8/2025	Specialized companies registered with Second, Third grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (In the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be Directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Wreckage of the Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner plane sits on open ground in Ahmedabad. — Reuters

NO ISSUES FOUND IN BOEING FUEL SWITCHES, SAYS AI

NEW DELHI: Air India said on Tuesday it has completed precautionary inspections of the fuel control switch locking mechanism on all its Boeing 787 and 737 aircraft, with no issues detected. The probe into the Air India crash that killed 241 of the 242 people on board and 19 on the ground is focused on the fuel control switches of the Boeing 787 jetliner.

The switches control fuel flow to aircraft engines, allowing pilots to start or shut them down on the ground, or manually intervene during in-flight engine failures. Air India began voluntary inspections of the switches on July 12. India's aviation regulator soon ordered all domestic carriers to conduct similar checks, prompting some foreign airlines and regulators to follow suit.

A preliminary report from the AAIB earlier this month found the switches had almost simultaneously flipped from 'run' to 'cutoff' shortly after takeoff, causing the engines to lose power. — Reuters



A view of the aftermath of the fire in Evin prison in Tehran, Iran. — Reuters

AMNESTY URGES PROBE INTO ISRAELI STRIKE ON TEHRAN

PARIS: Amnesty International on Tuesday called for a war crimes investigation into Israel's deadly air attack on Tehran's Evin prison during last month's 12-day war. The strike, confirmed by Israel, killed 79 people. It also destroyed part of the administrative building in Evin.

Amnesty International, an international non-governmental organisation that campaigns to protect human rights, called the Israeli attack "deliberate" and "a serious violation of international humanitarian law". The air strikes should therefore be "criminally investigated as war crimes", it said.

"The Israeli military carried out multiple air strikes on Evin prison, killing and injuring scores of civilians and causing extensive damage and destruction in at least six locations across the prison complex", Amnesty said, basing its assessment on what it said were verified video footage and witness statements. There was nothing to suggest that Evin prison could justifiably be seen as a "legal military objective", it said. — AFP

EMERGENCY SUPPORT

S Korea's Lee declares disaster zones



South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung declared six districts as special disaster zones after days of torrential rains left a trail of destruction in parts of the country. Around 19 people have died and nine were still missing in South Korea as of Tuesday morning, while 2,549 people were still displaced. President Lee's declaration of special disaster zones gave authorities access to emergency administrative and financial support to aid victims. — Reuters

JAPAN MOVES TOWARDS FIRST NEW REACTOR SINCE FUKUSHIMA DISASTER

TOKYO: A Japanese utility said on Tuesday it was taking an initial step towards building the nation's first new nuclear reactor since the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster more than a decade ago. After the 2011 tsunami and meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, Japan shut down all of its nuclear reactors, with the public voicing unease about the energy source.

And 14 years since the disaster, Japan has restarted many reactors, with the public's concerns about

nuclear power declining, according to opinion polls. Utility Kansai Electric's president Nozomu Mori said on Tuesday the company will conduct a geological survey to "evaluate the possibility to construct the successor plant to Mihama Nuclear Power Station", resuming a project delayed by the 2011 disaster.

"As natural resources are limited in our country... it is important that nuclear power fulfils its role in the years to come", he said during a televised press conference,

adding that it was not clear when construction might start. After the 2011 Fukushima meltdown, Kansai Electric suspended a geological survey needed for a plan to replace one of the three Mihama reactors.

In 2015, the operator retired two of the Mihama reactors that had operated for more than 50 years. The third reactor still runs today despite having operated for nearly 50 years. A new reactor could cost one trillion yen and may take 20 years to be operational. — AFP

21 Gaza children die from malnutrition, starvation

THE head of Gaza's largest hospital on Tuesday said 21 children have died due to malnutrition and starvation in the Palestinian territory in the past three days, amidst a devastating assault by Israeli forces. Gaza's population of more than two million people is facing severe shortages of food and other essentials, with residents frequently killed as they try to collect humanitarian aid at a handful of distribution points.

"Twenty-one children have died due to malnutrition and starvation in various areas across the Gaza Strip", Mohammed Abu Salmiya, the director of Al Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza, told reporters. The doctor said the deaths had been recorded at multiple hospitals during the past 72 hours.

The announcement came just hours after Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli strikes had killed 15 people, after the World Health Organization said Israel attacked its facilities amidst expanding ground operations. Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that Israeli strikes on the Al Shati camp west of Gaza City killed at least 13 people and wounded more than 50. Authorities in the Palestinian territory say more than 59,000 people have been killed during the 21-month war.

Most of Gaza's population has been displaced at least once during the conflict and the Al Shati camp — on the Mediterranean coast — hosts thousands of people displaced from the north in tents and makeshift shelters. Raed Bakr, 30, lives with



Palestinian children wait for a meal at a charity kitchen in the Mawasi area of Khan Yunis. — AFP

Gaza's population of more than two million people is facing severe shortages of food and other essentials, with residents frequently killed as they try to collect humanitarian aid at a handful of distribution points

his three children and said he heard "a massive explosion" at about 1:40 am on Tuesday, which blew their tent away. "I felt like I was in a nightmare. Fire, dust, smoke and body parts flying through the air, dirt everywhere. The children were screaming", Bakr, whose wife was killed last year, said.

Reports of the latest death toll came as the Roman Catholic church's most senior cleric in the Holy Land said the humanitarian situation in Gaza was "morally unacceptable". "We have seen men holding out in the sun for hours in

the hope of a simple meal", Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa said.

His visit came after an Israeli army strike on the only Catholic church in Gaza killed three people last week, prompting Pope Leo XIV to condemn the "barbarity" of the war and the blind "use of force". The World Health Organization too sharply criticised the Israeli military. The UN agency's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus accused troops of entering its staff residence; and forcing women and children to evacuate. — AFP



PHILIPPINES FLOODING DISPLACES THOUSANDS

MANILA: Heavy flooding inundated the Philippines' capital on Tuesday, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee; and schools and government offices to shut, while a fresh storm brewed off the coast. At least six people have died and another six remain missing after Tropical Storm Wipha skirted the country on Friday.

Many neighbourhoods in Manila woke to find calf-deep pools of floodwater after an overnight downpour swelled the Marikina River. More than 23,000 people living along the riverbank were evacuated from their homes overnight and moved to schools, village halls and covered courtyards. About 47,000 were evacuated from across the capital's Quezon, Pasig and Caloocan areas, as well as from the main government district. — AFP

CEASEFIRE AGREEMENTS

DR Congo 'close' to peace, says minister



The Democratic Republic of Congo is "close" to peace, its interior minister said, referencing the signing of a ceasefire with the armed group M23. "Peace is a choice", said interior minister Jacquemain Shabani, adding that after decades of instability "I am confident and fully convinced that we are close to peace". The population must be "prepared to move towards this objective" and it was necessary to make "concessions", he said. — AFP

SERIOUS VIOLATIONS

Syria identifies 298 suspects in killings



A Syrian committee investigating sectarian violence in the country said on Tuesday that it had identified 298 suspects implicated in serious violations during bloodshed that left at least 1,426 members of a minority dead in March. The committee's investigation documented "serious violations against civilians on March 7, 8 and 9, including murder, premeditated murder, looting, destruction and burning of homes, torture and sectarian insults", spokesman Yasser al Farhan said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Venezuelan detainees are shown being sent home in a prison exchange for Americans held in Venezuela, at El Salvador International Airport. — Reuters

EL SALVADOR SLAMS VENEZUELA OVER MIGRANT PROBE

SAN SALVADOR: Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele lashed out at the Venezuelan government after it announced an investigation into alleged torture of migrants deported by the United States and jailed in El Salvador. More than 250 migrants held in a notorious Salvadoran prison returned to Venezuela on Friday as part of a prisoner exchange agreed with the United States. The deal involved the release of 10 US citizens and residents detained in Venezuela.

Venezuelan Attorney General Tarek William Saab announced an investigation on Monday against Bukele and other Salvadoran officials, whom he accused of committing crimes against humanity for alleged abuses of migrants imprisoned for nearly four months in El Salvador. The migrants, jailed in CECOT prison built to house dangerous gang members, suffered sexual abuse, daily beatings, rotten food, and torture, Saab said.

Bukele said on social media that President Nicolas Maduro's government was "satisfied with the exchange agreement; that's why they accepted it". — AFP

GREECE BRINGS IN HEAT MEASURES



Greece introduced emergency measures on Tuesday to help workers cope with temperatures of up to 43C in a heatwave due to last all week. Cities opened up air-conditioned public rooms and the labour ministry ordered a pause in outdoor work from 12:00 to 5:00 pm in most of the country, including Athens. — AFP

HUMANS BEAT AI GOLD-LEVEL SCORE AT TOP MATHS CONTEST

SYDNEY: Humans beat generative AI models made by Google and OpenAI at a top international mathematics competition, despite the programmes reaching gold-level scores for the first time. Neither model scored full marks -- unlike five young people at the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO), a prestigious annual competition where participants must be under 20 years old. Google said that an advanced version of its Gemini chatbot had

solved five out of the six maths problems set at the IMO, held in Australia's Queensland this month. "We can confirm that Google DeepMind has reached the much-desired milestone, earning 35 out of a possible 42 points -- a gold medal score," the US tech giant cited IMO president Gregor Dolinar as saying. "Their solutions were astonishing in many respects. IMO graders found them to be clear, precise and most of them easy to follow." Around 10 per cent of human contestants won

gold-level medals, and five received perfect scores of 42 points. US ChatGPT maker OpenAI said that its experimental reasoning model had scored a gold-level 35 points on the test. The result "achieved a longstanding grand challenge in AI" at "the world's most prestigious math competition", OpenAI researcher Alexander Wei wrote on social media. "We evaluated our models on the 2025 IMO problems under the same rules as human contestants," he said. — AFP

Bangladesh mourns as toll from jet crash hits 31

GRIEF

gave way to anger in Bangladesh on Tuesday, a day after a fighter jet crashed into a school, killing 31 people, mostly children, in the country's deadliest aviation accident in decades. The pupils had just been let out of class when the Chinese-made F-7 BJI aircraft slammed into the private Milestone School and College in Dhaka on Monday. At least 31 people have died, up from the military's earlier toll of 27. More than 170 people were injured in the crash, with 69 of them still undergoing treatment at various hospitals. "Ten patients are in very critical condition," Sayedur Rahman, from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, told reporters.

At a protest on the school campus, students accused the government of lying about the death toll and demanded a list of those injured. "There were hundreds of students in that academic building. We saw body parts strewn all over the ground. Where are they?" a 17-year-old student, who requested anonymity, said. "When students and teachers asked this question to the military personnel, they roughed us up," he said.

Some of the students carried placards that read: "We want justice" and "Where are the bodies of our brothers and sisters?" Students also stormed the national secretariat in Dhaka, prompting police to use batons and stun grenades, local media reported. Press secretary Ahammed Foyez said that the government had agreed to meet the student's demands. "We believe the demands raised by the students are legitimate and should be fulfilled," Foyez said.

Teacher Shahadat Hossain, whose son narrowly escaped the crash, was devastated to see the school bereft of its usual buzz. "Along with the children, the school has lost its life," he said. "There are two swings in front of the affected building. During lunch breaks and after school, children play there. Even yesterday, around the time the plane crashed, students were on those swings," the 45-year-old said.

Around 7,000 pupils are enrolled at the school, including Abul Bashar's sixth-grade son whose best friend was killed. "He came



Bangladesh's fire service and security personnel conduct a search and rescue operation, in Dhaka. — AFP

out just two or three minutes before the accident occurred," said Bashar. "He couldn't sleep through the night and forced me to bring him to school this morning," the father added, while his son stood in silence.

School authorities have retrieved bags, shoes and identity cards of children from the site. Air Force personnel said remnants of the fighter jet were removed on Monday night, but they were still scouring the site for evidence. "I don't know how long it will take to return to normalcy, to relieve the children from this trauma," teacher Hossain said.

On Monday night, school authorities held prayers at the campus. Bangladesh's interim

leader Muhammad Yunus expressed "deep grief and sorrow" over the incident and declared a day of national mourning. "The loss suffered by the Air Force, the students, parents, teachers and staff of Milestone School and College, as well as others affected by this accident, is irreparable," he said. "This is a moment of profound pain for the nation." The military said the pilot, 27-year-old flight lieutenant Towkir Islam, was on a routine training mission when the jet "reportedly encountered a mechanical failure". He tried to divert the aircraft away from densely populated areas, but crashed into the two-storey school building. — AFP

Moscow not expecting 'breakthroughs' from Ukraine talks

MOSCOW: Moscow on Tuesday once again downplayed expectations for a third round of peace talks with Ukraine and did not confirm the date for a meeting in Istanbul set for Wednesday by Ukraine. That came after the Kremlin on Monday said that the two sides were far apart in their visions on how to end the more than three-year-old conflict, and as they continued to pummel each other with drones and missiles. "We don't have any reason to hope for some miraculous breakthroughs," Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said at a regular briefing in answer to a question about the Kremlin's expectations from the talks.

Outlining potential topics for discussion, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Kyiv was ready to "secure the release of our people from captivity and return abducted children, to stop the killings, and to prepare a leaders'

meeting." Moscow said that "a lot of work lies ahead" before even discussions could take place about possible talks between Putin and Zelensky, who last met in 2019.

Ukraine said its ex-defence minister and current secretary of the security council, Rustem Umerov, will head Kyiv's delegation on the talks on Wednesday. But the Kremlin said only that it hoped talks could be held "this week". "As soon as we are ready, we will make an announcement regarding the dates," Peskov said.

Moscow's delegation at the last round of talks with Ukraine was led by a hawkish historian and the current head of the Russian Union of Writers, Vladimir Medinsky, whom Ukraine described as a puppet with no authority. Ukrainian and Russian delegations met in Istanbul on May 16 and on June 2 as Washington stepped up pressure for a deal, but no breakthroughs were made and



A resident reacts at the site of the Russian drone strike, in Odesa, Ukraine. — Reuters

the talks only yielded agreements to exchange prisoners and soldiers' bodies.

At the frontline, far from the diplomatic deliberations, the brutal conflict raged on, with

Moscow and Kyiv saying that they had intercepted dozens of drones launched at each other. The Russian army also said that it had captured the village of Novotoretskoye in the Donetsk region -- the latest advance

as Moscow intensifies its ground offensive.

A Ukrainian drone strike on a private bus in the Russian-occupied part of the Kherson region killed three people and wounded another three, a Moscow-installed official said. Another man died in Russia's western border Belgorod region after a Ukrainian attack, according to the local governor. At the same time, a Russian drone and missile salvo on Ukraine killed a 10-year-old boy in the eastern frontline city of Kramatorsk, and wounded more than a dozen people across the country, Kyiv's authorities said.

In recent weeks, Russia has fired a record number of drones and missiles at Ukrainian cities, and seized more frontline territory, which Kyiv says is evidence that Moscow is not serious about halting the all-out offensive it launched in February 2022. — AFP

OPINION

The butterfly effect: the boldness of becoming



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

INSIDE the dark cocoon, the butterfly trembles. What was once safe and familiar, its caterpillar world, is dissolving. From here on forth, no turning back, yet the unknown feels terrifying. Change always does.

The moment before transformation is rarely graceful. Often filled with doubt, resistance and fear, evolution demands surrender – not just of what we do, but of who we have been.

We all carry our cocoons. Patterns that protected us, roles we played, comfort zones we learned to settle into. Even when they no longer fit, we cling – because comfort, even in limitation, feels safer than uncertainty.

The butterfly reminds us: staying small may feel safe, but it stifles our wings. True growth requires boldness. Not always loud, not always seen but bold in the sense that it asks us to choose what’s familiar. To step towards discomfort. To outgrow the version

of ourselves that once served us.

While that might sound like a dramatic act of change, it rarely is. Transformation begins in the smallest moments. It begins when you say no to what drains you, even if you are used to saying “yes”.

When you speak your truth, even if your voice shakes. When you let go of what’s “supposed to be” and begin to trust what’s true for you now. These are the butterfly’s first flutters. Quiet, subtle, uncertain – but powerful beyond measure.

The Butterfly Effect teaches us that a tiny shift can ripple outward into extraordinary impact. One choice today may alter your direction for a lifetime. A moment of courage may rewrite a story you thought was set in stone. Once you’ve stepped into that new air, out of the cocoon and into the open, something in you changes.

Change asks something of us. It asks us to leave behind the comfortable and reach for the possible. However, only the bold, the ones

willing to risk small discomforts for long-term peace, ever truly transform.

So, if you’re standing at the edge of change, unsure if you’re ready, remember this: the butterfly never knew the wings it held. It had to let go first. It had to trust the becoming.

You don’t need to have it all figured out. You just need to take one small, brave step forward. As that’s how lasting change begins – with a single choice made in courage.

If you find yourself at the brink, trembling, however it is the quiet prelude to flight. You don’t need to see the whole sky to begin. You just need to trust the flutter, the first breath of becoming. As once you step into who you are meant to be, wings trembling and heart wide, you will never long for the safety of smallness again. Furthermore, the sky sensing your arrival, will make room.

You don’t need to see the whole sky to begin. You just need to trust the flutter, the first breath of becoming.

ANXIOUS PARENTS
FACE TOUGH
CHOICES ON AI

THOMAS URBAIN

When it comes to AI, many parents navigate between fear of the unknown and fear of their children missing out.

“It’s really hard to predict anything over five years,” said Adam Tal, a marketing executive and father of two boys, when describing the post-generative AI world.

Tal is “very worried” about the future this technology holds for his children — whether it’s deepfakes, “the inability to distinguish between reality and AI,” or “the thousands of possible new threats that I wasn’t trained to detect.”

Mike Brooks, a psychologist from Austin, Texas, worries that parents are keeping their heads in the sand, refusing to grapple with AI.

For Marc Watkins, a professor at the University of Mississippi who focuses on AI in teaching, “we’ve already gone too far” to shield children from AI past a certain age.

Yet some parents are still trying to remain gatekeepers to the technology.

“In my circle of friends and family, I’m the only one exploring AI with my child,” remarked Melissa Franklin, mother of a 7-year-old boy and law student in Kentucky. “I know it’s inevitable, and I’d rather give my son a head start than leave him overwhelmed.”

The path is all the more difficult for parents given the lack of scientific research on AI’s effects on users. Several parents cite a study published in June by MIT, showing that brain activity and memory were more stimulated in individuals not using generative AI than in those who had access to it.

“I’m afraid it will become a shortcut,” explained a father of three who preferred to remain anonymous. “After this MIT study, I want them to use it only to deepen their knowledge.”

This caution shapes many parents’ approaches. Melissa Franklin only allows her son to use AI with her supervision to find information “we can’t find in a book, through Google, or on YouTube.” For her, children must be encouraged to “think for themselves,” with or without AI.

But one father — a computer engineer with a 15-year-old — doesn’t believe kids will learn AI skills from their parents anyway.

“That would be like claiming that kids learn how to use TikTok from their parents,” he said. Watkins, himself a father, says he is “very concerned” about the new forms that generative AI is taking, but considers it necessary to read about the subject and “have in-depth conversations about it with our children.”

“They’re going to use artificial intelligence,” he said, “so I want them to know the potential benefits and risks.” — AFP

The dons of delusion

FOR many of us who grew up in the Arab world during the 1980s, one of the sweetest childhood memories is watching the animated series World Stories (Hikayat Alamiyah). Among the most memorable episodes was Don Quixote de la Mancha, based on the iconic 17th century novel by Miguel de Cervantes.

The story is beloved for its mix of humour and idealism, a tale of an aging dreamer pursuing romance, honour and justice in a world that had long moved on from such ideals.

But beneath its charm, Don Quixote offers a sharp critique of society’s obsession with false nobility and inherited status, a problem still relevant today.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and we find a surprising parallel in the form of another “Don” Donald J. Trump, the 45th and now 47th President of the United States of America.

Though separated by centuries and cultures, Don Quixote and Donald Trump share traits that highlight larger societal trends. Both are senior men driven by grand delusions. Don Quixote jousted with windmills, mistaking them for giants. Trump, similarly, has waged rhetorical wars against wind turbines, diversity, migrants and multilateralism, conjuring threats that serve his narrative but bear little resemblance to reality.

Both figures also clung to images of nobility. Don Quixote called himself a “Hidalgo”, from a minor nobleman class, while Trump surrounded himself with gold-plated opulence and dynastic branding, projecting power through spectacle rather than substance. Trump, in a far grimmer analogy, has aligned himself with the Zionist regime in Israel, and with diminishing respect, the European Union, which increasingly appears more burdened burro than strategic partner.

From these two characters, one fictional, one all too real, emerge two sobering lessons.

First, fighting imaginary enemies is a costly illusion. Trump’s brand of leadership, like Quixote’s adventures, thrives on the creation of imaginary foes. Whether it’s Muslims, Mexicans, the media, China, Canada,



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Don Quixote jousted with windmills, mistaking them for giants. Trump, similarly, has waged rhetorical wars against wind turbines, migrants and multilateralism, conjuring threats that serve his narrative but bear little resemblance to reality. — AI image by Grok

trade partners or renewable energy, his narratives depend on division and distortion. But unlike Cervantes’ satire, the consequences here are real.

The obsession with dominance; economic, racial, or religious, has cost humanity millions of lives since the dawn of colonisation, from the 16th century through the global catastrophes of WWI and WWII. Today, we remain trapped in these cycles of manufactured fear and violence, watching new victims fall daily to this supremacist delusion, often under the guise of fighting “uncivilised” others.

Second, we must know when to wake up from our delusions.

Don Quixote eventually confronts his own madness, admits his foolishness, and dies a wiser, more grounded man. Trump, however, appears determined to double down.

He continues to bully allies and adversaries alike, belittling victims, pressuring the media, undermining global trade and threatening world peace. He dreams not of chivalry, but of control. And unlike Quixote, Trump’s fantasy is not just personal, it’s systemic, fuelled by trillions of dollars, social media echo chambers and reactionary political movements that risk dragging our world backward.

In the end, Cervantes gave us Don Quixote as a mirror to our own illusions. Today, Trump offers another. Both are tragicomic reminders that unchecked dreams, when detached from justice, empathy and reality, can become dangerous. As world citizens, thinkers and voters, we must ask ourselves: Are we following visionaries, or merely old wanna-be nobles lost in delusions of greatness?

Remembering Mandela’s Long Walk to Freedom



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

YES, he is a symbol of peace, an icon of humanity and a quintessential leader who inspired people around the world. He is none other than Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, who would have turned 107 years old on July 18 of this year.

It is worthwhile to take a step back and examine the life and legacy of former South African President Nelson Mandela, particularly his remarkable contributions to peace in light of the current crises of escalating global violence. He was a brilliant architect of the modern transitional justice approach, guiding South Africa into a new era.

Coincidentally, on the day I finished reading Nelson Mandela’s iconic autobiography Long Walk to Freedom for the second time, I reflected on my choice to revisit it. I believe that Mandela remains an irreplaceable leader and perhaps the most inspiring African figure of the twentieth century. This is his story, told in his own words.

It is Mandela’s unwavering resolve to pursue a peaceful political settlement in South Africa that distinguishes him from other leaders. His steadfast determination to continue on a nonviolent path, despite facing intolerable provocations, rather than resorting to revenge or violence, was unprecedented at that time.

“No one is born hating another person

because of the colour of their skin, their background, or their religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite”, believed Mandela.

Mandela and peace are synonymous. In 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his tireless efforts. He dedicated his life to advocating for equal opportunities, education and political rights for all.

“To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”. This renowned quote by Nelson Mandela is frequently cited by world leaders advocating for international peace.

As South Africa’s first Black president, Mandela worked tirelessly to transition the country from apartheid and minority rule to a government that represented the Black majority. In 1996, he signed a new constitution that established a democratic government in South Africa, ensuring freedom of expression and protecting the rights of minorities.

Apart from being a passionate advocate for more than just racial equality, his name also symbolises equality, freedom and generosity. It embodies all the admirable qualities that inspire hope for the eventual achievement of global equality. Mandela played a pivotal role in steering the country towards equality from the outset of his presidency.

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“It is vitally important that all structures of government, including the President himself, should understand this fully: that freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression”, Mandela stated while addressing the nation in 1994.

Mandela donated half of his salary to impoverished children and when he received the Nobel Peace Prize, he allocated a portion of the prize money to assist street children. Even after his retirement, he continued to support children in need.

“The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children”, Mandela stated in 1997. Throughout his life, he embodied these words as a steadfast champion for children’s rights. He was honoured with the World’s Children’s Prize for his unwavering commitment to advocating for the rights of children. Mandela is the only individual to have an international day named in his honour, although there are days dedicated to concepts or groups of people rather than specific individuals. In November 2009, the UN General Assembly declared July 18 as Nelson Mandela International Day, in recognition of his contributions to the culture of peace and freedom around the world.

Today, the world remembers Mandela with fondness. His legacy inspires hope and brings life to those in despair. He dedicated his entire life not for himself, but for the freedom of his nation.

MAGA-STYLE ‘ANTI-GLOBALIST’ POLITICS ARRIVES IN JAPAN

KYOKO HASEGAWA

Populist ideals are gaining traction in Japan, spurred by right-wing politicians running rampant elsewhere railing against “elitism”, “globalism” and immigration.

While Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba’s coalition lost its upper house majority in an election on Sunday, the “Japanese first” Sanseito party, created only five years ago, increased its seats from two to 15. Sanseito’s agenda comes straight from the copybook of right-wing movements such as US President Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again”, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Nigel Farage’s Reform party in Britain.

This includes “stricter rules and limits” on immigration and foreign capital, opposition to “globalism” and “radical” gender policies; and a rethink on decarbonisation and vaccines; and pesticide-free agriculture. Founded on YouTube, Sanseito will “bring power back to the people”, party leader Sohei Kamiya, a 47-year-old former teacher and supermarket manager, wrote in the Japan Times. Surveys have put immigration far down the list of voters’ concerns, who are much more worried about inflation and the economy. But for Sanseito, the influx of newcomers into Japan — where the immigration its economy badly needs is far lower than in other developed countries — is to blame for a host of ills from crime to rising property prices to dangerous driving.

But he added: “We are not exclusionary. We have never called to drive out foreigners”. Meanwhile online platforms have been flooded with disinformation, some of which Japanese fact-checking groups and the government have debunked. At a Sanseito election rally in front of Tokyo’s Shinagawa station, where orange T-shirted party workers handed out “Stop destroying Japan!” flyers, one voter said she was finally being heard. “They put into words what I had been thinking about but couldn’t put into words for many years”, said the 44-year-old IT worker on a precarious short-term contract. “When foreigners go to university, the Japanese government provides subsidies to them, but when we were going to university, everyone had huge debts”.

Russian bot accounts have been responsible for “large-scale information manipulation”, according to a much-read blog post by Ichiro Yamamoto from the Japan Institute of Law and Information Systems think-tank. More understanding towards Russia — something which was long anathema for Japanese right-wingers — is also a theme for Kamiya.

Hidehiro Yamamoto, politics and sociology professor at the University of Tsukuba, said that populism has not caught hold before because the LDP, unlike established parties elsewhere, has remained a “catch-all party”.

“The LDP has taken care of lower middle-class residents in cities, farmers in the countryside and small- and mid-sized companies”, he said. — AFP

WFC: A future built by women, for women

It all started with “just a belief”. Women shouldn’t wait for opportunities; they should create them. At its core, Women Future Cities (WFC) embodies the truth that empowered women are the soul of change and the heart of transformation.

The spark was lit by a question: “Why not host a global initiative and bring it to Oman as a chapter?” The belief turned into a vision and the answer became a movement.

That casual question, asked during a phone call in 2023 by a colleague, stayed with the founder, Laila al Hadhrami and eventually sparked a global initiative, Women Future Cities (WFC).

That colleague had been searching for data on empowered women in tech in Oman but ended up frustrated by how little was available. Then, almost as an afterthought, she suggested hosting a global initiative. Al Hadhrami, the moment lingered and the question echoed in her mind. That suggestion turned into a challenge. She began researching for similar initiatives, but none reflected the kind of inclusiveness she was seeking, “I wanted something more holistic”, she explained, “an initiative that empowers women not just in tech, but in leadership, sustainability and entrepreneurship”. She wasn’t looking for a replica; she aimed for something new. So the lingering question soon turned into a clear vision. And in December 2024, that vision became a movement: Women Future Cities (WFC) was officially launched, with its very first workshop held in Suhar, Oman and led by Al Hadhrami, the founder herself.

Through WFC’s first workshop, Al Hadhrami didn’t just launch the initiative from behind a desk; she actually embodied the initiative she introduced and aimed to inspire others. She shares that she led this first session, believing in leading by example — a principle she insists upon for all executive members joining WFC, so they can embody the role model they promote. The



Laila al Hadhrami, founder of Women Future Cities, Oman Chapter



MARYAM AL BALUSHI

The writer is an SQU student

From a casual question to an impactful and empowering initiative. Women Future Cities proves that all women could shine if they were offered the opportunity.

second workshop was led by Ayam al Kharousi, Head of the Oman Chapter.

This principle became an essential value in WFC. Every chapter head begins their journey by stepping forward and leading the first workshop in their region. That’s precisely what happened as WFC expanded into Jordan and Bahrain, where Razan Miqdad and Afnan Saqer, the respective heads of each chapter, led their sessions.

WFC has designed a model that “meets women where they are, whether they’re simply curious or ready to lead change”, stated the founder, who highlights that WFC offers accessibility, trust and relevance. She explains, “We listen closely to the community, understand their real needs and design programmes that are practical, inclusive and grounded in everyday life”. To encourage engagement, WFC offers a clear pathway with three levels of participation:

- Dreamers who come together to learn, explore and develop foundational knowledge.
- Ambassadors, who give back by leading workshops and awareness sessions.

- Champions are experienced leaders who mentor others and drive real impact in their communities.

To encourage participation, WFC publicly recognises every woman who leads at least two workshops, boosting visibility and building confidence, especially for those new to leadership. The initiative also offers a Mentorship Programme, connecting women with experienced role models who guide and inspire them. At WFC, every contribution is valued, from attending a first session to mentoring others.

From a casual question to an impactful and empowering initiative. Women Future Cities proves that all women could shine if they were offered the opportunity. “You don’t need to be an expert. You just need to be willing to learn. This space was created for you”, the founder points out to women who may still be hesitant to join.

Whether they begin as Dreamers or grow into Champions, WFC ensures that every woman is seen, supported and celebrated. It’s a space built by women, for women, to flourish as leaders in a promising community.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The agreement was signed by Sayyid Sulaiman al Busaidy, Chairman of OFA, and Carlos Queiroz

QUEIROZ OFFICIALLY SIGNS CONTRACT AS COACH OF OMAN

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced on Tuesday the official signing with Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz as the new head coach of the Oman national senior football team to replace former coach Rasheed Jaber. The signing ceremony took place at the Conference Hall of the OFA's Technical Department and the newly built national teams' residence complex in Seeb Stadium.

The agreement, which spans one year, was signed by Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamood al Busaidy, Chairman of OFA, and Carlos Queiroz. This marks the beginning of a new chapter in Oman's footballing journey as the team are gearing up for the decisive phase of the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to the Fifa World Cup 2026 which will take place in coming October beside other forthcoming official tournaments.

The experienced Queiroz, has strong resume in training field, will bring his experience to Oman as he has managed several national teams on the global stage including Portugal, Iran, Egypt and Colombia. His tactical acumen and leadership are seen as crucial assets to help and support Oman team who are seeking to qualify for the Fifa World Cup for the first time in history.

Both OFA and Coach Queiroz expressed strong commitment to achieving high technical standards and competitive results in the upcoming stage of the qualifiers. The OFA affirmed that the appointment aligns with the long-term vision to elevate the performance and international standing of the Red Warriors. As part of the roadmap moving forward, the OFA announced that a press conference will take place on August 5 where coach Carlos Queiroz will unveil to media all the relevant details about his technical vision, the upcoming preparation programme, and the overall work plan for the national team.

Oman will face the hosts Qatar and UAE teams in Group A in the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 26 Playoffs. The matches to be played in a single round-robin format scheduled for October 8 to 14 in Doha. The hosts of Group B Saudi Arabia will play against Iraq and Indonesia. Oman will meet Qatar in the opener on October 8 and then they will face UAE on October 11. All the matches will be held at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium at Al Sadd Club.

Oman face UAE in quarterfinal after straight-set loss to Saudi Arabia

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Oman national men's volleyball team suffered its second consecutive loss in the West Asia Championship, falling to Saudi Arabia in straight sets (3-0) during the third and final group stage match held at Isa Bin Rashid Hall in Riffa, Bahrain.

Despite a strong technical display from both sides, individual errors and missed opportunities at crucial moments tipped the match in favor of the Saudi team.

Oman started the match with a balanced performance and led the first set 16-13, thanks to standout plays by Mahmood al Saadi. However, Saudi Arabia managed to turn the tide and took the set 25-22.

The second set saw Oman come out with greater cohesion and

fighting spirit. The team dictated the pace through quick defensive blocks by Al Maamari and Al Haidi, and accurate passes from Al Muqbali, establishing a solid lead. However, a lapse in focus and errors in serve and defensive coverage allowed Saudi Arabia to come back and narrowly win the set 25-23, despite Al Saadi's efforts to reclaim the lead.

The third set was the most competitive, with both teams exchanging leads multiple times. Oman responded to an early Saudi advantage with focused attacks from Al Haidi and Al Saadi, and the introduction of Abdullah al Shibli added strength in short-ball plays.

However, offensive mistakes in the final moments gave Saudi Arabia the edge, winning the set 28-26 and sealing the match 3-0.



Oman started the match with a balanced performance and led the first set 16-13

Oman scored a total of 71 points in the match, committed 19 unforced errors, delivered 6 aces, and executed 9 blocks. Mahmood al Saadi was the top scorer of the match with 22 points.

Head coach Reza Hossein expressed his regret over the loss, stating that the team delivered a strong performance across the board we faced a well-organized opponent with experienced players.

We were a strong match for them, but we lacked decisiveness in the final points. I'm proud of the players' spirit, and I take full responsibility for the result. We will work hard to get back on track before the next match.

Mahmood al Saadi, Oman's top scorer in the match, said I gave everything I had in this crucial match, trying to be a real

offensive and moral asset to the team. From the very first point, I knew it would be tough, but I took responsibility as an attacker and tried to motivate my teammates. We had a good lead in the first set and I tried to extend it with powerful spikes, but our reception dropped and individual errors increased, which made things harder. This loss is painful, but it will be a valuable lesson, and I will do my best to come back stronger.

DECISIVE MATCH AGAINST UAE
Oman is now preparing for a decisive quarterfinal match against the United Arab Emirates, scheduled for Wednesday at 4:00 pm Muscat time. The knockout-stage encounter is a must-win opportunity for the team to rebound after consecutive losses to Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Hockey league 3rd round witnesses strong clashes



The round will resume on Thursday with two anticipated matches

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

THE excitement continues this evening in the 2025 Junior Hockey League as one match is scheduled for the third round, featuring Al Nahda and Al Salam clubs at the Sohar Sports Complex hockey field. The round will resume on Thursday with two anticipated matches: Saham will face Al Seeb at the same Sohar venue, while Salalah Sports Complex will host the clash between Salalah and Al Ittihad clubs.

SECOND ROUND RECAP

The second round witnessed an impressive 20 goals scored across three matches, highlighting an offensive flair and goal-rich performances. Ahli Sidab achieved a dominant 14-0 win over Al Salam, Masirah continued its strong form with a 3-1 victory over Al Seeb, while the match between Al Ittihad and Salalah ended in a 1-1 draw.

SIDAB THRASH AL SALAM 14-0

Ahli Sidab continued its commanding run by overwhelming Al Salam with four goals in the first quarter. Rashid al Alawi opened the scoring in the 3rd minute from a penalty corner. Saeed al Fazari added the second, followed by goals from Mohammed al Nasri and Haitham

al Wahaibi in the 9th and 14th minutes, ending the quarter 4-0.

Despite some improvement in Al Salam's defence in the second quarter, Abdullah al Dughayshi widened the lead in the 15th minute. Rashid al Alawi then netted a sixth goal, concluding the half with a 6-0 lead.

In the third quarter, Ahli Sidab continued its dominance, scoring six additional goals through Saeed al Fazari, Iyad al Alawi, Saad al Fazari, Muwathir al Rujaybi, Rashid al Alawi, and Anas Al Siyabi, ending the quarter at 12-0.

In the final quarter, Saad al Fazari sealed his hat-trick with two consecutive goals, ending the match with a massive 14-0 victory Ahli Sidab's second win of the tournament.

MASIRAH OUTPLAY AL SEEB 3-1

Masirah claimed its second consecutive win with a 3-1 result against Al Seeb in a match held at Al Seeb Club. The first quarter ended goalless despite attempts from both sides to take the lead.

In the second quarter, Ahmed al Farsi scored twice in quick succession (27th and 28th minutes) to give Masirah a 2-0 advantage. Al Seeb tried to respond but couldn't break through during this period.

At the start of the third quarter, Al Seeb intensified their attacks and succeeded in narrowing the gap with a goal by Ahmed

al Balushi in the 37th minute. However, Masirah maintained defensive stability to end the quarter 2-1.

In the fourth quarter, Abbas al Noufali converted a penalty corner into a third goal for Masirah, securing a well-earned 3-1 victory and strengthening their lead at the top of their group with a perfect record.

AL ITTIHAD HOLD SALALA H 1-1

In Salalah, Al Ittihad and Salalah played to a 1-1 draw in a tightly contested match at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Culture and Entertainment. The first quarter ended in a balanced, goalless draw.

Early in the second quarter, Nashwan Rajiboon opened the scoring for Salalah, giving his side the lead that lasted through the third quarter, despite Al Ittihad's modest attacking efforts.

In the final quarter, Al Ittihad ramped up the pressure and finally equalised in the 51st minute through Salem bin Zaid Ahmed, who converted a penalty corner. The match ended with both teams sharing the points.

With that, the second round of the Junior Hockey League concludes amid rising technical performance levels from the participating teams, signalling more intense and thrilling encounters in the rounds ahead.

SHORT TAKES



New Zealand's Mitchell Santner in action. — Reuters

NEW ZEALAND BEAT SOUTH AFRICA BY SEVEN WICKETS

HARARE: New Zealand's bowlers set up a comfortable seven-wicket win against South Africa in their Zimbabwe Twenty20 international tri-series match at Harare Sports Club on Tuesday.

South Africa were restricted to 134 for eight in their 20 overs after being sent in. New Zealand opening batsman Tim Seifert hit 66 not out as the Black Caps cruised to victory with 25 balls to spare.

New Zealand maintained their unbeaten record in the tournament and will go into the final against the same opponents at the same venue on Saturday as strong favourites. They won their first match against the Proteas by 21 runs.

South Africa could score only 18 runs in the first five overs despite losing only one wicket. "The way we bowled in the power play was outstanding," said New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner.

"Our bowlers found a length and found some swing and we were able to squeeze from there," said Santner.

Jacob Duffy and Adam Milne took two wickets each while fellow pace bowler Zachary Foulkes only conceded 12 runs in his three overs.

South Africa packed their team with spin bowlers but the tactic unravelled in the first over, bowled by left-arm spinner George Linde, as they attempted to defend a low total.

Linde started with two wides, one of which went to the boundary for four extra runs. Then Seifert was dropped at long-off before he had scored. The over cost 15 runs.

Seifert and fellow opener Devon Conway (19) took the total to 50 in the first five overs and the Black Caps were in control for the rest of the match.

— AFP



Joey Jones

LIVERPOOL DEFENDER JONES DIES AT AGE 70

LONDON: Former Liverpool and Wales defender Joey Jones, a key member of two European Cup-winning teams, has died aged 70, the club said on Tuesday.

Jones made 100 appearances for Liverpool in three highly successful years between 1975 and 1978, also winning a UEFA Cup and a league title.

The tough-tackling left-back also earned 72 caps for Wales. He was immortalised in a banner revealed by Liverpool fans at the 1977 European Cup final victory over Borussia Monchengladbach, which said: "Joey ate the frogs' legs, made the Swiss roll, now he's munching Gladbach".

It was a reference to wins over French club Saint Etienne and Zurich in the quarter and semi-finals.

"Liverpool FC is deeply saddened by the passing of Joey Jones. The thoughts of everyone at LFC are with Joey's family and friends at this sad time," the club said in a statement.

Jones started and ended his career at Wrexham and also had spells at Anfield, Chelsea and Huddersfield.

His former Wales team-mate Mickey Thomas posted on X: "This morning I lost my best friend and soul mate, Sir Joey our memories will never fade — Today my heart is broken. Love you Sir Joey RIP. My condolences are with Janice and all the family." — AFP



Venus Williams. — Reuters

Williams returns with doubles win at DC Open

SEVEN-TIME

Grand Slam single champion Venus Williams returned to competitive tennis after a 16-month hiatus on Monday with a doubles victory at the WTA and ATP DC Open.

The 45-year-old American joined compatriot Hailey Baptiste to defeat Canada's Eugenie Bouchard and US teen Clervie Ngounoue 6-3, 6-1 in a first-round match.

"After the match Hailey asked me, 'How did that feel?' It's probably even harder to play the doubles first because I'm not a doubles player," Williams said.

"So it's great to have her to kind of hold the team up. She has had the experience. She served first because she has been playing all year and playing well. I think that helped me a lot.

"I think also just to get the feel for the ball. Obviously singles I have a little more experience even though doubles I have had some great results.

"It's just nice to be able to play. Where I am at this year is so much different where I was at last year. It's night and day, being able to be here and prepare for the tournament as

opposed to preparing for surgery a year ago."

Williams makes her return to singles on Tuesday in the main court night feature match against American Peyton Stearns.

A crowd of about 3,000 spectators watched the doubles match, including NBA star Kevin Durant, who is from Washington.

"We were both so focused and after the match, I was, like, 'Did you see Kevin Durant walk in?' She was, like, 'Yeah,'" Williams said.

Fans chanting "K-D" made it tough for Baptiste to focus but she was happy to have a famous fan in the stands.

"I was, like, 'I want to show KD what I can do. Hit the ball to me,'" Williams said.

"They hit every ball to you. I was, like, OK, whatever. However we win is fine," she said.

For Williams, who battled health issues during much of her layoff, just being back on the court was a victory.

"I just want to be healthy. You can play all the matches in the world, can you do all the things in the world, but when your health is gone or when your opportunities are being taken away, it just puts a whole new perspective," Williams said.

"I wasn't even thinking about tennis at that point. Just wanted to have a successful

surgery that I lived through.

"Tennis is a game, it's our life, literally our obsession, it's actually a cult, I think. But at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter if your health is not there. "Definitely put it in perspective for me and maybe made it easier to make the decision to maybe come back out here and maybe play even freer."

SHE'S SUCH A LEGEND

Williams said she enjoys sharing her emotions with spectators after a triumph.

"It's so much work," she said. "I've been training for months to get to this moment, and then you train to be prepared to win in this moment, but it's not a guarantee. You don't win until that final point is over.

"It's important to share those emotions with the crowd."

Bouchard will retire next week in Canada and was pleased for one last meeting with Williams.

"To play against her one last time is fun and special," Bouchard said. "I was like kudos to you to keep kicking it. She's 14 years older than me and still plugging away. I have nothing but respect for her. She's such a legend." — AFP

Stokes to push through pain barrier against India

MANCHESTER: England captain Ben Stokes says he is ready to put his injury-ravaged body on the line again if it helps his side seal a Test series win over India.

All-rounder Stokes took five wickets, scored 77 runs and ran out Rishabh Pant across two innings of relentless effort during a 22-run win over India in the third Test at Lord's.

Victory gave England a 2-1 lead in a five-match series, with fast-medium paceman Stokes bowling 44 overs in total, including gruelling spells on the decisive final day."I'm not going to lie, I cannot wait to just lie on my bed for four days," said Stokes after the match.

The 34-year-old has suffered



England's Ben Stokes during the press conference. — Reuters

two severe hamstring injuries in the past 12 months but the skipper, speaking to reporters on the eve of the fourth Test at Old Trafford, said he was well-rested. "I felt like I was in a long-distance relationship with my family because I hardly saw them (despite) being at home. If the situation requires it again then I'll do what I need to do."

The quality of cricket on show from both England and India has drawn comparison with England's celebrated 2005 Ashes triumph."So far, the series has been great to play in and I presume it's been pretty good to watch," said Stokes. "The 2005 Ashes series was great to watch and I think we've gone all five

days in all three Tests so far so it just proves that the quality of cricket has been outstanding.

"Two teams going toe-to-toe and not very much separating us at the moment. It's been good to be a part of"

England's Liam Dawson will be playing his first Test in eight years after the left-arm spinner was recalled following Shoaib Bashir's series-ending finger injury at Lord's.

Dawson admitted last year that Test cricket was "completely off the radar" for him but, having returned to T20 international action against the West Indies in June, he is poised to make just his fourth appearance in a Test. — AFP

SPORTS



Soudal Quick-Step team's French rider Valentin Paret-Peintre celebrates on the podium after winning the 16th stage. — AFP

VALENTIN Paret-Peintre kept his cool in a furnace of pressure and heat, delivering a thunderous victory atop the legendary Mont Ventoux to give France its first win in this year's Tour de France during a breathtaking Stage 16 on Tuesday.

The Soudal-Quick Step rider edged out Ireland's Ben Healy in a heart-pounding sprint finale on the Giant of Provence, while Tadej Pogacar remained unshakable in yellow, fending off Jonas Vingegaard on the brutal 21.5 km ascent averaging 7.5 per cent. Defending champion Pogacar clawed two more seconds from his Danish rival in a final surge to extend his overall lead to 4:15.

Germany's Florian Lipowitz held firm in third at 9:03, pulling further ahead of fourth-placed Briton Oscar Onley, who lags another 2:01 behind.

But the day belonged to Paret-Peintre, whose lack of belief turned into defiance and then glory.

"I honestly didn't believe it," he said. "I thought Pogacar would go for victory today. But when we built a real gap, I told myself, you can't let a win on Mont Ventoux slip through your fingers."

Seven riders surged ahead from an early breakaway, carving out a healthy 6:30 buffer as they reached the base of the climb.

PEINTRE WINS TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE 16

PARET-PEINTRE
TAMES MONT
VENTOUX FOR
FRANCE

POGACAR STAYS
IN YELLOW,
EXTENDS
TOUR LEAD

IRELAND'S HEALY
SECOND IN
DRAMATIC
STAGE 16

The air grew thinner, the crowds louder and the landscape more lunar.

Spanish climber Enric Mas looked like the chosen one, attacking solo with 14.2 km to the summit. Behind him, Paret-Peintre, Healy, and Colombia's Santiago Buitrago gave chase.

As they passed Chalet Reynard - where pine forest yields to desolate, white-stone slopes — it became a survival march.

Mas and Buitrago fought valiantly but were dropped by the Franco-Irish duo, only to courageously claw their way back.

Then came Belgian Ilan Van Wilder, who fought his way back to the group and dug deep for teammate Paret-Peintre to keep the Pogacar-Vingegaard threat at bay.

Vingegaard had attacked a handful of times, the first attempt coming 9 km from the top, but could not shake off Pogacar, whose lone acceleration was also not strong enough to drop the Visma-Lease a Bike leader.

With 400 meters to go and the gradient spiking to a lung-scorching 10 per cent, Healy launched his sprint.

But Paret-Peintre, with ice in his veins and fire in his legs, clung to his wheel. In the final, agonising metres, he surged past, claiming not just a stage win, but also a place in French cycling folklore.

He was only the fifth Frenchman to conquer the Ventoux. — Reuters



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KEYFEATURE



The project is expected to produce around 115,000 tonnes of 21.5% copper concentrate annually starting in 2027.

Mazoon copper project puts environmental sustainability at forefront

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

ENVIRONMENTAL sustainability is a key defining feature of Oman’s largest copper mining endeavour, the Mazoon Copper Project, according to Mattar bin Salim al Badi, CEO of Minerals Development Oman (MDO).

The project, developed by Mazoon Mining, a subsidiary of MDO, is expected to produce around 115,000 tonnes of 21.5% copper concentrate annually starting in 2027.

In an interview with Oman General Radio, Al Badi shared that the project was designed with environmental responsibility from the outset.

“The Mazoon Project was designed with environmental responsibility at its foundation. We’re using dry stacking — an environmentally sound method for managing mine waste — which significantly reduces water usage and lowers emissions. This approach gives investors strong confidence in Oman’s position as a credible copper-exporting country,” the CEO explained.

According to Al Badi, while the project remains the largest in the Sultanate of Oman, it is not considered a large-scale project by global standards.

“The Mazoon Copper Project is, of course, the largest in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of production and also in terms of investment value. But by global standards, it is not considered a large-scale project,” he said.

Oman takes leading role in gas sector growth: GECF

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 22

OMAN is emerging as a regional leader in natural gas development, with expansion activities underway across the entire value chain — upstream, midstream and export — according to the latest Global Gas Outlook report by the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

Headquartered in Doha, the GECF is committed to making “natural gas the pivotal resource for inclusive and sustainable development” and aiming “to shape the energy future as a global advocate of natural gas and a platform for cooperation and dialogue.”

The 2025 edition of the report highlights Oman’s growing prominence as a gas producer and exporter in the Middle East, particularly as it expands its liquefaction capacity. While liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports are set to remain the mainstay of gas trade, the country’s role in the sector is becoming increasingly strategic.

“In 2023, Oman exported 12 million tonnes (Mt) of LNG, with over 90 per cent of shipments directed to the Asia Pacific region. These exports are projected to remain steady at 10 Mt by 2030, gradually declining to 8 Mt by 2040, and further decreasing to 6 Mt by 2050,” the report noted.

Oman’s liquefaction complex at Qalhat recently completed a multi-year



The 2025 edition of the report highlights Oman’s growing prominence as a gas producer and exporter in the Middle East.

upgrade that boosted nameplate capacity from 10.4 Mtpa to 11.5 Mtpa. Actual production climbed to a record 11.98 Mtpa in 2024, pushing LNG revenues to historic highs.

Further expansion is planned with the addition of a 1 Mtpa LNG bunkering facility at Suhar. “In early 2024, the country, in partnership with TotalEnergies, reached a Final Investment Decision (FID) to develop the Marsa LNG project.

Set to commence operations in 2028, it will become the Middle East’s first LNG bunkering hub — positioning LNG as a cleaner marine fuel and supporting decarbonisation in the shipping sector,” the report explained. Notably, the report

omits reference to a planned fourth LNG train at Qalhat, announced by the Omani government in July 2023. The proposed 3.8 Mtpa train would raise the complex’s total capacity to approximately 15.2 Mtpa.

However, a final investment decision is pending the availability of uncommitted gas feedstock and long-term offtake agreements.

On the upstream side, Oman’s natural gas production has also seen robust growth. Output rose to 39 billion cubic metres (bcm) in 2023, up from 33 bcm in 2020.

This growth was driven largely by the Khazzan-Makarem field, which accounted for 33 per cent of total production in 2023, as well as upstream development

linked to the Marsa LNG project, the report stated. All of Oman’s gas production currently comes from onshore fields, positioning the country as a key contributor to regional onshore output growth.

Exploration activity is also accelerating. In 2023, Oman awarded three new onshore blocks in the southern Rub al Khali, near Block 6, covering more than 20,000 square kilometres. The government has since launched a direct award initiative offering six additional blocks — 43A, 43B, 66, 73, 75 and 76 — for exploration.

The report noted that further investments will target smaller greenfield projects and optimise production from brownfield sites, aiming to enhance recovery rates and operational efficiency. Oman’s strategy focuses on balancing domestic demand with export ambitions — particularly to Asia — while integrating decarbonisation technologies such as carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) to meet global sustainability goals. An investor-friendly regulatory environment further supports this vision, the report added.

Looking ahead, the report concludes: “Oman is expected to sustain its gas production through the forecast period, reaching 43 bcm by 2050. Achieving this target will require successful exploration, with Yet-to-Find (YTF) resources projected to contribute 60 per cent of total production by mid-century.”

MoU signed to advance logistics education in Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Oman Logistics Academy (OLA), a newly established facility committed to qualifying Omanis for numerous openings being created by an influx of investment in the logistics industry, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Blue Ocean Corporation, a globally renowned provider of training and consulting in procurement, logistics and supply chain management.

The MoU was officially signed at a ceremony in Muscat by Shaikh Abdulaziz al Harthy, Chairman of Oman Logistics Academy, and Dr Sathya Menon, Group CEO of Blue Ocean Corporation. Headquartered in London and established in 1998, Blue Ocean Corporation has earned global recognition for delivering world-class training solutions across key business domains.

This collaboration is set to launch a portfolio of internationally accredited certification programmes in supply chain and logistics management, contract



Shaikh Abdulaziz al Harthy (right), Chairman of Oman Logistics Academy, with Dr Sathya Menon, Group CEO of Blue Ocean Corporation, at the MoU signing in Muscat

management and procurement. These programmes are designed to align with global best practices and directly support Oman Vision 2040, contributing to the nation’s strategic goal of becoming a leading regional logistics hub.

Shaikh Abdulaziz al Harthy, Chairman of Oman Logistics Academy, stated, “This MoU marks a transformative step in Oman’s logistics education journey.

“Partnering with Blue Ocean Corporation brings global expertise closer to Omani youth and professionals, equipping them with the essential skills to lead and innovate within the supply chain and logistics sectors.”

Dr Sathya Menon, Group CEO, added, “We are honoured to collaborate with Oman Logistics Academy on this national mission. Our vast experience in the GCC and globally, along with the Academy’s strong ties with industry and government, will ensure that Oman’s logistics sector is equipped with future-ready talent and globally benchmarked capabilities.”

The agreement outlines the development and delivery of specialised training programmes tailored for public and private sector professionals, as well as job-seekers. A key component of the initiative includes a training-for-employment model, aimed at nurturing a skilled, competitive workforce that drives Oman’s economic diversification

and logistics sector growth.

A wide range of professional and corporate training programmes is now accessible to support the upskilling of Omani youth and professionals across key sectors.

These programmes span logistics and supply chain management, procurement and purchasing, human resources, IT, quality management, project management, accounting and finance, aviation, leadership, sales and soft skills.

Tailored to the needs of both individuals and institutions, the training is delivered in Arabic, English and French, helping to meet the evolving demands of Oman’s workforce and align with the national goals of economic diversification and talent development

The participants in these programmes have the opportunity to earn internationally recognised certifications through globally affiliated institutions such as CIPS, PMI and CMI. These qualifications not only strengthen individual career prospects, but also contribute to raising the standard of professional excellence in Oman.

ADVERTORIALS

OUTSTANDINGPROGRESS

NATIONAL FINANCE
CEO WINS ‘BEST
FINANCIER’ AWARD



TARIQ SULAIMAN
AL FARSI

Chief Executive Officer
of National Finance

MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, is proud to announce that its Chief Executive Officer, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, has been honoured with the title of ‘Best Financier’ at the prestigious Flying Lion Awards 2025, presented by The Phillips Group. This accolade celebrates Al Farsi’s exceptional

contributions to the financial sector and highlights the outstanding progress and accomplishments National Finance has achieved under his visionary leadership.

The Flying Lion Awards are among the most distinguished recognitions globally, honouring leaders and influential individuals who have made outstanding contributions to their industries and nations. Celebrated for their expertise, innovation, outstanding performance and far-reaching impact, recipients embody excellence and exemplary achievement in their respective fields.

The awards are presented by The Phillips Group (TPG), a global retained executive search firm specialising in board and C-level placements for multinational companies for nearly 40 years.

Under Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi’s leadership, National Finance has witnessed significant growth, innovation and resilience — solidifying its position as a market leader in the nation.

His commitment to responsible financing, digital transformation and customer-centric solutions has set new industry benchmarks and contributed to the broader economic development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Farsi’s vision emphasises the nurturing of a dynamic, positive workplace culture and championing national talent development, thus strengthening National Finance’s standing as an employer of choice.

Furthermore, his resolute focus on sustainability is reflected in the comprehensive frameworks and strategies implemented across the organisation, aligning with national priorities and positioning the company to drive measurable impact in the pursuit of collective ESG goals.

Commenting on the achievement, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi stated, “I am deeply honoured and humbled to receive this recognition on the global stage of the Flying Lion Awards.

This accolade represents far more than a personal achievement, it is a testament to the support and dedication of the entire National Finance family, whose resilience and exceptional talent continue to propel the company to new heights.

Our consistent performance reflects a steadfast commitment to delivering innovative, customer-focused finance solutions and it is this collective pursuit of excellence that defines who we are as an organisation”.

Over a career spanning 22 years, Al Farsi has held key positions in top governmental organisations, including CEO of Al Raffd Fund and board member for the Public Authority of SME Development. He has also chaired Riyada, the Tender Committee for SME Authority and Entrepreneurship Award; and served as the Deputy Chairman of Omanisation in the Finance and Banking Sector Committee in the Ministry of Labour. Furthermore, he has been instrumental in the establishment of Islamic banks in the Sultanate of Oman and GCC.

AMOUAGE
EXPANDS
REGIONAL
PRESENCE
WITH NEW
ARABIC
LANGUAGE
PLATFORMS

MUSCAT: Following its record growth across the GCC, Amouage, the independent Omani High Perfumery House, has launched an Arabic e-commerce experience on amouage.com alongside @AmouageArabia, a dedicated Arabic-language Instagram account.

These new platforms extend the House’s presence in its home region where its language, values and aesthetics have long resonated, inviting clients into a more personal experience, shaped by a shared heritage and a deep appreciation for



craftsmanship.

The new e-commerce website brings the full Amouage universe closer to clients across the GCC and

beyond, speaking to markets that have not only embraced the House, but continue to shape its journey.

From discovery to delivery, the experience is tailored to the rituals and expectations of the region. @AmouageArabia complements this extension with a native visual and editorial voice, reflecting the nuance, rhythm and essence of the Arab world.

As part of this chapter, the House has also introduced an Arabic rendition of its logo, a subtle yet meaningful expression of cultural fluency.

BYD Qin Plus PHEV now
with hot summer deals

THE faster, more efficient and sustainable BYD Qin Plus DM-i is an innovation not to be missed. Here’s your chance to own the plug-in hybrid sedan with BYD’s hot summer deals. As part of the offer, new Qin Plus PHEV owners can enjoy 5 years/75,000 km service plans on the purchase of the plug-in hybrid models.

Bringing more exciting chances, all customers are eligible to participate in the grand raffle for an opportunity to win an all-expenses-paid holiday to Türkiye. Plus, scratch and win exciting prizes including an iPhone 16 Pro Max, Apple Watch, Apple AirPods and a PHEV battery charger for the convenience of charging your Qin Plus PHEV at home.

BYD PHEV’s feature its dynamic super hybrid DM-i technology that offers an unmatched driving experience, premium luxury, ultra-low fuel consumption, a longer driving range and a peace of mind with



BYD PHEV’s feature its dynamic super hybrid DM-i technology.

advanced safety features in each trim.

The dreamy Qin Plus is perfect for customers looking for sustainable products to save fuel can enjoy an impressive fuel economy of 3.8L/100km, seamlessly combining gasoline and electric power.

The 1.5L engine, paired with an EHS electric motor, delivers swift acceleration and smooth power delivery.

Expect faster acceleration

from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.3 seconds with 194 hp and a combined driving range of 990 kilometres.

The visually stunning exterior of the Qin plus classic speaks the dragon face design language, blending strength, power and elegance.

It features 17-inch alloy wheels and LED taillights accenting its dynamic waistline. Inside, the driver-focused cockpit seamlessly merges

aesthetics with functionality.

The car is equipped with an 8.8-inch LCD driver dashboard and an advanced infotainment system on a 10.1-inch rotatable screen, with Apple and Android connectivity.

Just say ‘Hi BYD’ to enjoy seamless connectivity and start your drive.

BYD prioritises safety, enhancing every journey with thoughtfully designed features.

The sedan comes equipped with a suite of intelligent safety systems, including automatic emergency braking (AEB), lane departure warning (LDW) and adaptive cruise control (ACC).

Reinforced with a high-strength body structure, the Qin Plus ensures maximum protection for all passengers. BYD, the world’s largest NEV (New Energy Vehicle) manufacturer, offers a diverse lineup of vehicles in Oman.

Since its introduction to the Omani market, BYD has rapidly expanded its network of showrooms and state-of-the-art service centres.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING PROVIDES SHARIA-COMPLIANT CREDIT CARDS

MUSCAT: NBO Muzn Islamic Banking offers a diverse range of eco-friendly credit cards that combine sustainability, global privileges and full Sharia compliance, designed to meet the needs of a wide range of customer segments.

Available in gold, platinum and dignature tiers, the cards are structured on Qardh Al Hasan principles and provide a host of premium services tailored for modern and responsible spending.

Commenting on the offers, Salima bint Obaid al Marzooqiyah, Assistant General Manager — Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, “At Muzn Islamic Banking, we are



The cards are structured on Qardh Al Hasan principles and provide a host of premium services tailored for modern and responsible spending.

continuously reimagining how Islamic finance can meet the evolving needs of our customers. Our credit card is not only based on ethical banking principles but

also reflects our commitment to environmental sustainability.

By integrating global lifestyle benefits with Sharia-compliant financial solutions, we provide customers with a seamless way to align their values with their everyday choices. This is yet another step forward in our mission to deliver innovation that honours tradition while serving the needs of a dynamic, conscientious market”.

The Gold Credit Card offers essential benefits including medical and travel assistance, car rental discounts and special hotel deals through Booking.com and Agoda.

Likewise, the Platinum Credit Card includes additional

privileges such as airport lounge access, exclusive offers through the Xperience with Entertainer app and enhanced travel privileges.

Going further, the Signature Credit Card combines all the features of the Platinum Credit Card and further includes multi-trip travel insurance, concierge and chauffeur services, airport transfers and premium benefits on international bookings and rentals.

With these offers, Muzn Islamic Banking continues to expand its portfolio of purpose-driven products, offering customers choices that combine ethical finance with everyday convenience.

Dhofar Islamic unveils exclusive campaign to attract SMEs

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of Bank Dhofar, has announced the launch of its SME Campaign 2025, a strategic initiative aimed at attracting small and medium enterprise (SME) customers.

The three-month campaign is a core component of the bank’s strategic growth plan; it aims to strengthen customer relationships and drive cross-sell opportunities within Oman’s fast-growing SME sector.

The comprehensive campaign is set to offer a suite of tailored benefits and incentives to businesses that open accounts with Dhofar Islamic, reinforcing the bank’s commitment to supporting the backbone of the Omani economy.

By providing added value from the outset,



The three-month campaign is a core component of the bank’s strategic growth plan.

Dhofar Islamic seeks to enhance customer retention and increase its overall portfolio value.

As part of the campaign, SME customers newly opening accounts with Dhofar Islamic will enjoy several incentives.

These include a waiver of the first-year annual fee for secured credit cards for business owners, complimentary bank statements for one year and the first cheque book free of charge.

Additionally, customers will be assigned a dedicated relationship manager at the branch level, offered bulk account opening services for staff and provided with attractive rates for Point-of-Sale (POS) machines.

Commenting on the campaign, Bilal bin

Faiz al Raisi, AGM & Head of Retail Banking at Dhofar Islamic, said: “Our SME campaign reflects our commitment to supporting the growth and development of small and medium businesses in the Sultanate of Oman.

By offering meaningful incentives and simplified banking services, we aim to empower SMEs with the financial tools they need to succeed while also supporting our strategic objective of growing the CASA portfolio.

At Dhofar Islamic, we are deeply committed to fostering their success”. It underscores Dhofar Islamic bank’s ongoing efforts to foster entrepreneurship, provide Sharia-compliant banking solutions and strengthen the bank’s presence in the SME segment.

BUSINESS

SIDRAH4.0



Participants include fresh graduates, working professionals, and entrepreneurs, all selected for their drive to grow and lead.

Leadership programme to inspire entrepreneurial spirit among Omani women

MUSCAT: Sidrah 4.0, the fourth edition of Oman’s impactful leadership programme for young Omani women, has kicked off. Sidrah continues its mission to guide participants through a journey of inner strength, community connection and personal transformation. This year’s edition focuses on inspiring holistic leadership by combining physical resilience, self-reflection, digital learning, and contributions that serve local communities.

Co-designed and co-run by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah welcomes a diverse cohort of women aged 20-35 from across Oman. Participants include fresh graduates, working professionals, and entrepreneurs, all selected for their drive to grow and lead. The programme supports them in developing leadership skills, and discovering a deeper sense of direction that connects their personal values and ambitions with the Oman Vision 2040.

Phase 1 begins with a five-day immersive journey that blends physical challenge and self-discovery. The first half features an outdoor experiential learning experience that includes camping and hiking with Outward Bound Oman, while the second half includes transformative simulations and team activities led by Lahunna Oman.

Phase 2 combines a gamified microlearning experience via the Salalem Learning Management System, weekly group coaching with the International Coaching Federation Oman Chapter, networking to build meaningful relationships, mentoring sessions for inspiration, and community service.

Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, commented: “At Sohar International, we believe that empowering Omani women with future-ready skills is essential to unlocking the nation’s full economic potential. Our strategic sponsorship of the Sidrah Programme reflects a long-term commitment to purposeful partnerships that build capability, confidence and opportunity.”

He added, “By working with Lahunna to equip young women across the Sultanate of Oman with leadership, financial and digital literacy, and employability skills, we are investing in changemakers who will contribute directly to Oman’s socio-economic progress and the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040. We are proud to help create pathways that move talent from learning to impact into workplaces, entrepreneurship and community leadership.”

Maryam al Shaibani, Vice-President of Integrated Digital Solutions at OQ said, “Sidrah 4.0 reflects OQ’s commitment to innovation, resilience and community empowerment. By equipping young women with the tools, skills and mindset to lead with purpose, the programme turns ambition into action and potential into progress. She added, “At OQ, we see digital transformation not just as a technical shift but as a cultural one, where people are empowered to adapt, grow and drive meaningful change. Sidrah 4.0 brings this to life, offering a platform for young leaders to shape a more sustainable, inclusive future.”

NEW DISCOVERY

Firm strikes major oil find off Poland



A Canadian energy company has discovered a major offshore oil field — Wolin East — near Świnoujście on Poland’s Baltic Sea coast. Estimated at 200 million barrels of oil equivalent, it’s the largest conventional hydrocarbon find in Poland.

Oil extraction could start in 3–4 years, supplying up to 5% of Poland’s annual oil demand. The site lies just 6 km from the German border. — ONA

STRONG DEMAND

India demand boosts palm oil prices



Palm oil prices have risen on expectations of strong demand from India ahead of its festive season. The commodity remains cheaper than soybean oil, prompting Indian importers to increase purchases.

Malaysia’s palm oil exports to India are projected to grow into Q3 2025. The forecasted prices will remain between RM4,100 and RM4,300 per tonne in the coming month. — ONA

LARGEST FIND

China launches output from oil field



China launches output from oil field China’s CNOOC has started production at the Kinlei 2-10 field in the Bohai Sea, China’s largest offshore shale oil find with over 100 million tonnes in reserves.

The first development phase includes 79 wells and a peak output of 3,000 tonnes daily. The field sits 20 metres underwater and required advanced technology to extract its heavy oil, said Xinhua News Agency. — ONA

Soft summer demand weighs on US gasoline

NEW YORK: US gasoline prices could fall below \$3 a gallon this summer for the first time in over four years as a stretch of bad weather events dampens fuel demand and a jump in imports fills inventories.

Gasoline prices have been in a lull in recent months, a boon for Americans travelling this summer. Consumers endured record prices at the pumps after Russia’s 2022 attack of Ukraine upended energy markets.

Gasoline prices fell 8.3% over the 12-month period ended in June, the latest Consumer Price Index report showed, as US crude prices tumbled more than 20% amid concerns over lacklustre demand and a trade war with China.

Lower oil prices reduce the cost to refiners for producing motor fuels, with some of the savings typically passed on to consumers.

US President Donald Trump has promised to lower fuel prices, although analysts say presidents ultimately have little influence on pump prices.

Fuel demand in the week ended on July 4, typically among the periods of highest consumption, was down 2.5% from the same time last year.

Analysts said the slowdown was likely due to extreme heat blanketing parts of the country, which may have discouraged some driving.

The national average price of gasoline after the Independence Day holiday dipped to \$3.14 per gallon, the lowest during summer months in four years, AAA data showed.

Average gas prices across the US have not fallen below \$3 a gallon since May 2021.

Summer is typically the peak season for gasoline consumption in the US, but gasoline product supplied, the US Energy Information Administration’s proxy for demand, has averaged 9.2 million barrels a day over the past four weeks, down by 1% from the same period last year.

More fuel-efficient vehicles on the road and post-pandemic changes in driving patterns - particularly remote working - are expected to permanently



Crude oil storage tanks are seen in an aerial photograph at the Cushing oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

OIL PRICES FALL AS TARIFF DEADLINE LOOMS

LONDON: Oil prices declined for a third consecutive session on Tuesday on concerns the brewing trade war between major crude consumers the United States and the European Union will curb fuel demand growth by reducing economic activity.

Brent crude futures were down 53 cents, or 0.8%, to \$68.58 a barrel at 1219 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$66.57 a barrel, down 63 cents, or 0.9%.

The August WTI contract expires on Tuesday and the more active September contract was down 52 cents, or 0.8%, to \$65.33 a barrel.

“Oil prices fell for a third straight session ... as urgency

builds in trade negotiations between the US and its partners,” Soojin Kim, an analyst at bank MUFG, said in a note.

The Trump administration has set an August 1 deadline for countries to secure trade deals or face steep tariffs.

The EU is exploring a broader set of possible counter-measures against the United States as prospects for an acceptable trade agreement with Washington fade, according to EU diplomats.

The US has threatened to impose a 30% tariff on EU imports if a deal is not reached. A weaker dollar has limited some losses for crude as buyers using other currencies are paying relatively less. — Reuters

reduce US gasoline consumption from its peak of more than 9.3 million bpd in 2018.

“As we head toward August,

I think gasoline will see additional weakness,” said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

“The national average has a good chance of falling below \$3 per gallon in September,” he added.

That downward momentum could continue, De Haan said, as Opec’s decision to boost crude production by a larger-than-expected 548,000 bpd in August adds more pressure to oil prices.

Imported gasoline flowing into the US has also caused a surge in storage demand.

Weekly US gasoline imports peaked in mid-June at 100,700 bpd, the highest in over a year, government data shows, driven by an influx of shipments from Canada and Europe. Imports in June were up around 7% compared to the same period a year ago.

In the US, demand for tanks to store gasoline has climbed since March, reaching a three-year high in June, according to data from storage broker The Tank Tiger.

“If refiners are producing more gasoline, you need a place to park it if it’s not being consumed,” said Steven Barsamian, chief operating officer at The Tank Tiger.

— Reuters

US TREASURY SAYS NO REASON FOR FED CHAIR TO STEP DOWN NOW

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Tuesday that he did not see a reason for Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell to resign immediately, a day after calling for a review of the Fed.

Bessent’s comments in a Fox business interview come as Powell faces growing pressure from Donald Trump’s administration to slash interest rates, with the president recently targeting the central bank chief over the Fed’s \$2.5 billion renovation project as well.

“There’s nothing that tells me that he



SCOTT BESSENT
US Treasury Secretary

wanted to leave early, he should as well, Bessent added.

should step down right now,” Bessent said, referring to Powell.

But he noted that Powell’s term as Fed chair ends in May 2026, and that Powell should see out his full term if he wants to.

But if the Fed chief

Late on Monday, Bessent called for the Fed to conduct an “exhaustive internal review of its non-monetary policy operations,” accusing the central bank of “significant mission creep” in a social media post. The US central bank has held interest rates steady this year as it monitors the effects of Trump’s sweeping tariffs since returning to the White House — drawing ire from the president.

Officials expect to have an understanding of how the levies impact the US economy in the summer months, and are approaching further rate cuts cautiously. — AFP

OPINION

Oman’s clean energy transformation is no longer a distant goal



NAJAH
AL RIYAMI

The writer is
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FROM the desert interiors of Ibri to the coastal winds of Dhofar, Oman’s energy future is shifting dramatically. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals’ Annual Report 2024 outlines a bold transition: the establishment of seven dedicated Renewable Energy Zones across Dhofar, Al Duqm, Al Ghazir, Manah, Ibri, Sur, and Musandam.

These zones are not just strategic points on a map — they represent a national commitment to sustainability, economic diversification and energy security.

With long-term targets to generate 30% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, Oman is investing heavily in solar and wind power. Utility-scale solar farms in Manah and Ibri are already under development, and the expansion of wind energy projects in Dhofar and Al Duqm is underway. These zones were selected for their geographic strengths — solar intensity, wind potential, and access to existing infrastructure — making them ideal for large-scale clean energy deployment.

Yet Oman’s ambitions go further. The report highlights the country’s emerging role as a green hydrogen leader.

Backed by abundant land and renewables, Oman aims to produce one million tonnes of renewable hydrogen annually by 2030, ramping up to 3.75 million tonnes by 2040

and 8.5 million tonnes by 2050. These targets would position Oman as the largest hydrogen exporter in the Middle East and among the top globally.

To enable this, Oman has allocated approximately 50,000 square kilometres of land for hydrogen development — an area equivalent to the size of Slovakia. Through the government-backed entity Hydrom, a total of eight project agreements have been signed to date. These integrated projects combine solar, wind, desalinated water, and hydrogen production infrastructure, all focused on export readiness.

Oman’s strategy centres around green ammonia as the primary carrier for hydrogen exports. With existing port infrastructure and planned upgrades in Salalah, Al Duqm and Sur, the country is well-positioned to deliver competitively priced ammonia to global markets.

By 2030, Oman’s hydrogen production costs are projected to fall to around \$1.60 per kilogramme, supported by some of the world’s lowest renewable energy prices — between \$25 and \$35 per megawatt-hour.

The economic outlook is equally compelling. The clean hydrogen economy could bring in \$33 billion in investments by 2030, while generating an estimated \$2 billion in annual revenues from exports. Domestically, switching from fossil-based

With long-term targets to generate 30% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, Oman is investing heavily in solar and wind power. Utility-scale solar farms in Manah and Ibri are already under development, and the expansion of wind energy projects in Dhofar and Al Duqm is underway.

hydrogen to renewable hydrogen in refineries and industry could cut CO₂ emissions by more than 7 million tonnes annually — roughly 7% of Oman’s 2021 baseline — and save over 3 billion cubic metres of natural gas each year.

These developments are part of a broader vision aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The government is also advancing regulatory frameworks, land auctions, and international certification to ensure credibility and competitiveness in emerging green markets.

In parallel, Oman is exploring domestic hydrogen use in steelmaking and high-temperature industrial processes, setting the stage for low-carbon manufacturing clusters in the future.

While the global hydrogen market remains in its infancy, Oman’s proactive approach — coupled with its geographic, economic, and political advantages — makes it a serious contender in the race toward a net-zero future. The Annual Report 2024 paints a picture not just of aspirations, but of measurable progress, real partnerships and structural reform.

Oman’s clean energy transformation is no longer a distant goal. It is an evolving national strategy, already underway— anchored in data, powered by sunlight and wind, and steadily redefining the country’s place in the global energy landscape.

US CAN SQUEEZE RUSSIA WITHOUT ‘SECONDARY TARIFFS’

HUGO DIXON

DONALD TRUMP does not need so-called secondary tariffs to crush Russia’s oil revenues, currently running at \$160 billion a year. The US president’s recent threat to sanction countries that buy oil from Moscow is full of pitfalls. He has a better way to cut the cash flow that fuels the Kremlin’s war against Ukraine.

This would be to persuade India, Russia’s second biggest customer, to stop buying its oil while convincing Saudi Arabia to pump more. Doing so would ensure global crude prices do not jump as Moscow’s exports fall. The US could also effectively slash the price that Russia gets for its foreign oil sales – going even further than the cut the European Union agreed last week.

Together, these measures would heap more trouble on President Vladimir Putin’s economy, which is already facing strains from a mounting budget deficit, slowing growth, rising bad debts and still high inflation.

What’s the problem with going the whole hog and stopping all of Moscow’s oil exports? That is what Trump’s threat to impose secondary tariffs on countries that trade with Russia is designed to achieve. He said last week that, if Putin did not end the war in Ukraine in 50 days, he would slap 100% tariffs on US imports from states that buy Russian exports.

Such blanket secondary tariffs would have so many drawbacks that financial markets do not believe Trump will carry out his threat. Russian equities and the rouble rose after his comments, while the crude price fell – exactly the opposite of what would have happened if investors thought he was serious.

Putin’s country is the world’s third biggest oil producer after the US and Saudi Arabia. It exported 7.2 million barrels a day of crude and refined products such as diesel in June for \$13.6 billion, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), implying an annual rate of just over \$160 billion. Removing all this supply from the global market would push prices sharply higher. Among other things, that would hurt US consumers, damaging Trump’s popularity.

Another problem is China, which bought almost a third of Russia’s crude exports by volume from January to May.

Beijing is Moscow’s most important ally. So if Trump slapped 100% tariffs on Chinese imports into the United States, he probably would not change its behaviour. He would merely further inflame a trade war with the world’s second largest economy and push up inflation at home.

— Reuters

AI driving industrial sustainability in Oman

OMAN’S vision for a net-zero future depends not only on cleaner fuels and renewable power but also on how its industrial sector adapts. Industries such as LNG, refining, cement, fertilisers, and steel are deeply embedded in the economy. These are also among the most energy-intensive and emission-heavy sectors.

To achieve meaningful decarbonisation while remaining globally competitive, Oman must adopt a more intelligent approach, and artificial intelligence (AI) can provide that strategic advantage.

AI technologies are now at a turning point. No longer confined to automation or software, they are beginning to shape how materials are processed, how energy is consumed, and how emissions are measured and reduced.

The integration of AI with process simulation, as shown in recent LNG and hydrogen liquefaction research, demonstrates how surrogate modelling using artificial neural networks can drastically reduce computational costs and unlock complex optimisation problems that were previously unfeasible.

AI-based surrogate models have reduced computational cost by 100% while keeping prediction error margins below 5%. This computational efficiency opens the door to real-time optimisation and adaptive control in energy-intensive processes. Similarly, in carbon capture technologies, AI is enabling solvent screening and process optimisation that would otherwise take years of experimentation. As highlighted in recent reviews on biphasic and amine-blended solvents, AI can accelerate the discovery of low-energy, high-efficiency capture agents suited for specific industrial gas streams. Rotating Packed Bed (RPB) systems, considered next-generation in carbon capture, are now being paired with AI algorithms to fine-tune solvent performance, regeneration energy, and capture rates.

These innovations are especially relevant for Oman’s industrial hubs



AI-enabled technologies can support the transition of industrial zones to low-carbon clusters.

These innovations are especially relevant for Oman’s industrial hubs such as Sohar Port and Freezone, SEZAD, Salalah Free Zone, and Rusayl Industrial City, which collectively drive a large share of the country’s economic output and energy demand.



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such as industrial hubs across Oman such as Sohar Port and Freezone, SEZAD, Salalah Free Zone, and Rusayl Industrial City, which collectively drive a large share of the country’s economic output and energy demand.

AI-enabled technologies can support the transition of these zones to low-carbon clusters, enhance energy efficiency in steel, cement, and petrochemical sectors, and advance integrated decarbonisation plans across the value chain. By aligning with national industrial priorities and strategic development goals, AI can help deliver energy savings, emissions reduction, and digital competitiveness in line with Oman Vision 2040.

To unlock this potential, three strategic actions are needed. First, Oman must build national capacity in AI for process systems engineering. This includes workforce development across universities and training centres, focused on simulation, machine learning, and optimisation.

Second, industrial data must be integrated with secure digital platforms. Without trusted data, AI cannot generate actionable insights.

Third, public-private partnerships should support pilot projects in areas such as hydrogen liquefaction, biodiesel production, and CO₂ capture, demonstrating the return on investment and scalability of AI-based decarbonisation.

The road map is clear. From LNG to hydrogen and from CO₂ capture to sustainable fuels, Oman can lead the region by combining its industrial infrastructure with intelligent technologies. AI is not a future luxury. It is a present necessity. It enables Oman to shift from manual optimisation to systems that adapt, learn, and continuously improve performance.

By embedding AI into its sustainability strategy, Oman will be better positioned to achieve national emissions targets, attract green investments, and develop exportable technologies in energy and environment.

Oman’s industrial zones can serve as testbeds for AI-integrated industrial transformation, with Suhar being one notable example, supporting the country’s ambition to become a global player in sustainable industry and energy transition.

BUSINESS

INDIA-US
TRADE DEAL
PROSPECTS
DIM AHEAD
OF TARIFF
DEADLINE

NEW DELHI: The prospects of an interim trade deal between India and the United States before Washington's August 1 deadline have dimmed, as talks remain deadlocked over tariff cuts on key agricultural and dairy products, two Indian government sources said.

US President Donald Trump threatened a 26% tariff on Indian imports in April but paused implementation to allow for talks. That pause ends on August 1, though India has yet to receive a formal tariff letter, unlike over 20 other countries.

India's trade delegation, led by chief negotiator Rajesh Agrawal, returned from Washington after a fifth round of talks without a breakthrough.

"An interim deal before August 1 looks difficult, though virtual discussions are ongoing", one of the Indian government sources said, adding a US delegation was expected to visit New Delhi soon to continue negotiations.

Talks are stalled as New Delhi



The Indian flag, the US flag and miniature people with laptops are seen in this illustration. — Reuters

is refusing to open its politically-sensitive agriculture and dairy sectors, while Washington is resisting India's demand for relief from higher tariffs on steel, aluminium and autos.

Officials are exploring if these

issues can be deferred to a later stage, after an interim deal, the second Indian official said.

Ajay Sahai, director general of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, warned sectors like gems and jewellery could be hit

hard if 26% tariffs are imposed.

"However, this could be temporary, as both countries aim to sign the deal over time", he said.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Monday that the Trump administration was more concerned with the quality of trade agreements than their timing. Asked if the deadline could be extended for countries in talks, he said it was up to Trump.

Indian officials remain hopeful of clinching a broader deal by September or October, in line with what was agreed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump in February.

"Given that there have been five rounds of negotiations and another US delegation is expected, we remain optimistic about finalising a trade pact", a third government source said. It's a busy week for earnings, but what will these results tell us?

The sources requested anonymity as negotiations are not public.

— Reuters

CLASSIFIEDS

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BEYOND THE BOTTLE: RETHINKING WATER WITHOUT PLASTIC_{> 20}



ENTERTAINMENT

‘Superman’ triumphs once again at North American box office



THE MAN OF STEEL has staying power: “Superman” topped the North American box office for a second week running and surpassed the \$400 million mark worldwide, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

Riding largely positive reviews, the latest big-budget action film featuring the iconic superhero from Warner Bros. and DC Studios earned \$57.3 million in the United States and Canada, Exhibitor Relations said.

That puts its North American take at \$235 million and its international sales at \$171 million — or \$406 million globally.

“Jurassic World: Rebirth” — the latest instalment in the blockbuster dinosaur saga — also held its ground in second place at \$23.4 million. Its worldwide total stands at \$647.2 million.

The Universal film, starring Scarlett Johansson, Jonathan Bailey and Mahershala Ali, takes viewers to an abandoned island research facility, where secrets — and genetically mutated dinosaurs — are lurking.

“I Know What You Did Last Summer,” a sequel to two 1990s slasher hits that bring back the franchise’s original stars Freddie Prinze Jr and Jennifer Love Hewitt, opened in third place at a disappointing \$13 million.

“This is another horror series returning after a long layoff, in this case after 27 years,” said industry analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

“Generally, the layoffs don’t bother these films; in fact, they get stronger... that’s not happening here.”

“Smurfs,” the latest film featuring the adorable blue creatures and starring Rihanna as Smurfette, opened in a lackluster fourth place with \$11 million in North American ticket sales.

“F1: The Movie,” the Apple and Warner Bros. flick starring Brad Pitt as a washed-up Formula One driver who gets one last shot at redemption, finished in fifth place at \$9.6 million.

“The current lineup in theatres is strong, with a broad selection of big titles including superheroes, action, monsters, horror and animation,” said Gross.

“Superman” will soon get a new superhero rival when Marvel’s hotly anticipated “The Fantastic Four: First Steps” starring Pedro Pascal hits theatres in the coming days.

Rounding out the top 10 were: “How to Train Your Dragon” (\$5.4 million); “Eddington” (\$4.3 million); “Elio” (\$2.0 million); “Lilo & Stitch” (\$1.5 million); “28 Years Later” (\$1.3 million) — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



LIFESTYLE

Participating children in traditional costumes carry apricot dumplings during the apricot festival parade in Spitz an der Donau in Lower Austria. —AFP



FILM

Canadian actor Simu Liu attends the World Premiere of Marvel Studios’ “The Fantastic Four: First Steps” at the Dorothy Chandler Pavillon in Los Angeles. —AFP



FASHION

A model presents an autumn-winter creation by fashion house “No Name” during the 83rd edition of Intermoda in Guadalajara, Jalisco state, Mexico. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



sree_landscapes
Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman

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Roll over Beethoven:
Remote highway
plays Ode to Joy



NO RADIO? No problem. The emirate of Fujairah has installed rumble strips along a 750-metre (half-mile) stretch of highway that play the Ode to Joy melody from Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as cars roll over - part of a project to integrate music into daily life. Similar so-called Musical Roads have already been installed in places like the United States, Japan and Hungary. However, this is the first permanent road in the Arab world, according to Ali bin Obaid al Hefaiti, director of the Fine Arts Academy in Fujairah, a lesser-known emirate roughly 120 kilometres (75 miles) from the global tourism hub

of Dubai. The technology works by carving strategically-spaced grooves into the asphalt on Fujairah's Sheikh Khalifa Street. Then, as tires hit the ridges at roughly 100 km/hr (62 mph), the resulting vibrations produce a melody audible inside the vehicle. Beethoven's Ode to Joy, a tune known to almost every ear on earth, was a natural choice, Al Hefaiti said. Mohammad al Matrooshi, an Omani resident travelling from Sharjah, said the music relaxed him after a long journey. "The music gives you a different mood, especially because the music is by Beethoven." — Reuters



A jockey crosses the finish line during the annual horse racing event in Semonkong. — AFP

LESOTHO'S JOCKEYS
SADDLE UP FOR
MOUNTAIN
HORSE RACING

SWATHED in vibrant woollen blankets against the biting winter chill, jockeys — some no more than boys — thundered down a dusty track carved between the undulating hills of the tiny kingdom of Lesotho. Spectators lining the ridges cheered on the riders as their horses sprinted down one of Africa's highest tracks, more than 2,200 metres (7,200 feet) above sea level. Horse racing in Lesotho, a country ringed by South Africa, is not just a sport, it is a cultural carnival where wagers are the real blood sport. This weekend's edition in the village of Semonkong in central Lesotho carried extra weight; it was the premium fixture of the season and timed to mark King Letsie III's birthday. Preparations started before the crowd arrived, with the horses, also wrapped in blankets and balaclavas to keep warm, walked to the arena in song and dance, then brushed and fitted with weather-worn saddles for their races. For many jockeys the track is a rare escape. The country of around 2.3 million people ranks among the world's poorest, its rich mineral wealth overshadowed by sky-high youth unemployment and a troubling rate of suicide. The textile-dependent economy faces further gloom, with fresh uncertainty following tariffs announced by the administration of US President Donald Trump, who earlier this year mocked Lesotho as a place "nobody has ever heard of". The unspoken rule is that you have to forget all your problems or you will fall, jockey Tsaenh Masosa said. "You have to be focused", said the 21-year-old hotel employee, layered in white, pink and blue jackets.



Two jockeys stand next to their horses in a field in Maluti mountains ahead of the annual horse racing event. — AFP

Races stretch between 800 and 1,200 metres across a rugged mountain terrain that tests both the rider and horse. Winners pocket up to 1,500 loti (\$85) per race, a significant payday in Lesotho, where more than 36 per cent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, according to the World Bank. At the trackside, most bets are simple showdowns — punters backing one horse to outrun another, rather than the overall race winner. There are no tickets or betting slips, just fistfuls of cash, tense stares and quick payouts as money changes hands the moment one horse edges out another at the finish line. Horses first arrived in Lesotho with European settlers in the 19th century and over generations, crossbreeding gave rise to the sturdy

Basotho pony — mid-sized, tough and known for its endurance. These ponies, along with cross-breeds and thoroughbreds from neighbouring South Africa, now make up the racing stock. But beyond the track, horses remain part of daily life. In the mountains, they are still used to herd sheep and goats, or to reach remote villages where no roads go. That deep connection runs through the culture. "All the people from Semonkong prefer horse racing to football", said 39-year-old maintenance worker Andreas Motlatsi Mojaje. On the dusty oval, Masosa is still chasing his first win. He has raced seven times, coming closest with a second-place finish, but that has not dulled his hunger. "I like fast horses, it makes me enjoy", he said with a smile. — AFP

FEATURES



BEYOND
THE BOTTLE:
RETHINKING
WATER WITHOUT
PLASTIC

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

IN A WORLD drowning in plastic waste, one of the most visible culprits is something as seemingly harmless as a bottle of water. Lightweight and convenient, plastic water bottles have become part of everyday life. But beneath that convenience lies a mounting environmental cost — one that appears in landfills, oceans, and even in our food chain.

Across the globe, momentum is growing to reduce dependence on single-use plastics, and bottles are a major part of that story. The shift begins with a simple but powerful act: bringing your own. Reusable water bottles — made of stainless steel, glass, or durable BPA-free plastic — are fast becoming daily essentials. In the Gulf’s unforgiving heat, they do more than cut waste; they keep water colder, longer.

Access is key. Around the world, refill stations are appearing in airports, shopping centres, universities, and workplaces, making it easy to refill on the go. Apps like Refill and Tap now map out nearby refill points. In Oman, an increasing number of cafés, gyms, and co-working spaces are offering water refills, quietly encouraging a shift in consumer behaviour.

Concerns about water quality often drive the decision to buy bottled water, even where supplies are safe. But this is also changing. Modern home filtration systems — from simple charcoal pitchers to high-performance reverse osmosis filters — now offer a reliable and cost-effective alternative. They empower households to trust their tap water and significantly reduce plastic use.

Offices, schools, and event organisers are also adapting. Water dispensers and “bring your own bottle” policies are replacing pallets of bottled water. Some public events have gone further — banning plastic bottles entirely and offering branded reusable bottles alongside refill stations.

Meanwhile, innovation is redefining what a bottle can be. Start-ups are developing biodegradable options made from seaweed, sugarcane, and starch-based materials that break down naturally instead of lingering for centuries. Recent research in Oman’s waters confirmed that cassava starch-based bioplastics degrade considerably faster than conventional polyethylene, opening the door for locally suitable alternatives.

A CLEAR MESSAGE IN OMAN

Oman has taken a significant step towards environmental conservation by implementing a comprehensive policy aimed at eliminating single-use plastics. This initiative underlines the country’s commitment to tackling plastic pollution and aligns with its broader sustainability goals outlined in Oman’s Vision 2040.

Concerns over plastic waste rose in Oman during the early 2020s. The government highlighted increasing challenges related to plastic debris polluting marine and terrestrial environments. By 2021, the government

recognised the urgent need for action, acknowledging the impact on marine ecosystems and waste management infrastructure. Regional cooperation within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) further propelled momentum for environmental reform.

In 2022, Oman announced plans to restrict the import, production, and use of single-use plastics, including plastic bags, cutlery, and packaging. Stakeholders such as environmental organisations like the Omani Environment Society, alongside private companies, played an active role in shaping these regulations. Awareness campaigns launched in 2023 aimed to educate the public on the harmful effects of plastic pollution and promote sustainable alternatives, such as reusable bags and biodegradable packaging.

Legislative measures were enacted in June 2024, when the Council of Oman approved the Plastic Waste Reduction Law. This legislation banned the distribution of single-use plastic bags nationwide, with initial compliance deadlines set for early 2025. Retailers were encouraged to adopt reusable or biodegradable options, and enforcement measures — including fines between OM R10 and OM R50 for violations — were introduced in March 2025. The ban was further extended in June 2025 to cover other single-use plastics, such as straws, cutlery, and polystyrene containers. To facilitate compliance, the government established recycling centres and incentivised local manufacturers to develop sustainable alternatives.

Early results are encouraging, with data showing a 35% reduction in plastic bag use within three months of enforcement. Environmental organisations praise Oman for its proactive stance, emphasising that such policies are vital for protecting marine ecosystems along its extensive coastline. Moving forward, Oman aims to expand waste reduction initiatives further and continue public education campaigns to ensure regional compliance. The government remains committed to sustainable development and conserving its natural resources for future generations.

Oman is sending a clear message: single-use plastics are being phased out for good. Change takes time, but it is underway. The more we opt to refill rather than replace, the more we dilute the grip of throwaway culture. Bottles are a good place to start — not just for the planet, but for the habits that shape our future.

Hydration doesn’t need to come wrapped in plastic. The future is refillable, renewable, and rooted in responsibility.