

O M A N
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Observer

SUNRISE 05:29 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:03 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:38 PM

MAGHRIB 07:02 PM

ISHA 08:22 PM

INBRIEF

HM GREETES PRESIDENT OF FRANCE

CALL FOR AWARENESS AS DRUG ABUSE HITS A HIGH

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan lauded the depth of bilateral relations between the two countries. His Majesty also wished France stability and prosperity and the realisation of further achievements. SEE ALSO P9

6,741 narcotic cases recorded in Oman between 2023 and 2024

YOUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

DR RASHID AL KAABI

The official spokesperson for the Public Prosecution

Public Prosecution seeks a greater role for the family, educational, religious and media institutions to protect children from drug addiction

social and economic impacts of drugs including psychological and physical illnesses, family disintegration, theft and violence as well as the economic loss. He called for a greater role for the family, educational, religious and media institutions.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman is applying the national strategy (2023–2028) for combating drugs and is intensifying prevention, treatment and rehabilitation efforts. He praised the role of the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Health, the Public Prosecution, the Ministry of Education, and other relevant authorities in combating the drug phenomenon.

The Public Prosecution spokesman stressed the importance of monitoring children, adding that families should not hesitate to seek treatment when necessary as addiction is not just a deviation but a disease that requires early and comprehensive intervention.

The Sultanate of Oman had taken a series of important legislative and regulatory steps, the first of which

was passing the Law on Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances pursuant to Royal Decree No 99/17.

In addition, the National Strategy for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (2023-2028) was laid out, outlining the policies, programmes and regulatory activities necessary to address contemporary challenges in this field, the Public Prosecution spokesman said.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), through the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, continues making significant efforts to implement the necessary security measures to prevent drug smuggling across land, sea and air. The ROP has significant capabilities to confront cross-border smuggling networks.

In the same context, the Public Prosecution is responsible for handling drug and addiction cases through the Drug Cases Department, he said, adding that the number of drug cases reported in 2024 saw a significant increase compared to 2023.

ROYAL DECREE AMENDS PROVISIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION LAW

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 60/2025 on amending some provisions of Royal Decree No 52/2023 on the promulgation of the Social Protection Law. It reads as follows: Article (1) says that the provisions of Clauses (2), (3) and (5) of Article Six of Royal Decree No 52/2023 shall be replaced with the following texts: 2- The provisions of the branch on insurance for work injuries and occupational diseases for non-Omani workers under the attached law shall come into force after (5) years from the date of issuance of this decree. 3- Chapter Six of Part Three of the attached law shall come into force after (3) years from the date of issuance of this decree. 5- Clause (1) of Article (139) of the attached law shall come into force on the date determined by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund, provided it does not exceed (4) years from the date of issuance of this decree. Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions. Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication. — ONA

OVER 850 STUDENTS ATTEND MILITARY TRAINING

SALALAH: The second edition of the Military Discipline Programme began on Sunday in Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, with support from various military and security agencies as well as other government institutions. More than 850 students from across the Sultanate of Oman participated in the programme. REPORT ON P2

Omani media raises pitch on nation’s potential to global audience

MUSCAT: The Omani media continues to present a distinguished image of the Sultanate of Oman to the global audience, guided by a media strategy aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The Ministry of Information has implemented methods and programmes to strengthen Oman's international presence, including hosting international journalists, organising meetings with officials, producing documentaries and enhancing cooperation with global media institutions. These efforts serve as a mirror reflecting Oman's potential, achievements and modern advancements across political, economic, tourism, cultural and developmental fields.

To expand engagement with international media entities, Oman has hosted dozens of journalists from different continents. They left with deeper impressions of a nation that combines political stability, cultural openness and economic prosperity. Hosting programmes have resulted in the production of over 937 media materials between January 2024 and June 2025, including visual and written reports, analytical articles, short films, and interactive posts on social media and prestigious media platforms. Some international outlets have even published special editions highlighting Oman's economic growth, transition towards green hydrogen, sustainable

SHEIKHA BINT AHMED AL MAHROUQIYAH

Acting Director-General of External Media at the Ministry of Information

The Ministry of Information has implemented annual policies, methods, and programmes to strengthen Oman's international presence. — ONA

environmental policies and its balanced political stances.

More than 18 bilateral media memoranda of understanding were either signed or finalised for signing, reflecting an expansion of media partnerships with friendly nations and reinforcing frameworks for cooperation. These efforts have also led to a 52 per cent increase in media coverage by regional and international outlets in 2024 compared to 2023 — an indicator of growing global interest in Oman due to its notable efforts and active role in promoting international peace and security, including its mediation in Iranian-American talks, as well as its dynamic economic, trade and investment activities. TURN TO P4

OMAN



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SHORT TAKES



RAINS FALL
IN AL SHARQIYAH
NORTH

IBRA: Several wilayats of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate experienced moderate to heavy rains on Sunday afternoon associated with downdraft gushing causing wadis to flow.

Heavy rains were reported on the northern villages of the Wilayat of Ibra, extending along the eastern Al Hajar Mountains range. Rains fell on the villages of Qafifa, Al Jarula, Warid, Al Khaddad, Al Radidat, Al Haimah and neighbouring villages causing wadis to overflow.

Light to moderate rains were also reported in the wilayats of Al Mudhaibi, Al Qabil and Dima W'attayeen leading to the overflowing of several wadis. — ONA

ECO-WALK UNITES
COMMUNITY FOR
CONSERVATION

SALALAH: A major environmental conservation initiative kicked off in Dhofar Governorate on Saturday. The Directorate-General of Civil Aviation, in collaboration with the Society for the Conservation of Nature, organised an eco-walk along the scenic Ayn Ghayth hiking trail.

The event, which saw enthusiastic participation from community members, aimed to foster a spirit of cooperation and promote a healthy lifestyle while emphasising the essential mission of environmental conservation. The participants set off from Salalah Airport in 4x4 vehicles, heading towards Ayn Ghayth, a picturesque 5-kilometre trail featuring a stunning waterfall and a natural pool.

Along the trail, each participant actively contributed by scattering seeds from 21 native plant species, symbolising a collective effort to revive and sustain Dhofar's rich flora. The initiative concluded with the planting of a small fig tree, carefully protected with stones and shrubs.

This initiative is a vital step towards repopulating the vegetation in Dhofar's mountains and wadis, while also serving as an important reminder to both residents and visitors of the critical importance of preserving and respecting the environment.

SECOND
MILITARY
DISCIPLINE
PROGRAMME
LAUNCHED
IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The second edition of the Military Discipline Programme began on Sunday in Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, with support from various military and security agencies as well as other government institutions. More than 850 students from across the Sultanate of Oman participated in the programme.

Running until August 6, the programme includes lectures on military discipline and organisation, first aid, teamwork, leadership techniques and military sciences, along with awareness sessions on various social topics. It also features diverse



Over 850 students from across Oman are taking part in the programme

sports and scouting competitions.
In addition, specialised workshops on citizenship, belonging, artificial intelligence and entrepreneurship aim to nurture modern leadership thinking and enhance the personal and

community skills of participants.
Following its remarkable success in its first edition last year, this year's programme continues with an expanded vision to shape a generation of Omani youth. — ONA

‘Duqm-2’ marks major step
for Oman’s space ambitions

THE second mission of a series of experimental space rocket launches, Duqm-2, has successfully concluded on Sunday without ignition of the vehicle. Stellar Kinetics' Kea-1, a two-stage guided experimental suborbital vehicle, was set to launch from Etlaq Spaceport before it was halted during the final preparations due to a technical issue with onboard actuators.

Etlaq, Stellar Kinetics, and institutional partners gathered immense data leading up to the launch attempt before initiating protocols to safely unload the propellants from Kea-1 and secure the premises.

Etlaq has successfully prepared and executed spaceport activities, accomplishing a number of goals and gaining critical insights across technical, operational and logistical aspects. The Duqm-2 mission supported the upskilling of Omanis in launch operations such as handling cryogenics, establishing power systems, constructing launch pad infrastructure and providing tenant services. The launch attempt marked a major operational success for Etlaq Spaceport.

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, CEO of Etlaq Spaceport, said: “We achieved many objectives of the Duqm-2 mission, including planning the mission, navigating regulatory processes, designing ground infrastructure and building an integration hangar. We commend the teams, both local and international, for their disciplined decision-making in prioritising safety and system integrity. Etlaq Spaceport continues to rapidly acquire knowledge to prove itself as a capable, reliable host, and this effort further strengthens our role in building sustainable, skill-based partnerships in the global launch ecosystem.”



Duqm-2 stands as a proud milestone for Etlaq and Oman

The experimental suborbital vehicle was designed by Stellar Kinetics to prove orbital class systems such as stage separation and guidance and navigation systems, while operating in the Middle Eastern summer on unprecedented timelines. Over the course of the two-week campaign, the vehicle underwent successful payload integration, electronics testing and fuel tank filling.

A spokesperson for Stellar Kinetics said: “It has been an exciting few months working closely with the Etlaq and NASCOM teams preparing for this mission. We proved out the majority of our objectives, demonstrating how fast we can move through this complex programme with our regional partners. The National Space Programme and Civil Aviation Authority provided support throughout, allowing agility and responsiveness in the regulatory environment that is immensely valuable for a fast paced programme like the Duqm-2 mission.

The spokesperson added that the Stellar Kinetics team encountered an issue with a COTS valve actuator used for various systems on the Kea vehicle. We are postponing the launch until a replacement solution is developed. While the ignition moment was missed, this mission delivers on the calendar announced in February. Over the next 4 months we anticipate a series of subsequent launches to continue on the R&D pathway. As the programme builds momentum, we expect to see a steady stream of both experimental and commercial Stellar Kinetics vehicles launching from the Etlaq Spaceport.

The Kea-1 vehicle carried two tethered payloads from international partners, spanning the UK and Taiwan, for scientific research and microgravity testing. The mission offered hands-on experience and critical data that will support the next generation of aerospace talent both locally and globally.

Ieuan Carney, a PhD student from the University of Surrey leading the Jovian-O team on behalf of Jupiter, said: “Although the payload didn't get to deploy, it's something we were prepared for because we know space projects often have setback in the early stages. We're still so proud of what we've done, developing a payload and fitting it onto a rocket.”

SIGHT Space founder, Kevin Chen, said: “The experience of working alongside Stellar Kinetics and Etlaq Spaceport has been invaluable for our team and the National Central University in Taiwan. We are proud to have reached this milestone and this collaboration reminds us that progress in space always comes through testing, iteration and international cooperation.” — ONA

Shura report highlights outcomes of legislative, oversight work

MUSCAT: In accordance with its commitment to transparency and public engagement, the Majlis Ash'shura has released a comprehensive media report highlighting the outcomes of its legislative and oversight work.

This report coincides with the conclusion of the second annual sitting (2024–2025) of the Tenth Term (2023–2027) and follows the Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to adjourn the session on July 13, 2025, as per Article 41 of the Law of the Council of Oman (7/2021).

The report showcases the Council's dedication to enhancing public engagement by providing detailed

statistics and key indicators on its activities, including legislative performance, oversight tools, council sessions, and the work of the Council's Bureau and standing committees. These efforts demonstrate the Council's effective implementation of the powers and responsibilities granted to it under the Law of the Council of Oman.

During the sitting, the Council held 14 regular sessions, with four dedicated to ministerial statements by service ministers. These statements covered various topics such as education, heritage and tourism, housing and urban planning, commerce, industry,



The report showcases the Council's dedication to enhancing public engagement by providing detailed statistics and key indicators on its activities.

investment promotion, and the state budget for the fiscal year 2025. Additionally, a session focused on a discussion request submitted to the Minister of Labour regarding temporary employment initiatives.

In terms of legislative output, the Council reviewed 16 draft laws and 7 international agreements referred by the government. Key legislations included the 2025 State Budget, Real Estate Regulation Law, Anti-Trafficking Law, Telecommunications and Information Technology Law, State Revenue Collection Law, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law, amendments to the Arbitration Law,

Civil Society Institutions Law, Land Registry Law and Cybercrime Law. The Council also proposed three legislative initiatives, including the Draft Law for the Sports, Culture and Youth Activities Support Fund.

Regarding oversight tools and committee work, the Council activated 169 oversight tools, including parliamentary questions, requests for briefing and urgent statements. The Bureau of the Council held 12 meetings, and the standing committees held 92 meetings, addressing various national issues through legislative reviews, field visits, stakeholder hearings and studies.

SHORT TAKES



The platform allows farmers to easily showcase their fresh and organic products.

‘HASEED’ LINKS AL DHAHIRAH FARMERS WITH RETAILERS

SUHAR: A student team from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar has launched a digital platform named ‘Haseed’, designed to directly link farmers in Al Dhahirah Governorate with fruit and vegetable retailers. The initiative aims to streamline marketing processes, reduce waste and enhance the efficiency and quality of the local agricultural supply chain.

Mahmoud al Harmali, a team member, explained that the project was inspired by the challenges farmers face in delivering their products to local markets within Al Dhahirah. Many are forced to sell individually at weekly markets or transport their goods outside the governorate, leading to spoilage and delayed sales, while most retailers rely on imported produce from other governorates.

He noted that the team encountered several challenges during development, including difficulty accessing farm owners directly. Additionally, digital promotion proved challenging, prompting the team to adopt on-ground outreach by visiting traditional markets - particularly at dawn on Fridays, a peak time for Omani traders and vendors.

The platform allows farmers to easily showcase their fresh and organic products, while retailers can source locally grown goods at fair prices with assured quality. ‘Haseed’ also features an organised delivery system transporting produce from farms to stores, along with smart surplus management technology to minimise agricultural waste and maximise crop utilisation.

Available products on the platform include a variety of farm-direct offerings such as dates, onions, leafy greens, melons and guavas. — **ONA**

‘FUTURE PIONEERS’ PROGRAMME LAUNCHED



The programme aims to enhance entrepreneurial culture among youth. — **ONA**

SAMAYIL: The second edition of the ‘Future Pioneers’ programme kicked off on Sunday in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, organised by the Career Guidance and Student Counselling Centre in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED).

The programme was held at the Omani Women’s Association headquarters in Samayil. The programme will run until July 17, 2025.

The programme, targeting students from grades 7 to 9 across the governorate, aims to enhance entrepreneurial culture among youth, equip them with innovation tools, and encourage them to explore technical projects and start-up establishment.

It features a comprehensive five-day training programme that includes practical workshops, creative activities, interactive learning and teamwork, along with foundational awareness of entrepreneurial concepts.

The participants will present their projects before a specialised judging panel, simulating real-world investor scenarios. The programme contributes to preparing a generation of proactive and innovative students, strengthening their future role in building a creativity-driven national economy. — **ONA**

MWASALAT ELECTRIC BUS FREE RIDE ATTRACTS 1,000 PASSENGERS

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabiyousef](#)

Mwasalat, Oman’s national road transport provider, announced that over one thousand passengers have utilised the free electric bus service on Route 4. This service operated between Muscat and Muttrah, passing by Al Alam Palace on a trial basis over the past four days.

Sunday marked the final free trial of the electric bus service, which began from Ruwi Mwasalat bus station at 6:25 pm. There were four services from Ruwi to Muttrah and back.

Mwasalat introduced the first



Mwasalat has taken executive steps to reduce the carbon footprint of its operations.

electric vehicle to support the national goal of achieving Net-Zero emissions by 2050 during the khareef 2024. The bus has a capacity of 28 passengers and is electronically adjusted to travel at speeds ranging from 70 to 130 kilometres per hour, making it suitable for city use.

Mwasalat has taken executive steps to reduce the carbon footprint of its operations and turn sustainability plans into concrete actions on the ground.

In comments to the Observer, a senior official from Mwasalat mentioned that there are plans to test more electric buses on different routes in the coming days.

First spine surgery without anaesthesia performed

THE Medical City for Military and Security Services, represented by Medical City Hospital in Al Khoudh, has successfully performed its first vertebral fixation surgery using conscious regional anesthesia, eliminating the need for general anaesthesia. This breakthrough marks a major advancement in surgical care, reflecting the hospital’s commitment to adopting the latest international medical practices and offering safer, more modern treatment options.

This milestone paves the way for wider adoption of this advanced approach, which helps reduce complications and speed up recovery, particularly for patients with chronic conditions where general anaesthesia poses higher risks.

The hospital’s anaesthesia team skillfully managed the case, precisely adjusting sedation doses while maintaining full patient consciousness throughout the procedure, allowing real-time monitoring of neurological responses.

The nursing team played an essential role in preparing the patient both physically and psychologically, as well as providing continuous post-operative care.

Brigadier General Dr Saleh bin Saud al Abri, Director-General of Medical City Hospital for Military

The milestone paves the way for wider adoption of advanced approach, which helps reduce complications and speed up recovery



This breakthrough marks a major advancement in surgical care

and Security Services - Muscat, stated that this successful surgery demonstrates the hospital’s readiness to adopt advanced techniques, further solidifying its role as a regional centre for surgical specialties and medical education.

Colonel Dr Ahmed bin Saif al Jahwari, Senior Consultant Spine

Surgeon and Operating Surgeon, explained that conscious sedation surgeries are an ideal option for patients at high risk from general anaesthesia. He attributed this achievement to the seamless coordination between medical teams and the high competence of the hospital’s medical and nursing staff. — **ONA**

Al Wusta-Dhofar roads ready for khareef season

HAIMA: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, represented by the Roads Department in Al Wusta Governorate, has intensified efforts to prepare and enhance the road network linking Al Wusta to Dhofar Governorate, ensuring safe and smooth travel during the khareef season.

Eng Bakhit bin Salem Al Awad, Director of the Roads Department in Al Wusta, said the department began implementing a comprehensive field plan in early June in collaboration with maintenance companies. The plan aims to boost road efficiency and secure them for the anticipated increase in traffic during the khareef season.

He explained that 11 specialised machines have been deployed to clear dust and sand from key roadways, supported by technical teams and emergency equipment working around the clock to address any sudden issues.

Among the priority routes



11 specialised machines have been deployed to clear dust and sand from key roadways.

are Sultan Said bin Taimur Road (265 km), the coastal road (Sinaw–Mahout–Al Jazir), and Al Ashkharah–Mahout–Al Jazir road, covering a total of 431 km. In addition, maintenance and rehabilitation work was completed on the 310-metre Suqra Pass in Al Jazir, with all essential traffic safety

measures put in place before the season.

The department has also upgraded Al Juba–Haj road in the Wilayat of Mahout, extending 14.8 km, by widening shoulders and repairing damaged sections to improve infrastructure and reduce accidents.

Al Awad confirmed that the Roads Department continues to enhance traffic safety and is utilising all available resources to keep the transportation network free of damage. Field teams remain on constant alert to monitor traffic conditions and provide immediate support when needed. — **ONA**

OMAN

Media raises pitch on nation’s potential to global audience

FROM PAGE 1

To showcase Oman’s civilisational role and ancient history, the Ministry of Information oversaw the production of the documentary series “House of Wonders” in three languages. Additionally, a book documenting Oman’s civilisational influence in Zanzibar and East Africa was launched.

Collaboration with Russia’s RT channel also resulted in the production of “The Dagger”, a film that highlights the cultural and historical dimensions of Oman’s global presence. The film narrates the story of a historical dagger transferred from the National Museum of Oman to Russia’s Hermitage Museum.

The ministry has broadened its international network, leveraging a database of over 500 regional and global media entities. It actively engages with them using advanced technological tools and has introduced digital publishing for foreign-targeted content, which has received widespread positive response. This is particularly evident in the growing global media interest in Oman’s role in environmental and energy issues, especially green hydrogen, as seen during His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s visit to the Netherlands and the launch of a strategic project — the largest of its kind — for exporting green hydrogen to Europe.

Sheikha bint Ahmed al Mahrouqiyyah, Acting Director-General of External Media at the Ministry of Information, stated that enhancing Omani’s global image requires continuous, professional and strategic engagement with international media. This approach serves as a long-term investment in the nation’s reputation, reaffirming its noble stances and humanitarian message.

Through this balanced approach, Omani media continues to fulfil its sincere and objective mission, drawing inspiration from national principles, future vision and the firm belief in media’s pivotal role in shaping Oman’s international presence. — ONA

11th Human Development Conference kicks off

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 13

THE 11th Annual Human Development Conference opened here yesterday, July 13, 2025, at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, under the theme, “Developing Human Capital through Training and Qualification.” The event puts a strong focus on innovation and artificial intelligence (AI) as part of national efforts to build future-ready competencies aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and attended by several senior officials, experts and specialists from Oman and abroad.

Organised by Al Asayel Conferences in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s Dhofar branch, the two-day conference aims to empower national talents and develop the local workforce to meet evolving labour market demands.

In his keynote address, Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, presented the opening paper titled, “Investing in Human Capital through the Lens of Oman Vision 2040.” He emphasised that human development remains central to achieving economic transformation and long-term sustainability.

“Investing in national competencies



Dignitaries interacting with exhibitors at the 11th Annual Human Development Conference

improves quality of life and creates job opportunities,” Al Busaidy said. “It is a key driver for economic diversification and building a knowledge-based society capable of navigating future challenges.” Naif bin Hamed Fadhil, Chairman of the OCCI Dhofar Branch, delivered remarks on behalf of the organising committee, calling for integrated strategies to harness the full productive potential of Oman’s human capital.

“The global shift towards a knowledge economy demands advanced training and qualification systems,” Fadhil stated. “We must adopt a holistic model to build analytical and innovative skills within the workforce.” The second paper, titled “Human Development Policies in the Governorates”, was presented by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North. It

was followed by a third presentation by Eng Mohammed bin Hamoud al Nuaimi, CEO of the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), who discussed the integration of roles between government, training institutions and professional associations.

The first day of the conference also featured a panel discussion titled “Setting the Compass for Sustainable Human Development” and a workshop on “Needs Assessment Tools and Methodologies.” The day concluded with a recognition ceremony honouring guest speakers, partners and supporting organisations.

The Human Development Conference serves as a key platform for sharing best practices and advancing dialogue on workforce strategy, digital transformation and AI integration, all vital for achieving Oman’s socio-economic goals.

HiShopping celebrates 30K user milestone, reinforces community vision

MUSCAT: HiShopping, Oman’s emerging super app, marked a significant milestone with a major event in Muscat celebrating its rapidly growing user base and outlining its long-term digital vision. The event, held at the Grand Millennium Hotel’s Grand Ballroom, brought together more than 1,000 guests, including senior investors from China, Taiwan, Singapore and the UAE, as well as leading social media influencers and public figures.

Organised by North Pole Star Company, the ceremony combined celebration with strategy, unveiling HiShopping’s road map for future growth while reinforcing its commitment to empowering consumers and merchants across the Sultanate and beyond.

The highlight of the evening was the continuation of HiShopping’s generous monthly giveaway campaign. With over 30,000 active users now on the platform and more than 2,000 registered merchants, HiShopping has pledged to give away two brand-new cars every month, alongside a selection of premium electronics and home appliances.

The campaign, branded as “Recharge & Get Now”, offers customers the chance to win items such as an iPhone 16 Plus, Samsung smartphones, smart TVs, refrigerators, washing machines, air fryers and juicers — all by simply recharging through the platform.

In his keynote address, Shaikh Hamad al Suwaidi, Chairman of HiShopping, welcomed guests with a message of gratitude and ambition. “Your presence honours us, and I would like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to everyone here,” he said. He also acknowledged the vital support of Oman’s Ministry of Commerce,



Industry and Investment Promotion, which he described as a key driver behind the platform’s rapid rise. “Since our launch on January 26, we have witnessed remarkable growth,” he added. “Our ambition is to become the leading gateway for smart digital living in Oman and the region.”

Shaikh Hamad is a well-known Emirati businessman with a storied career that extends far beyond the tech space. He is the founder of Al Ghwaiis Stables for Horses and Camels, with a long-standing presence in regional racing circles. A close associate of the late Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan and Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Shaikh Hamad’s name is synonymous with traditional sports, entrepreneurship and innovation.

His ventures include Al Ghwaiis Car Rental, the first mobile restaurant in the UAE (1982), and an instrumental role in the conceptual design of Ski Dubai. Today, he continues to manage a diversified investment portfolio while actively

promoting heritage sports.

What distinguishes HiShopping from other platforms is its unique economic model, rooted in the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Mundell. Inspired by Mundell’s theory of optimal currency areas, the platform has adopted a framework that focuses on equitable value sharing between businesses and consumers. In doing so, HiShopping challenges conventional e-commerce norms, adopting a user-centric approach where a share of profits is reinvested back into the community, rewarding consumers and reinforcing loyalty.

This philosophy is echoed in the platform’s core values, which were prominently displayed at the event. These include promoting transparency, offering high-quality products at lower costs and empowering local communities through digital engagement. HiShopping also emphasises the use of artificial intelligence, innovation and e-commerce technologies to



create opportunities that benefit consumers, advertisers and partners alike.

The company’s slogan, “Empowering Communities, Improving Lives”, encapsulates its broader mission — to build a more inclusive, sustainable digital economy across Oman and the wider Gulf.

HiShopping is more than just a digital marketplace; it aims to become a comprehensive super app. From payment solutions to product discovery and community engagement, the platform envisions a unified digital experience that serves both individual consumers and small businesses. This integrated approach is particularly important in Oman, where growing digital connectivity is opening new doors for local entrepreneurs and consumers alike.

The event also served as an opportunity to strengthen ties with the media, as an official invitation was extended to national and regional outlets to attend and cover

the occasion. With expectations of future collaborations, the organisers underlined the media’s essential role in sharing success stories and building trust with the public.

As Oman pushes forward with its Vision 2040 goals, which include digital transformation, economic diversification and SMEs empowerment, platforms like HiShopping are gaining momentum as engines of innovation. By combining sound economic theory with real-world incentives and community-based programmes, HiShopping offers a promising model for inclusive growth in the digital age.

As the evening came to a close, attendees took part in prize draws, entertainment segments and networking opportunities, all wrapped in a festive atmosphere. With plans for expansion and product diversification on the horizon, HiShopping is well-positioned to reshape the region’s e-commerce landscape, one recharge at a time.

OMRAN GROUP LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO BOOST DOMESTIC TOURISM

MUSCAT: Omran Group has launched a comprehensive promotional campaign titled ‘In Oman’ in collaboration with the national travel operator ‘Visit Oman’, as part of its efforts to enhance domestic tourism and expand the scope of travel experiences across the Sultanate of Oman.

Running until the end of August, the campaign aims to encourage citizens and residents to explore the diverse tourist attractions found in Oman’s governorates by offering exclusive accommodation packages at the group’s hospitality facilities, along



Running until the end of August, the campaign aims to encourage citizens and residents to explore the diverse tourist attractions

with a variety of activities and unique travel experiences.

Shabib bin Mohammed al Maamari, General Manager of the ‘Visit Oman’ platform, stated that the campaign represents a significant step in expanding the digital platform’s services, contributing to the promotion of Omani destinations and enhancing user experience through advanced solutions that simplify travel planning.

This initiative aligns with the shared vision of strengthening cooperation among key national institutions in the tourism sector and delivering an integrated travel experience. — ONA

#WithinOman enriches tourism experiences

OMAN Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has officially relaunched its #WithinOman campaign in collaboration with the National Travel Operator (Visit Oman) – an integrated promotional effort designed to stimulate domestic tourism, encourage exploration of Oman’s diverse destinations, and celebrate the rich cultural and natural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman.

Running until the end of August, the campaign presents a wide range of exclusive staycation packages and curated experiences across Omran Group’s hospitality assets and experiences.

This year’s campaign features discounts on room stays, food and beverages, complimentary child stays, and engaging adventure, heritage and wellness experiences. Through Visit Oman’s leading-edge digital booking platform, visitors can now easily plan their complete travel itineraries with just one click – offering ultimate convenience and flexibility for travellers within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.



The campaign presents a wide range of exclusive staycation packages

More than just a seasonal offer, the #WithinOman campaign aims to reinforce Oman’s position as a compelling year-round tourism destination and enrich domestic tourism; it also contributes to enhancing travel itineraries, turning every journey into a personalised, immersive and fulfilling experience.

“We’re thrilled to collaborate with Omran Group on the rollout of the summer campaign, marking a significant milestone in expanding Visit Oman’s leading-edge digital booking platform. Now serving both

trade partners and travellers, the platform delivers a seamless user experience with dynamic product offerings – all just a click away. This initiative underscores the group’s shared commitment to advancing national efforts that boost domestic tourism and celebrate Oman’s extraordinary diversity, from the dramatic fjords of Musandam to the lush khareef landscapes of Dhofar,” said Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director of Visit Oman.

Participating hotels and resorts include iconic properties such as Al Bustan Palace, W Muscat, JW Marriott Muscat, Crowne Plaza OCEC, Atana Musandam, Atana Khasab, Crowne Plaza Duqm, Alila Hinu Bay, and Dusit D2 Naseem Resort Jabal Akhdar among others – offering bespoke packages for families, friends and adventure-seekers alike. The campaign also features activities and attractions such as Al Hoota Cave, the Musandam Zipline, Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve, and various events, including the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Rummana pomegranate festival in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and the Oman Kite Festival.

MUSCAT GOVERNORATE
MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (21/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to participate in the following Bid:

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	1 F / 2025	Design, Manage, Operate & Implementation of Different Events at Qurum Natural Park	150 /- OMR	03/8/2025	10/8/2025	21/8/2025

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

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality must be valid to obtain the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality’s Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
- 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 commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents.
- Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and place in the box located in building (A) in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality’s website (www.mm.gov.om).
- For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (mais.h.alnofli@mm.gov.om)
- 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.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION IN OMAN RISES 11%

MUSCAT: Electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman increased significantly by 11 per cent by the end of April 2025, reaching 13,479.8 gigawatt-hours (GWh), compared to 12,142.3 GWh during the same period in 2024. Muscat Governorate recorded the highest growth rate, surging by 195.9 per cent to 93.9 GWh. The governorates of Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South also posted a 2.8-per cent increase, reaching 2,659.6 GWh, while Musandam saw a 16.6-per cent rise to 128.2 GWh.

In contrast, the combined electricity production of Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Dhahirah governorates grew more modestly by 5.7 per cent, totalling 7,970.9 GWh. Dhofar Governorate recorded a decline of 4.5 per cent to 1,699.1 GWh, and Al Wusta’s output also dropped by 3.2 per cent to 42.3 GWh. — ONA



Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health - invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

S. No.	Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission / Closing Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
1	2609/2025/ MOH/ DGHSDH-5	GENERAL MAINTENANCE WORKS IN DHANK HEALTH CENTER AT AL DHAHIRA GOVERNORATE	Thursday 24/ JUL /2025	Before 9 am on Sunday 24/ AUG /2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in fourth grade	• SME:10 R.O • LO:25 R.O

• Tenders should be submitted online on https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om.

• The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

• For any clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402244, Email id: etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gives a speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. — AFP

EU and Indonesia announce ‘political agreement’

BRUSSELS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Sunday announced a “political agreement” to conclude a long-awaited free trade deal, as US leader Donald Trump upends global commerce. “We’re living in turbulent times and when economic uncertainty meets geopolitical volatility, partners like us must come closer together. So today we’re taking a big step forward in this partnership,” von der Leyen told journalists in Brussels. “I am very pleased to report that we have just reached a political agreement on an ambitious Free Trade Agreement.”

A European Commission statement called Sunday’s agreement a “decisive milestone” towards striking the deal — which is to be concluded in September by EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic and Indonesia’s chief economic minister Airlangga Hartarto.

“There’s a lot of untapped potential in our trade relationship. And therefore this agreement comes at the right time, because the new agreement will open new markets,” von der Leyen said. — AFP

Malaysia ex-PM Mahathir discharged from hospital



Mahathir Mohamad

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad has been discharged from hospital, his office said on Sunday, after being admitted for fatigue following a picnic celebration for his 100th birthday. Mahathir, leader of the Southeast Asian nation for more than two decades, has a history of heart problems and has undergone bypass surgeries. He has been hospitalised repeatedly in recent years, most recently in October for a respiratory infection.

He was under observation at the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur for fatigue-related issues on Sunday, his office said. “Mahathir has been allowed home as of 4:45 pm (0845 GMT),” it said in a statement. A physician who was a member of parliament until 2022, Mahathir drove himself on Sunday to the celebration, which also marked the 99th birthday of his wife, Hasmah Mohd Ali, a day earlier, local media reported. The reports said he cycled for an hour before appearing tired. His birthday was on Thursday. — Reuters

US OFFICIALS DEFEND IMMIGRATION RAID TACTICS

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump’s top immigration officials on Sunday defended the use of aggressive snatch and detain tactics by masked and armed federal agents, days after a federal judge ruled that arrests were being made “based upon race alone.” Trump’s border czar Tom Homan and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem made the administration’s case on the Sunday talk shows, just a day after a farm worker died in California after being injured in a

raid on a legal cannabis farm. District Judge Maame Ewusi-Mensah Frimpong ordered a halt to “roving patrols” targeting suspected undocumented migrants in Los Angeles, saying a person’s race, language or workplace was not sufficient justification. “Physical description cannot be the sole reason to detain and question somebody,” Homan said. But he acknowledged that appearance was one of those factors, and said there were sometimes

“collateral arrests” of innocent people in targeted raids. He said the administration would comply with the judge’s decision but fight it on appeal. Noem called the judge’s ruling “ridiculous” and slammed what she called the “political” nature of the decision. “We always built our operations, our investigations on case work, on knowing individuals that we needed to target because they were criminals,” Noem said. — AFP

Gaza reports 43 dead as truce talks deadlocked

GAZA’S civil defence agency said Israeli air strikes on Sunday killed more than 40 Palestinians, including at a market and a water distribution point, as talks for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas stalled. Delegations from Israel and the Palestinian militant group have now spent a week trying to agree on a temporary truce to halt 21 months of devastating fighting in the Gaza Strip. But on Saturday, each side accused the other of blocking attempts to secure an agreement at the indirect talks in the Qatari capital, Doha.

On the ground, civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said at least 43 people were killed in the latest Israeli strikes, including 11 when a market in Gaza City was hit. Elsewhere, eight children were among the 10 victims of a drone strike at a water point in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza, Bassal said. Israel’s military blamed a technical problem for that strike, saying it had been targeting a member of Hamas ally Islamic Jihad. “As a result of a technical error with the munition, the munition fell dozens of meters from the target,” a statement read. “The incident is under review.”

Reports of casualties were being examined, it added. Khaled Rayyan said that he was woken by the sound of two large explosions after a house was hit in Nuseirat. “Our neighbour and his children were under the rubble,” he said. Another resident, Mahmud Al Shami, called on the negotiators to secure an end to the



Smoke plumes rise from Israeli bombardment in Bureij in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

Eight children were among the 10 victims of a drone strike at a water point in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza, Bassal said. Israel’s military blamed a technical problem for that strike

war. “What happened to us has never happened in the entire history of humanity,” he said. “Enough.” Gaza’s health ministry says that at least 58,026 Palestinians, most of them civilians, have been killed in Israel’s retaliatory campaign. The UN considers those figures reliable. UN agencies on Saturday warned that fuel shortages had reached “critical levels”, threatening to worsen conditions for Gaza’s more than two million people.

Talks to seal a 60-day ceasefire and hostage release were in the balance on Saturday after Israel and Hamas accused each other of trying to block a deal.

Hamas wants the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, but a Palestinian source with knowledge of the talks said Israel had presented plans to maintain troops in more than 40 per cent of

the territory.

The source said Israel wanted to force hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into the south of Gaza “in preparation for forcibly displacing them to Egypt or other countries”. A senior Israeli official said Israel had demonstrated an openness “to flexibility in the negotiations, while Hamas remains intransigent, clinging to positions that prevent the mediators from advancing an agreement”.

Meanwhile, a Gaza-bound boat carrying pro-Palestinian activists and humanitarian aid left Sicily on Sunday, over a month after Israel detained and deported people aboard a previous vessel.

The Handala, operated by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, left the port of Syracuse shortly after 12:00 pm, a journalist saw, carrying about fifteen activists. — AFP



CAMBODIA MARKS UNESCO RECOGNITION

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia held ceremonies across the country on Sunday to celebrate Unesco’s recognition of three former Khmer Rouge sites as World Heritage, honouring their transformation from centres of repression to places of peace and reflection. The Tuol Sleng prison and Choeung Ek killing fields in Phnom Penh, and M-13 prison in Kampong Chhnang province were inscribed as “Cambodian Memorial Sites: From centres of repression to places of peace and reflection” during a Unesco meeting in Paris.

“This is a model for the world, showing the long struggle of Cambodia, reconciliation, the spirit of national unity, finding justice for the victims and building peace,” said interim Culture Minister Hab Touch. — Reuters

BOAT CAPSIZE

Dominicans resume search for migrants



Rescue teams resumed their search in difficult conditions for some 20 migrants missing after a boat capsized off the eastern coast of the Dominican Republic. The death toll from the capsizing rose to six. The boat was headed for the US territory of Puerto Rico carrying between 40 and 50 people, with 17 rescued. The Navy said the migrants “were trying to travel illegally to Puerto Rico” from the eastern end of the Dominican Republic. — AFP

DEFEATING VIOLENCE

Nigeria jails 44 for terrorism financing



Nigeria slapped 44 Boko Haram members with jail terms of up to 30 years for funding terrorist activities. The convicted were among 54 suspects arraigned in four specially-constituted civilian courts set up at a military base in the town of Kainji in central Niger state. The Nigerian military’s 16-year campaign to crush the gunmen in the northeast has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes. — AFP

HOTSPOTS UNDER CONTROL

Syria contains wildfires after 10 days



Syria’s civil defence agency on Sunday said wildfires in the country’s west, which have burned vast tracts of forest and farmland and forced evacuations, had been brought under control after 10 days. In a statement, the agency said that “with the spread of the fires halted and the fire hotspots brought under control on all fronts”, teams on the ground were working to cool down the affected areas while monitoring any signs of reignition. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Chancellor Friedrich Merz delivers a speech during a session of the German Bundestag. — AFP

MERZ URGES GOVT UNITY AFTER ROW OVER TOP JUDGES

ARNSBERG: German conservative Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Sunday praised the cooperation with his Social Democratic coalition partners, after a spat within the government led to a delay of the appointment of three new judges to the country’s top court. “We even work really well together with the Social Democrats in this coalition,” Merz said while visiting a local festival in his hometown of Arnsberg, some 45 kilometres east of Dortmund. “And that also shows that the political centre in our country is capable of working together, governing together and ensuring that our democracy remains stable in the middle,” he said. It comes after a confirmation vote in parliament was postponed on Friday after Merz’s conservatives unexpectedly withdrew support for a candidate to the country’s Constitutional Court backed by the Social Democrats (SPD), the junior partner in government.

Merz, who has been in power since May, has often promised that his government would avoid the constant coalition squabbles that characterized the term in office of his predecessor, Olaf Scholz. The new chancellor is likely also to be asked about the dispute during broadcaster ARD’s widely watched summer interview. — dpa

THOUSANDS ATTEND POPE 'S PRAYER



Thousands of people streamed to a small Italian hilltop village not far from Rome on Sunday, to hear Pope Leo deliver his first Angelus prayer from his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. “I am happy to be among you... and thank you all for your warm welcome,” the Pope declared, standing outside the gates of the Apostolic Palace, flanked by two Swiss Guards in full dress uniform. Undeterred by rainy weather, thousands of people crowded the streets of the village, perched on a hilltop and overlooking a lake, to get a glimpse of the new pope as he delivered for the first time the Angelus prayer. — AFP

AUSTRALIA STRESSES SOVEREIGNTY IN ADVANCE TO ANY CONFLICT

SYDNEY: Australia will not commit troops in advance to any conflict, Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy said on Sunday, responding to a report that the Pentagon has pressed its ally to clarify what role it would play if the US and China went to war over Taiwan. Australia prioritises its sovereignty and “we don’t discuss hypotheticals”, Conroy said in an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. “The decision to commit

Australian troops to a conflict will be made by the government of the day, not in advance but by the government of the day,” he said. Elbridge Colby, the US under-secretary of defence for policy, has been pressing Australian and Japanese officials on what they would do in a Taiwan conflict, although the US does not offer a blank cheque guarantee to defend Taiwan. Colby posted on X that the Department of Defense is implementing President Donald

Trump’s “America First” agenda of restoring deterrence, which includes “urging allies to step up their defense spending and other efforts related to our collective defense”. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, speaking in Shanghai at the start of a six-day visit to China that is likely to focus on security and trade, said Canberra did not want any change to the status quo on Taiwan. — Reuters

North Korea offers Russia full support on Ukraine

NORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un offered Moscow his full support for its war in Ukraine during talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Pyongyang state media said on Sunday. Lavrov’s visit to North Korea was the latest in a series of high-profile trips by top Moscow officials as both countries deepen military and political ties amid Russia’s offensive against Kyiv. Pyongyang sent thousands of troops to Russia’s Kursk region to oust Ukrainian forces and has also provided the Russian army with artillery shells and missiles. Moscow said Lavrov’s talks with Kim were held in a “warm comradely atmosphere.”

Lavrov expressed “sincere gratitude to Pyongyang” for its role in Kursk and support of Russia’s operation, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement. Moscow also said the two sides “agreed” that the West was to blame for “the growing tension” on the Korean peninsula. The ministry earlier posted a video on Telegram of the two men shaking hands and greeting each other with a hug. It said the talks were held in Wonsan, a city on North Korea’s east coast where a massive resort was opened earlier this month — one of leader Kim’s pet projects. Kim told Lavrov that Pyongyang was “ready to unconditionally support and encourage all the measures taken by the Russian leadership as regards the tackling of the root cause of the Ukrainian crisis”, KCNA said. The North Korean leader also expressed a “firm belief that the Russian army and people would surely win victory in accomplishing the sacred cause of defending the dignity and basic interests of the country”. He lauded Putin’s “outstanding leadership”, the report said. The two men otherwise discussed “important matters for faithfully implementing the agreements made at the historic DPRK-Russia summit talks in June 2024”, KCNA said, referring to North Korea by its official acronym. Lavrov told Kim that



Kim Jong Un and Sergei Lavrov attend a meeting in Wonsan. — Reuters

Putin “hopes for continued direct contacts in the very near future”, according to Russia’s TASS news agency. He left Pyongyang and landed in Beijing on Sunday to attend a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Foreign Ministers’ Council, TASS reported on its Telegram account. Ahead of Lavrov’s recent visit, Russia announced that it would begin twice-a-week flights between Moscow and Pyongyang. Lavrov lauded Wonsan as “a good tourist attraction”, adding: “We hope it will be popular not only with local citizens, but also with Russians.” KCNA also issued a statement on Sunday on the meeting between Lavrov and his North Korean counterpart Choe Son Hui, held a day earlier in the coastal city, saying that bilateral ties were becoming an “invincible alliance”. Moscow “expressed its firm support for the DPRK side in its just efforts for defending the security of the state” during the meeting, KCNA said. In return, Choe demonstrated “full sympathy and support for all the measures taken by the Russian government to remove the root cause of the Ukrainian conflict”. TASS earlier reported that Lavrov thanked the “heroic” North Korean soldiers who have been deployed to aid Russia during

the ministerial meeting. Around 600 North Korean soldiers have been killed and thousands more wounded fighting for Russia, Seoul has said. North Korea only confirmed it had deployed troops to support Russia’s war in April, and admitted its soldiers had been killed in combat. Both sides “emphasised their determination to jointly counter the hegemonic aspirations of extra-regional players, which are leading to escalating tensions in Northeast Asia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region”, Russia’s foreign ministry said. The two heavily sanctioned nations signed a military deal last year, including a mutual defence clause, during a rare visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Pyongyang. Meanwhile, Russia said on Sunday it took another village in the west of Ukraine’s Donetsk region, as its troops advance towards the neighbouring Dnipropetrovsk region. Russia’s defence ministry said Russian troops had captured the village of Myrne, calling the village by its Soviet name “Karl Marx”. It lies close to the administrative border between the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions. — AFP

Macron to raise French defence targets

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron is to set new French defence targets in the face of a menacing Russia and a potential United States disengagement from Europe, his office said. “Defence efforts” must be made in the face of mounting threats and a disintegrating world order, Elysee officials said ahead of the president’s 7:00 pm (17:00 GMT) speech to the armed forces, traditionally held on the eve of France’s national Bastille Day holiday. Despite France’s difficult budgetary situation, the president’s announcements will be “major”, they said. French military and security officials have been warning of global threats weighing on France, with Defence Chief of Staff Chief Thierry Burkhard saying on Friday that Russia posed a “durable” threat to Europe and that the “rank of European countries in tomorrow’s world” was being decided in Ukraine, attacked by Russia in 2022. He also warned of the consequences of a diminished US commitment to Europe, along with cyber threats, disinformation



French President Emmanuel Macron

campaigns and the risk of terror attacks. “We have to take account of the fact that there has been a change in strategic parameters,” he said. Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu weighed in, telling the La Tribune weekly newspaper that “it’s our job to provide answers”. France needed to make “a new effort” if it wanted to “depend on nobody” in the future, the minister said. France’s defence budget has already increased sharply since Macron took power,

rising from 32.2 billion euros (\$37.6 billion at current rates) in 2017 to 50.5 billion currently, and is projected to reach 67 billion euros in 2030. Any major defence spending boost could, however, threaten French efforts to cut deficits and reduce its debt mountain, amid pressure from the EU Commission on Paris to impose more fiscal discipline. The servicing of France’s debt alone will cost the Treasury 62 billion euros this year. But Prime Minister Francois Bayrou, who on Tuesday is to outline his budget plan for 2026, has declared the defence budget to be “sacrosanct” and exempt from budgetary cuts. Several Nato countries are boosting their military spending, after the alliance’s members agreed last month to spend five per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on security. Britain aims to increase its defence budget to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027, and to 3.0 per cent after 2029. Germany plans to reach a defence budget of 162 billion euros by 2029, equivalent to 3.5 per cent of its GDP, while Poland already dedicates 4.7 per cent of GDP to defence. — AFP

المركز الوطني
للإحصاء
والمعلومات

انترنشنال
سلفطنة عمان

NATIONAL CENTRE
FOR STATISTICS
& INFORMATION

Enhancing Knowledge
SULTANATE OF OMAN

ANNOUNCEMENT

The National Center for Statistics and Information announces the following tender: -

Tender No.	Tender Name	Deadline for Purchasing Documents	Deadline for Submitting Documents
17/2025	Implementing a household income and expenditure survey using artificial intelligence project	31/7/2025	21/8/2025

- Local and International companies specialized in this field, who have obtained a valid registration certificate from the Tender Board and wish to obtain the terms and specifications documents, should do so through the website (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of publication of this announcement until the date mentioned above.
- For inquiries related to technical support for the electronic tendering system, please contact (24402200) or email (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om)

OPINION

New travel trends redefining summer escapes



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

THE peak of the summer season is now here, with khareef officially opening in Salalah, schools and colleges finally closed, and an unrelenting sun to escape from. For those who can travel, going away can be reinvigorating and inspiring. But increasingly, trends show that traditional travel to tourist places is now taking a back seat, with unusual experiences and off-beat destinations being the preferred choices.

As the Covid pandemic waned, there was a spurt in tourism which continues unabated. What has changed, however, is the destination and the purpose of travel.

While Europe has long being the preferred tourist destination, it is not really the top choice any more, especially in peak summer when heatwaves and population density makes it less than appealing. This is in addition to locals in cities like Venice and Barcelona actively dissuading tourists from cramming their roads and infrastructure.

According to established travel sites, the preference in travel has now shifted to creating experience. This could be culinary,

cultural or even spiritual.

For example, a BBC report suggested that younger travellers were looking for unusual experiences which would buck the trend. These are also termed noctourism and calmcations.

The former focuses on nighttime travel experiences, including star gazing and northern light viewing from the Arctic. But it can also be frequenting late-opening museums and bioluminescent beaches, both of which offer a different perspective of a well-known place, but at a different time.

Another primary purpose of travel is to get away from it all – the noise of urban spaces, the overconsumption of typical tourist sites and the pressure to participate in tourist activities. Solutions for escape include camps that cater to different levels of luxury and offer different facilities. Whether in the snows of Norway or the jungles of Kenya, there are spaces where one could just listen to the voice of nature.

Not everybody wants to travel far in a limited time. And not everybody can afford it. That is why short distance travel has become popular, especially among those who prefer

A new wave of adventure is inspiring trends like noctourism - discovering destinations after dark - and calmcations, escapes dedicated to rest, mindfulness and deep relaxation

multiple short holidays than one long one. Short holidays are made more possible now with budget airlines and Airbnbs which offer competitive prices. This allows the budget conscious traveller to plan well ahead of time and make use of any offers that are given.

While many resorts and tourist places attract different kinds of tourists, the more family conscious travellers prefer packages which are curated individually. There is a substantial rise in tourism from the Middle East to countries which are culturally familiar, like Malaysia and Indonesia, which offer family friendly atmosphere and cater to food preferences as well.

Much of travel today is about sharing experiences on social media. That is why most hotels and resorts have highly decorated exteriors which act as backdrops for vertical shots on mobile phones.

Of course, there are those who may not like to travel, or are unable to do so for many reasons. That in itself is not a limitation anymore. Books, videos and podcasts more than compensate for the physical journey while keeping in touch with current travel trends.

DANISH CHEF SERVES UP GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY BY BIKE

CAMILLE BAS-WOHLERT

Hopping off his custom-built bicycle-turned-portable kitchen, Danish chef Morten Kryger Wulff started whipping up a feast of tantalising, original dishes -- served with a generous side of nature.

The 56-year-old chef, a veteran of prestigious kitchens across Europe, got the idea more than two decades ago to take his cooking to the great outdoors, leading customers on a gastronomic bike ride through Copenhagen -- with delectable food served at every stop.

On a sunny weekday in July, grilled seaweed, dill cream, bean fricassee, Nordic pizza and blackcurrant ice cream were on the menu for the ride from the Danish capital's harbour to the Amager Nature Park.

"This is as close as I can come to nature, cooking-wise, in a chef way," said Wulff. The tour lasts about four hours total, covering three to five kilometres.

It is broken into bike rides of about 15 minutes each, in between which the chef gets off his bike, unfolds his table and starts cooking.

"You take away the walls of a traditional restaurant and you expose yourself to the city and to the elements you're in," he said.

In his cargo bike -- a contraption he designed himself, measuring over two metres long and weighing 130 kilograms -- he brings everything he needs: a foldable work surface, a refrigerator, a gas burner and all his ingredients.

"It is impressive to watch him cook from that small kitchen, to see how compressed everything is," said Pernille Martensson, a Copenhagen local who joined the tour with her husband to celebrate his birthday. The route is "part of the menu," said Wulff.

"For example, the dish with fish or shellfish or seaweed are typically served by the channels," he said.

On the docks, he sautes shrimp before serving them in shells.

As Wulff and his group gradually move away from Copenhagen's city centre, the chef -- who has worked at The Savoy hotel in London and Geneva's InterContinental -- shares stories about the city and the project. It all began in 2002, when he was kicked out of a municipal park for trying to have a barbecue with friends, and decided to start cooking outdoors legally.

Wulff takes an ecologically gentle approach. "The food we get for these tours is, of course, all harvested and bought locally," he said.

"Bicycle, it's the most sensible vehicle, the smartest vehicle. It does not use any energy. You can have a battery, but it's pedal-powered," he said. — AFP

When novels mattered

I'M old I'm old enough to remember when novelists were big-time. When I was in college in the 1980s, new novels from Philip Roth, Toni Morrison, Saul Bellow, John Updike, Alice Walker and others were cultural events. There were reviews and counter-reviews and arguments about the reviews.

It's not just my nostalgia that's inventing this. In the mid- to late 20th century, literary fiction attracted huge audiences. If you look at the Publishers Weekly list of bestselling novels of 1962, you find works by Katherine Anne Porter, Herman Wouk and J.D. Salinger. The next year you find books by Mary McCarthy and John O'Hara. From a recent Substack essay called "The Cultural Decline of Literary Fiction" by Owen Yingling, I learned that E.L. Doctorow's "Ragtime" was the bestselling book of 1975, Roth's "Portnoy's Complaint" was the bestselling book of 1969, Vladimir Nabokov's "Invitation to a Beheading" was No. 3 in 1958, and Boris Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago" was No. 1.

Today it's largely Colleen Hoover and fantasy novels and genre fiction. I have no problem with genre and popular books, but where is today's F Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, George Eliot, Jane Austen or David Foster Wallace? I'm not saying novels are worse now. I am saying that literature plays a much smaller role in our national life, and this has a dehumanising effect on our culture. There used to be a sense that novelists and artists served as consciences of the nation, as sages and prophets, who could stand apart and tell us who we are. As sociologist C. Wright Mills once put it, "The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely lively things."

Why has literature become less central to American life? The most obvious culprit is the Internet. It has destroyed everybody's attention spans. I find this somewhat persuasive but not mostly so. The decline in literary fiction began



DAVID BROOKS

The writer is an author and commentator for The New York Times

Even a great TV series doesn't give you access to the interior life of another human being the way literature does. Novels can capture the ineffable but all-powerful zeitgeist of an era with a richness that screens and visual media can't match.

in the 1980s and 1990s, before the Internet was dominant. People still have attention span enough to read the classics. George Orwell's "1984" (an essential guide for the current moment) has sold over 30 million books and Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" has sold over 20 million.

People still have the attention span to read a few contemporary writers — Sally Rooney and Zadie Smith, for example — and a sprinkling of reliably left-wing literary novels: Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and Barbara Kingsolver's "Demon Copperhead." It's just that interest in contemporary writers overall has collapsed. I would tell a different story about the decline of literary fiction, and it is a story about social pressure and conformity. What qualities mark nearly every great cultural moment? Confidence and audacity. Look at Renaissance art or Russian or Victorian novels. I would say there has been a general loss in confidence and audacity across Western culture over the past 50 years.

In the 1970s, artists and writers were attempting big, audacious things. In literature there was Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" and Saul Bellow's "Humboldt's Gift." In movies there was "The Godfather" — I and II — and "Apocalypse Now." Rock stars were writing long ambitious anthems: "Stairway to Heaven," "Free Bird" and "Bohemian Rhapsody." Even the most influential journalists were audacious: Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson. Everything feels commercialised, bureaucratised and less freewheeling today.

Furthermore, the literary world is a progressive world, and progressivism — forgive me, left-wing readers — has a conformity problem. Even more than on the right, there are incredible social pressures in left-wing circles to not say anything objectionable. (On the right, by contrast, it seems that you get rewarded the more objectionable things you can say.)

Conformity is fine in some professions, like being a congressional aide. You're not being

paid to have your own opinions. But it is not fine in the writing business. The whole point is to be an independent thinker, in the social theorist Irving Howe's words, to stand "firm and alone." Given the standards of their time, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain and James Baldwin had incredible guts and their work is great because of their nonconformity and courage.

If the social pressures right around you are powerful, you're going to write for the coterie of people who consciously or unconsciously enforce them. If you write in fear of social exile, your villains will suck. You'll assign them a few one-dimensional malevolences, but you won't make them compelling and, in their dark way, seductive. You won't want to be seen as endorsing views or characters that might get you cancelled.

Most important, if you don't have raw social courage, you're not going to get out of your little bubble and do the reporting necessary to understand what's going on in the lives of people unlike yourself — in that vast boiling cauldron that is America.

We have lived, for at least the past decade, in a time of immense public controversy. Our interior lives are being battered by the shock waves of public events. There has been a comprehensive loss of faith. I would love to read big novels capturing these psychological and spiritual storms. And yet sometimes when I peek into the literary world, it feels like a subculture off to the side.

Literature and drama have a unique ability to communicate what makes other people tick. Even a great TV series doesn't give you access to the interior life of another human being the way literature does.

Novels can capture the ineffable but all-powerful zeitgeist of an era with a richness that screens and visual media can't match. It strikes me as highly improbable that after nearly 600 years the power of printed words on a page is going to go away. I would put my money on literature's comeback, and that will be a great blow to the forces of dehumanisation all around us. — The New York Times

The world hears a cry from Gaza



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

AROUND the world, there are cities that breathe history while others bleed it. Gaza experiences both. Today, the wind that moves through Gaza’s crushed streets carries more than dust; it carries stories, but without endings. These stories tell of a grandmother’s last prayer, a father’s grief and a child’s shoes beneath a collapsed roof. Gaza has become a poem written in fire and silence. The sun still rises there, but it brings no light, only reveals what the night tried to hide: the broken bricks where a bakery once stood, the twisted metal of a child’s wheelchair and the silence in places where laughter once lived. To some, Gaza is just a place on a map. To others, it is a wound that won’t heal; rather a scar stitched with years of blockade, bombing and betrayal. There are those who say, “It’s complicated.” But to the child trapped under ruins, nothing is complicated. To the mother who wraps her daughter in a white sheet instead of a wedding dress, nothing is complicated. For the people of Gaza, this war is not merely a current crisis, it is a reflection of decades of displacement, military occupation and homelessness. The Gaza Strip, home to over two million people, has lived under a strict blockade for ages. This has suffocated

its economy and turned it into what many describe as an “open-air prison.” The war has only deepened this sense of isolation and despair. What does it mean to be born into war, to grow up surrounded by fences and drones, knowing the sky is more likely to bring death than rain? The cries of children, the wails of mothers and the silence of crushed homes rise like smoke from a land overwhelmed. For the people of Gaza, this is not a moment in time, it is a continuing blockade, where hope is limited like water and every dawn is just another surprise. This is not just another chapter in a long conflict; it is a humanitarian disaster marked by profound suffering, scarred families and a collective trauma no statistics can capture. The people of Gaza no longer count days; they count losses: a son, a sister, a street, a future and more. Israel, armed with unmatched military power, claims the right to defend itself. But when a hospital becomes a battlefield, when journalists are buried beneath their own headlines, we must ask: what exactly is being defended? Worldwide protests have erupted in solidarity with Gaza. Millions have taken to the streets — not for political gain, but out of shared sorrow over images of children pulled from ruins, of families huddled among wreckage. Yet

Gaza bleeds and the world turns away. But Gaza speaks through the eyes of children who have stopped asking when it will end because they no longer believe in endings, only survival.

despite global outcry, political action has been slow, and repeated calls for ceasefires have been drowned out by geopolitical interests. The war in Gaza has exposed not only the fragility of peace in the region, but also the moral failure of the international community to uphold justice and human rights. What is needed now is not more weapons, but a genuine commitment to ending the cycles of violence that have plagued Palestinians for generations. The world has been watching Gaza burn. Every moment it fails to act — every leader who chooses politics over principle, every silence that follows another massacre — is a moral scar on the face of humanity. And yet, from the chambers of the United Nations to the halls of Western parliaments, there is only a deafening quiet. A silence not born of ignorance, but of deliberate choice. In the stillness of night, beneath a sky scarred by drones and rockets, Gaza bleeds and the world turns away. But Gaza speaks through the eyes of children who have stopped asking when it will end because they no longer believe in endings, only survival. History will be remembered these days. The question is: will it remember a world that stood by silently or one that found the courage to act?

Rewriting the past: Indonesia’s history books spook scholars

MARCHIO GORBIANO

The Indonesian government’s plans to issue new history books have sparked fears that mention of deadly riots in 1998 targeting mostly ethnic Chinese in the country will be scrubbed from the text. The 10-volume account was ordered by the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, an ex-general accused of abducting activists in the unrest that preceded dictator Suharto’s fall, claims he denies. Scholars fear his government could use the exercise to rewrite history and cover up past abuses. Draft volume summaries and a chapter outline seen by AFP do not include any specific section on the 1998 violence. A summary of Suharto’s rule in the volume dedicated to him only mentions how “student demonstrations... became a factor” in his resignation. “The writing was flawed since the beginning,” said Andi Achdian, historian at Jakarta’s National University, who has seen the outline. “It has a very strong tendency to whitewash history.” Suharto ruled Indonesia with an iron fist for more than three decades after grabbing power in the wake of a 1965-6 massacre. The culture minister overseeing the government’s history project, Fadli Zon, told lawmakers last week the account “does not discuss May ‘98... because it’s small”. Neither does it promise to include most of the “gross human rights violations” acknowledged by former president Joko Widodo in 2023. Jajat Burhanudin, a project editor, contradicted Fadli and dismissed concerns, saying the new volumes would include 1998 events, with the draft outline just a “trigger for discussion”. Officials say the new historical account is needed to strengthen Indonesian identity, but warned that any omission about its darkest past will raise eyebrows over objectivity. “This project risks erasing uncomfortable truths,” said Usman Hamid, executive director of Amnesty International Indonesia. The project involves 113 academics including historians, but at least one of them has resigned. Archaeologist Harry Truman Simanjuntak said he quit in a dispute over language -- the term “early history” was used instead of “prehistory” for Indonesia’s ancient civilisation. Fadli told lawmakers the phrase was avoided because it was created by Indonesia’s former Dutch rulers. The furore around the project has caused some opposition lawmakers and critics to call for its suspension or cancellation. Activist Maria Catarina Sumarsih, whose son was killed in a military crackdown after Suharto’s fall, accused the writers of warping the past. “The government is deceiving the public... especially young people,” she said. Others said documenting Indonesia’s past was best left to academics. — AFP

France & Oman: Common vision, shared ambition

ON the occasion of the French National Day, I would like to express my gratitude to the Omani authorities and the Omani people for their warm welcome, as well as to the French community and to all the friends of France in Oman. I took up my duties in this friendly country one year ago, and since then I have experienced every single day the friendship between France and the Oman, between the people of France and the people of Oman. After arriving in Oman in August 2024, I have quickly been given the honour to present my credentials to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude for his warm welcome and his guidance on deepening the historic and fraternal bilateral relationship between our two countries. I would also like to extend my most sincere thanks to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, for his constant support and friendship, as well as to all the representatives of the government in Oman, who spare no effort to further enhance the excellent relationship between France and Oman. Same as Oman, France remains committed to the resolution of conflicts through negotiation, a position that has been reiterated by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, with regard to Ukraine, Iran and Gaza. That is why in the recent period, the French President has called twice by telephone His Majesty the Sultan, in particular to thank him for the role played by the country in the release of a French national detained in Iran. Indeed, international law remains our compass, thus I expressed France’s full support for the negotiation processes that were conducted by the Omani authorities under the aegis of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, between Iran and the US. I also reiterate France’s call for an end to the tragedy of the



NABIL
HAJLAOUI

The author is Ambassador of France to Oman

Th cooperation is also being strengthened year by year in many other fields like education, justice, health and space

Palestinian population in Gaza, for the immediate resumption of humanitarian aid distribution and for the release of all hostages. We must give both Israelis and Palestinians a political perspective that will allow peaceful coexistence and security for all. It is in this spirit that a conference will be held in New York on the two-state solution, following a French initiative supported by its Arab and international partners. These French positions were also expressed by a high-profile parliamentary delegation from the France-Gulf Friendship Group, which met, in Muscat, with the highest figures in the Omani legislative sphere last April. The past year has also been very fruitful and active in terms of developing economic relations, strategic cooperation, and scientific and cultural cooperation between France and Oman. Recently, French companies such as TotalEnergies and EDF Power Solutions have invested 2 billion euros in Oman in key energy sectors in support of the Oman Vision 2040. In May 2025, the MARSALNG project in Suhar was inaugurated, representing the largest foreign investment of the year in Oman. More than forty French companies in all major sectors are present in Oman, investing and contributing to the development of the Oman’s economy and the creation of jobs for Omanis. These elements gave us the opportunity to host in October 2024 an important mission of MEDEF International, France’s largest business association. The mission was composed of numerous French companies interested in the opportunities offered by the Omani economy, which is resolutely committed to an unprecedented diversification. It is also in support of a closer economic cooperation that we had the honour, in early 2025, of welcoming in Oman a delegation from the Normandy Region, led by the President of this region

and including many business representatives, who forged promising links with public and private companies of Oman and strengthened equestrian cooperation between France and Oman, both of which excel in this field. Our strategic and defence cooperation is also very intense: the visit of the Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, who met his Omani counterpart in early 2025, was an opportunity to reinforce the excellence of our relationship of trust and to renew France’s commitment both in terms of reciprocal training and operational cooperation. Our cooperation is also being strengthened year by year in many other fields like education with the establishment of higher education scholarships in France, co-financed by both countries; medicine with Omani doctors being sent to France to specialise; justice with a significant increase in cooperation between magistrates, particularly in training and exchange of expertise; health with the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding between French and Omani institutions in cancer treatment; and space with the positioning of very high-level French offers in the satellite sector, a particularly promising field in Oman. France in Oman relies mainly on its diplomatic team, as well as on the French-Omani Centre, the French International School in Muscat, the French-Omani Friendship Association, the French Foreign Trade Committee and the French-Omani joint business council for raising high our common ambitions and shared values. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them for their commitment to fostering excellent relations between our two countries. It is therefore with pleasure and pride that I extend my sincerest wishes for success and prosperity to all our Omani friends and our fellow citizens residing in Oman.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



OMAN CRICKET SEASON BEGINS

MUSCAT: Domestic cricket is one of the key pillars which showcases the depth of cricket in Oman and the recent rise of Oman Cricket (OC) at the international level has a lot to do with the versatile competition and robust structure of domestic cricket in the league. Following the summer break, Oman Cricket is set to get the ball rolling with the 2025-26 season set to resume from August 15 for Premier Division with the exciting Oman D20 and September 5 for other senior teams.

OC has begun the process of teams' registration for the new season and the doors opened for registration this weekend. Interested teams may register before or by August 3 for all divisions and the last date of players' registration is August 10. For the registration, teams can do it online on [www.omancricket.org](#), registrations or contact Zeeshan Siddique (+968 92204745) for any related queries.

OC Chief Development Officer (CDO) Duleep Mendis hopes for an exciting season and said: "We have seen an improvement in the quality of cricket being played in the domestic cricket leagues. We have seen great progress from the domestic teams to rise through the ranks. Furthermore, we have been able to pick a few new players in the national teams based on their performance in the domestic league. We hope to have another entertaining season with intense and closely fought matches." Last season, Oman Cricket witnessed the participation of a total of 60+ teams across all divisions, beginning from the Premier to the lowest I division.

AL BALUSHI NAMED AS INDOOR HANDBALL TEAM COACH



NABIL BIN HASSAN AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT: The Oman Handball Association (OHA) announced during a board meeting took place on Sunday and chaired by Chairman Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, appointment of Nabil bin Hassan al Balushi

as national head coach of the senior men's indoor handball team. The decision came as part of the Association's preparations for the Asian Men's Handball Championship which is set to be held in Kuwait in January 2026 and will also serve as the qualifier for the 2026 IHF World Championship in Germany.

Nabil al Balushi previously served as assistant coach under Algerian Coach Mourad Bouzbet during the 2022 edition of the Asian Championship in Saudi Arabia. His promotion to head coach reflects OHA's strategy to elevate local technical talent and entrust national teams to experienced Omani professionals.

The board has also granted Al Balushi the authority to appoint his own assistant coaching staff, providing him with the flexibility to form a strong technical staff capable of leading Oman to success in upcoming regional and international challenges. In addition to the coaching appointment, the OHF announced the following key support roles for the senior team. Anwar bin Mohammed al Balushi named as Director of National Indoor Handball Teams while Ahmed al Jassasi assigned as Team Manager. These appointments aim to ensure a fully integrated and well-structured technical and administrative setup for the national team's upcoming campaigns.

The board also confirmed the continuity of the current technical staff for the Oman U-19 Indoor Handball Team, led by head coach Yahya al Maashari and assistant coach Hassan al Maamari. Ahmed al Jassasi will also continue as team manager in this category.

Oman finish fifth after close battle with UAE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

THE Oman U-16 national basketball team concluded its campaign in the Gulf regional qualifiers for the Asian Championship with a dramatic 65-69 loss to the UAE in their final match, held at the Bahrain Basketball Association Arena in Umm Al Hassam, Manama.

Oman approached the game with a defensive mindset, while the UAE team imposed their rhythm early on with fast breaks and inside scoring, ending the first quarter ahead 24-17.

In the second quarter, the UAE continued to dominate as Oman struggled with defensive coverage and transition play. The UAE extended their lead, winning the quarter 17-11 and closing the first half with a 41-28 advantage.

The third quarter saw a clear improvement in Oman's performance. The team increased its offensive intensity, particularly through Adam al Hinaï and Saif al Yahyaei, who helped narrow the gap with swift movement and accurate shooting. Oman won the third quarter 24-15.

The fourth quarter was evenly contested. Oman pushed hard to equalise and even led briefly, capitalising on the UAE's physical fatigue. Oman scored 11 points to the UAE's 7, bringing the game to a 63-63 tie at the end of regulation and forcing overtime.

In the extra period, Oman rushed several plays, resulting in missed opportunities, while the UAE capitalised on their chances and scored 6 points to Oman's 2, securing a hard-fought 69-65 victory.

For Oman, standout player Adam al Hinaï scored 25 points, followed by Saif al Yahyaei with 12 points, Sami al Busaidy with 11, and Elias al Obaidani with 6. On the UAE side, Hussein Fadel led the scoring with 23 points, while Hamdan al Shaddadi contributed 11.

In the second match of the final day, Saudi Arabia defeated Kuwait 73-50, securing qualification alongside Bahrain.

With this result, Oman finished the qualifiers in fifth place. From the Gulf region, Bahrain qualified with a perfect record of 8 points from all wins, while Saudi Arabia came second with 7 points



For Oman, Adam al Hinaï scored 25 points

from three wins and one loss. Both teams have now secured their spots in the Asian U-16 Championship, which will take place in Mongolia this August.

Oman's 12 player squad for the qualifiers included: Saddam al Shezawi, Khuzaymah al Shibli, Rashid al Isaei, Abdulrahim al Rushdi, Elias al Obaidani, Al Mulhim al Obaidani, Abdulsamad al Subhi, Muhannad al Batashi, Adam al Hinaï,

Jayyed al Kindi, Saif al Yahyaei, and Sami al Busaidy.

The official delegation also included: Abubakar al Jahwari, Vice-President of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA); Saeed al Habsi, Acting Secretary-General; head coach Zouhair al Ayashi; assistant coach Ali al Balushi; team manager Ghassan al Busaidy; and physiotherapist Amer al Zaidi

Oman sailors to train in Poland for Asian Games

MUSCAT: Oman's 49er Performance Team, supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), will be competing in the 49er, 49erFX, and Nacra 17 Open Polish Championships as part of preparations for the Asian Games 2026. With the Games getting underway in just over 12 months' time, the duo of Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi will travel to Gdynia, Poland, for five days of racing from 14-18 June 2025 with two days of practice before competition begins.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail's Head Coach Performance, said "Participation in the 49er, 49erFX, and Nacra 17 Open Polish Championships is a key component of our strategy for the 49er Performance Team. Our ultimate goal is to win a medal in sailing for Oman at the Olympic Games, and with the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games just over three years away, we have



Archive photo from the 2023 Asian Olympic qualifier

to expose our sailors to a high calibre of competition in order to improve. These championships are another opportunity to improve, to learn and to fulfil this objective."

Jacek Nowal, 49er Coach, added, "This is an important step on our road to the Asian

Games 2026 in Japan. Our sailors have the opportunity to compete against and learn from some of the very best in the world in a very high-level championship. We aim to use this event to acclimatise our sailors to the levels we are aiming for, to maximise their strengths and learn to

overcome the challenges most commonly encountered on the water ahead of the Asian Games 2026, which is likely to be a qualification event for the LA28 Olympic Games." The 49er, 49erFX, and Nacra 17 Open Polish Championships are organised by the Polish Yachting Association. A maximum of 15 races will be sailed across the five days of the event, with the medal races scheduled for Friday 18 July 2025.

The event is held as part of the 26th annual Gdynia Sailing Days festival, one of the largest and most prestigious sailing festivals in Europe - lasting 20 days. Located on the Baltic Sea, the port city boasts a rich maritime history and a growing reputation as a sailing destination. Gdynia will also host the World Sailing Championships in 2027, which will also be a qualification event for the LA28 Olympic Games.

SHORTTAKES



Marquez celebrates after winning the sprint race. — AFP

MARQUEZ BATTLES BACK TO WIN GERMAN GP

SACHSENRING: Ducati’s Marc Marquez overcame a nightmare start to snatch a dramatic last-lap victory in treacherous, wet conditions to claim a record-breaking 10th sprint win of the MotoGP season at the German Grand Prix on Saturday.

The Ducati rider had plummeted to fourth after going wide at turn one despite securing a seventh pole position of the season, but he mounted a masterful comeback before overtaking Aprilia’s Marco Bezzecchi on the final lap.

Yamaha’s Fabio Quartararo finished third to complete the podium while VR46 Racing’s Fabio Di Giannantonio and Pramac Racing’s Jack Miller rounded out the top five.

The victory saw Marquez become the first rider to win 10 sprints in a season as he extended his championship lead to 78 points over his brother Alex, who finished eighth. “In the beginning of the race, I was struggling. I did a mistake on turn one, the exit on the start. And then I lost some positions,” Marquez said.

■ MARC MARQUEZ WINS 10TH SPRINT OF SEASON

“But then, step-by-step I got the rhythm, like in the practice... I’m happy because we take 12 points again in the sprint. But if tomorrow is wet (during the race), we need to brake a bit more before overtaking somebody.”

■ MARQUEZ EXTENDS CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD TO 78 POINTS

Marquez shot off the line with what seemed like a dream getaway, only to surrender the lead immediately as he went wide on turn one and fell to fourth while Bezzecchi seized control. As Marquez looked to move up the pack, he had Di Giannantonio to contend with as the VR46 Racing rider overtook him twice in a dogged battle for fourth place.

Di Giannantonio’s teammate Franco Morbidelli had moved up to second but he crashed heavily on lap four and the Italian rider was thrown off his bike and sent tumbling across the gravel.

Morbidelli was diagnosed with a severe contusion to the left collarbone and was taken to hospital for further checks.

As Marquez picked up the pace, he battled past Di Giannantonio and then set his sights on Quartararo, who had made a brilliant start despite being seventh on the grid. — Reuters



Ben Stokes celebrates with Ben Duckett after taking the wicket of Akash Deep at Lord’s on Sunday. — AFP

ENGLAND BOUNCE BACK AGAINST INDIA

CHASING a target of 193, India ended Day 4 in deep trouble at 58 for 4 in their second innings against England in the third Test at Lord’s on Sunday.

At stumps, KL Rahul stood firm on 33 (not out), while night-watchman Akash Deep was bowled by England skipper Ben Stokes off the final delivery of the day — a blow that left India trailing by 135 runs heading into a tense final day.

India’s top order faltered under pressure, with Yashasvi Jaiswal falling for a duck, Karun Nair dismissed for 14, and captain Shubman Gill managing only 6 as England’s bowlers made early inroads in the low-scoring chase.

Earlier in the day, England were dismissed for 192 in their second innings, lasting 62.1 overs. Washington Sundar led India’s bowling effort with a superb spell of 4 for 22, while Mohammed Siraj (2/31) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/38) picked up two wickets apiece. Akash Deep chipped in with one.

Resuming the third session at 175 for 6, England lost their final four wickets for just 17 runs. Washington struck early after tea to remove Ben Stokes for 33 and later wrapped up the innings by bowling Shoaib Bashir (2). Bumrah claimed the wickets of Chris Woakes (10) and Brydon Carse (1) to complete a



Washington Sundar celebrates with Ravindra Jadeja after taking the wicket of England’s Joe Root. — AFP

disciplined effort by the Indian attack.

Sundar took four wickets, including the prize scalps of Joe Root, Jamie Smith and England captain Ben Stokes.

Root and Stokes kept India at bay for much of the afternoon’s play after coming together shortly before lunch with England in trouble at 87-4.

But a partnership worth 67 ended when Root, who made a hundred in the first innings, was bowled behind his legs for 40 after missing a sweep against Sundar.

New batsman Smith’s three previous

scores this series had been 184 not out, 88 and 51.

But the wicketkeeper managed just eight before he was bowled by a Sundar delivery that kept a touch low.

Sundar, on an increasingly helpful pitch, had now taken two wickets for three runs in 11 balls, with England 164-6.

All-rounder Stokes, without a Test hundred in over two years, demonstrated great discipline while batting throughout all of Sunday’s second session.

But, in common with several England team-mates, he gave his wicket away when on 33 the left-handed batsman swung himself off his feet trying to slog Sundar and was clean bowled.

Stokes banded his bat on the turf in anger, with England now 181-7.

And that became 182-8 when Jasprit Bumrah, the world’s top-ranked Test bowler, took his first wicket of the innings with a yorker that was too good for Brydon Carse.

Bumrah then bowled Chris Woakes with a superb delivery that seamed in down the slope to clip leg stump before Sundar knocked over last man Shoaib Bashir’s stumps to end the innings.

England resumed on 2-0 with Zak Crawley, who had angered India late Saturday with his time-wasting tactics, alongside opening partner Ben Duckett. — Agencies

Oman bag two medals at GCC swimming tourneys

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Oman’s swimmers concluded their campaign at the 29th edition of the GCC Swimming Championships with a silver and a bronze medal. The gulf event which was hosted at Khalifa Sports Complex in Bahrain during July 11-13 saw standout performances by Omani swimmers including: Hussain Taha, who earned silver in the 200 metres Singles Medley, and Ali al Hassani, who clinched bronze in the 100 metre Freestyle. Their achievements were notable given the fierce competition and unexpected decision to eliminate age group categories just few days before the event began by the organisers.

Bahrain topped the overall medal table with 42 medals including 19 gold, followed by Saudi



Hussein Taha wins the silver medal in the 200 metres individual medley

Arabia with 55 medals including 12 gold, and Kuwait with 25 medals including seven gold. Oman finished with two medals including one silver and one bronze.

Several participating nations, including Oman, expressed strong dissatisfaction with the sudden decision to cancel all age-based



Ali al Hasani won the bronze medal in the 100 metres freestyle race

categories, converting the entire event to an open focusing on senior category format. This late change put younger swimmers, such as Oman’s squad which was comprising athletes aged between 13 to 17 at a competitive disadvantage, as they had to compete against seasoned



The male competitions

swimmers aged 24 and above. Qatar and the UAE teams withdrawal from the championship and this impacted significantly on the competitive balance and technical level of the event. Oman’s coaching staff had initially prepared their athletes for age-group contests, including domestic and overseas camps.

Despite the faced challenges, Oman team swimmers delivered top performances as Hussain Taha narrowly missed podium finishes in multiple events but secured silver in the 200 metres Singles Medley with a strong technical show. The national team swimmer Ali al Hassani performed strongly in the 100 metre Freestyle as he captured bronze and nearly challenging for higher honors.

The 4x800 metre relay team comprised from Ali al Hassani, Hussain Taha, Mohammed al Wahaibi, and Khalil al Hassani, finished fourth, narrowly missing out on a medal due to the experience and age of rival teams. Other swimmers such as Mohammed al Wahaibi, Hamed al Hassani, and Mohammed al Farsi also competed in various distances with strong effort, often placing in the top six despite the tough field.

MERLIER WINS STAGE NINE OF TOUR DE FRANCE



“One moment I thought I was boxed in but I can come out just before 200 metres or maybe just after, I don’t know anymore”

TIM MERLIER



Jonathan Milan

Merlier beats Milan in another photo finish



Tadej Pogacar

Pogacar retains yellow jersey



Mathieu van der Poel

Van der Poel’s early attack ends in heartbreak

TIM MERLIER powered past Jonathan Milan to win stage nine of the Tour de France on Sunday, denying the green jersey holder back-to-back wins after Mathieu van der Poel’s audacious solo attack ended in heartbreak just 700 metres from the finish. Merlier’s second stage win of this year’s Tour mirrored the Soudal Quick-Step sprinter’s photo finish victory over the Italian on stage three. The Belgian stayed glued to Milan’s wheel before unleashing his kick metres from the finish in Chateauroux after the 174.1-kilometre ride from Chinon.

“One moment I thought I was boxed in but I can come out just before 200 metres or maybe just after, I don’t know anymore,” Merlier said.

“I just go all in and I’m happy I can win my second stage here.”

Van der Poel’s day began with promise as he and Jonas Ricksaert broke away early, building up a commanding lead of more than five minutes with a tailwind pushing them to speeds of more than 50 kph.

The Alpecin-Deceuninck duo persisted after taking points in the intermediate sprint for the green jersey before the peloton began their chase.

“Well, five minutes-and-a-half is a lot so we tried to help and also other teams started to help. The pacing was quite high,” Merlier added.

“So they were at the front but it was just hard for the guys in the front and the guys who were pulling and the bunch was just nervous.”

However, the peloton soon began to reel in the Alpecin-Deceuninck duo to reduce the lead to less than a minute with 11 km to go while sprint specialist Wout Van Aert was dropped.

As the rest of the Alpecin-Deceuninck team attempted to move to the front of the bunch and disrupt the chase, a tiring Ricksaert finally gave in and slowed down, leaving Van der Poel to ride solo to the finish with more than five kilometres left.

The Dutchman was visibly grimacing as the chasing pack came into view behind him and his heroic effort ended in the final kilometre when he was swallowed up by the bunch.

Slovenia’s Tadej Pogacar (UAE Team Emirates) retained the yellow jersey and maintains a 54-second lead over Belgian Remco Evenepoel (Soudal-Quick-Step) in the general classification.

UAE Team Emirates and Pogacar suffered a major blow, however, when mountain domestique Joao Almeida was forced to abandon the race after fracturing a rib in a crash on stage seven — just before the Tour heads into the mountains.

The 26-year-old, who finished fourth in the general classification last year, had come into the race in brilliant form having won the Tour de Suisse, the Tour of the Basque Country and the Tour de Romandie earlier this year. — Reuters



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KEYPROJECT



The MoU was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Said al Amri, CEO of Oman Airports and Dr Tony Chan, CEO of WCT International.

OMAN, MALAYSIA
EXPLORE AIRPORT
LAND DEVELOPMENT

MUSCAT: Oman Airports has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Malaysian company WCT International Limited to explore development and investment opportunities on lands surrounding Muscat International Airport.

The agreement seeks to establish strategic cooperation between the two sides, fostering idea exchange and joint expertise in order to support the development of key projects that enhance both leisure and commercial experiences for visitors and travellers.

The MoU was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Said al Amri, CEO of Oman Airports and Dr Tony Chan, CEO of WCT International. As part of the collaboration, the parties will hold specialised workshops and discussions to create a comprehensive master plan aimed at fully utilising the potential of the airport’s surrounding land.

The initiative is designed to expand commercial activities in the area, including hospitality and entertainment facilities, as well as interactive experiences and diverse services.

The goal is to boost the investment value of the land and increase revenue from direct and joint ventures, further contributing to the overall growth of Oman’s real estate development sector.

— ONA

Muscat plan competes for global urbanism award

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 13

THE Muscat Structure Plan — a blueprint for enhanced governance, future growth and resilient development of sustainable neighbourhoods across the capital region of the Sultanate of Oman — has been shortlisted among landmark international developments vying for honours at the prestigious World Architecture Festival (WAF), set to take place in Miami, USA, later this year.

The annual World Architecture Festival is the world’s largest awards programme and conference dedicated to celebrating excellence in global architecture and urbanism.

The 2025 edition, scheduled from November 12–14, marks the first time the event will be hosted in the United States.

In an announcement, Broadway Malyan — the UK-based global architecture, urbanism and design practice — revealed that the Muscat Structure Plan is a frontrunner for one of the top accolades.

“We’re excited to share that the Muscat Structure Plan is a finalist in the World Architecture Festival’s Future Projects — Masterplanning category for the 2025 awards”, the firm noted.

The Greater Muscat



The Greater Muscat Structure Plan — a strategic framework for sustainable growth and urban governance, aligned with the Sultanate of Oman’s 2050 net-zero emissions target.

Structure Plan focuses on compact, connected development by increasing population densities in better-linked areas, aiming to curb urban sprawl.

It promotes the creation of well-defined, serviced urban districts with a clear purpose, identity and strong connection to their surroundings.

To underpin economic resilience, the plan proposes the creation of 19 employment clusters, supporting Muscat’s projected growth to 890,000 jobs by 2040, while driving a shift to a knowledge- and innovation-based economy.

Recognising Muscat’s pivotal role in delivering Oman

Vision 2040, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning commissioned a technical team led by Broadway Malyan to develop the Greater Muscat Structure Plan — a strategic framework for sustainable growth and urban governance, aligned with the Sultanate of Oman’s 2050 net-zero emissions target.

A key feature of the Plan is the introduction of over 54 kilometre of mass transit lines, enabling higher-density, mixed-use development on underutilised government land.

The transit network is designed to bring one-third of Muscat’s population within

a 20-minute walk of a station or feeder stop, supporting a shift towards low-carbon, accessible urban living.

Additionally, the Plan seeks to leverage Muscat’s natural and heritage assets — including its dramatic coastline and historic identity — to position the capital as a compelling destination for tourism, investment and regional talent.

The city’s 12 wadi systems, which connect the mountains to the coast, form the backbone of a proposed open-space network, reinforcing Muscat’s transformation into a lush, green urban oasis amidst its arid surroundings.

Human development policies must be tailored to governorate needs

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 13

SHAIKH Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, delivered a keynote presentation during the 11th Annual Human Development Conference held in the Wilayat of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, calling for a more decentralised and localised approach to development planning in Oman.

In his presentation, Al Kindi highlighted a number of persistent challenges facing development at the governorate level. He pointed to the disparity in infrastructure and development opportunities between governorates, noting that weak alignment between educational outcomes and local labour market needs continues to hinder inclusive growth.

He also emphasised that limited resources pose a serious obstacle to skills development, particularly in the face of rising demand for technical and vocational competencies.

The Governor further identified



Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, addressing the conference in Salalah on Sunday

the slow activation of local partnerships as a constraint on development, citing the need for improved coordination among government agencies, the private sector and civil society.

Youth unemployment, particularly among new graduates, remains high in many governorates, which Al Kindi attributed to a lack of training programmes that are closely aligned with the demands of local economies.

He also addressed the growing trend of internal migration from rural areas to urban centres, which, he warned, is weakening the social and economic fabric of many local communities. Finally, he noted that the absence of accurate local-level data makes it difficult to measure the impact of public policies and to base decisions on reliable information.

To address these challenges, Al Kindi presented six key policy recommendations.

First, he called for the design of localised development programmes tailored to the specific needs of each governorate. This includes developing micro-level development plans that take into account local strengths, weaknesses and priorities.

Second, he advocated for empowering local leadership by transferring certain policy-making powers to governorates.

This would allow decision-making to become more responsive and context-driven.

Third, he encouraged the strengthening of partnerships with local companies and non-governmental organisations, arguing that such collaborations are essential for delivering targeted development outcomes.

Fourth, Al Kindi recommended greater investment in technical and vocational education as well as support for local innovation and entrepreneurship. He stressed the importance of preparing youth for emerging sectors in the local economy. Fifth, he called for improvements in the quality

of public services, including the introduction of clearer performance standards, institutional accountability and continuous evaluation of service delivery.

Finally, he proposed the development of localised data platforms that would allow for better monitoring of key development indicators. These platforms would support more informed policy-making and help track the effectiveness of government interventions on the ground.

Al Kindi’s presentation aligned closely with Oman Vision 2040’s emphasis on decentralisation, citizen empowerment and regional development. His remarks underscored the urgency of building governance models that respond to local realities while contributing to national goals.

The conference, which continues through July 14 at Millennium Resort Salalah, provides a platform for exchanging ideas and forging partnerships to advance human development across the Sultanate of Oman.

ADVERTORIALS

HOLISTICAPPROACH



These offerings form part of BankDhofar’s bancassurance initiative.

BankDhofar unveils affordable, all-inclusive health insurance solutions

MUSCAT: More than just protection against illness, surgery, diagnostics, and hospitalisation, BankDhofar’s health insurance products represent a holistic approach to safeguarding health and well-being.

These solutions, which offer extensive coverage for individuals, families, and domestic workers, are made possible through a strategic partnership with Dhofar Insurance Company — one of the largest and most respected insurers in the Sultanate of Oman.

Designed to provide flexibility, value and peace of mind, they are available exclusively to BankDhofar account holders.

These offerings form part of BankDhofar’s bancassurance initiative, which combines its expansive branch network and digital infrastructure with Dhofar Insurance’s underwriting expertise to deliver customer-centric insurance solutions.

The health insurance portfolio is organised into four major categories, each tailored to meet the unique needs of different customer segments. The most popular is the Individual Health Insurance plan, which is offered in three tiers — Green, Silver and Gold — each providing varying levels of coverage and benefits.

Plans include inpatient and outpatient services, diagnostic tests, maternity, physiotherapy, optical and dental care, alternative therapies, and access to both local and international healthcare networks. Eligibility is open to Omani citizens and legal residents between the ages of 18 and 65; and children under 18 can be enrolled when at least one parent is included in the policy.

For budget-conscious customers, BankDhofar offers the Affordable Health Cover plan. This solution caters to the general population, particularly salaried individuals and families seeking dependable coverage at competitive rates.

The plan includes essential health benefits, making quality healthcare more accessible to a broader demographic. The third category is the Unified Health Insurance Plan, also known as “Dhamani” Targeted at employees in the private sector, this scheme is being rolled out in phases as part of a national mandate.

It is governed by a collaborative platform involving the Ministry of Health, Royal Oman Police, Financial Services Authority, healthcare providers and third-party administrators.

Completing the lineup is a specialised plan for household help — the Unified Domestic Worker Health Insurance. This convenient and cost-effective solution allows BankDhofar customers to provide health coverage for their domestic workers, an essential yet often overlooked segment of the workforce.

AMOUAGE’S LOVE DELIGHT IS NOW EXTENDED WITH THREE LUXURIOUS BODY PRODUCTS

MUSCAT: In 2024, the Omani High Perfumery House of Amouage completely reimagined its Secret Garden Collection and welcomed a new creation, Love Delight, inspired by the refined richness of Arabian sweets.

Now, the House returns to this much-loved creation and reinterprets its most luxurious attributes in the form of three irresistibly self-indulgent beauty products: a Bath & Shower Gel, a Body Lotion and a Hair Perfume.

“Love Delight is one of our most charming creations,” says



Amouage’s Chief Creative Officer Renaud Salmon, “so we couldn’t wait to revisit the special corner of our Secret Garden that it occupies.

We were excited by the prospect of viewing it afresh and finding new ways to bring out different aspects of its personality. At the same time,

like we did with last year’s luxury body line for Guidance, we wanted this to be an opportunity to connect Love Delight in a very authentic way to one of the most precious treasures of Oman.”

The treasure in question is Frankincense essential oil. Long an important part of Oman’s heritage, the ancient resin offers proven health benefits and has been highly regarded for centuries.

The variety that grows in Oman has, since historical times, been considered one of the finest in the entire world.

Own the BYD Han with hot summer deals

DAZZLE

the road with BYD’s premium sedan, the Han, this summer season. For all those wishing to be a part of this revolution, now is your chance, as BYD Oman presents an exclusive opportunity with its hot summer deals.

New BYD customers can enjoy a 3-year/60,000 km of free service on the purchase of electric vehicles.

Along with a mega chance to participate in the grand raffle for an all-expenses-paid holiday to Türkiye. Plus, scratch and win exciting prizes including an iPhone 16 Pro Max, Apple Watch, Apple AirPods, and get a free EV battery charger for the convenience of charging your BYD Han at home.

The all-electric BYD Han is the epitome of power and sophistication, demonstrating BYD’s core value of providing “technology for a better life.”

The sleek and sporty sedan



The all-electric BYD Han is the epitome of power and sophistication.

takes the driving experience to unprecedented levels, accelerating from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.9 seconds.

Designed by Wolfgang Egger, a world renowned German car designer, the Han’s design reflects the dragon face language with its sporty, sleek appearance and dynamic

waistline. Lit by an advanced lighting system that resembles dragon eyes and features through-type LED tail lights inspired by Chinese knots, the Han is a head-turner on every curve of the road.

Inside, be welcomed by the BYD Heart shift lever, a 12.3” LCD display, and a 15.6” 8-core

rotatable screen on the spacious dashboard. The Han spells luxury from every angle.

Fitted with premium Nappa leather seats, the BYD Heart shift lever, 12-speaker Dynaudio system, and multi-color gradient ambient lighting, be prepared to be swept away by the library-level quiet space, with the interiors benchmarking the craftsmanship of top German automobile designers.

Furthermore, the Han is a powerful performer, equipped with 120 kW DC fast charging that takes only 30 minutes to charge from 30% to 80%.

It delivers an impressive extended driving range of up to 521 km, easily meeting daily commuting and travel needs.

Don’t miss out on this great opportunity to own the future. Visit BYD Flagship showroom in Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman to witness the evolution and test drive the EV to know more. In Oman, BYD vehicles are distributed by World Auto Business LLC.

NBO WINS GOLD AT MMA SMARTIES MENA AWARDS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been awarded the prestigious Gold Award in the AI-Driven Creative Excellence category at the MMA Smarties Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Awards 2025.

This accolade recognises the bank’s innovative marketing campaign featuring the recently launched Abu Salim’s AI-Driven Family, the first of its kind in Oman.

Commenting on the achievement, Sherifa bint Ibrahim al Maskraiayah, Head of Brand at NBO, said: “This recognition is a testament to our ongoing commitment to enhancing customer experiences by embracing innovation in communication and marketing.

The ‘Abu Salim’ family campaign demonstrates the powerful synergy between creative storytelling and advanced technology, while proudly reflecting Oman’s rich heritage and national identity. We are



This accolade recognises the bank’s innovative marketing campaign.

honoured to represent the Sultanate of Oman on this regional stage and to showcase how AI can be harnessed to connect with customers in meaningful and relevant ways”.

Competing against leading brands and organisations from across the region, NBO’s campaign emerged as a top performer in its category, reinforcing the bank’s forward-thinking approach and dedication to creativity and innovation in marketing.

The MMA Smarties Awards are among the most prestigious global accolades in marketing and digital innovation, celebrating campaigns that drive significant impact and engagement.

NBO continues to lead Oman’s financial innovation journey, consistently advancing its products and services while staying closely aligned with the evolving needs and aspirations of its customers.

Seeh Al Sarya Engineering launches first edition of “Kafa’a” programme

MUSCAT: As part of its national commitment to empowering Omani talent, Seeh Al Sarya Engineering has concluded the first edition of its “Kafa’a” programme, which aims to train and qualify a group of Omani engineering graduates who are currently seeking employment.

The programme is part of the company’s community initiatives to enhance national capabilities and contribute to developing a skilled workforce in the engineering sector.

Implemented in collaboration with SAS Media, the programme ran for a full month at the company’s headquarters. Participants received intensive practical training across several key departments, including quality, health and safety, human



Participants received intensive practical training across several key departments.

resources, planning, as well as various administrative and engineering departments.

The programme also included field visits to the company’s project sites, giving participants first-hand exposure to real work environments and project operations.

Designed to simulate a real-world work environment, the programme equipped trainees with professional and technical skills aligned with current labor market demands.

Eng Said bin Rashid al Asmi, CEO of Seeh Al Sarya Engineering, emphasised that the “Kafa’a” programme reflects the company’s deep-rooted sense of national responsibility.

He highlighted the vital role of

the private sector in empowering Omani talent, particularly in the engineering fields that are witnessing rapid growth across the Sultanate of Oman.

Participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity, praising the programme for its practical value and for enhancing their readiness to enter the job market and contribute meaningfully to Oman’s development.

The programme concluded with a graduation ceremony organised by the company and attended by a number of officials, as a gesture of appreciation for the trainees’ efforts and to encourage them to continue pursuing excellence in their professional careers.

BUSINESS



Production of regular motor fuel (91) reached 7.39 million barrels, up from 6.68 million barrels in May 2024.

REFINERY OUTPUT IN OMAN SEES MODEST GROWTH

MUSCAT: Refinery production in Oman recorded a modest increase of 1.3 per cent by the end of May 2025, while motor fuel output rose more significantly by 10.7 per cent, according to figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Production of regular motor fuel (91) reached 7.39 million barrels, up from 6.68 million barrels in May 2024. Sales also climbed by 2.2 per cent to 5.8 million barrels, although exports fell by 5.7 per cent to 1.23 million barrels.

Premium gasoline (95) production dipped slightly by 1.2 per cent to 5.33 million barrels. Despite this, sales rose by 1.3 per cent to 5.38 million barrels, while exports jumped by 20.6 per cent to 690,700 barrels. Diesel production reached 13.67 million barrels, up by 3.4 per cent from the previous year. Sales increased by 5.3 per cent to 5.99 million barrels, though exports declined by 12.5 per cent to 6.68 million barrels.

Jet fuel output declined by 14 per cent to 4.15 million barrels. Both sales and exports saw decreases of 9.1 per cent and 15.6 per cent, respectively. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) production edged up by 0.3 per cent to 3.19 million barrels. Sales rose by 20.8 per cent, but exports were down sharply by 53.6 per cent to 109,900 barrels.

In the petrochemicals sector, gasoline output rose by 8.5 per cent to 74,300 metric tonnes, while paraxylene production increased by 3.1 per cent to 224,100 metric tonnes. Polypropylene output surged by 47.4 per cent to 148,000 metric tonnes. However, polypropylene sales dropped by 8.4 per cent to 13,700 metric tonnes. — ONA

CEOTALK

‘We are building careers, not just filling vacancies’

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

In the heart of Oman's national workforce transformation stands Tawteen, a digital platform that has quietly become one of the most powerful engines of employment reform in the country.

In an exclusive interview, Loay al Mujaini, Acting CEO of Tawteen, shared insights into how this data-driven platform is reshaping not just how Omanis find jobs — but how the private sector hires, how regulators plan, and how sectors build long-term workforce capabilities.

“Tawteen was never meant to be just another job portal,” said Al Mujaini. “From the outset, our vision was to build an integrated national ecosystem — one that connects individuals, employers, and regulators in a common effort to localise jobs, enhance productivity, and advance Oman's strategic human capital goals.”

At the core of Tawteen's purpose is its alignment with Oman Vision 2040, particularly the pillars of economic diversification and human capital development.

Al Mujaini, who has been instrumental in architecting the platform's multi-dimensional functionality, sees Tawteen as “a living infrastructure” for national workforce planning.

“What sets Tawteen apart is its ability to integrate intelligence with action. We're mapping workforce supply, identifying skills gaps, and aligning all of that with sector growth and investment trends,” he explained.

“That allows policy-makers, educators, and employers to work with unprecedented clarity.”

Tawteen supports 17 sector committees established in collaboration with the National Employment Programme (Tashgheel). These committees rely on the platform's robust data tools to govern



Every labour clearance is tied to actual sector data—Omani availability, expatriate concentration, upskilling potential, and hiring timelines. It's governance made digital, fair, and fast.

LOAY AL MUJAINI
Acting CEO, Tawteen

labour clearances and ensure structured prioritisation of Omanis for critical roles.

“These aren't just dashboards. They're decision engines,” Al Mujaini said.

“Every labour clearance is tied to actual sector data—Omani availability, expatriate concentration, upskilling potential, and hiring timelines. It's governance made digital, fair, and fast”.

Among the platform's standout features are its workforce profiling tools, a digital contract system, a freelancing marketplace, and employer productivity modules.

Tawteen also connects to localisation tools that help companies meet procurement and Omanisation goals.

“The private sector is our primary partner,” Al Mujaini noted. “We're giving them the tools to find talent, meet compliance goals, and contribute meaningfully to the national workforce strategy. The response has been strong—over 1,700 companies and 100,000 job seekers have registered with us so far”.

Since its launch, Tawteen has hosted over 670 job postings, offering more than 3,000 vacancies. But Al Mujaini emphasises that metrics alone do not define success.

“For us, it's about building sustainable career pathways,” he said.

“That's why we've introduced career pathing, freelancing opportunities, and

insights into long-term sectoral growth trends. We want Omanis to see the full picture—not just the next paycheck.”

Tawteen's real-time job marketplace, he added, is helping bridge long-standing mismatches between graduates and employer needs.

“We prioritise fresh graduates and those without prior experience. Tawteen connects them directly to training programmes and sends tailored job alerts. It's proactive—not passive—engagement,” said Al Mujaini.

One recent success story involved the water sector, where Tawteen helped channel hiring in response to a major infrastructure investment.

“When Nama Water Services announced over RO 700 million in new investments, the water sector committee, using Tawteen, was able to quickly identify and post 885 jobs,” Al Mujaini recalled.

“That's the kind of responsiveness we're building across sectors.”

Behind Tawteen's growing reputation is Al Mujaini's own blend of strategic vision, operational acumen, and inclusive leadership.

Known for his ability to align multi-stakeholder efforts—from government and private sector to job seekers—he has driven Tawteen's development from a concept into a vital national instrument.

“We're not just automating systems,” he said. “We're transforming mindsets—about how we hire, how we train, how we grow. That requires trust, transparency, and constant innovation.”

Looking ahead, Tawteen is preparing to expand into new areas such as reskilling, training integration, and entrepreneurship support.

“We want Tawteen to be more than an employment platform,” Al Mujaini concluded. “We want it to be a launchpad for economic empowerment. As Oman marches toward Oman Vision 2040, Tawteen is ready to be a partner in every Omani's professional journey”.

First-ever directory of space sector companies unveiled

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched a first-ever directory of space sector companies.

The Private Sector Directory Space Sector 2024, released by the National Space Programme, contains a comprehensive list of private sector entities with the purpose of promoting local players and facilitating global partnerships.

In his foreword, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, underscored the significance of the initiative.

“The Space Directory serves as a comprehensive source, cataloguing the key entities, initiatives, and capabilities within our space sector. It is designed to be a valuable reference for stakeholders across government, industry, academia, and international partners. Our objective is to facilitate collaboration, promote the exchange of knowledge, and inspire a new generation of



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Omanis to take part in the space sector.”

According to the Minister, the handbook profiles companies working across various fields within the space sector.

“The Sultanate of Oman has a growing number of private sector companies who are working along the space sector value chain.

The Space Directory serves as a comprehensive source, cataloguing the key entities, initiatives, and capabilities within our space sector. It is designed to be a valuable reference for stakeholders across government, industry, academia, and international partners. Our objective is to facilitate collaboration, promote the exchange of knowledge, and inspire a new generation of Omanis to take part in the space sector

We are proud that we have enterprises in these domains: companies operating satellites, distributing remote sensing data, companies using satellite data to create solutions and respond to key local challenges, companies delivering world-class satellite communications services, private projects to develop the most promising sites in the world for a new commercial spaceport, and companies developing scientific and economic space zones,” he said.

Furthermore, the Minister noted that the space sector still contains significant untapped

potential.

“We still see many opportunities for growth in the Omani space sector. We hope this directory will inform readers about enterprises working in the Sultanate of Oman, and enable many quality connections and meaningful partnerships.”

The directory lists 20 companies in Oman as of the end of 2024, including seven drone and space services and applications companies, five space-related services and consultancy companies, four satellite communication service providers, two satellite and remote sensing operators, and two launch companies (a parent and subsidiary).

The private sector plays a key role in the National Space Policy and Executive Programme, which aims to boost contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP from 2% currently, to 5% by 2030 and 10% by 2040, under the umbrella of the Oman Vision 2040's National Digital Economy Plan.

According to the recent data, the sector contributes 0.05% to the local GDP with a market value of \$155 million as of 2021.

KEEP WORKING

EU ready to defend interests against US



The European Union said on Saturday it was ready to retaliate to defend its interests if the United States pressed ahead with imposing a 30% tariff on European goods from August 1.

Ursula von der Leyen, head of the EU executive which handles trade policy for the 27 member states, said the bloc was ready to keep working towards an agreement before August 1, but was willing to stand firm. — Reuters

NO DEAL

30% tariff on imports from Mexico



President Donald Trump on Saturday threatened to impose a 30% tariff on imports from Mexico starting on August 1, after weeks of negotiations with the major US trading partners failed to reach a comprehensive trade deal.

Trump announced the latest tariff in a letter to Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum that was posted on his Truth Social media site. — Reuters

GOVERNMENT ORDER

India eases sulphur emission rules



India has reversed a decade-old mandate to install \$30 billion worth of clean-air equipment, easing sulphur emission rules for most coal-fired power plants, a government order said.

The government was reviewing 2015 norms that required nearly 540 coal-based power units to install flue-gas desulphurisation systems that remove sulphur from the plants' exhaust gases in phases starting in 2027. — Reuters

OPINION

The Achilles heel of global supply chains



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

OVER 80 per cent of the international trade is transported by sea and what is more interesting is that a significant share of this passes through a handful of maritime chokepoints, making them of strategic importance. Maritime chokepoints are narrow straits or canals that connect a large portion of the global shipping to major oceans and seas. These chokepoints are strategically significant as they provide passage for oil, natural goods and other commodities, thus having the power to disrupt international trade. The chokepoints connect major global markets. Europe and Asia are connected through the Suez Canal, while the Strait of Hormuz is the main route for the Arabian Gulf exports. In 2021, the restrictions on the Suez Canal led to global shipping delays. The tensions related to the Strait of Hormuz or Bab Al Mandeb have resulted in a halt to major shipping companies. In 2023, the Panama Canal disruption led to restricted movement of ships across the canal, resulting in astronomical shipping delays and significant economic losses. Maritime chokepoints play an indispensable role in global trade. Disruptions of these chokepoints can trigger cascading failures in the supply chain. They can be referred to as the Achilles heel, the

primary being: The Strait of Hormuz is the world’s most essential and critical energy corridor. 20% of oil and 30% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) are shipped through this narrow stretch of water. This narrow stretch of water lies between Iran to the north and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman to the south, linking the Arabian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea. A closure or disruption could lead to soaring oil prices and devastate those economies that depend on Gulf oil. It also has the potential to trigger immediate global consequences. The Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. It carries approximately 12% of global trade. In 2021, one ship blocked the canal and the world had to pay a price of \$9.6 billion daily for stalled shipments. Any disruptions and restrictions could paralyse global supply chains, leading to soaring inflationary pressures worldwide. The Panama Canal connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It carries 46% of the shipping across the US East Coast and Asia. The severe drought in 2023-2024 raised questions on the viability of this channel for sustainable international trade. In the early months of 2024, there was a 36% decline in canal traffic. Despite numerous challenges, the

Maritime chokepoints play an indispensable role in global trade. Disruptions of these chokepoints can trigger cascading failures in the supply chain.

unavailability of an alternative shipping route renders this canal both strategically and critically important for international trade. The Strait of Malacca spans three countries: Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. This strait handles 80% of China’s oil exports and 40% of Japan’s maritime trade. Globally, the Strait of Malacca accounts for approximately 30% of the world’s international trade. Any conflict or disruptions to this strait could paralyse or stop East-West trade. These narrow straits of water or maritime chokepoints are the Achilles’ Heel of international trade. Any pressure on these points due to conflict, climate change, war, or geopolitical escalations would send ripples across the global north and south, crippling the global supply chain network; and businesses and people would face outsized consequences. These maritime chokepoints have gained significant importance in global security and economic stability. Companies must engage in resilience planning and adopt strategies to navigate the geographical inevitability by near-shoring critical supplies and goods, real-time risk monitoring, and financial hedging. Until some scalable alternatives emerge, these maritime chokepoints will continue to be the spine of international commerce.

PENTAGON DIGS DEEP TO MINE SPAC OF LAST RESORT

JONATHAN GUILFORD

TRADE-WAR costs are piling up. China’s chokehold on rare earth metals used in everything from electric vehicles to military equipment has led to a pricey Pentagon deal with MP Materials to secure domestic supply. It lays bare the price of President Donald Trump’s mercurial and contradictory policies. Minerals described as rare are abundant, but the deposits are scattered and hard to refine. MP’s Mountain Pass is the only end-to-end US pit focused on magnets. Boss James Litinsky took the miner public by merging it with a special-purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, in 2020. Like so many other deals with cash-stuffed shells, it has been a disappointment. MP generated less than half the \$250 million of EBITDA expected in 2023. It also touted promising markets in EVs and wind turbines, whose prospects have been dampened by the Trump administration. Worse still, the company relied on an offtake agreement for its unrefined concentrates with China’s Shenghe Resources, a partly state-owned miner that is also an MP shareholder. The country accounts for 91% of rare-earths refining, according to the International Energy Agency, making the threat of cutting off supplies a potent one. The US Department of Defence unveiled its solution on Thursday. It set a minimum price for MP’s refined neodymium-praseodymium oxide, or NdPr. At \$110 per kilogramme, it is far higher than the metal’s spot price and its recent historical average. This should help \$7 billion MP offset the loss of Shenghe after it stopped selling to China in April because of Beijing’s tariffs on US imports. As part of the deal with the government, it has agreed to rip up the offtake agreement entirely. The company’s cost to produce NdPr last quarter was about \$60 per kilogramme and analysts expect it to produce 5.4 kilotons in 2026. On that basis, the DoD will fund some \$270 million of EBITDA, more than twice as much as was previously anticipated for the whole company. Magnets, too, will benefit from new US military contracts. MP shares jumped more than 40%. The government was in a tight spot. Stakes held by Shenghe and Australian billionaire Gina Rinehart, along with last year’s takeover approach from Lynas Rare Earths complicated matters and left MP vulnerable. US taxpayers are nevertheless paying a steep price to secure rare earths, including lending the company \$150 million alongside equity ownership, through both preferred stock and warrants exchangeable into common shares. For a Republican party that professes to champion free markets, it’s a noticeably forceful fist-bump with the invisible hand. — Reuters

For investors, UK is now ‘an attractive place to be’

THE chief executive of James Henderson — a British-American global asset management group headquartered in London — Ali Dibadj, has said international investors are “starting to take notice” of investment opportunities in the UK, adding to the growing chorus of senior finance executives who are bullish about British assets. The company offers a range of financial products to individuals, intermediary advisors and institutional investors globally, under the trade name Janus Henderson — the groups holding company. “There is an enormous opportunity, not just for investors to invest in the UK, but to open up the UK to investors around the world”. Dibadj said. “The UK has a stable political backdrop and has solid foundations for growth — a UK consumer that is in real wage growth and has built up savings since Covid, businesses that have been conservative in their borrowings and banks that have rebuilt their balance sheets since the global financial crisis”. Dibadj, who joined Janus Henderson in 2022 from Alliance Bernstein, added that a likely lower interest rate environment in the UK and a stock market that trades at a “significant valuation discount” to those elsewhere in the world were among other reasons to be optimistic. “A stable political backdrop and a modestly growing economy at a very reasonable valuation is a solid place to be”, said the 50-year-old. “International investors are starting to take notice and there has been an uptick in inflows to UK equities from overseas”. UK-focused funds have posted considerable outflows following Brexit and several bouts of political upheaval, but the pace of withdrawals has slowed in recent months. Data from Calastone showed net outflows of £449m from UK equity funds in May were down to half the



Buses go past the Bank of England building, in London, Britain. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL andyjailil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

monthly average for the past three years. However, equity funds have only recorded one month of positive flows in the past four years. New York-based Dibadj is the latest high-profile investment executive to single out potential investment opportunities in the UK. In May, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink said that the world’s largest asset manager had been increasing investment in “undervalued” UK assets. Fink said the \$11.6m asset manager had added to its UK positions “across the board” and claimed some of the negativity shown towards British companies “was probably not warranted”. “I have more confidence in the UK economy today than I did a year ago”, Fink said. The 72-year-old pointed to the growth agenda fostered by the UK government. He highlighted in particular that the Competition and Markets Authority has sped up its decision-making. “I don’t know what’s changed it but it’s a good change”, Fink said. JPMorgan chief Jamie Dimon also recently backed the government’s approach. He told Financial Times in April that “there’s much to like” about Labour’s pro-growth agenda. Other investment leaders are pointing to renewed interest in European assets amidst uncertainty following the introduction of trade tariffs by US president Donald Trump. Growth minded: Dibadj praised the UK government for “real conviction” in pushing through market reforms that aim to spur growth and investment, such as the recent Mansion House Accord. This saw several of the UK’s largest pension providers commit to allocating at least 10 per cent of their defined contribution assets to private markets by 2030. At least half of those asset will go to investments in the UK. “There is a growth-minded government that has shown it will take action, a catalyst to kick start investment,” said Dibadj. “That, combined with the opportunity that existing valuations present, are what makes the UK such an attractive proposition moving forward”.

BUSINESS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 13

SAYYID

Salem bin Musallam al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources

Development, affirmed that the ministry is advancing a new generation of specialised training and development programmes tailored to the specific needs of each governorate.

These efforts aim to strengthen human capital and align skills development with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

Speaking at the 11th Annual Human Development Conference in Salalah, Al Busaidy announced that customised training initiatives will be introduced for each governorate, focusing on building local leadership and technical specialisations that directly address regional development requirements. He described the initiative as a strategic step towards decentralised, results-oriented training.

He further noted that the ministry is working to establish clear vocational pathways beginning at the intermediate school level. These pathways will

LABOUR MINISTRY UNVEILS VOCATIONAL PLAN FOR GOVERNORATES

Customised training initiatives will be introduced for each governorate, focusing on building local leadership and technical specialisations that directly address regional development requirements.



The ministry is working to establish clear vocational pathways beginning at the intermediate school level.

enable Omani youth to pursue professional education aligned with their individual aptitudes and the economic priorities of their local communities.

Each governorate will benefit from a unique comparative advantage, with vocational colleges and training centres delivering programmes tailored to those needs.

“We are currently piloting two models to establish a comprehensive vocational track that links education with employment and improves the job readiness of our youth,” said Al Busaidy.

He emphasised that these initiatives build upon previous achievements, with renewed focus on enhancing training quality and expanding developmental impact.

Al Busaidy concluded by reaffirming the ministry’s commitment to empowering Omanis across all governorates, stating that these targeted programmes represent a transformative phase in national workforce development, built on principles of specialisation, decentralisation and future-readiness.

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

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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

HOW THIS DIGITAL GARDEN HELPS CULTIVATE VALUES AND CULTURE IN YOUNG OMANIS²⁰

LIFESTYLE

Prada looks at collaboration with Indian footwear artisans after sandal scandal



PRADA IS looking to collaborate with “artisanal footwear” makers in India in a partnership, it said on Friday, two weeks after the Italian luxury group triggered a controversy by debuting ethnic sandals resembling 12th-century Indian ones.

After viral photos from a Milan fashion show drew criticism from Indian artisans who make the sandals — named after the historic city of Kolhapur in Maharashtra state — Prada was forced late last month to acknowledge that its new open-toe footwear was inspired by ancient Indian designs.

The furor even saw sales of Indian sandals boom, with sellers and artisans seeing the controversy as a way to promote the heritage craft by tapping into nationalist pride.

Prada said that it held talks remotely on Friday with the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, which represents 3,000 Kolhapuri sandal artisans and discussed potential opportunities for future collaboration.

“The next step will be for Prada’s supply chain team to meet a range of artisanal footwear manufacturers”, the company said.

The Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce said that Lorenzo Bertelli, son of Prada’s owners and head of its corporate social responsibility, joined the talks on Friday.

The chamber of commerce said that during the talks Prada said it aimed to launch a limited-edition “Made in India” Kolhapuri-inspired collection of sandals in partnership with Indian artisans.

India’s luxury market is small but growing, with the rich splurging on designer fashion, top end sports cars and pricey watches.

Prada does not have any retail stores in India and its products are usually reserved for the super rich who shop overseas.

The sandal scandal left the social media abuzz for days with criticism and sarcastic memes, with Indian politicians, artisans and the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce demanding due credit to Indian heritage. — Reuters

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



ART

An artwork depicting the portrait of King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886) is seen at the shipping pier of lake Chiemsee in Prien, southern Germany. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actress Tripti Dimri (L) and actor Siddhant Chaturvedi attend the trailer launch of their upcoming Hindi-language film ‘Dhadak 2’ in Mumbai. — AFP



FASHION

Models present creations from the “Beneath the Waves” Spring/Summer 25 collection during the Charles & Ron catwalk show at Malta Fashion Week in Valletta, Malta. — Reuters

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Recovering Giorgio Armani says he will be back in September



THE FOUNDER of Italian fashion house Giorgio Armani issued a message as he turned 91 on Friday to say that he will be back in September, after a health problem forced him to miss the Milan and Paris fashion shows in recent weeks. It was the first time Giorgio Armani has missed one of his catwalk events. His company said last month he was recovering at home, without elaborating on his health, while Italian newswires reported that he had been in hospital for some days. “In the last few weeks I strongly felt the embrace of

those who were thinking of me”, Armani said in an open letter published by several Italian newspapers, mentioning family, colleagues, employees, the press and people on social media. “Today, on my 91st birthday, I want to thank all of you for the closeness you have shown me. It wasn’t easy for me not to hear your applause live. Thank you from the bottom of my heart and I’ll see you again in September”, he added. The next Milan fashion week is scheduled to run from September 23 to 29. — Reuters



Bad Bunny draws jubilant Puerto Ricans to historic residency

BAD BUNNY launched his historic residency on Friday with an explosive performance that fused folkloric drumming and dance with the reggaeton beats that have made him a global star, as thousands of Puerto Ricans screamed along to every word during the show limited to locals. The concert series in San Juan is Bad Bunny’s showcase of Puerto Rican pride and resilience, a slate of weekly performances rooted in home and history. The elated audience went wild as the megastar first appeared on the lush, verdant rainforest set, where he joined a troupe of drummers and dancers in a powerful love letter to the island’s history of resistance. The residency entitled “No Me Quiero Ir De Aquí” — “I don’t want to leave here” — is a history lesson in Puerto Rican music and rhythms as well as a rallying cry that lays bare the island’s colonial past and present. Bad Bunny, 31, has long used his platform as a means to give voice to his fellow Puerto Ricans, while also managing to rule the charts with his reggaeton-forward blend of eminently danceable pop that has found massive global success. And now the artist born Benito Martinez Ocasio is bringing that success back home to El Choli, as the arena with a capacity of more than 18,000 is colloquially known in the Puerto Rican capital. “It’s super emotional”, Amanda Sanchez, 30, said. — LOCALS FIRST — “I think Benito did something really transcendental, for what the culture is, here in Puerto Rico”, said the content creator dressed in a red scarf. From moving, acoustic renditions delivered from beneath a tree to a house structure on the other side of the arena where Bad Bunny partied with the likes of LeBron James, the energy was relentlessly high. During a seamless transition from one super smash — “Nuevayol” — to



another — “Titi me pregunto”, the stadium almost seemed to shake. “I don’t hear you!” the artist shouted to roars from his fans. That the first nine shows are limited to Puerto Rican residents — a poignant remark on Bad Bunny’s commitment to making music first and foremost for the people of his homeland — is something “really special for us”, said Sanchez. Puerto Rico is a US territory but

not a state. Even though its residents are American citizens, their rights are limited. They cannot vote in the US presidential election, for example and have only a non-voting delegate in Congress. Sanchez said it was heartwarming “to be able to feel like an artist of Bad Bunny’s magnitude can give us, the people of the island” first pick of shows. “And we are here to enjoy it, to dance and to have a great time!” As fans, many wearing the iconic Puerto Rican “pava” straw hats, filed en masse into El Choli, vendors slung pina colodas, the beloved frozen drink born on the island. — SPEAK THE ‘TRUTH’ — Prior to the show a screen overlooking the tropical set — on which live chickens wandered freely — displayed facts about Puerto Rican history and unabashed political statements. The crowd burst into applause when the screen flash with the message: “PR is an unincorporated territory of the United States, but has its own flag, culture and identity”. The highly anticipated residency announced in January began on July 11 and will continue into September over subsequent on Friday to Sunday three-day weekends. Michelle Munoz, 55, a Brooklynite of Puerto Rican origin, did not have tickets for the buzzy opening night but showed up anyway to soak in the vibes. Munoz said she began coming back to her parents’ homeland in 2023, after having stayed in the United States for decades. Now, she feels “like this is where I want to spend the rest of my life”. For Munoz, Bad Bunny’s popularity stems from his willingness to speak the “truth” while “showing and honouring the history of music — the music that came before him, that he grew up on and that made him”. “He’s not a crossover. He is a Spanish-singing global artist”, she added. “Not everybody can do that”. — AFP

FEATURES



HOW THIS DIGITAL GARDEN HELPS CULTIVATE VALUES AND CULTURE IN YOUNG OMANIS

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

ACROSS OMAN, a rising concern grips many parents: children are spending endless hours in front of screens, yet gaining little of true value. While digital devices offer entertainment, much of the content available today undermines our cultural and ethical foundations, exposing young minds to ideas that clash with our core values. This pressing challenge prompts families to ask a vital question: how can we provide a safe, enriching and engaging digital alternative that preserves our values whilst embracing modern technology?

Enter Bustan — a groundbreaking solution developed by Digital Dimension, Oman's premier innovator in technology and digital development. More than just an entertainment app, Bustan is a conscious, values-driven digital platform designed to educate

and inspire. Rooted in Omani and Islamic identity, it offers a captivating environment where entertainment meets moral and spiritual growth, seamlessly blending tradition with innovation.

What distinguishes Bustan is its comprehensive approach to child development. It prioritises nurturing not just knowledge but also spiritual awareness and ethical values. A highlight of the platform is its Quran section, engaging children with recitations by peers in a lively, approachable format that encourages memorisation and daily familiarity — transforming holy verses into a natural, beloved part of their routine.

Bustan's diverse offerings include an array of educational songs with mesmerising visuals that teach fundamental concepts like the alphabet, numbers and colours — each infused with lessons on patience, kindness and co-operation. Interactive stories and animated adventures turn traditional screen time into meaningful storytelling, fostering understanding, imagination and joy.

The platform's originality shines through its locally inspired cartoons, featuring characters like "Mazen" — an adventurous boy exploring Oman's rich heritage. Series such as "The Letter Village", "Qal Al Hudhud" (The Hoopoe Said) and historical tales like "The Omani Who Defeated the Portuguese", celebrate national pride whilst imparting timeless lessons rooted in history and culture.

Recognising the importance of play, Bustan offers purpose-built games that combine fun with moral and cognitive development. From Mazen's Car, where children collect Islamic values, to memory games, puzzles and creative tools, every activity fosters learning, ethical growth and positive engagement. Whether piloting aeroplanes with Mazen or solving ethical mazes as detectives, children are immersed in meaningful, value-rich experiences.

The importance of such educational platforms cannot be overstated, especially when viewed within the context of Oman's evolving education system. According to the World Bank's recent reports, Oman has made significant progress in educational reform, aiming to make learning more inclusive, innovative and aligned with the demands of a modern economy.

The government's Oman Vision 2040 emphasises the integration of technology into education, promoting digital literacy and innovative learning methods across all levels. This strategic focus signals a national recognition of the need to equip the younger generation with skills necessary for tomorrow's workforce and digital programming plays a pivotal role in this transformation.

Traditional education in Oman, whilst robust and comprehensive, faces challenges in adapting fully to the rapid technological changes sweeping the world. While schools have incorporated computer labs and digital resources, experts agree that there remains a gap in culturally and ethically aligned digital content tailored specifically for Omani children. According to the Oman Daily Observer (2023), there is a pressing need to develop indigenous digital education solutions that reinforce local values whilst fostering critical thinking and creativity. A stronger emphasis on digital programming that is both meaningful and culturally relevant can bridge this gap, making learning more engaging and effective.

In this context, platforms like Bustan become vital supplementary tools in the educational landscape. They not only align with Oman's national objectives but also empower parents and educators to guide children's digital experiences positively. Research from Unesco underscores the importance of quality digital content in shaping children's cognitive and social development, especially in the digital age where screen time is inevitable. When thoughtfully designed, such platforms can enhance learning outcomes, foster moral development and reinforce cultural identity — goals that resonate deeply with Oman's national aspirations.

Furthermore, integrating digital platforms rooted in cultural values ensures that children develop a strong sense of pride and identity. For example, Bustan's stories about Oman's history and heritage serve as educational bridges, making history accessible and inspiring young Omanis to appreciate their roots. Such content nurtures a sense of belonging and instils pride in national identity, essential ingredients for building social cohesion and a resilient future society.

Beyond individual learning, Bustan plays a key role in fostering community engagement. It provides a platform for parents and teachers to participate actively in their children's digital education, encouraging shared learning experiences that strengthen family bonds and social responsibility. Involving the community helps reinforce values and promotes a collective identity rooted in pride and cultural continuity.

Ultimately, Bustan is more than a digital app — it's an educational revolution tailored specifically for Oman's young generation. It aligns with the country's strategic vision of fostering innovation and cultural preservation whilst nurturing young minds. As Oman continues to develop its education system, it becomes increasingly clear that digital programming must be both innovative and culturally rooted to be truly effective.