

O M A N
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Observer



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ROYAL DECREE

PROVISIONS OF OFFICIAL GAZETTE LAW AMENDED

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No 86/2025 on amending some provisions of the Official Gazette Law, reading as follows: Article (1) states that the amendments attached to this decree shall be applied to the Official Gazette Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No 84/2011.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts the amendments attached to this decree or contravenes their provisions.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing. — ONA

HM, EMIR OF KUWAIT DISCUSS RELATIONS

A telephone call was held on Tuesday between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mishal A Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait. During the call, the two leaders discussed areas of cooperation and partnership between the two countries and ways to promote and enhance them in a manner that serves their peoples. The two leaders also reviewed the regional and international developments and exchanged views on them.

HM GREET'S CHINA, NIGERIA, CYPRUS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to the People's Republic of China in realising further achievements in all spheres. His Majesty the Sultan also sent a cable of greetings to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the Republic of Nigeria on his country's National Day. Furthermore, His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Nikos Christodoulides of the Republic of Cyprus on his country's Independence Anniversary.

TYPHOON BRINGS FLOODS IN VIETNAM



A paramilitary officer and a man remove a motorcycle from a flooded area after Typhoon Bualoi made landfall in Nghe An province, Vietnam, on Tuesday. — Reuters

‘The One Team Initiative’ to bring real impact in public service

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

With the Royal blessing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Royal Academy of Management announces the launch of ‘The One Team Initiative’ for the government this month. The first national initiative of its kind in the region is dedicated to developing a mindset focused on creating real impact in public service. The initiative aims to emphasise the pivotal role

of the civil service and to realise the higher purpose of joining the one government team. In its inaugural year, 5,000 employees nominated from 19 government entities representing the state's administrative apparatus will take part.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy of Management, said that the Royal blessing of the initiative reflects



Royal Academy of Management

His Majesty the Sultan's keenness to instil a mindset that transcends functional roles towards the higher purpose of joining the government team and realising the true impact of public service on society and the nation. He noted that the initiative aligns with the global transformations in the government's work and its role in serving the individual and society.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), said

that the Royal blessing for the implementation of ‘The One Team Initiative’ for the government marks a national path aimed at building a collective mindset of shared responsibility. He added that the participants in the first year form the foundation of a continuing journey to embed the spirit of working as one government team across the state's administrative apparatus, contributing to the realisation of the country's national vision, Oman Vision 2040. **TURN TO P2**

GDP records 2.1% growth at constant prices

MUSCAT: The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Sultanate of Oman at constant prices recorded a growth rate of 2.1 per cent in the second quarter of 2025. It reached a market price value of RO 9.36 billion, compared to RO 9.16 billion during the same period in 2024.

Preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that this growth is primarily attributed

to a 3.8-per cent increase in the value added of non-petroleum activities, which reached RO 6.86 billion by the end of the second quarter of this year, compared to RO 6.611 billion in the same quarter of 2024.

The data showed the following on the level of economic activities: agriculture and fishing activities grew by 12.5 per cent, recording RO 307.4 million, compared to RO 273.3 million. Industrial activities

registered a slight growth of 0.2 per cent, with their contribution reaching RO 1.97 billion, compared to RO 1.96 billion. Service activities grew by 4.9 per cent, with a total contribution of RO 4.58 billion, compared to RO 4.37 billion in the second quarter of 2024.

As for petroleum activities, they recorded a marginal increase of 0.5 per cent, reaching RO 2.97 billion in the second quarter of 2025,

compared to RO 2.96 billion during the same period in 2024.

Within the petroleum sector, Oman's crude oil production showed a slight rise of 0.9 per cent, contributing RO 2.49 billion to the GDP at constant prices, compared to RO 2.47 billion. Conversely, natural gas activity decreased by 1.5 per cent, with a contribution of RO 482.6 million, compared to RO 489.9 million. — ONA

UN chief calls ‘all parties’ to commit to Gaza deal

ARAB AND MUSLIM COUNTRIES WELCOME TRUMP'S PEACE EFFORTS

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called for “all parties” to commit to the peace plan for Gaza presented by US President Donald Trump, a spokesman said. “It is now crucial that all parties commit to an agreement and its implementation... He once again reiterates his call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire,” Farhan Haq, a spokesman for Guterres, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the US-sponsored ceasefire proposal for Gaza on Tuesday was hinging on Hamas's response to the 20-point plan which Trump has said was “beyond very close” to ending the two-year-old conflict in the enclave. Mediators Qatar and Egypt shared the document with Hamas late on Monday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stood alongside Trump at the White House and pledged his support for the proposal.

Hamas was not involved in the negotiations that led to Trump's plan, which calls on the group to disarm, a demand it has previously rejected.

A source close to Hamas said the plan was “completely biased to Israel” and imposed “impossible conditions” that aimed to eliminate the group.

However, an official briefed on the talks said early on Tuesday that Hamas negotiators “would review it in good faith and provide a response”.



Palestinian children gather to receive food portions from a charity kitchen in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

Trump told Hamas that if it rejected his offer, Israel would have full US support to take whatever action it deemed necessary.

The plan specifies an immediate ceasefire, an exchange of all captives held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, a staged Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas and the introduction of a transitional government led by an international body.

Many elements of the 20

points have been included in numerous ceasefire deals proposed over the last two years, including those accepted and then subsequently rejected at various stages by both Israel and Hamas.

One of Hamas's main conditions since the outset of the war has been a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in return for the release of the remaining captives. And while the group has indicated its readiness to relinquish administrative authority, it has consistently

ruled out disarming.

“What Trump has proposed is the full adoption of all Israeli conditions, which do not grant the Palestinian people or the residents of the Gaza Strip any legitimate rights,” a Palestinian official, who asked not to be named, said.

However, Hamas faces considerable pressure to accept the plan, with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Egypt all welcoming the initiative. — Agencies

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The two sides discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations. — ONA

GEN AL NUMANI RECEIVES UKRAINIAN AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Tuesday Olha Selykh, Ambassador-designate of the Republic of Ukraine to the Sultanate of Oman. At the meeting, Al Numani wished the ambassador success in carrying out her new duties and a pleasant stay in the Sultanate of Oman. The two sides discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations and aspects of joint cooperation between the two friendly countries. — ONA

SYMPOSIUM UNDERLINES ROLE OF TRANSLATORS



The symposium brought together translation professionals, students, representatives of publishing houses. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman marked International Translation Day, which falls on September 30 every year. A symposium to this effect was held in Muscat on Tuesday under the auspices of Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA). Titled “Translation: From Theory to Practice”, the symposium aimed to develop the skills of translators and related professionals and enable them to exchange expertise. The symposium was organised by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences in cooperation with the GCC Centre for Translation, Arabisation and Promotion of the Arabic Language, and Al Zahra College. The symposium brought together translation professionals, students, representatives of publishing houses and and interested parties. It sought to build partnerships among translation stakeholders in the Sultanate of Oman, upgrade the standard of Omani translators and enhance their active presence in the regional and international arenas. — ONA

Oman, Bulgaria discuss enhancing bilateral ties

MUSCAT: The first round of the Political Consultations Session between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Bulgaria was held in Muscat on Tuesday. The Omani side was led by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Bulgarian side was led by Maria Anguelieva, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. The session reviewed the existing bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and affirmed the keenness of both sides to continue developing cooperation in various fields.



The two sides discussed the possibility of exchanging the opening of embassies in both countries. — ONA

The two sides discussed the possibility of exchanging the opening of embassies in both countries. They also addressed a number of regional and international issues of mutual interest, including the repercussions of the Israeli war on Gaza. The session was attended by Mundhir bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, Todor Stoyanov, Director-General for Bilateral Relations at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Integrated care enhances quality of life for elderly

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, joins countries around the world in celebrating the International Day of Older Persons, which falls on October 1 of each year. Efforts continue to develop an integrated system of programmes and services for the elderly, meeting their needs, protecting their rights, enhancing their quality of life, and ensuring their effective integration into family and society. Radhia al Fahdi, Director of the Elderly Department at the Ministry of Social Development, emphasised that caring for the elderly is a priority in the ministry’s policies. She noted that this care is not merely a service, but rather a human and social culture that must be instilled in young people from an early age. Al Fahdi added that the ministry is working with educational institutions to implement the ‘Awareness Bag’ initiative. This initiative aims to instil values of respect and appreciation for the elderly in the early stages of education, building generations more aware of the rights and status of the elderly. She added that the ministry provides a



Efforts continue to develop an integrated system of programmes and services for the elderly.

comprehensive package of services to support the elderly and their families. Most notably, the ministry prepares homes that suit their needs and ensure their safety and comfort. This is done through a cooperation agreement with the Ihsan Association to implement programmes that prepare homes for alternative families. The ministry also provides a package of social assistance to support these families and facilitate the fulfilment of the basic needs of the elderly. Additionally, they empower and train families in appropriate care methods and provide psychological and social support to ensure a supportive and safe environment. The total number of beneficiaries of various

social services provided to the elderly and their families reached 2,800 during the first half of 2025, reflecting the extent of efforts made to enhance their quality of life and achieve their social well-being. Embodying the values of respect and pride in the status of the elderly as a fundamental pillar of the Omani social fabric, the Ministry of Social Development has sought to provide services. One of the most prominent offerings is the Home Care Programme, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. This programme provides a package of social and health services at the residence of the elderly, without requiring their transportation. The number of beneficiaries of the programme reached 1,499 during the first half of 2025. To enable the elderly to live independently, the ministry provided 1,217 prosthetic and medical aid devices during the first half of 2025. These devices include wheelchairs, medical beds, hearing aids, and other tools that enable them to lead their daily lives with comfort and safety. The number of Omanis who received care within the framework of alternative families reached 105 cases until mid-2025. In contrast, the number of residents in the Social Care Home in Al Rustaq reached 35 residents until June 2025.

‘The One Team Initiative’ to bring real impact

FROM P1

He further noted that in the coming five years, the initiative will extend to all employees of the state’s administrative apparatus at every administrative level. Dr Al Lawati said that the initiative was conceived with a national vision, shaped by diverse inputs from the relevant entities. It will be implemented by national talents specifically prepared for this initiative, while ensuring the active involvement of the targeted institutions across all stages from design to development and implementation. This approach guarantees alignment with the evolving global landscape, while

remaining inspired by Omani values, character and identity. Hilal bin Mudhafar al Riyami, Head of the One Team Initiative, said that its objectives will be realised through four central dimensions. The first, ‘Me and the Job’, focuses on the higher purpose of working in public service, moving beyond routine practice to a deeper awareness of role and mission. The second, ‘Me and Society’, encourages employees to adopt the mindset of responsible citizens contributing to community service. The third, ‘Me and Oman’, highlights the meaningful impact a one government team can make in shaping

the nation’s future across administrative levels. The fourth, ‘Me and the World’, underscores the importance of leveraging global developments, seeking opportunities before challenges, in alignment with Omani values and identity. Al Riyami added that delivering the deeper impact of public service and its national dimensions will be achieved through an integrated framework of five main elements. These include ‘the one-day workshop’, an interactive experience designed to inspire employees to reflect on their individual roles in public service and their daily impact on their institutions and society.

Event to highlight high incidence of breast cancer, its prevention

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The number of breast cancer patients in Oman has risen by 119 per cent, according to a report published by the Ministry of Health (MoH). The World Health Organization (WHO) has chosen October to spread awareness about early detection of breast cancer. This year, the theme of the awareness is ‘Every Story is Unique, Every Journey Matters’. To mark the initiative, an event will be held at the College of Banking and

Financial Studies (CBFS) on October 3. Titled “Together We Can Ban Cancer”, organised by Barkat Al Noor Clinic in association with the ‘Wings of Women’s World’ and Oman Cancer Association (OCA), the event will highlight the importance of the 3 Ps: prevention, protection and periodic examination. Speaking to the media, Dr Rajyashree Narayanankutty, an award-winning surgeon, specialising in Breast Cancer diagnosis in Oman for over 33 years at Barkat Al Noor Clinic, said that it is important every woman stays aware of breast



Organisers of ‘Together We Can Ban Cancer’ speak to the media in Muscat on Tuesday.

cancer and conducts self-examination. “If there is anything unusual, one must

immediately follow up with a doctor. It is important that all the family members go through counselling. Most

women hide the symptoms out of fear or concern for the family. Early detection means overcoming cancer.” Dr Rajyashree said a healthy lifestyle and regular check-ups are very important factors. “Do not be afraid. There is treatment and cure,” she said. “Although I began my career as a general surgeon, it was a cancer survivor and founder of OCA who is my role model in initiating this mission to spread breast cancer awareness. So, Barkat Al Noor Clinic dedicates all the events and programmes to spread awareness to the

community. So, we are extending our support to OCA,” said Dr Rajyashree. On October 3, during the ‘Ban Cancer’ awareness campaign, WWW members will showcase their talents through various activities, h ighlighting the organisation’s core values of expertise, compassion and community engagement. “This joint initiative exemplifies WWW’s dedication to addressing critical health challenges, fostering proactive outreach and supporting women and families globally in the fight against cancer,” said Dr Reshmy.

SHORT TAKES



The guests also learned about the programmes and services provided to the SME sector. — ONA

SAUDI DELEGATION BRIEFED ON OMAN’S SMEs SECTOR

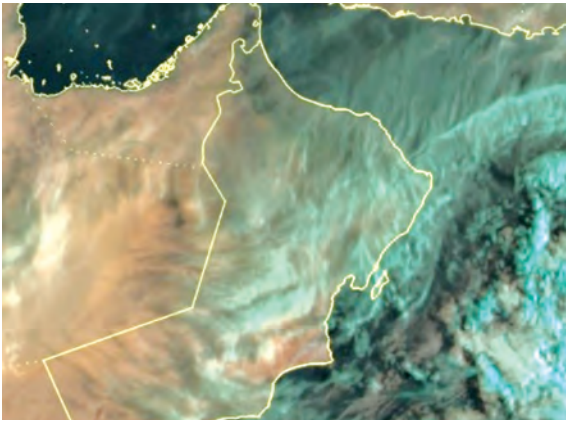
MUSCAT: Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), on Tuesday received Sami bin Ibrahim al Husaini, Governor of the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority (Monsha’at) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and his accompanying delegation at Riyadh’s headquarters in Muscat.

The meeting was held to strengthen bilateral relations and exchange expertise between the two sides.

During the meeting, the most notable successful experiences and practices in supporting and empowering entrepreneurs were highlighted.

The guests also learned about the programmes and services provided to the SME sector in both countries. This is intended to enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030. The visiting delegation also toured several business centres, incubators, and marketing outlets affiliated with Riyada in Muscat and Nizwa. They held direct meetings with a number of Omani entrepreneurs and were briefed on successful pioneering experiences across various sectors. — ONA

LOW PRESSURE CLASSIFIED AS DEPRESSION



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Weather analysis and the latest satellite images indicate that the low-pressure system over the Arabian Sea has now been classified as a tropical depression, according to the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre.

It has been observed northeast of the Arabian Sea, close to the Indian coast (Gujarat), located at longitude (68.8 E) and latitude (22.5 N) with estimated surface wind speeds around the centre of 20-27 knots (37-50 km/hour).

It is expected to move west towards the centre of the Arabian Sea, with high and medium cloud advection expected to continue. Meteorological specialists are actively monitoring upcoming updates. The Civil Aviation Authority has advised everyone to follow the issued weather bulletins and reports.

There was a continued flow of high and medium clouds over most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday.

The Oman Met Office stated that aerial images showed the flow of high and medium clouds, which may be interspersed with some light rain in some of the governorates. The focus has been on the developments across the Arabian Sea, with observations of light rain clouds over the area.

Speaking to the Observer, a weather forecaster at the Oman Met Office said, “For the next three days, we are not expecting any direct impact.” Continuous monitoring of the northwest coast of India has been conducted, as it has been identified as a low-pressure area.

International weather updates have also reported on the possibility of the situation developing into a tropical depression.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre will be issuing reports at regular intervals.

AL BATINAH FILM FESTIVAL ATTRACTS 319 FILMS FROM 33 COUNTRIES

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

As many as 319 films from 33 countries have been shortlisted for the 3rd Al Batinah International Film Festival to be held from October 27 to 30. The massive participation reflects the increasing demand for the Oman cinema industry, according to the organisers. “We are happy to announce the broad international participation in the Oman cinema

industry and will be screening as many as 319 films from 33 countries as part of the 3rd Al Batinah International Film Festival organised by the Oman Film Society (OFS) in cooperation with the Al Batinah North Governor’s Office,” said Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, OFS Chairman.

The festival features a strong presence in the artificial intelligence (AI) films category, with 18 participating films, including eight from Oman. Additionally,

15 films were produced by Omani institutions — 13 by government entities and two by the private sector. The festival aims to enhance cultural and artistic exchange, promote the ‘Make Your Film in Oman’ initiative, and showcase Oman as a fertile ground for film-making and open-air studios.

“This will contribute to strengthening its position on the global film production map and attracting international production companies,” Al Ajmi said.

Team develops smart tech to tackle obesity

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

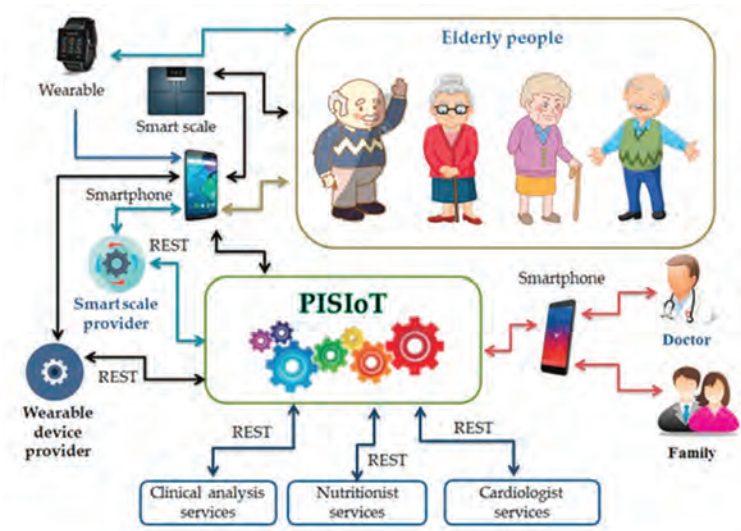
A PIONEERING research team is breaking new ground in the fight against obesity through the use of cutting-edge technologies in health data analysis and prediction.

The team has developed a smart healthcare platform that combines Internet of Health Things (IoHT) technologies with advanced machine learning to support the early prediction, prevention, and management of obesity in both children and adults.

The system integrates wearable devices, health sensors, and electronic medical records to gather real-time biometric data and deliver personalised health recommendations.

Titled “Development of Internet of Health Things (IoHT) - Machine Learning Based Smart Healthcare System for Prediction, Prevention and Control of Obesity in Children and Adults”, the project is led by principal investigator Nabila al Rashdi, Senior Lecturer at the College of Engineering at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), and funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Al Rashdi stated that the project sets out several core objectives, beginning with the development of an intelligent healthcare system capable of collecting biomedical data from obese individuals through IoHT




NABILA AL RASHDI
Research lead and senior lecturer, NUST

devices. It aims to analyse this data using a range of machine learning and deep learning algorithms, enabling the generation of real-time recommendations for weight management and obesity prevention. The team also developed a user-friendly web/mobile application for patients to interact with the system and monitor their health metrics.

A major component of the research involved collecting and pre-processing electronic health records, particularly for children aged 0 to 2 years, from local healthcare institutions and Ministry of Health platforms, including the Al Shifa electronic system.

These records were used to build and validate machine-learning models designed to forecast childhood obesity, with the goal of selecting the model with the

highest predictive accuracy.

According to Al Rashdi, the system offers “remarkable accuracy” in forecasting childhood obesity, noting that “by analysing biometric indicators and electronic health records, especially those collected from birth to age two, we can now predict the risk of childhood obesity with remarkable accuracy.”

The researchers further urge increased national investment in AI-powered healthcare technologies to advance predictive and personalised medicine across the Sultanate of Oman.

They highlight the potential of using insights from predictive models in public health awareness campaigns to inform communities about obesity risks and promote healthier lifestyles.

Future work, they note, should focus on expanding and refining these models by incorporating more diverse datasets, advancing deep learning techniques, and addressing data privacy and personalisation challenges.

The research team, led by Al Rashdi and supervised by Dr Varghese MJ, has submitted a scientific manuscript detailing the project’s findings to a peer-reviewed journal and is currently awaiting publication.

This research underscores the Sultanate of Oman’s leadership in applying artificial intelligence and health technologies to tackle modern healthcare challenges.

AI has become indispensable for health experts

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

The Legal Conference on Legislation and Digital Transformation in the Health Sector, organised by the Oman College of Health Sciences, concluded on Tuesday. The final day opened with a knowledge session titled ‘Between Ethical Guidelines and Enforceable Legal Frameworks: Regulatory Authorities’ Directions Worldwide’, and was followed by a session exploring ethical frameworks for digital health practices.

Participants examined the growing role of artificial intelligence in healthcare services before concluding with a forward-looking discussion on the future vision for developing the sector.

Dr Asma al Balushi, Consultant in Emergency Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, explained that ethical guidelines in medicine are rooted in long-standing medical, jurisprudential and legal traditions. She emphasised the four principles of medical ethics



The final day opened with a knowledge session exploring ethical frameworks for digital health practices.

— respect for patient autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice — as well as international benchmarks such as the Declaration of Geneva, the modern Hippocratic Oath and the Declaration of Helsinki.

She said that frameworks are shaped by national legislation, including medical profession laws, liability regulations and data protection laws, as well as executive rulings and judicial precedents, adding that these are further clarified through executive regulations and bylaws issued by ministries of health and medical councils, which specify how laws should

be implemented in practice.

Dr Abla Khaled Elfeky, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Civil and Commercial Procedural Law at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport in Egypt, said that AI has become indispensable for doctors, allowing more precise examinations, accurate test results and more effective treatment plans, while also serving as a backbone for advanced surgeries. She explained that without AI, physicians would struggle with efficiency and accuracy, describing it as “a must for

medical practice these days.”

At the end of the conference, a set of key recommendations was announced, including the creation of a clear legal framework to regulate digital medical services and research, while ensuring that health and biometric data are fully protected in accordance with national strategies and international agreements.

The participants also recommended introducing specific laws to govern the use of artificial intelligence in healthcare, based on international best practices.

Another focus was on automating health processes from legal, judicial and technical sides in cooperation with different institutions.

Other recommendations called for stronger regional and international cooperation in digital health and for sharing successful experiences between countries. The conference also suggested setting up a national reference body to strengthen digital health governance, workshops, and seminars on healthcare and digital transformation.

SPOTLIGHT

NANNIES, MAIDS, OR BOTH?

While maids provide much needed support, most agree that the responsibility for raising children cannot and should not be fully transferred

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 30

IN MANY Omani households, domestic helpers have become an essential part of daily life. Beyond managing household tasks, some families rely on them as caregivers for their children. This dual responsibility has sparked a debate; can domestic workers effectively and safely balance the role of housekeeper and a nanny? And does their job title or training truly matter when children's well-being is at stake?

Household agencies often present their maids as “multi-skilled”, capable of managing the home and supporting childcare. According to Um Bader, owner of a domestic worker recruitment office in Barka, “Families increasingly request workers who can handle both responsibilities. It's seen as more practical and affordable. However, not every worker has the training to deal with young children, especially infants or children with special needs.”

On the other hand, many parents remain careful. For some, trusting a domestic worker with childcare feels like handing over their most important responsibility to someone they hardly know. Halima al Balushi, a mother of four, explains, “I need help at home, but I wouldn't leave my children entirely in the care of a worker. They are not trained educators or nurses. Their main role should be managing the house, not taking care of the children.”

For others, the decision is clear and precise. Some parents prefer nurseries or childcare centres over leaving children at home with nannies. “I would never trust leaving my daughter with a



I need help at home, but I wouldn't leave my children entirely in the care of a worker. They are not trained educators or nurses. Their main role should be managing the house, not taking care of the children

HALIMA AL BALUSHI
A mother of four children

housemaid,” says Khalsa al Jabri, a working mother. “If I have to choose, I would rather place her in a licensed nursery where I know professional nannies are watching her. At least there, she learns, plays and interacts in a safe environment.”

Yet, other families argue that domestic workers can become like second mothers, offering love and consistency. For working parents, especially mothers balancing careers, the support of a trusted domestic worker is invaluable. Some even prefer to hire workers specifically as nannies, focusing only on childcare rather than household duties.

The debate also raises questions of safety and regulation. Agencies admit that training standards vary

widely. While some workers receive orientation in childcare, others arrive with no relevant experience. This gap fuels concerns about the child's emotional and physical well-being.

Dr Jawaher al Hadrhrami, an educational specialist, offers a warning as high concerns note: “Children need not only supervision but also proper emotional and educational stimulation. When childcare is left only to untrained workers, the child may lack the developmental support they need. Parents must remain the primary source of guidance, while nurseries and schools complement this role. Domestic workers can help, but they should never replace the parents' active involvement.”

SHORTTAKES



An expanded awareness symposium was titled ‘Genetic Blood Disorders and Pre-Marital Screening’. — **ONA**

HEALTH AWARENESS
HELD IN AL AWABI

AL AWABI: The Health Committee in the Wilayat of Al Awabi on Tuesday organised an expanded awareness symposium titled “Genetic Blood Disorders and Pre-Marital Screening.”

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, with the attendance of several officials in the governorate.

The symposium included three working papers: The first paper addressed genetic diseases. The second paper reviewed the details of the pre-marital screening programme from a health perspective, while the third paper covered the Sharia and jurisprudential aspects of pre-marital screening.

Dr Jean-Jacob Jabbour, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in the Sultanate of Oman, highlighted the importance of the symposium in its significant awareness role for preventing a number of genetic and infectious diseases, including blood disorders. — **ONA**

CONFERENCE ON
ARCHAEOLOGY
IN FEBRUARY

MUSCAT: In collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is set to host the First International Conference on the Archaeology of the Oman Peninsula. The inaugural edition of the conference coincides with the celebration of the Golden Jubilee, marking fifty years since the release of the first issue of the Journal of Oman Studies in 1975.

The conference sessions will feature research papers presented under several key themes, the most notable of which are: The Oman Peninsula in Prehistory (From the Stone Age to the Pre-Islamic Periods); The Oman Peninsula during the Islamic Periods (Early, Middle and Late); Rock Art in the Oman Peninsula; Built Heritage in the Sultanate of Oman; Paleoclimate and Paleoenvironment in the Oman Peninsula; and Underwater Archaeology.

More than fifty scholars, researchers and academics from Oman and abroad are scheduled to present their research papers at the conference. They represent a wide range of international archaeological survey and excavation missions operating in Oman.

More schools in Oman lapping up AI

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

More schools in Oman are integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their curricula, according to an AI expert. Speaking to the Observer, TS Sreedhar, an expert in AI, said that there has been a major wave in Oman in terms of AI, and it is only a matter of time before the entire education system is fully equipped with AI.

“Oman has taken a major leap, and some of the schools have already implemented AI in their academics following the Indian School Al Ghubra, which is the first school to embrace AI in their curriculum,” TS Sreedhar said.

“The aspects of acquire, analyse and innovate



T S SREEDHAR

in the country. The other international schools are keen on embracing AI,” he added. “A lot of corporates too have shown interest in adopting AI for their processes and productivity enhancement measures following the school,” Sreedhar said.

He highlighted NeuraEdge, a cutting-edge Small Language Model-based smart solution built

inculcated by SuperAI have really excited the students and parents too. Moreover, the announcement by the chairman of Indian schools on the adoption of AI in the schools has created more interest

to empower enterprises and governments with secure, domain-specific AI. Unlike generic large models, NeuraEdge is designed to run efficiently on private and hybrid clouds, delivering high-speed, cost-effective and context-aware AI solutions.

With capabilities spanning chatbots, document intelligence, knowledge management and decision-support systems, AI solutions provide organisations with sovereign, customisable, scalable and secure AI applications tailored to their unique needs.

“By combining the power of LLMs with the practicality of small, optimised models, AI can shape the future of technological advancement in Oman and beyond,” Sreedhar said.

Conference reaffirms role
in supporting innovation

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

THE Digital Content Conference with AI was launched on Monday at the Civil Aviation Authority Hall, under the auspices of Dr Siham al Harthy, member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, featuring a distinguished lineup of international and Omani speakers and experts.

The two-day event attracted a wide audience, including government and private institutions, entrepreneurs, and those interested in modern digital technologies. The conference reaffirmed Oman's role in supporting innovation and promoting digital transformation in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The conference brought together content creators, designers and digital entrepreneurs to explore the latest trends in content creation and AI applications, which delve into the realms of creativity and innovation. It included sessions, workshops, and inspiring discussions aimed at knowledge sharing and building an interactive network of experts and professionals, contributing to the development of this sector and keeping pace with global technological transformations. The focus was on empowering creativity with AI tools in video editing, image generation, character design, visual effects, and automated scriptwriting, in addition to



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accelerating creative production processes using smart tools to reduce time and effort in editing and design.

The conference also aimed to enhance visual and auditory experiences by improving image and sound quality and enabling real-time translation. It further highlighted opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship through digital production projects and creative agencies powered by AI.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed al Hajri, participant in the conference, stated that the conference was very insightful. He also added that the conference is crucial for anyone who wishes to understand digital marketing or incorporate artificial intelligence.

Dr Nada Ezz, an assistant professor in art education at Helwan University and AI ambassador for Egypt, emphasised that the future

of AI is very promising in Oman. She noted that the massive number of conference attendees only goes to assert Omanis' willingness and enthusiasm to learn more about AI.

On the sidelines of the conference, two distinctive competitions were launched. The first was the AI Video Production Competition, targeting youth and content creators to produce a short film about Oman using AI tools.

The second was the Best Arab Influencers in AI Content Creation Competition, which aimed to honour Arab influencers who have played a significant role in spreading AI awareness through digital platforms.

Winners were selected based on nominations and public voting and received the Digital Excellence Shield, certificates of recognition and the opportunity to participate as speakers in upcoming events.

RAM, Russian Presidential Academy launch knowledge exchange

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has launched a strategic knowledge-exchange programme with the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA).

Marking a significant milestone in strengthening international partnerships, the programme aims to foster collaboration in the area of public sector leadership through the exchange of government expertise between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation. It will further support leadership development and promote global best practices in public administration.

The participants include Russian government officials enrolled in an Executive Master's in Public Administration.

The bespoke knowledge-exchange programme is designed to enrich the knowledge and perspectives of the participants, offering them a deep dive into Oman's modern approaches to governance and leadership.

By facilitating this exchange of knowledge and expertise, the programme will strengthen bilateral cooperation and showcase Oman's effective achievements and experiences in public administration on the global stage.

Held from September 28 to October 4, the programme embodies RAM's strategic vision of expanding international cooperation and creating new platforms for knowledge exchange that support the public administration sector.



The knowledge-exchange programme underscores RAM's commitment to being a leading institution in fostering international partnerships in leadership and management.

It also offers Omani leaders invaluable insights and exposure to emerging global trends in governance, economics and leadership, enhancing their strategic perspective and leadership acumen.

Khalid al Shaqsi, RAM's Director of Academic Affairs and International Cooperation, said, “This programme is a direct outcome of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Royal Academy of Management and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration earlier this year.

It aligned with the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Russian Federation, where he met with President Vladimir Putin.”

He added, “This initiative transcends a mere exchange of knowledge; it represents a decisive, strategic and concrete step to deepen bilateral relations, expand leadership perspectives, and open new avenues for collaboration in the areas of governance, management and public policy.”

The knowledge-exchange programme underscores RAM's commitment to being a leading institution in fostering international partnerships in leadership and management.

Exchanging expertise with reputed institutions abroad, such as RANEPA, RAM continues to contribute to strengthening Oman's position as a dynamic hub for fostering constructive dialogue and building strategic global partnerships.

WORLD

PUBLICDEMANDS



Protesters holding a Madagascar flag gather during a demonstration, in Antananarivo. — AFP

NEW YOUTH PROTESTS IN MADAGASCAR

ANTANARIVO: Protesters in Madagascar held new demonstrations on Tuesday, facing a heavy police presence and teargas, journalists saw, a day after President Andry Rajoelina sacked his government in a bid to quell days of unrest that the UN said has killed 22 people. Inspired by “Gen Z” protests in Indonesia and Nepal, the youth-led movement has taken aim at ingrained misgovernance, fuelled by anger over repeated water and power cuts across the poor Indian Ocean nation.

Rajoelina fired his entire government Monday, apologised for his ministers’ inaction and vowed to find a solution to the country’s problems. But it was not enough to put paid to protests, with hundreds turning up on Tuesday for a fresh rally in the capital following calls on social media.

Police were deployed in and around the city centre. At one roadblock, they fired teargas to scatter a small crowd that had begun to gather. Minimal activity resumed in the outskirts, with streets filled with schoolchildren and people pulling carts, though traffic remained light. Protesters have demanded that Rajoelina, who first came to power in 2009 following a coup sparked by an uprising, resigns.

“They call us the TikTok generation, a generation of idiots, and when we rise up, they won’t even let us speak,” a student protester said on Monday, dressed in black in line with a call on social media to mourn those killed. “Mr Andry Rajoelina, when you led protests, you were allowed to, it was fine. But when we young people rise to fight for our country, you try to silence us,” she said.

Previous demonstrations have been met with a heavy police response, with at least 22 people killed and more than 100 injured, according to the UN. Some of the victims were protesters or bystanders killed by the police or the security forces, according to the office of the UN’s human rights chief, who condemned the use of live ammunition. The government has rejected the tally as unverified and “based on rumours or misinformation”.

Protests first started in the capital Antananarivo on Thursday before spreading to other cities across the country of nearly 32 million people, according to World Bank data. Last week’s protests in Antananarivo were followed by widespread looting throughout the night, prompting authorities to declare a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

Rajoelina, a former mayor of Antananarivo, came to power on the back of a coup that ousted former president Marc Ravalomanana.

On Monday, he invited applications for a new premier over the next three days before a new government is formed. “The president is part of a corrupt system,” said a 30-year-old agricultural engineer, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “He is trying to make us believe that something will change.” The current unrest is the latest to hit Madagascar since the end of French rule.

Philibert Tsiranana, who led the country through the post-independence era, was forced to hand over power to the army in 1972. Madagascar ranks among the world’s poorest countries but is the leading producer of vanilla. — AFP

TALIBAN INTERNET CUT SPARKS AFGHANISTAN TELECOMS BLACKOUT

KABUL: The United Nations called on Afghanistan’s Taliban authorities to immediately restore internet and telecommunications in the country, 24 hours after a nationwide blackout was imposed. The government began shutting down high-speed internet connections to some provinces earlier this month to prevent “vice”, on the orders of shadowy supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Mobile phone signal and internet service weakened on Monday night

until connectivity was less than one per cent of ordinary levels. Afghans are unable to contact each other, online businesses and the banking systems have frozen, and diaspora abroad cannot send crucial remittances to family. All flights were cancelled at Kabul airport on Tuesday, journalists saw.

“The cut in access has left Afghanistan almost completely cut off from the outside world, and risks inflicting significant harm on the Afghan people, including

by threatening economic stability and exacerbating one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises,” the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a statement. “The current blackout also constitutes a further restriction on access to information and freedom of expression in Afghanistan,” it added.

The telecommunications ministry refused to let journalists enter the building in Kabul on Tuesday. — AFP

World powers back Trump plan to end the war in Gaza

KEY Muslim nations have thrown their weight behind a plan by US President Donald Trump to end the war in Gaza, even as some Palestinians decried the proposal as a “farce”. Washington’s European allies have urged Hamas to accept the plan, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he supported as he warned the Palestinian group of more devastation if it did not comply.

Eight Arab or Muslim-majority nations said they “welcome the role of the American president and his sincere efforts aimed at ending the war in Gaza”. In a joint statement, they said they “affirm their readiness to engage positively and constructively with the United States and the parties toward finalising the agreement and ensuring its implementation”. The countries include Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Turkiye.

Another signatory was Qatar, which has played a key mediatory role, and Saudi Arabia.

Indonesia and Pakistan, the world’s two most populous Muslim-majority countries, also signed. Indonesia has offered troops as part of a future Gaza force, while Pakistan has been eager to woo Trump and improve its relationship with Washington. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he believed Trump was “fully prepared to assist in whatever way necessary” to secure an end to the war.

The Palestinian Authority, which Netanyahu has sought to sideline, was also quick to offer support, calling Trump’s efforts “sincere and determined”. Hamas has yet to



Palestinian children gather to receive food portions in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

comment in depth, while Qatar said it would hold talks with negotiators and Turkey on Tuesday to discuss the plan. “The (Hamas) negotiating delegation promised to study it responsibly,” Majed al-Ansari, Qatar’s foreign ministry spokesman, told a press conference.

However, Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian armed group fighting alongside Hamas in Gaza, called the plan “a recipe for continued aggression against the Palestinian people”. “Through this, Israel is attempting to impose what it could not achieve through war,” it said.

Several European leaders voiced support on Tuesday for Trump’s Gaza plan, with Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz calling it the “best chance” to end the war as he met relatives of German-Israeli hostages. In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called

“We’re going to do about three or four days. We’re just waiting for Hamas, and Hamas is either going to be doing it or not. And if it’s not, it’s going to be a very sad end

DONALD TRUMP

the situation in Gaza an “ongoing tragedy”. “We want this plan to be implemented and for it to help bring events in the Middle East to a peaceful conclusion,” he told reporters.

Trump gave Hamas an ultimatum of “three or four days” on Tuesday to respond to his plan for Gaza, as the Palestinian group reviewed the proposal backed by Israel.

“We’re going to do about three or four days,” Trump told reporters when asked about any timeframe. “We’re just waiting for Hamas, and Hamas is either going to be doing it or not. And if it’s not, it’s going to be a very sad end.”

Trump also won UK and French backing which includes a call for a transitional body in Gaza involving former British premier Tony Blair, a former envoy for the Middle East Quartet. — AFP

FLATTENED BUILDING

Dozens missing in Indonesia school collapse



Searchers raced on Tuesday to rescue dozens of people still believed trapped a day after the collapse of a school building in Indonesia that has already left three dead. The building gave way on Monday, where students were gathered for afternoon prayers, said local reports. Rescue agency head Nanang Sigit said in a statement that the number of people affected was 100, revising down an earlier figure of 102 due to double-counting. — AFP

CONNECTING PROJECT

India to build first cross-border railway



India and Bhutan will build the first cross-border railway lines connecting both countries with the \$454-million project to be completed in four years. Indian foreign secretary Vikram Misri said his country, which is Bhutan’s main trading partner, “has played a vital role” in the modernisation of the Himalayan kingdom’s infrastructure and economy. The rail project will be of “huge benefit to the people of Bhutan,” India’s Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw said. — AFP

TORRENTIAL DOWNPOURS

Rain warning lowered in eastern Spain



Spain’s national weather service downgraded its rain alert for Valencia, the site of deadly flooding in 2024, but issued its highest warning for the holiday islands of Ibiza and Formentera. The alert level in Valencia was cut by two levels from red to yellow, a day after torrential downpours forced schools to close. Monday’s red alert in Valencia revived memories of October 2024, when flooding killed more than 230 people. — AFP

COOPERATIONPARTNERS



Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba (L) shakes hands with South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (R) at Nurimaru APEC House in Busan. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA’S LEE, OUTGOING JAPAN PM ISHIBA HOLD TALKS

SEOUL: The leaders of South Korea and Japan agreed on Tuesday to work together to tackle global trade turmoil while reaffirming their commitment to denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula, a South Korean presidential spokesperson said. President Lee Jae Myung hosted Japan’s outgoing Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on a goodwill visit to highlight the neighbours’ commitment to improve once-frosty ties and cooperate more closely on trade.

“The two leaders shared the view that ... Korea and Japan, as neighbours and global cooperation partners with similar positions, should act together to address challenges,” the spokesperson, Kang Yu-Jung told a press briefing after they met.

The effort to resolve challenges facing the international community comes amidst a turbulent geopolitical environment and trade order, she said, adding that both reaffirmed commitment to the “complete denuclearisation” of the Korean peninsula.

Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said there was no reason to avoid talks with the United States if it stopped insisting that his country give up nuclear weapons, but he would never abandon the nuclear arsenal to end sanctions.

Lee has engaged with Japan on security and trade issues, continuing his predecessor’s policy of cautious rapprochement after years of tension over Japan’s wartime history. “As the world becomes increasingly difficult, I believe that coordination and exchange between our close neighbors are truly crucial,” he said in opening remarks.

Ishiba said he hoped Korea and Japan would continue to work together more closely than any other countries do.

Ishiba, whose Liberal Democratic Party is set to pick a new leader on October 4 who is likely to become prime minister, met Lee in the southern city of Busan during his two-day visit. Ishiba is a unique figure in the Japanese ruling party and South Korea looked forward to his continued role in helping two-way ties after he steps down, Lee’s national security adviser, Wi Sung-lac, told a briefing on Monday.

Japan has reached a framework deal with Trump, who has signed an executive order formalising the pact to lower tariffs to 15 per cent on its products, including autos.

But many issues remain to be ironed out, including Japan’s pledge to invest \$550 billion in US projects and further action Trump has threatened on pharmaceutical and semiconductor imports worldwide. — Reuters

GERMAN FAR-RIGHT MP’S EX AIDE JAILED FOR SPYING FOR CHINA

DRESDEN: A former aide to German far-right lawmaker Maximilian Krah in the European parliament was jailed for four years and nine months on Tuesday on charges of spying for China. The court in Dresden found Jian Guo guilty of acting as an agent for a Chinese intelligence service while working for Krah, a member of the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. An accomplice of Guo, a woman named only as Yaqi X., was given a suspended sentence of one

year and nine months. “There is no question that you were an employee of a Chinese intelligence service,” presiding judge Hans Schlueter-Staats said to Guo, citing wiretapped conversations and other evidence. Prosecutors had sought seven and a half years in jail for Guo, a German national who worked as a Brussels-based staffer for Krah between 2019 and 2024. They told the court that Guo had worked for Chinese intelligence from 2002 and used his position in Krah’s office to gather intelligence

on European affairs and on the AfD. The court heard he passed on hundreds of documents and collected information about leading AfD politicians, including party leaders Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla. He also spied on Chinese opposition figures and dissidents in Germany. Chinese national Yaqi X., who worked at a firm that provided Leipzig airport with logistics services, admitted she had passed on information to Guo about flight schedules. — AFP

Russian drone strikes kill four in Ukraine’s Sumy

UKRAINE

said on Tuesday that a Russian overnight drone strike had killed a family of four in the northeastern Sumy region. Oleg Grygorov, the head of the regional military administration, said Russian forces had hit a residential building in the village of Chernechchyna, in the Krasnopillia community. “A couple with two young children lived in this house. Unfortunately, no one managed to escape,” Grygorov wrote on the Telegram platform. “Rescuers (recovered) the bodies of four deceased people from under the rubble — parents and their sons, six and four years old,” he said. “This is a terrible and irreparable loss for the entire community and the region.”

Russia’s defence ministry said it had “intercepted and destroyed” 81 Ukrainian drones overnight. The governor of Volgograd, Andrey Bocharov, said the Russian military had repelled a “massive” Ukrainian drone attack over the southern region. “According to preliminary information, there was no damage to structures or injuries,” Bocharov said.

On Sunday, a massive Russian drone and missile attack against Ukraine lasting 12 hours killed at least four people in the capital Kyiv, including a 12-year-old girl, and left dozens injured across the country. Ukraine said it had been targeted by 595 drones and 48 missiles that night, most of which were shot down by air defences. The fighting in Ukraine is essentially taking place in the east and Russia controls about a fifth of Ukrainian territory.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin called up 135,000 men for routine military service, the country’s biggest autumn conscription drive since 2016. Conscripts are expected to serve for a year at a military base inside Russia, not to fight in Ukraine, although there have been reports of conscripted men being sent to the front line. Since launching his full-scale military assault on Ukraine in February 2022, Putin has put Russia on a war footing, boosting military spending to levels unseen since the Soviet era and expanding the army.



A view shows a residential neighbourhood hit during a Russian drone, in the outskirts of Kyiv. — Reuters

Meanwhile, the Czech Republic announced on Tuesday it is restricting the holders of Russian diplomatic and business passports from entering the country in what it said was an EU first, citing security concerns. The EU is pondering curbing the movement of Russian diplomats across the Schengen free travel area. Prague has long proposed restrictions on the movement of Russian diplomats following Moscow’s attack of Ukraine in 2022.

“We have imposed an entry ban on the holders of Russian diplomatic and business passports at international airports,” Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky told reporters. He added Russians with an accreditation issued by Prague would be allowed to enter, and that the measure does not concern diplomats at Moscow’s embassy in the Czech capital.

Foreign ministry spokesman Daniel Drake said that the measure took “immediate effect” and that Prague was the first within the EU to adopt the measure. Lipavsky told reporters his country would “continue to push the proposal for pan-European, pan-Schengen restrictions”. He added the European measure would “help resolve our security problem as (Russia’s) diplomatic network conceals networks of agents who endanger our security here”.

The Czech intelligence service BIS said

in its annual report for 2024 that “Russia continued its efforts to rebuild broader espionage networks operating under diplomatic cover”. The Czech Republic, an EU and NATO member with a population of 10.9 million, has provided Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid since the Russian attack started.

Separately, Ukraine has sent a team of anti-drone warfare specialists to Denmark “for exercises”, President Volodymyr Zelensky said, as Copenhagen prepares to host European leaders amid a spate of alleged Russian airspace violations in Europe. Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Polish soldiers would also head to Denmark to help secure the upcoming EU leaders meeting and European Political Community summit.

The violations include a massive drone incursion into Poland and fighter jets entering Estonia’s airspace. Ukraine has faced nightly waves of Russian drone and missile attacks for much of the three-and-a-half-year war that Russia launched. “Our group of specialists has begun deploying a mission in Denmark to share Ukraine’s experience in countering drones,” Zelensky said in a post on social media, adding the team would participate in joint exercises with allies. — AFP

Venezuela’s Maduro readies state of emergency over US ‘aggression’

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said that he is ready to declare a state of emergency over the threat of US “aggression,” following a spate of deadly US strikes on suspected Venezuelan drug boats. “Today the consultation process began...to declare a state of emergency in accordance with the constitution and protect our people, our peace, and our stability if Venezuela were attacked by the American empire, attacked militarily,” Maduro said in a televised address.

Earlier in the day, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez told foreign diplomats that Maduro had signed a decree giving himself “special powers” as head of state to act in matters of defense and security in the event the United States “dares to attack our homeland.” A government source, however, said that Maduro had not yet signed the document. “The vice president

presented the document to show that everything was ready and that the president can decree it at any time,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The left-wing authoritarian Maduro placed Venezuela on high alert over a major US military deployment near his country’s coast.

US President Donald Trump has deployed eight warships and a nuclear-powered submarine to the southern Caribbean as part of a stated plan to combat drug trafficking, but which appears particularly aimed at pressuring Maduro. US forces have destroyed at least three suspected drug boats in the Caribbean in recent weeks, killing 14 people in a move decried as “extrajudicial execution” by UN experts. Now, US military officials are drawing up options to target drug traffickers inside Venezuela’s borders, according to a report by US news outlet NBC, citing four sources



Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro speaks during a press conference, Caracas. — AFP

familiar with the discussions. Declaring a state of emergency would allow Maduro, whose disputed reelection last year was not recognized by much of the international community, to temporarily suspend Venezuelans’ basic rights. Rodriguez was

confident that Venezuelans would unite behind Maduro in the event of a US attack. “Venezuela is united in the defense of our country,” she said, vowing: “We will never surrender our homeland.” In his address, Maduro also asserted that he had “good feedback”

from a private conversation he’d had with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Maduro said that Guterres had expressed his “astonishment at an unprecedented escalation, an extravagant escalation, which, for almost seven weeks, was announced and launched against a peaceful country, Venezuela.” These assertions have not been confirmed by the UN.

Venezuela carried out military exercises in coastal areas on Saturday after the US deployed ships off its coast, stirring invasion fears. The exercise involved cannons being fired into the sea and amphibious vehicles being disembarked from a boat and moving onto shore. Trucks carried Russian-made Pechora anti-aircraft missiles to the area. The military also led an exercise to occupy Patos Island, an uninhabited island near the border with Trinidad and Tobago, deploying helicopters and paratroopers. — AFP

OPINION

For powerful presence, you need to be powerfully present



HYESHA
BARRETT

The writer is a Master
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WE were taught from a young age that “presence” is about how we appear to others: the way we dress, shake hands and speak to people. Society tells us to polish our exterior, to be notable, to project confidence. However, none of that matters if we are not fully “here”. Presence is not a performance. It is not about personality, charisma, or the clever words that earn approval. True presence is the ability to inhabit your own life fully: to sense the underlying current of the moment, to notice what’s happening inside you and to stand rooted in your truth. Powerful presence has little to do with what others see and everything to do with where your attention is. A person who is powerfully present radiates steadiness. They do not need to prove nor persuade — their calm energy draws people in naturally. Think about the individuals you admire most. Often, they are not the loudest voice in the room, but the ones who carry an ease that invites others to

exhale. They are not scattered, distracted, or somewhere else in thought. They are here: fully, openly and without pretence. Choosing to be powerfully present is not easy! It often feels uncomfortable because it requires us to turn inwards, instead of numbing out or rushing past. It asks us to notice our emotions, face the parts of life we would rather ignore, and quiet the mental chatter that pulls us away from the now. It invites us to stop rehearsing what we will say next and simply listen, both to others and to ourselves. Being present is not passive - physically here, but mentally checked out. It is a deliberate act of reclaiming your focus from everything that competes for it: the phone notifications, the endless to-do lists, the internal pressure to be “on” all the time. Powerful presence begins in the body. It is felt in a deep breath that lands fully, in the softening of the jaw, in the way you allow your shoulders to drop and ground yourself in this moment. The beauty of presence is that it cannot be

The beauty of presence is that it cannot be faked. Confidence can be feigned, composure can be staged, but presence cannot be pretended.

faked. Confidence can be feigned, composure can be staged, but presence cannot be pretended. Presence must be cultivated. It is something you return to again and again, like coming home. When you practice presence, you create a ripple effect. Others around you feel safer. Conversations deepen. Problem-solving becomes more creative. People sense that you are with them, and that alone changes the quality of every interaction. Being powerfully present is an act of courage, particularly in a world that rewards constant distraction and endless motion. It is not about controlling how others see you; it is about allowing the real you to secure space. When you show up fully in this moment, you become the kind of person others naturally pay attention to, because they feel seen too, and that is where true influence begins. Your presence is your power and when you claim it, everything around you transforms.

US SANCTIONS ON
KEY INDIAN PROJECT
IN IRAN TAKE EFFECT

Shaun TANDON

US sanctions went into effect on Monday on a major Indian port project in Iran, as President Donald Trump again showed his willingness to punish longstanding partner New Delhi in aid of his wider regional goals — in this case to pressure Tehran. The sanctions on the Chabahar port came a day after wide UN sanctions also came back into force on Iran, as Trump, European allies and Israel have all targeted the country over its nuclear programme. The first Trump administration issued a rare exemption in 2018 to allow Indian companies to keep developing Chabahar when the United States imposed sweeping unilateral sanctions on Iran, whose main port at Bandar Abbas is overcapacity. But much has changed since 2018. Kabul was then still controlled by a government backed by Washington, the European Union and India, who viewed Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan with suspicion, accusing it of having ties to the Taliban. Chabahar had been billed as an alternate gateway to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, which has long controlled the lion’s share of transit trade into Afghanistan. The Taliban retook control of Afghanistan in 2021, as US forces withdrew under a peace deal signed by Trump. Trump, who appeared peeved after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declined to praise him over a ceasefire in a four-day conflict with Pakistan, has imposed major tariffs on India due to its purchases of oil from Russia. State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott announced the end of the sanctions exemption on Chabahar in an earlier statement that said it was effective on September 29. Under US law, companies, including state-run India Ports Global Limited, will have 45 days to exit Chabahar or risk having any US-based assets frozen and US transactions barred. Joshua Kretman, a counsel at law firm Dentons who formerly worked on sanctions at the State Department, said any inclusion of an Indian firm on the sanctioned list “has the potential to create a kind of cascading effect where banks and other companies may not transact with the designated business.” “If that sanctioned entity operates globally, needs access to major banks or dollar clearing, there is a legitimate reason for concern,” he said. Commenting on the decision, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said only: “We are presently examining the implications that this revocation has for India.” Despite the closing of Afghanistan, India last year signed a 10-year contract in which the state-run India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) promised \$370 million of investment in Chabahar. — AFP

Wealth of ideas: Tharwa
and future of innovation

POSITIVE energy makes the world go around. That spirit powered the Tharwa Forum, a three-day ideation lab held in September 2025. The name “Tharwa” (Arabic for “wealth”) reflects His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s belief that youth are the nation’s real wealth and recalls how the the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos saw a balanced relationship between heritage, aspirations and energy. Ninety-nine volunteers from civil society, business and government gathered to design innovative youth programmes and influence future national planning. Open dialogue characterised the forum. Participants debated youth-focused research, volunteering, dialogues and appreciation events. Senior officials joined discussions, illustrating why target groups must be involved in policy design. Oman’s youth programme sits amid a demographic context in which young people represent a large and growing share of humanity. According to the United Nations, there are 1.2 billion people aged 15-24 (16 per cent of the world’s population), and the number will rise to nearly 1.3 billion by 2030. Harnessing this demographic dividend requires robust youth-led innovation. A leading global model for youth ideation is the Youth Innovation Lab (YIL) programme developed by Save the Children. Its programmatic guide stresses that successful labs are built on a human-centred design process rooted in six principles: empathy, a bias for action, radical collaboration, rapid prototyping, visualisation and adherence to process. These principles encourage participants to get out of the classroom, identify real problems, build prototypes and iterate. YILs emphasise psychological safety, clear boundaries, supportive relationships, autonomy and opportunities to belong. Facilitators are trained to create an environment where young people can test ideas without fear, learn leadership skills and see themselves as change agents.



KHALID
AL HURAIBI

The writer is an inno-
vator and an insights
storyteller

Tharwa Forum can seed a generation of forward-thinking youth capable of balancing cultural heritage with bold new ideas, turning youth energy into national wealth.

The guide notes that youth innovation labs are not micro-enterprise programmes; rather than promising to launch businesses, they build leadership, problem-solving and community engagement skills. Participants still finish the programme having learned to solve problems using design thinking, engage more with their communities and earn respect, outcomes that help them secure support for future ventures. Several international initiatives show how structured ideation coupled with follow-up support can produce scalable solutions. Youth Co:Lab, a partnership between UNDP and Citi Foundation, has become Asia-Pacific’s largest social-innovation platform. In India alone, six national dialogues have reached over 19,000 participants and supported 2,600 youth-led teams. Its 2024-25 edition focuses on disability-inclusive innovation; the programme aims to back 30-35 early-stage startups with mentorship and seed grants. Co-designing challenges with disabled entrepreneurs ensures solutions are inclusive from the outset. The World Food Forum’s Youth Innovation Lab uses competitions, incubation and masterclasses to develop sustainable food solutions. It hosts research challenges and startup competitions, incubating projects and providing masterclasses from experts so participants can “identify out-of-the-box, actionable solutions” to transform agrifood systems and address climate change. The lab emphasises that ideation must lead to incubation and networking if solutions are to survive beyond the event. Earlier labs demonstrate the model’s scale: the 2022 UNLEASH India lab convened 1,000 participants from more than 100 nationalities, producing 175 solutions across seven thematic tracks. The 2024 Amazon lab in Brazil included 80 per cent participants from Indigenous and traditional communities, ensuring solutions reflected local needs. In the Caribbean, the DIA Urban Labs run by the Trust for the

Americas transform community centres into innovation hubs. APPLYING GLOBAL LESSONS TO OMAN’S THARWA FORUM These programmes show that ideation labs succeed when they combine structured design processes with inclusive participation, psychological safety and follow-up support. For the Tharwa Forum, incorporating such practices could amplify impact: 1. Adopt design thinking: Train facilitators and participants in human-centred design principles — empathy, prototyping and collaboration — so ideas are tested and iterated quickly. 2. Ensure safe, inclusive spaces: Like YIL and UNLEASH, prioritise gender equity, accessibility and the involvement of marginalised youth, including those with disabilities. 3. Provide mentorship and follow-through: Create post-forum prototyping or incubation programmes, similar to Youth Co:Lab and UNLEASH, offering mentorship, small grants and connections to partners. 4. Engage community and industry: Involve local businesses, research institutions and government to ensure ideas address real needs and have pathways to implementation. DIA Labs’ community partnerships and hackathons illustrate how local challenges can be solved collectively. 5. Measure and share results: Track the number of ideas developed, partnerships formed and initiatives launched, and share these stories to attract wider support. Global programmes report participant numbers, ventures created and funds awarded, which builds credibility and draws resources. By further enriching Oman’s cultural values with evidence-based practices from successful youth innovation programmes, the Tharwa Forum can become more than a one-off event. It can seed a generation of forward-thinking youth capable of balancing cultural heritage with bold new ideas, turning youth energy into national wealth.

Ensuring universal health services to combat NCDs



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

NON COMMUNICABLE diseases (NCDs), constituting the primary public health challenges globally, are rising in all nations, impacting every community, and rendering them critical concerns for public health, productivity and sustainable economic development.

The World Health Organization data reveals that two billion individuals are affected by NCDs, encompassing heart and lung diseases, cancer and diabetes. Among the 18 million individuals who die from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) annually before reaching 70, more than 80 per cent reside in low- and middle-income nations.

Approximately one billion individuals globally are believed to suffer from mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders; one in seven adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 face mental health issues, and over 720,000 people commit suicide annually.

The UN agency predicts that by 2025, NCDs will account for over 70 per cent of worldwide fatalities, with 85 per cent of these deaths taking place in developing countries. Data suggests that in the absence of effective prevention strategies, around 41 million people in low-income countries will die from NCDs by 2025, primarily due to cardiovascular problems, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

“The primary healthcare model provides the most comprehensive, fair and economical method to address this crisis,” asserts the

global organisation in a report on how primary healthcare can deliver scalable solutions to the NCDs.

In this context, the political declaration at the United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on September 25 holds great importance as it establishes global objectives to be met by 2030, such as reducing tobacco users by 150 million, increasing individuals with controlled hypertension by 150 million, and providing 150 million more people with access to mental health services.

Acknowledging that primary healthcare represents a national health system, the Sultanate of Oman has endeavoured to enhance its health system to guarantee fairness and universal access to health services. Throughout the nation, more than 200 primary healthcare centres offer services, stocked with necessary medications, diagnostic equipment and skilled healthcare professionals.

Universal health coverage aims for all individuals to access the health services they require without facing financial difficulty due to unaffordable out-of-pocket expenses. It includes access to quality health services – from health promotion and prevention to treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care – along with financial risk protection coverage.

Similar to numerous developing nations, Oman is experiencing a significant shift in the prevalence of NCDs, which have now become the primary cause of many fatalities

In Oman, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory disorders, cancer and diabetes account for over 80 per cent of all deaths linked to non-communicable diseases, with elements like lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and tobacco consumption raising the risk of NCDs

in this country.

This was emphasised by Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and Chair of the National Committee for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases at the UN Headquarters in New York during the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, recently.

“Similar to numerous nations globally, Oman too faces the challenge of non-communicable diseases,” she remarked at the event. These quiet illnesses, despite their profound seriousness, take lives, restrict personal potential and put pressure on the core structure of our communities.

In Oman, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory disorders, cancer and diabetes account for 83 per cent of all deaths linked to non-communicable diseases, with elements like lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and tobacco consumption raising the risk of NCDs.

Nonetheless, Oman is completely cognisant of this challenge and is striving with commitment and determination to address it. The issue in Oman and globally, she stated, involves not only reducing the burden of illness, but also safeguarding dignity, maintaining opportunities and ensuring the future for future generations.

Ultimately, health remains a fundamental element of the nation's progress and a comprehensive strategy that has the capability to reduce NCDs and enhance the well-being of its citizens.

FRENCH FIRMS TO BOOST CAPACITY TO SPY FROM STRATOSPHERE

Tim Hepher

French companies are fine-tuning plans for stratospheric spy balloons and airships as competition heats up in the no man’s land between the atmosphere and outer space, tipped as the next potential zone of tensions between world powers.

Stratobus, owned by Thales Alenia Space and Hemeria, a small firm created in 2019 to prevent sensitive technology from leaving France during a wider merger, is the latest company to focus on a belt known as Very High Altitude.

The growing importance of near-space captured global attention in 2023 when the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon. Beijing insisted it served scientific purposes and strayed into US airspace accidentally.

“It’s a space that’s not occupied. We have to be there and if we aren’t, others will be,” Stratobus head Yannick Combet said.

The Stratobus airship is designed to re-establish communications after a disaster or sit with observation cameras above an area of sudden interest, like a hostage-taking.

“Notre-Dame (cathedral) would fit inside the balloon,” which is 142 metres long, Combet told the AJPAE media association. Thales is building test models and aims to be ready for use by 2031.

Hemeria’s smaller Balman balloon is designed to get into position quickly and can manoeuvre by changing altitude to exploit wind currents. A second test flight is planned in the coming weeks, with limited operations starting in 2027.

“We want to be reactive and capable of launching in a few hours... Today, the minimum preparation time for such a balloon is two months,” said project manager Alexandre Hulin.

In June, France unveiled a new strategy, calling for the ability to operate at Very High Altitudes between 20 km and 100 km and intercept opponents.

Weeks later, Paris said fighters had downed two balloons flying more than 20 km above the ground as a demonstration.

Officials say such vehicles can intervene over great distances and then stay over the same spot for months, complementing constantly-moving satellites. However, they operate in a legal grey zone left over from the earliest days of air power and are only now getting attention.

After World War One introduced aerial bombing, Paris peace negotiators granted every nation sovereignty over its airspace, abandoning efforts to make the skies as open as the high seas.

The right of each country to control its airspace was confirmed towards the end of World War Two. Space evolved on opposite lines. A 1967 treaty declared outer space “free for exploration and use,” but negotiators failed to establish an outer limit for the tapering atmosphere. — Reuters

How Asia can reduce its dollar dependence

THE US dollar remains the world's leading reserve currency, but recent developments – particularly President Donald Trump's unilateral economic diplomacy, including weaponisation of the dollar – have fuelled doubts about whether it will maintain that status. While some of America's geopolitical rivals may hope to displace the dollar, the real challenge facing Asian economies is to manage the vulnerabilities created by their heavy dependence on it.

To be sure, no other currency currently rivals the dollar's credibility and global reach. While geopolitical tensions and the risk of sanctions have fuelled diversification efforts, the greenback's international dominance is unlikely to diminish in the near term.

That is not necessarily good news for Asean+3 countries, because their longstanding reliance on the dollar makes them acutely exposed to US monetary-policy shifts and global financial shocks. Asian policymakers must therefore focus on bolstering financial resilience through deeper regional cooperation – not necessarily a euro-style monetary union, but rather pragmatic measures aimed at reducing risks and enhancing strategic autonomy.

For decades, the dollar has underpinned Asia's trade and financial flows, reflecting both supply-chain linkages and the greenback's status as a safe haven. In South Korea and Thailand, for example, more than 70 per cent of trade with China and Asean countries is invoiced in dollars. For emerging economies in particular, dollar assets offer unmatched liquidity and reliability, even as they create structural vulnerabilities.

Those vulnerabilities, though, can be severe. US monetary tightening often triggers capital outflows and sharp currency depreciation, leaving borrowers who earn in local currencies and borrow in dollars with higher debt burdens. This currency mismatch was at the core of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, which devastated economies throughout the



For decades, dollar has underpinned Asia's trade and financial flows.

region, necessitating intervention by the International Monetary Fund.

Asean+3 policymakers today remain keenly aware that Federal Reserve rate hikes could once again destabilise their economies. To mitigate such risks, many countries in the region have amassed large foreign-exchange reserves – mostly in US Treasuries – as a form of self-insurance. These strategic stockpiles reflect both the painful lessons of past crises and the lingering “IMF stigma” that discourages reliance on external bailouts. The idea of an Asian common currency, which briefly gained traction after the 1997 crisis, has since faded, as the continent's diverse political systems, economies and cultures make such an undertaking unfeasible. Instead, attention has shifted to more pragmatic, incremental initiatives.

For starters, advances in digital technology are enabling faster, cheaper cross-border settlements, driving demand for regional payment systems. Asean countries are currently piloting QR-code-based cross-border payment systems, while several central banks in East Asia are exploring distributed ledger platforms for multi-currency transactions.

But these efforts should not remain fragmented pilots. Asean+3 economies must work together to

scale up and integrate payment systems, thereby reducing transaction costs and exchange-rate risks in intra-regional trade and tourism.

Another challenge is to reinforce regional financial safety nets. With a lending capacity of \$240 billion, the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation provides liquidity to Asean+3 economies facing balance-of-payments crises. Building on the work of the Asean+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), member economies hope to strengthen the CMIM by introducing a Rapid Financing Facility and are considering paid-in capital contributions. Such reforms would make the CMIM more flexible and credible, enabling it to respond more effectively to sudden dollar-related shocks. Strengthening resilience through regional financial cooperation offers Asian economies a far better path than direct confrontation with the dollar. To guard against dollar-related shocks, they must build on existing Asean+3 initiatives in three core policy areas.

First, expanding local-currency settlement in trade and investment, especially through bilateral and regional currency swap arrangements, could help reduce vulnerabilities. Such frameworks – already operational between countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand – have proven effective in lowering transaction costs and mitigating risks.

Second, policymakers should advance the internationalisation of Asian currencies. Wider use of the yen, renminbi, and others in cross-border trade and finance could help reduce currency mismatches, even if none is positioned to replace the dollar globally. The third priority is to standardise financial platforms and promote interoperability across payment and settlement systems. AMRO has highlighted the importance of digital financial infrastructure, including fast payment networks, which could complement regional initiatives like Project mBridge and Project Guardian. ©Project Syndicate, 2025



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SPORTS

DRAW CEREMONY



HH Sayyid Malik bin Shihab al Said handing over the trophy to Al Amerat chairman as OHA chief Dr Marwan al Juma watches. — **Saleh al Sharji**

20 CLUBS TO TAKE PART IN 55TH HM CUP HOCKEY TOURNEY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) celebrated the draw ceremony for the 55th edition of His Majesty the Sultan’s Cup for Hockey, held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Malik bin Shihab al Said, with the presence of the OHA family and representatives of the participating clubs.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the audience watched a visual presentation that highlighted the achievements of the year, both locally and internationally, the most notable being the national team’s victory in the Asian Hockey Federation Cup on April 27, 2025.

This was followed by honouring the distinguished achievers in hockey for 2025 in recognition of their contributions and accomplishments. They included: Khalid al Shaibi, who surpassed the milestone of 100 international matches, Eng Thani al Wahaibi, who received certification as an international lecturer in the sport, and Mazin al Shukailli, who earned the international refereeing badge. Nawar al Jabri was recognised as the first Omani female umpire to officiate at the Asian level. Muhja al Numani, was honoured as the first Omani female judge at the Asian continental level while Amina al Jahafi, was celebrated as the first Omani female referee to participate in the AHF’s referee promotion course.

The event began with a detailed presentation on the tournament’s system, followed by the guest of honour handing over the trophy to Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, Chairman of Al Amerat Club, in recognition of his club’s victory in the previous edition. The competition format was also presented electronically, with 20 clubs taking part this year. This edition marks the debut of Ibri and the return of Fanja after an absence of three decades.

According to the system, clubs are classified into two categories Elite Category: Ahli Sidab, Seeb, Al Amerat, and Salalah (these clubs qualify directly for the final stages). Challenge Category: The remaining clubs, divided into four groups.

The draw for the 55th edition of the competition was conducted, with the draw carried out by Asim al Maimani, former goalkeeper of the national team, and Ala al Balushi, captain of the women’s national hockey team, who participated in the Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024.

Group 1 features Sohar, Al Salam, Majees, and Saham, while Group 2 brings together Nizwa, Qurayat, Muscat, and Oman Club. In Group 3, the competition will see Fanja, Mirbat, Dhofar, and Al Ittihad battling it out. Meanwhile, Group 4 includes Al Rustaq, Al Nahda, Ibri, and Masirah, promising strong matchups across all groups.

In the preliminary rounds, Challenge Category clubs in each group compete in a single round-robin format. A playoff match will be held between the first and second of each group to determine the team that qualifies for the final stages. Matches will be played at the hockey fields of the sports complexes and at the Hockey Oman Stadium.

In the final stages, the Elite Category clubs and the qualifiers from the Challenge Category are divided into two groups, with clubs in each group competing in a single round-robin format. The first and second place from each group advance to the semifinals. The first of Group Five meets the second of Group Six, with the winner advancing to the final and the loser playing for third place. Similarly, the first of Group Six meets the second of Group Five, with the winner advancing to the final and the loser contesting the third-place playoff.

Oman to host World Cup Snooker Doubles 2025

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

A NEW achievement added to Oman’s sporting record, the capital Muscat is preparing to host the World Snooker Doubles Championship (Men’s and Teams) from November 15 to 23, 2025. The event will be held under the supervision of the International Billiards and Snooker Federation (IBSF), with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), Sohar International Bank and Active Oman. It is set to welcome some of the world’s top snooker players. The total prize pool of the championship will reach \$60,000, in what is expected to be a global spectacle attracting snooker fans from across the continents.

The announcement of Oman’s successful bid to host the championship was made during a press conference at the Oman Automobile Association. Khalid bin Khalfan al Subhi, Chairman of the Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee, affirmed that this achievement reflects international recognition of Oman’s ability to organise world-class sporting events.

Al Subhi stated: “It is an honour to stand before you today to proudly announce a new accomplishment added to Oman’s record of successes: hosting the 2025 Snooker World Cup. This victory goes beyond organising a tournament; it affirms Oman’s global sporting stature and the international community’s trust in our organisational capabilities.”

He further noted that several countries had submitted bids to host the tournament, but Oman’s file stood out due to its clear organisational vision and comprehensive logistical plans, proving the Sultanate of Oman’s readiness to stage an event of this scale.

This edition will be among the largest in the history of the sport, with the participation of 35 countries and more than 120 elite players, making Muscat a hub for both high-level competition and



The total prize pool of the championship will reach \$60,000. — **Mohammed Abu Nahal**

cultural exchange that strengthens Oman’s international presence.

As part of the preparations, IBSF President Mubarak al Khayarin paid an official visit to Oman, where he met with officials at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and inspected the competition venues. He expressed his admiration for the organisational readiness and full confidence in Oman’s ability to deliver the championship in a manner befitting its regional and international standing.

Al Subhi added that preparations are not limited to organisational aspects but also extend to strengthening the national snooker team’s readiness. Ahmad al Hadi was appointed as team manager, with captain Abdullah al Raisi and coach Qadeer leading the technical setup. The plan includes comprehensive technical, physical and psychological training to ensure that Oman’s players represent

the nation honourably before local and international fans.

He emphasised that the championship will not only be a sporting event but also an opportunity to highlight Oman’s cultural identity and its capacity as a major destination for international events. It is also expected to boost sports tourism and open new horizons for Omani youth to engage with the world’s best players, gaining valuable experience to develop the sport locally.

The 2025 World Snooker Championship will also enjoy wide media coverage through IBSF’s official platforms, in addition to media outlets accompanying the players and delegations. The Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee will provide live coverage across its official social media platforms, ensuring that fans both inside Oman and around the world can follow every detail of the tournament as it unfolds.

Al Nahda take on Al Shabab in Gulf Cup CL opener

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Oman’s Al Nahda will begin their campaign in the 2025-2026 AGCFF Gulf Cup Champions League with a highly anticipated Group B clash against Saudi Arabia’s Al Shabab on Wednesday. The match is scheduled to kick off at 9 pm (Oman time) at Al Shabab Stadium in Al Riyadh. In the other Group B encounter, Qatar’s Al Rayyan will face Yemen’s Tadhamon Hadhramout Club at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Doha.

Al Nahda’s delegation arrived in Al Riyadh on Sunday and immediately commenced training under the guidance of head coach Naseef al Biawi. The squad’s main training session on Tuesday saw the technical staff sharpen the team’s tactical organisation, with a particular focus on offensive play and attacking transitions.

The Al Buraimi-based club will enter the continental competition on the back of solid performances in the domestic Jindal League.

Al Nahda managed to record a 3-0 victory over Saham in their latest fixture, having earlier secured a similar scoreline against Samayil in the opening round. They were held



The Al Buraimi-based club will enter the competition on the back of solid performances in the domestic Jindal League.

to a goalless draw by Ibri in the second match.

Head coach Al Biawi will rely on a mix of experienced campaigners and international professionals to lead the charge. The squad featured Oman national team goalkeeper Fayeze al Rushaidi, veteran midfielder Harib al Saadi, and standout talents including Thani al Rushaidi, Mohamed al Ghafri and Ghanim al Habshi. Their foreign contingent includes Tishdak Lokomi, Abubaker Diyara, Odavai Kemba, and Misoki Beri Jeen, who add further depth and international experience. However, Al Nahda will be without national team defender Ahmed al Kaabi, who remained sidelined due to an

injury sustained in their last league outing.

Al Nahda will host Al Rayyan on October 22 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat before meeting Tadhamon Hadhramout at the same venue on November 5. Their return leg fixtures will start with a match against Tadhamon Hadhramout on December 24, Al Shabab on February 11, 2026, and will conclude against Al Rayyan on February 17, 2026, in Doha.

Group A features Zakho Club (Iraq), Al Ain (UAE), Sitra Club (Bahrain), and Al Qadsia Club (Kuwait). The top two teams from each group will progress to the semifinals.

For Al Nahda, this event is a major opportunity to prove themselves against some of the

region’s most established clubs. With their strong domestic record and competitive edge, the Omani side is determined to make a deep run in the competition and write a new chapter in the Sultanate’s football journey.

The AGCFF Gulf Cup Champions League continues to serve as a prestigious platform for Gulf clubs, promoting competitiveness, technical growth, and sporting exchange. Past editions have crowned champions including Shabab Al Ahli (UAE), Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli and Al Ittifaq, while the most recent title was won by Iraq’s Duhok Club after their dramatic 2-1 aggregate victory over Kuwait’s Al Qadsia in the final.

CLASSIC RACES



The 2025-26 calendar will feature 25 races, beginning on October 18, at Al Rahba Farm.

25 RACES CHARTED FOR NEW OMAN EQUESTRIAN SEASON

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
BARKA, SEPT 30

The Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation (OERF), represented by the Oman Horse Racing Club, held its annual meeting for owners, trainers and jockeys for the 2025-26 season.

The 2025-26 calendar will feature 25 races, beginning on October 18, at Al Rahba Farm. Highlights include three classic races, the fifth race, the National Day Cup on November 15, the ninth race, the Oman Derby Cup on December 20, and the 25th and final race on April 18, 2026.

In addition, three races will be organised by the Royal Oman Police at the Wattayah track, along with the annual Royal Cavalry race, promising a diverse and competitive season.

The gathering, chaired by Sayyid Munther bin Saif bin Hamed al Busaidy, OERF Chairman, took place at the Boulevard Hotel Muscat in the presence of retired Brigadier General Abdulrazzaq bin Abdulqadir al Shehouri, Vice-Chairman and Hamood bin Ali al Nassi, Secretary-General.

The meeting provided a platform to discuss the development of equestrian sports in the Sultanate and ways to transform the sector into a fully integrated industry, drawing on regional experiences to strengthen Oman’s standing both locally and internationally.

Sayyid Munther began by reviewing the highlights of the previous racing season, noting the impressive results achieved by Omani horses and riders on international tracks, underlined the federation’s dedication to further strengthening equestrian sports in Oman. At the same time, he pointed out key challenges encountered last season, particularly the detection of prohibited substances in veterinary tests. He reminded participants that they remain banned and urged strict compliance to safeguard the integrity and reputation of the sport.

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The chairman also highlighted the registration fees for participating horses this season, explaining that these fees were discussed previously with stakeholders, noting that the fees are not intended as a source of revenue but rather as a means to regulate and further develop the sport, in line with other disciplines. He added that the new framework has enabled an increase in the number of races this season, priority will also be given to supporting trainers and apprentice jockeys in their professional growth.

Later, attendees shared views on several issues, including a request to review and possibly reduce the registration fees, as well as the importance of enhancing marketing strategies to attract private sector sponsorship, thereby boosting prize money.

Participants also emphasised the need to strengthen media coverage to highlight events and encourage sponsorships, alongside calls for strategic investment in Al Rahba Farm to keep pace with the sport’s development. Other points raised included the promotion of local breeding and the allocation of more races for Omani bred horses. The technical inquiries were addressed by the vice-chairman and the federation’s technical adviser.



USA’s Coco Gauff hits a return to Switzerland’s Belinda Bencic during their match at the China Open tournament in Beijing. — AFP

Sinner into Beijing final as Gauff survives Bencic test

JANNIK Sinner reached his third China Open final in a row on Tuesday as defending women’s champion Coco Gauff fought back to beat Belinda Bencic in a spicy contest. The world number two Italian Sinner beat Australia’s Alex de Minaur 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 and is one victory away from a second title in Beijing.

Top seed Sinner will face either American teenager Learner Tien or eighth-seeded Daniil Medvedev in the final.

His only loss on Beijing’s centre Diamond Court has been to great rival Carlos Alcaraz, who won last year’s championship match in three gripping sets.

“It’s a very special place for me. This court has always been amazing,” Sinner, beaten by Alcaraz in the recent US Open final, said.

“Many things were positive finding myself again here, playing the last match of the tournament, it’s great,” he added. “I’m very happy to be here on court tomorrow.”

Alcaraz is not defending his title in the Chinese capital and is instead playing in Tokyo.

De Minaur, who had never beaten Sinner in 10 previous meetings, forced a deciding set but Sinner reset and claimed victory when the third-seeded Australian fired long.

“He was playing some great tennis in the



Italy’s Jannik Sinner in action during his semifinal match against Australia’s Alex de Minaur. — Reuters

second set,” the 24-year-old Sinner said.

“The third set, luckily, I started very well, which gave me the confidence to continue.”

REALLY AGGRESSIVE

In the women’s draw, Gauff beat Bencic 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 and plays 66th-ranked Eva Lys of Germany in the quarter-finals.

“It was a tough match,” Gauff, the

American second seed, said.

“I had chances in the first to close it out but overall I’m happy with how I fought. She was being really aggressive.”

There were frustrations on both sides of the court at a largely empty stadium as the players switched between one half darkened by shade and the other in the blazing sun.

There was a flashpoint between the two players during a changeover in the second set when Switzerland’s 15th seed Bencic said: “Your team is chatting. I’m too old for these mind games, okay?”

“You’re the one playing the mind games,” Gauff shot back.

The 21-year-old Gauff kept it together to win the tie-break when Tokyo Olympic champion Bencic double-faulted on set point and threw her racquet in anger.

The world number three Gauff broke early in the third set and carried that momentum through to win when a flagging Bencic returned weakly into the net.

With her last-16 victory Gauff qualified for the WTA Finals in Saudi Arabia in November.

“Happy to qualify once again. Happy to be back in Riyadh and I’m glad I was able to do it here,” Gauff told the on-court interviewer.

Gauff faces Lys, who is into her first quarter-final in a WTA 1000 event after defeating McCartney Kessler of the United States 4-6, 6-1, 6-2. — AFP

Omani women’s club wins bronze in Abu Dhabi

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

The Women’s Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity (WCFSCC), representing the Sultanate of Oman, clinched third place in the second edition of the Sheikhha Fatima Bint Mubarak Women’s Basketball Cup, hosted in Abu Dhabi from September 23–27, with the participation of four Gulf clubs.

The Omani side sealed the bronze medal after a deserved 56–46 victory over the host Emirati Academy team in the third-place playoff, a thrilling encounter that remained closely contested until the final minutes.

The tournament followed a single round-robin format, with the top two advancing to the final, while the third and fourth-placed sides competed for the bronze. Over the course of four matches, the Omani club secured two key wins that ensured their place on the podium.

From the start, the bronze match was intense, with both teams exchanging control and attacking plays. Mahla Mohammed Abadi opened the scoring for Oman with two successful free throws before Suha Taher equalised for the hosts. Star player Shams al Duha’s dominance under the basket gave the Omani side momentum, though the Emirati Academy edged the first quarter 7–6.



The Omani side sealed the bronze medal after a 56–46 victory over hosts Emirati Academy team in the third-place playoff.

In the second quarter, Oman regained focus, with Mahla Abadi restoring the lead. Although Thia Awad tied things up with free throws, the Omani club began imposing its rhythm. Hayat al Maskari briefly put the Academy ahead, but Malak al Sulaimi responded with a three-pointer that energised her teammates. The momentum stayed with Oman, who ended the quarter 22–13 in front.

The third quarter saw the Academy attempt a comeback through Maryam al Mazroui and Suha Taher, but Mahla and Shams al Duha responded strongly with successive points. Showing great composure, the Omani players extended their lead to

39–25 by the end of the quarter. The final quarter began with a brilliant 3-pointer from Shams al Duha, widening the gap further. Mahla Abadi continued her outstanding form, scoring repeatedly to secure the win. Despite late efforts from Amal Haider and Thia Awad for the Academy, Oman’s defence held firm to seal the 56–46 triumph.

Commenting on the achievement, Hiba al Naabi, Board Member of the OBA and Head of the Women’s Basketball Committee, emphasised that this success was the result of joint cooperation between the Women’s Committee and the club, following a comprehensive preparation programme that included domestic and external training camps in Muscat and Khor Fakkan. She said the tournament was a key opportunity to refine and showcase emerging talent, noting that two players from the national youth team participated and delivered impressive performances, reflecting a promising future for women’s basketball in Oman.

Player Malak al Sulaimi highlighted that the team’s main strength lay in collective play, which created more space on the court and better shooting opportunities. Effective communication in both offence and defence, she added, reflected the team’s growth as an integrated unit capable of handling tough competition.

SPORTS

ALCARAZ BEATS FRITZ TO WIN JAPAN OPEN TITLE

WORLD NUMBER

ONE Carlos Alcaraz won his eighth title of a sensational season after beating American Taylor Fritz 6-4, 6-4 in the Japan Open final on Tuesday. The Spaniard has struggled with an ankle injury this week in Tokyo but he was still too hot for the rest of the competition to handle, including world number five Fritz. The US Open champion gave another breathtaking display of power and athleticism to lift the trophy in his first appearance in Japan. He clinched victory with a cleverly disguised drop shot before strolling to the net to give Fritz a warm embrace. “First time in Tokyo, first title here, hopefully not the last one,” said the 22-year old.

Alcaraz injured his ankle in his opening match in Tokyo as he ran for a shot, crumpling to the ground and sitting on the court for about five minutes.

He returned to play with heavy strapping on his ankle and admitted that the injury had been on his mind throughout the tournament.

“The start of the week was not really good with the ankle, and the way that I came back from that, playing a great tournament and great matches, I’m just really happy about it,” he said.

It was the Spaniard’s ninth straight final and his 10th of the season overall.

No man since his legendary countryman Rafael Nadal in 2017 had reached 10 finals in a season.

The win gave Alcaraz a measure of revenge after losing to Fritz for the first time at the Laver Cup in San Francisco two weeks ago. Alcaraz was not happy with the umpire in the final, telling him “you’ve never played tennis in your life” during a rant between games.

He squandered several chances to break Fritz in the first set but he made the breakthrough in the ninth game.

That left the Spaniard serving for the set, and he sealed the deal when Fritz dumped a return into the net.

Alcaraz kept his foot on the gas and broke his opponent to start the second set.

He broke him again to take a 4-1 lead and continued to punish Fritz with a series of brutal forehands.

Fritz hit back for his first break of the match but it was too little, too late as Alcaraz clinched the championship on his next service game.

“It’s been a pleasure to be able to play here in Tokyo in front of the Japanese fans,” said Alcaraz.

“I enjoyed every single second from when I stepped on the court, less the five minutes that I was on the floor with my ankle.

“The rest of the tournament, I enjoyed every single second.”

Fritz was looking to capture his third title of the season after wins at Stuttgart and Eastbourne. The American won the Japan Open title in 2022. Both Alcaraz and Fritz are in the draw for the Shanghai Masters this week. — AFP



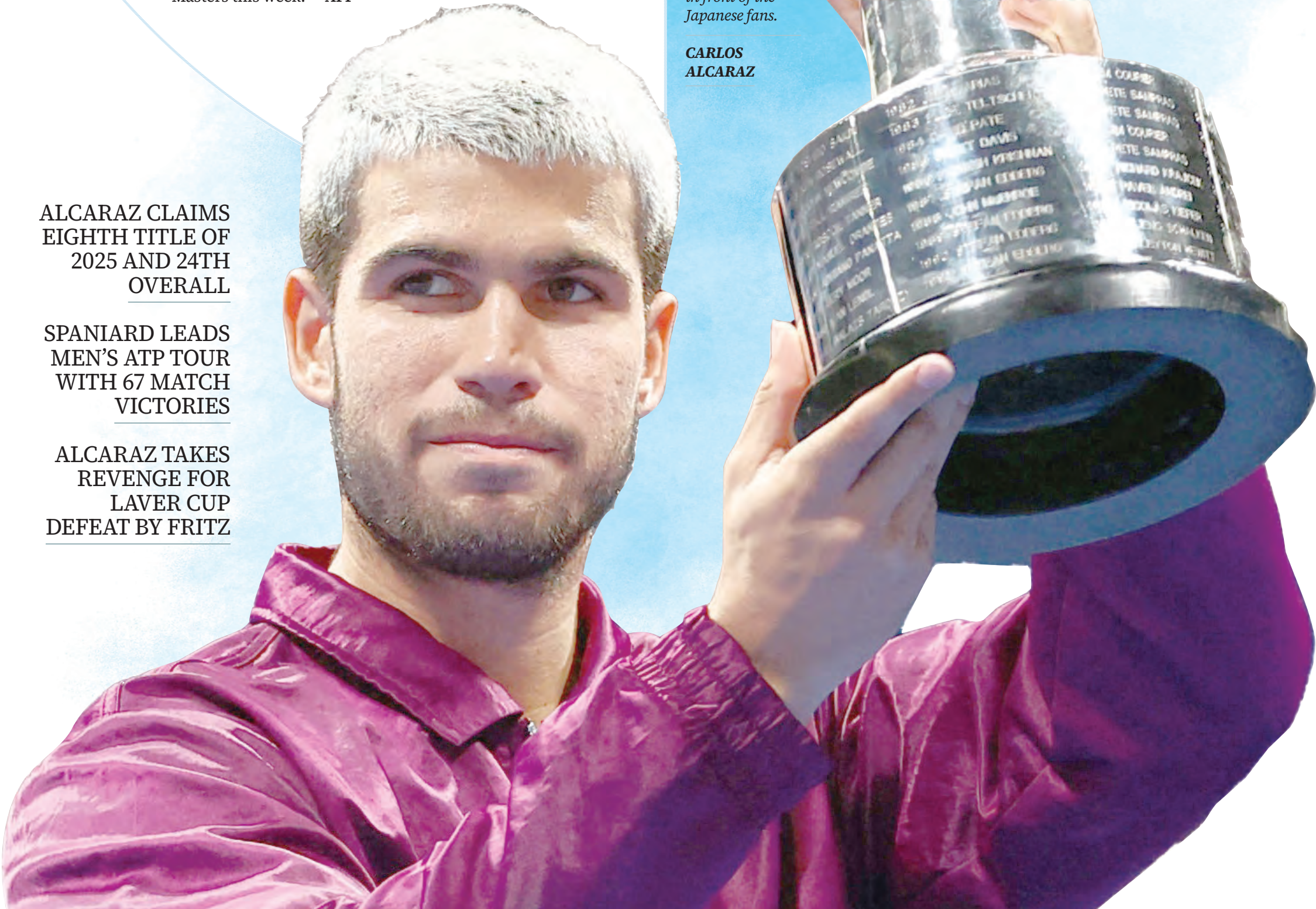
It’s been a pleasure to be able to play here in Tokyo in front of the Japanese fans.

CARLOS ALCARAZ

ALCARAZ CLAIMS EIGHTH TITLE OF 2025 AND 24TH OVERALL

SPANIARD LEADS MEN’S ATP TOUR WITH 67 MATCH VICTORIES

ALCARAZ TAKES REVENGE FOR LAVER CUP DEFEAT BY FRITZ





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Sembcorp Salalah's integrated water and power project has been in full commercial operation in the Wilayat of Salalah since May 2012

NAMA PWP AWARDS
NEW 10-YEAR
CONTRACT TO
SEMBCORP SALALAH

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Sembcorp Industries (Sembcorp) through its subsidiary, Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG (SSPWC), has been awarded a new 10-year Power and Water Purchase Agreement (PWP) from Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP). The new agreement will commence from April 4, 2027, following the expiry of the current 15-year PWP on April 3, 2027.

Under the new PWP, the contracted capacity of the Salalah Independent Water and Power Plant is 465MW of power per hour and 15 million imperial gallons (68,190 cubic metres) of water per day. The plant, which is developed, owned and operated by SSPWC, comprises a gas-fired combined cycle power plant and a reverse osmosis seawater desalination plant.

The award ensures continued offtake under mutually agreed commercial terms and reinforces the strategic partnership between SSPWC and Nama PWP. It also strengthens long-term revenue visibility and supports operational sustainability.

Built with an investment of around \$1 billion, the plant has been in full commercial operation since May 2012. Total investment in the development of the project is around \$1 billion.

With a portfolio of over 1.0GW of energy assets in Oman, comprising gas and renewables, Sembcorp is well-positioned to advance its long-term growth plans in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omani and Saudi Arabia
eye strategic partnership

THE JOINT Omani-Saudi Business Council held a meeting on the sidelines of the Omani-Saudi Franchise Exhibition to discuss aspects of economic cooperation opportunities between the two countries. The meeting was co-chaired by Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), and Dr Saad Othman al Qasabi, Governor of the Saudi Standards, Metrology and Quality Organization (SASO). It was attended by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI); Shaikh Ali bin Hamad al Kalbani, Head of the Omani Side of the Council; Abdulaziz Sami al Ali, Head of the Saudi Side of the Council; and several Council members.

During the meeting, opportunities for cooperation between the two countries were reviewed, along with a proposal to establish Omani-Saudi strategic partnerships in several promising economic sectors. This collaboration aims to develop joint investments, enhance integration in supply chains, and support the private sector's efforts to achieve the targets of Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030.

Al Yusef said that the Council represents a crucial bridge for enhancing economic and investment cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia. He noted that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries reached RO 1.212 billion (\$3.152 billion) by the end of June 2025, recording a 20.3 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

He explained that the Omani-Saudi partnership, built on strategic economic integration, allows for increased investment in vital sectors and facilitates the entry of Omani products into the Saudi market and vice-versa. He affirmed the government's support for all enablers and facilities that empower the private sector to contribute to sustainable growth. He mentioned the adoption of mutual recognition of the certificate of origin between the two countries, which



Qais Mohammed al Yusef and Dr Saad Othman al Qasabi in Muscat on Tuesday. — ONA

helps streamline the flow of goods, unify quality and conformity standards, and enhance industrial integration. He stressed the importance of establishing the Omani-Saudi Joint Company and encouraging joint exhibitions in the fields of franchising, real estate development, and information technology, with a focus on investment in banking, insurance, real estate, industrial, tourism, logistics, and mining sectors.

Al Yusef emphasised that these joint initiatives and projects reflect the commitment of both countries to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi 2030, and enhance commercial and investment cooperation, contributing to the prosperity of both peoples.

For his part, Dr Saad bin Othman al Qasabi stated that the Omani-Saudi Business Council is an important station in the journey of growing partnership between the two countries. He noted that both countries have made significant strides in economic integration to achieve their respective visions, which focus on

economic diversification. He mentioned that the trade exchange between the two countries is constantly growing, reaching \$34 billion by the end of 2024, and approximately \$4 billion by the end of the second quarter of 2025. He expressed aspirations to double efforts to increase trade and investment exchange, empower the private sector, establish commercial partnerships, and support entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, OCCI chief Al Rawas said that the Council meeting is part of continuous efforts to strengthen the economic partnership and translate the excellent relations into investment opportunities and qualitative projects that enhance the empowerment of the private sector in both countries. He added that the meeting comes at an important time, witnessing accelerated growth in Omani-Saudi economic relations, driven by infrastructure development, logistical connectivity via border crossings, and the integration of developmental visions of the two countries. — ONA

Oman’s oil output projected to cross 1.2 million bpd in 2028

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Oman's oil production is forecast to progressively rise to reach 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) — ahead of schedule — by 2028, bolstered in part by commitments from the OPEC+ alliance to roll back output cuts, according to international ratings agency S&P Global Ratings.

This compares with output of around 1 million bpd in 2024, which was earlier projected to reach approximately 1.1 million bpd by 2027. The upward revision reflects a combination of OPEC+-driven measures and expectations of incremental growth in Oman's production at a rate of 2-3 per cent annually over the next couple of years.

“Incorporated into our growth forecast is the anticipation that oil production will progressively increase towards 1.2 million bpd by 2028, ahead of schedule and up from 1 million bpd produced in



OPEC+ driven output cuts are expected to partly contribute to Oman's oil production rise.

2024, following recent announcements from OPEC+ that it would further increase production”, S&P Global noted in its recent outlook statement affirming Oman's sovereign ratings at ‘BBB-/A-3’. Furthermore, condensate and gas production are anticipated to increase in the medium term, supported by private investment.

This trend is expected to continue notwithstanding the government's pivot to green hydrogen production, initially targeted at 1 million tonnes by 2030, the report said.

Citing Oman's strategy to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050, the report also highlighted the government's success in attracting foreign investors to develop its liquid ammonia and hydrogen production capabilities and replace gas in electricity generation. These efforts will ultimately enable the Sultanate of Oman to become a “top exporter of liquid ammonia and hydrogen” by 2030, it noted.

“Oman has the potential to develop low-cost solar and wind energy, given its abundance of land, with renewable energy currently representing about 18% of the country's total power generation. Recently, it was announced that one of two 500-megawatt solar power plants (Manah-1) generated 1 terawatt hour (TWh) of electricity since trial operations started in January 2025. The solar project is expected to produce 1.5 TWh annually and underscores that progress in Oman's renewable energy sector is well underway”, S&P said.

Playing a key role in driving energy sector growth in the Sultanate of Oman are Energy Development Oman (EDO) and OQ — the integrated energy group of Oman.

As “national champions charged with managing Oman's energy sector developments”, these two companies have worked to realise efficiencies and pursue growth opportunities across the sector, the ratings agency added.

ADVERTORIALS

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Through Himmah, National Finance continues to drive impactful initiatives in environmental sustainability, community development and social empowerment.

NATIONAL FINANCE BACKS TURTLE PROTECTION INITIATIVE

National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, reinforced its commitment to environmental stewardship by supporting the Turtle Protection Programme at the Turtle Reserve in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The company’s volunteer group, Himmah, joined the Turtle Commandos Programme to contribute to critical conservation efforts aimed at protecting endangered turtle species and preserving Oman’s marine ecosystem.

Oman plays a vital role in global turtle conservation, serving as a sanctuary for five key species — the Green, Olive, Loggerhead, Hawksbill and Leatherback turtles.

The Al Sharqiyah South Governorate Turtle Reserve is one of the nation’s most important conservation sites, renowned for its nesting grounds of green turtles. National Finance’s participation highlights its dedication to sustainability and the protection of biodiversity.

Commenting on the initiative, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, said: “It is a privilege for our Himmah team to contribute to this meaningful initiative that not only raises awareness about the importance of preserving our environment and native species, but also instils a sense of responsibility towards our land.

At National Finance, sustainability is a core value and the dedication shown by our volunteers reflects our commitment to protecting Oman’s biodiversity for future generations”.

Through Himmah, National Finance continues to drive impactful initiatives in environmental sustainability, community development and social empowerment. The team’s values of unity and collective purpose guide their efforts to create lasting, positive change for both the environment and society.

As part of its broader sustainability agenda, National Finance actively seeks partnerships with organisations that share its vision for conservation and environmental awareness.

By leading such initiatives, the company encourages stakeholders, partners and the wider community to join in safeguarding Oman’s rich natural heritage.

NWS HOSTS WATER SECTOR INNOVATION WORKSHOP

Nama Water Services, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, organised a workshop on “The Strategic Framework for Innovation in the Water Sector” to promote innovation in water management and support Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Buthaina bint Mahfoodh al Wahaibi, Acting Manager of Innovation and Sustainability at Nama Water Services, said innovation is now a strategic

necessity to address climate change, resource pressures and rising costs. She emphasised the company’s focus on improving service quality, operational efficiency, resource management, reducing water loss and expanding reclaimed water reuse, highlighting the importance of collaboration and practical solutions.

The workshop covered four themes: research and technology, policies and enablers, data and knowledge management; and

capacity building, including training talent and creating incubators to turn ideas into solutions. Dr Buthaina described the event as a platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing and exploring opportunities to institutionalise innovation in sustainable water management.

Experts and stakeholders praised Nama Water Services for leading a culture of innovation and supporting projects that advance sustainability in Oman.

MG Motor launches the all-New MG 8 PHEV

MG MOTOR has officially launched the all-new MG 8 Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) in Oman, marking a significant milestone for the brand in the Middle East.

As MG’s first PHEV mid-size sedan in the region, the MG 8 combines advanced hybrid technology, premium comfort and refined design, offering a record-breaking driving range of up to 1,655 km on a single tank and charge, including 125 km in pure EV mode.

Earlier this year, the MG 8 achieved a Guinness World Record by covering 2,208 km on one tank and full charge, with an average fuel consumption of just 2.49L/100km.

This achievement highlights MG’s commitment to redefining efficiency without compromising performance. Designed with the Middle East in mind, the MG 8 PHEV underwent rigorous hot-weather testing to ensure durability and reliability under extreme summer conditions.

The model also carries GSO and SASO certifications, underscoring compliance with regional quality and safety standards.

On the outside, the MG 8 features a bold wide grille, sharp LED headlights and connected LED tail lamps, creating a commanding road presence. With a wheelbase of 2,810 mm and a streamlined profile, the sedan projects both elegance and strength. Inside, the cabin draws inspiration from executive lounges, featuring premium leather, dual 12.3-inch digital displays, zero-gravity seats and generous rear legroom. Attention to detail, such as suede quilting and refined finishes, delivers a modern and comfortable driving experience.

Power comes from a 1.5L plug-in hybrid engine producing 201 hp and 330 Nm of torque, managed by MG’s DMH Super Hybrid Technology.

This system intelligently switches between petrol and electric modes, maximising fuel efficiency while



Power comes from a 1.5L plug-in hybrid engine producing 201 hp and 330 Nm of torque, managed by MG’s DMH Super Hybrid Technology.

The MG 8 PHEV will be available in two trims. The 1.5L STD offers LED headlamps, 17-inch alloys, dual displays, a 6-speaker audio system, auto air-conditioning and multiple safety features including regenerative braking.

ensuring smooth performance. Five driving modes adapt to varying conditions, providing flexibility for both city commutes and long journeys. An industry-first 5-in-1 PICU Controller improves efficiency and responsiveness, while NVH levels are reduced by 10% compared to similar models, ensuring a quiet cabin. Commenting on the launch, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani stated:“The all-new MG 8 PHEV marks a defining moment for MG in Oman. With its record-breaking range, hybrid technology and luxury design, this model reflects our commitment to innovation and sustainable mobility.

At MHD ACERE, we are proud to introduce a vehicle that sets new benchmarks for performance and comfort while reinforcing Oman’s embrace of green mobility”.

Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG Motor Middle East, added:“Following its Guinness

World Record, the MG 8 PHEV demonstrates our ambition to set new benchmarks in the region. With hot-weather testing, GSO and SASO certifications and advanced hybrid technology, this model reinforces our position as one of the fastest-growing automotive brands in the Middle East”.

The MG 8 PHEV will be available in two trims. The 1.5L STD offers LED headlamps, 17-inch alloys, dual displays, a 6-speaker audio system, auto air-conditioning, and multiple safety features including regenerative braking. The 1.5L COM enhances the package with 18-inch alloys, a 360-degree camera, ventilated and memory driver’s seat and curtain airbags, along with premium conveniences such as seamless smartphone connectivity.

Backed by an 8-year/120,000 km battery warranty, the all-new MG 8 PHEV sets a new standard for sedans in Oman.

Buy a Toyota Yaris and win big in exclusive limited time raffle

The Toyota Yaris is more than a compact car — it is a smart, stylish and reliable companion built to complement the lifestyle of drivers across Oman. Combining dynamic performance, modern design, advanced safety and exceptional value, the Yaris ensures every journey is enjoyable and worry-free.

As part of a limited-time campaign, customers who purchase a new Toyota Yaris will enjoy an exciting package of benefits. These include entry into a raffle to win one of 50 brand-new Yaris cars, along with 5 Years / 50,000 km service, 50% VAT covered, 50% insurance covered and RO 50 worth of Thiqah Loyalty Points. This biggest-ever offer is valid until December 29,



Under the hood, a 1.5-litre Dual VVT-i engine with 104 HP is paired with a smooth CVT transmission, delivering spirited performance and excellent fuel efficiency.

2025. (Terms & Conditions apply; benefits may vary across model variants. Customers are encouraged to visit the nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for full details).

The Yaris stands out with its sleek, aerodynamic profile, bold grille, sharp headlamps and sculpted rear design. Premium touches such as alloy wheels, LED daytime running lights and chrome accents elevate its sporty yet refined appeal. Compact in size yet confident on the road, the Yaris is ideal for both city commutes and longer drives.

Under the hood, a 1.5-litre Dual VVT-i engine with 104 HP is paired with a smooth CVT transmission, delivering spirited performance

and excellent fuel efficiency. Inside, the spacious cabin offers comfort and practicality, with features such as an 8-inch infotainment system, 4-speaker audio and effective air conditioning for a pleasant driving experience.

Safety remains a top priority, with features including multiple airbags, ABS, EBD, Brake Assist, Hill Start Assist, VSC, TPMS and more. Higher trims add Toyota Safety Sense technologies such as Pre-Collision System, Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Departure Alert.

For more details, test drives and the latest updates, visit www.toyotaoman.com or your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom.

SELECTIVEGROWTH



Mineral fuels, oils and waxes accounted for 58.1 per cent of exports with a value of \$179.7 million.

GCC EXPORTS TO UKRAINE UP BY 81.7% IN 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

Exports from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to Ukraine increased by 81.7% in 2023 to \$309.5 million, marking a \$139.1 million increase from 2022, according to a GCC STAT report.

Mineral fuels, oils and waxes made up 58.1 per cent of exports with a value of \$179.7 million. Electrical machinery and equipment represented 12.8 per cent, valued at \$39.7 million, followed by miscellaneous exports, which accounted for 12.5 per cent with a value of \$38.6 million.

Aircraft and parts accounted for 7.2 per cent of exports with a value of \$22.3 million. Plastics and plastic articles made up 4.9 per cent with a value of \$15.1 million, followed by vehicles and parts with a 4.6 per cent share, valued at \$14.1 million.

On the other hand, imports from Ukraine to the GCC dropped by 30.1 per cent to \$796.7 million, representing a decline in value-terms of \$343.9 million.

Imports of animal and vegetable fats and oils made up 28.0 per cent of imports valued at \$222.8 million, followed by meat and edible meat offal (25.3 per cent of imports), valued at \$201.5 million.

Miscellaneous imports accounted for 21.7 per cent with a value of \$172.6 million, while imports of cereals accounted for 13.7 per cent with a value of \$108.8 million.

Articles of iron and steel represented 7.3 per cent of imports with a value of \$57.8 million. Tobacco and manufactured substitutes made up 4.2 per cent, with a value of \$33.2 million.

The total trade exchange between the two entities amounted to \$1.11 billion in 2023, marking a 15.6% decline from 2022.

UK RULES OUT TAX ON PRIVATE HEALTHCARE

LONDON: Britain will not impose sales tax on private health care, its health minister said on Tuesday, amidst media reports that it was one option being considered by the government ahead of a November 26 budget.

“It’s not happening”, health minister Wes Streeting said.

Finance Minister Rachel Reeves is widely expected to hike taxes at the November budget to fill a fiscal hole which economists forecast at tens of billions of pounds, prompting speculation as to where the axe might fall.

Reeves said on Monday she was sticking to the Labour Party’s manifesto commitments not to raise sales tax, known as value added tax (VAT), national insurance contributions or the rates of income tax.

But she also said there would be hard choices to make in November. — Reuters

TRADE MOVES

Trump imposes tariffs on imports



US President Donald Trump imposed 10% tariffs on imported timber and lumber and 25% on kitchen cabinets, bathroom vanities and upholstered furniture, effective October 14. Justified under Section 232 for national security reasons, the tariffs could increase to 30–50% by January 1 for countries without formal trade agreements, affecting Canada, Vietnam, Mexico and others. — Reuters

VISA BETS ON STABLECOINS TO SPEED UP CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

BENGALURU: Visa said on Tuesday it will start testing a new way for businesses to fund international payments by allowing them to use stablecoins instead of pre-depositing cash in local accounts.

The move signals growing acceptance of these digital tokens among major businesses, who have been emboldened by the United States passing the Genius Act, a law that set clear rules for stablecoin issuers.

“The Genius Act changed

everything. It made everything so much more legitimate. Before that regulatory clarity, all the big institutions were sort of on the fence”, Mark Nelsen, head of product for Visa’s commercial and money movement solutions, said in an interview with Reuters.

The company is working with some unnamed partners and plans to expand the pilot programme next year, it said.

The pilot initiative will allow banks, remittance firms and other

financial institutions to pre-fund accounts with stablecoins instead of traditional currencies.

Such a move could make cross-border transactions faster and free up cash, as companies often have to lock funds in multiple currencies worldwide to cover local payouts.

Stablecoins are digital tokens designed to keep a constant value. They are often backed by traditional assets such as the US dollar or Treasuries.

— Reuters

FSA channel enhances protection of investors

THE Financial Services Authority (FSA) has launched a dedicated page on its official website and digital platforms under the title ‘Investor Protection Portal’, in its commitment to raising awareness and protecting citizens, residents and investors.

The portal provides a reliable channel that enables citizens, residents and investors to access accurate information and updates on unlicensed entities engaged in securities-related activities. It also allows users to seamlessly submit reports in the event they encounter any entity operating in such activities without a licence.

The Authority clarified in a notice published across its platforms that the portal includes a link to the list of unlicensed entities, in addition to a link to the list of licensed companies available on its website under the title ‘Licensed & Accredited’. This facilitates public access to the entities that can be safely dealt with, as they are licensed and subject to the supervision of the Financial Services Authority in the Sultanate of Oman. This provides investors and the public with a trusted reference



The Authority clarified that the portal includes a link to the list of unlicensed entities, in addition to a link to the list of licensed companies available on its website under the title ‘Licensed & Accredited’.

to verify which entities are operating legally within the non-bank financial sector.

It affirmed that the launch of the portal comes in response to the growing need for tools and information that raise awareness and provide protection against potential risks posed by unlicensed platforms and companies, helping to prevent financial fraud, particularly those that exploit the internet and social media to promote their activities. In this context, the Authority stressed that

awareness of sound investment practices and ensuring that dealings are limited to licensed and accredited entities represent the first line of defence against fraud and investor losses.

The portal offers three core services: reporting unlicensed entities engaged in illegal investment activities, accessing an updated list of unlicensed companies that should be avoided and submitting reports on licensed entities to ensure effective monitoring and compliance.

In this regard, the FSA has issued a notice against dealing with unauthorised platforms or companies claiming to provide securities investment services online, via social media or other channels. This follows the monitoring of unauthorised entities impersonating licensed platforms and companies regulated by supervisory authorities, as well as the case of an external entity falsely claiming to be a financial regulatory body in the Gulf region under the name ‘Gulf Higher Authority for Financial Conduct’.

The Authority, in its notice, underscored the importance of ensuring the entities investors deal with are duly licensed to carry out securities-related activities by the supervisory authority, which is the Financial Services Authority in the Sultanate of Oman. It clarified that a commercial registration issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion does not constitute a licence to engage in such activity. The Authority further emphasised that awareness of sound investment principles is essential to protect market participants from the risks of loss and fraud.

Oman and Saudi Arabia sign deals to boost trade

MUSCAT: Oman and Saudi Arabia agreed to mutually recognise the certificate of origin to speed the flow of goods and deepen industrial integration, officials said after a bilateral meeting in Muscat chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry and Saudi Arabia’s Acting Under-Secretary for Empowerment, Eng Badr bin Adel Foudah.

The talks, held at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, endorsed a second package of integration measures: listing Omani and Saudi products within approved industrial capabilities; equal treatment



Representatives signing the MoUs in Muscat on Monday.

for companies in government tenders and procurement; streamlined product registration with regulators; a fast-track for conformity approvals; incentives for joint industrial investments; and closer value-chain integration, including through free-trade agreements

and targeted African markets. Several memorandums of understanding were signed between companies from both countries to develop strategic partnerships, exchange expertise and open new markets for national products.

“These initiatives aim to

achieve Omani-Saudi industrial integration by attracting quality industrial investments, simplifying regulatory procedures and harmonising conformity and quality standards — consolidating both countries as regional industrial and trade hubs, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030”, Dr Masan said.

Omani industrial exports rose 39% to RO 733 million by end-July 2025 from RO 526 million a year earlier, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Saudi exports to Oman increased 10% to RO 762 million. Total bilateral trade grew 20% to RO 1.757 billion, underscoring stronger demand for Omani products in the Saudi market.

TECH ADVANCES

Opera launches AI-powered browser



Opera (OPRA O) has launched Neon, an AI-powered browser that performs tasks and runs code directly on web pages. Aimed at power users, it offers features like form-filling, data comparison and local AI actions for privacy.

Neon’s on-device operation avoids cloud routing, aligning with stricter data regulations and boosting Opera’s position in the competitive browser market. — Reuters

ECONOMIC TRENDS

French inflation rises, prices ease



PARIS: France’s consumer price inflation rose to 1.2% year-on-year in September, the highest in eight months, driven by higher service and food costs, INSEE reported. Energy and manufactured goods prices declined. On a monthly basis, consumer prices fell 1.0%, mainly due to seasonal drops in transport and accommodation. Meanwhile, producer prices edged down 0.2% in August, with annual growth slowing to 0.1%. — dpa

OPINION

Income tax in Oman: Why it’s a strategic necessity



SADIQ MOHAMMED SAID AL LAWATI

The writer is Training Manager (Retired) Petroleum Development Oman

INCOME TAX is a mainstay of public finance worldwide. It funds essential services, stabilises budgets and reduces dependence on volatile revenues. Oman long debated the idea; in June 2025 the government announced a personal income tax to take effect on January 1, 2028. The system sets a 5% rate and targets only individuals with annual gross income above RO 42,000 — aligned with Oman Vision 2040 diversification and social-protection goals.

Why tax now? Because stable, rules-based revenue lets the state pay salaries, operate institutions and build infrastructure without over-borrowing. For countries with fixed or tightly managed exchange rates, printing money is not a viable option for closing deficits. Oman's rial is pegged to the US dollar, so large fiscal gaps must be financed through domestic borrowing, reserve drawdowns, or external debt — each with costs. Selling foreign-currency reserves weakens the buffer needed for trade and essential imports; heavy borrowing can crowd out private credit and raise interest costs; external debt diverts hard currency to debt service.

When deficits persist, governments often raise charges for fuel, power, water and other

services while cutting capital projects. A modest, well-designed income tax broadens the revenue base and helps avoid stop-start austerity. Historically, Oman's surpluses have tracked high oil prices; when prices ease, the budget moves into deficit. The 2025 budget, for example, projected a deficit of RO 0.62 billion, funded by borrowing and reserves. At the same time, authorities have been reducing public debt, which stood at about RO 14.3 billion at end-Q1 2025 — lower than the prior year — showing a commitment to fiscal prudence.

Crucially, the new tax is structured to protect the vast majority of households. With a high exemption threshold of RO 42,000, roughly 99% of residents are expected to remain outside the tax net. For those above the threshold, the tax typically applies to income remaining after deducting essential expenses such as food, utilities, transport, insurance and wages for domestic staff.

In many systems, allowances also account for family dependants and some jurisdictions tax other gains — such as inheritances — depending on local law. The broad principle is to target capacity to pay while shielding basic living costs.

The reform also fits Oman's demographic and developmental trajectory. Half a

Why tax now? Because stable, rules-based revenue lets the state pay salaries, operate institutions and build infrastructure without over-borrowing.

century ago, the population was small and infrastructure limited, reducing the need for broad-based personal taxation. Today, with a population nearing five million and a diversified, modern economy, stable non-oil revenue is necessary to sustain high-quality services and invest in long-term priorities — from education and health to infrastructure and climate resilience.

Taxes are not merely a fiscal tool; they embody a social contract. Citizens contribute a small share of income and the state delivers security, services and opportunity. That symbiotic relationship reduces the need for costly borrowing, strengthens macroeconomic credibility and supports inclusive growth.

Many countries pair income taxes with social safety nets, including unemployment benefits, to cushion households and preserve cohesion through economic cycles.

In short, the personal income tax scheduled for 2028 is a strategic step towards a more resilient Omani economy. By diversifying revenue, protecting most households and reinforcing fiscal stability, it positions the Sultanate of Oman to keep investing in its people and its future while reducing exposure to oil-market swings and debt cycles.

NAVIGATING GLOBAL ECONOMIC TRENDS AND CHALLENGES



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As the economic landscape continues to evolve, keeping a close eye on these trends will be essential for achieving financial success and economic resilience.

The trends influence everything from market dynamics to the value placed on a business. Global economic trends have significant impacts on local businesses, influencing their valuations and strategic

direction. International economic conditions such as shifts in trade policies, tariffs and geopolitical relations can create ripple effects.

Technology continues to revolutionise finance and artificial intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of this transformation. From algorithm-driven trading platforms to AI-powered wealth management tools, investors now have access to smarter, data-driven decision-making. AI is also reshaping industries such as healthcare, finance and manufacturing, creating new investment opportunities.

Businesses must also navigate challenges and opportunities presented by global trade policies and international relations. For instance, a new trade agreement might open markets or impose stricter regulations. Companies flexible enough to adapt quickly can seize new opportunities or mitigate potential pitfalls.

Behavioural biases — such as overconfidence, fear of missing out (FOMO), or loss aversion — can lead to poor decisions. For instance, panic selling during a market dip or chasing the latest investment trend without proper research can be costly.

Adapting business strategies to reflect economic trends is essential for protecting and enhancing valuation. Companies must focus on flexibility in their strategic planning, allowing them to respond swiftly to shifts in economic conditions. This could involve changing product lines, entering the new markets, or adjusting pricing strategies to remain competitive.

Market volatility remains a major concern for investors, with fluctuating interest rates adding another layer of complexity. Central banks worldwide are adjusting rates in response to inflation and economic growth, which impacts borrowing costs, corporate profits and consumer spending.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria now play a crucial role in investment decisions. More investors are prioritising companies that focus on sustainability, ethical governance and social responsibility.

This shift isn't just about ethics — it's also about profitability. Companies with strong ESG policies tend to perform better over time, attracting more investor interest.

Reframing business relationships in Oman

In business gatherings across the Sultanate of Oman, one question surfaces again and again: does success flow mainly from product, governance and performance — or from having the “right numbers” in your phone?

The question is not cynical; it is practical. Oman's private sector is widening and maturing. Banking remains a cornerstone of the financial system, while energy continues to anchor value chains.

Yet as new leaders take charge and firms scale up, many entrepreneurs tell me that introductions and trust still open doors faster than pitch decks and spreadsheets.

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. Relationships are a form of social capital. In a relationship-based society like ours, trust can reduce uncertainty, speed decisions and help smaller firms be seen.

The issue is not relationships themselves, but how they are used. When relationships become a bridge to value, they are an asset. When they become a substitute for value, they are a liability.

Distinguishing the two is essential. Legitimate networks help businesses find partners, investors and clients. They do not replace a strong product, clear strategy or sound governance.

By contrast, practices that look like favouritism can dampen competition and discourage innovation. Most business people do not want that; they want fair access, predictable rules and timely decisions.

Three areas deserve careful, constructive attention. First, access to finance. When loans are assessed on data, cash flows and collateral, smaller firms gain confidence to invest. When lending appears to reward proximity rather than performance, promising enterprises can hesitate to grow.

Second, procurement and contracting. Transparent processes, clear criteria and timely feedback help suppliers improve and compete. Third, leadership appointments. When senior roles are advertised and selection



Better disclosure and data-led lending can build confidence across Oman's business ecosystem.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at The Observer.

Relationships are a form of social capital. In a relationship-based society like ours, trust can reduce uncertainty, speed decisions and help smaller firms be seen.

standards are known, trust rises and results are easier to evaluate.

Oman Vision 2040 already points the way: a competitive, diversified economy built on transparency, capability and opportunity. The goal is not to erase relationships — that would be neither realistic nor desirable — but to align them with merit so they amplify, rather than replace, value creation.

What does this look like in practice?

- More open information. Publishing concise rationales for major procurement awards and senior appointments can improve understanding without adding bureaucracy.
- Data-driven finance. Expanding the use of credit information and supply-chain finance can widen access to working capital for SMEs, while keeping risk standards strong.
- Clear conflict-of-interest rules. Regular disclosures by boards and executives — with simple, practical templates — help prevent misunderstandings and

support confidence.

- Support for start-ups. Targeted innovation challenges and pilot contracts for local solutions can bring new firms into value chains in a measured, low-risk way.
- Constructive feedback loops. Unsuccessful bidders receiving brief feedback are better placed to improve and succeed next time.

These steps are modest, implementable and consistent with international good practice.

Importantly, they respect Oman's institutional context and the role of market regulators, public entities and financial institutions.

Culture matters too. Many Omani companies already model good practice: transparent hiring, published ethics codes and supplier-development programmes. Highlighting such examples — and learning from them — can be as powerful as new rules. When business leaders set the tone, teams follow. When teams follow, ecosystems shift.

For individuals, the lesson is simple and encouraging. Build your network — but build your value even more. Prepare thoroughly. Share data. Deliver on time. Communicate clearly. Relationships may open the first door; performance keeps the doors open.

For institutions, the path is equally clear. Make processes simpler and more predictable. Use technology to shorten timelines and widen participation. Reward quality and delivery. The result is the same for everyone: greater trust, better outcomes and faster progress towards the Oman Vision 2040 targets.

In the end, the winning market is not the one with the thickest address book. It is the one that converts knowledge, effort and relationships into measurable results — jobs created, exports grown, services improved. When connections and merit work together, Oman's private sector becomes more dynamic, more inclusive and more resilient. That is a goal all of us — government, financiers and entrepreneurs alike — can confidently share.

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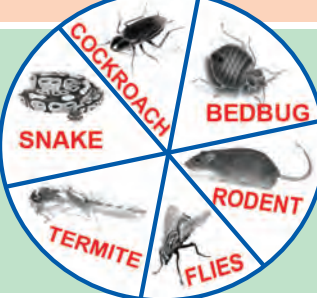
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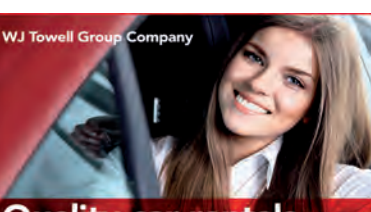
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ART/LIFE



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THE VISUAL CUSTODIAN OF THE WILD > 20



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ART

Ivory Coast historic beachside town boasts new modern art museum



A NEW contemporary art museum has opened in Ivory Coast's Unesco-listed beachside town of Grand-Bassam in a building that is a remnant of its colonial past. Twenty-eight artists from nine African countries feature in the inaugural exhibition of paintings, sculpture, photography and design at La Maison de l'art (The House of Art).

The former post office and customs building has been overhauled respecting its colonial-era architecture of red earth bricks, large wooden windows and high ceilings. It has two permanent exhibition spaces as well as a temporary one and offers a residency for artists with a workshop and meeting rooms.

"This is what we, as artists, are looking for: homes to welcome us, to receive our work, to discuss, exchange and enrich ourselves. In fact, it's a gathering place", Ivorian painter and exhibitor Mathilde Moreau said.

With its tropical climes, sea air and history, Grand-Bassam is a magnet for artists despite lacking some of what the economic capital, Abidjan, can offer.

Under French imperial rule, the southeastern town was Ivory Coast's capital, with the mix of people who settled there making it a centre of arts and culture.

The old quarter was added to the Unesco World Heritage List in 2012.

The House of Art, which officially opened on Thursday, resulted from a partnership between the culture ministry and the Societe Generale Foundation Ivory Coast.

The museum "represents this breath of fresh air for the preservation, transmission and promotion of our culture", Culture Minister Francoise Remarck said.

Moreau, the artist, who headed the Abidjan school of fine arts for nearly two decades, said it was "invigorating" to see the art museum "blossom here, in my birthplace".

Another exhibitor Mounou Desire Koffi also stressed the significance of having the art space as he said there were "not many galleries" in Ivory Coast.

"The fact that a very large museum gives us the possibility to be able to show our work here and internationally is very important to me", he said. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actress Rani Mukerji takes part in celebrations on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Durga Puja in Mumbai. —AFP



FILM

US actor Dwayne Johnson attends the premiere of "The Smashing Machine" at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Beverly Hills, California. —AFP



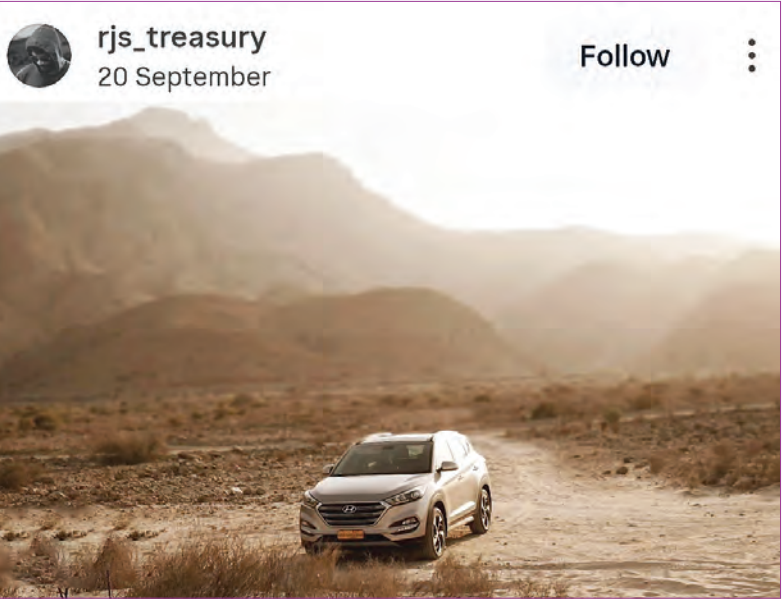
LIFESTYLE

An Afghan man sells plastic cans along a road in Faizabad district, Badakhshan province. —AFP

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Bottega Veneta shows off ‘soft functionality’ in Milan



BRITISH DESIGNER Louise Trotter showed her debut collection for Bottega Veneta in Milan on Saturday with a collection focused on “soft functionality”, with structured clothes in supple, draped fabrics.

In front of an audience that included actresses Uma Thurman and Julianne Moore, the models wore leather coats and suits with wide shoulders as well as voluminous fur-like tops — one in shimmering gold — matched with slinky skirts.

Other dresses were more fitted, wrapped around the body and lined with cotton so they slid off the skin, in a collection focused on tailoring and the softest leathers, satin and wool.

Bottega Veneta is known for its handbags and these were also big, brightly coloured and made with the label’s trademark “intrecciato” leather weave and carried under the

arm.

Trotter, who was named last December, said she sought inspiration from the early years after the founding of the firm in Vincenza in 1966 and its expansion into the United States.

This included the decision not to brand its bags but let the craftsmanship speak for itself.

“I think the early period between 1966 and 1977 is a good starting point for me. I discovered this sort of soft functionality in bags, a liberation of women at that time”, Trotter said backstage after the Milan Fashion Week show.

“And also I think I discovered this bold confidence. To wear a bag without a logo, you have to be confident”.

She recalled Laura Braggion, Bottega Veneta’s first female creative lead, who was part of Andy Warhol’s team in New York.— AFP



Sought by luxury labels, Nigerian leather reclaims home market



MOST NIGERIAN

leather, often semi-finished, is exported to Europe and Asia and turned into luxury items bearing international brand labels, with zero trace of its origins.

But with her homegrown brand, Isi Omiyi creates high-end pieces to try to reclaim Nigeria’s leather identity.

In her apartment in the Lagos metropolis, she has created a boutique corner where bags, wallets and shoes are carefully displayed on shelves, some carrying price tags of up to \$1,500.

“Leather is part of our heritage. I can’t just stand by and watch others receive all the credit for work that we started here,” the 56-year-old designer told AFP.

Her mission is to amplify “Made In Nigeria” craftsmanship.

She “would like these foreign brands to indicate on their products: ‘originally from Nigeria’ and ‘made in Italy’, ‘made in France,’ or elsewhere, because most of them don’t,” Omiyi said.

According to the country’s export promotion agency, Nigeria exports 90 percent of its leather, mainly to Italy and Spain, which make up around three-quarters of the total volume. Leather exports generate about \$600 million in annual revenue, said Oluwole Oyekunle, a researcher at the Nigerian Institute of Leather and Science Technology in Samaru in northern Kaduna state.

- KANO, CRADLE OF TANNERIES -

In Kano, a state in northern Nigeria, major international luxury

brands source leather through intermediaries, who link them with tanners.

The state counts 11 tanneries. Ztannery, operational since 2010, takes daily delivery of dozens of fresh hides of goats and sheep from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries. They are sorted and treated over nine days.

“We process from zero to semi-finished leather, which is 80 percent of the whole process,” said company owner Abbas Hassan Zein, 47.

Intermediaries ship the hides to Europe, where they undergo further treatment before being sold to luxury brands like “Gucci, Ferragamo, Prada, Louis Vuitton, all the big names”, Zein added.

“And this is where the process goes from ‘Made in Nigeria’ and the balance 10 percent of the finished leather is lost and becomes ‘Made in Italy’ or ‘Made in China,’” he added.

Modern tanneries with state-of-the-art machinery like Ztannery only accept large orders paid in dollars or euros, cutting off access by local designers who would pay in local currency.

Many turn to the traditional Majema tannery, founded in 1932 in the heart of Kano city.

Here, everything is done manually. Dozens of tanners clean and dye hides directly on the earthen floor amid plastic bags and bottles.

“Our customers come from the north and south, and we also export to neighbouring countries such as Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Cotonou (Benin) and Europe,” said tannery manager Mustapha Umar, 52, standing in front of goat hides hanging from wires, waiting to be dyed the next day.

- ‘EXPRESSION OF HERITAGE’ -

In 2017, Femi Olayebi, founder of the Nigerian brand FemiHandbags, created the Lagos Leather Fair, an annual event that brings together approximately 100 leather professionals in Nigeria’s commercial hub.

“There was a need for a platform dedicated to designers, products and leather suppliers, demonstrating that Nigerians, with their own resources, are capable of creating items that are worth purchasing,” said Olayebi.

Public and private ventures are growing in the sector in Africa’s most populous country.

In Kano, Indian, Chinese and some European producers -- not necessarily from the big names -- “have started showing interest of coming here to do the manufacturing”, said Tijjani Sule Garo, of GB Tannery, a family business spanning three generations.

Back in Lagos, the state government in August launched a factory in the Mushin neighbourhood, with the target of producing leather goods and creating 10,000 jobs, located near one of the country’s largest leather markets.

To compete against global leather industry giants, Olayebi stresses the need for “better machines, better access to high-quality Nigerian leather, and above all, better training”.

For David Lawal, 26, brand executive for Morin.O, it all boils down to promoting Nigerian identity.

Many customers seek a “timeless expression of heritage”, narrated through leather products created in Nigeria and crafted by Nigerians, said Lawal. —AFP

FEATURES



THE VISUAL
CUSTODIAN
OF THE WILD

ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN 2023, Mohammed bin Abdulmunim Abdullah Al Bahr al Rawas achieved a moment that many photographers worldwide dream of: he was awarded second place in the prestigious Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum International Photography Award, under the compelling theme of “Diversity”. The award, regarded as one of the most esteemed and competitive photography competitions globally, attracts thousands of entries from across the planet. Its reputation for recognising exceptional talent makes Al Rawas’s achievement not just a personal triumph but a testament to his skill and dedication.

The Hamdan Award isn’t merely about submitting images; it is an intensive process that demands not only technical excellence but also a profound storytelling ability — an album of images that weave narratives about human life, environment, culture and innovation. To qualify, photographers must display a remarkable level of expertise, originality and emotional impact. The competition’s jury, comprising illustrious figures from the international artistic and scientific communities, scrutinises each entry with rigorous standards, selecting those that exemplify excellence and originality.

For Al Rawas, the journey to that recognition was steeped in anticipation — a mixture of hope, anxiety and quiet confidence born from years of relentless pursuit. As he submitted his portfolio, layered with images reflecting Oman’s rich tapestry of wildlife, he knew the significance of this platform. It wasn’t merely about winning; it was about sharing Oman’s natural beauty with the world, about holding up a mirror to a region often misunderstood or overlooked in global narratives.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Al Rawas sees photography as more than mere imagery. For him, it is a powerful tool for environmental advocacy and cultural preservation.

Through his camera, he reveals the often-hidden nuances of bird and animal behaviour — details that



require patience, keen observation and a genuine understanding of wildlife in its natural surroundings.

His approach elevates him from a skilled photographer to a dedicated researcher, actively contributing to environmental programmes, workshops and academic publications that underscore the vital link between knowledge and visual storytelling.

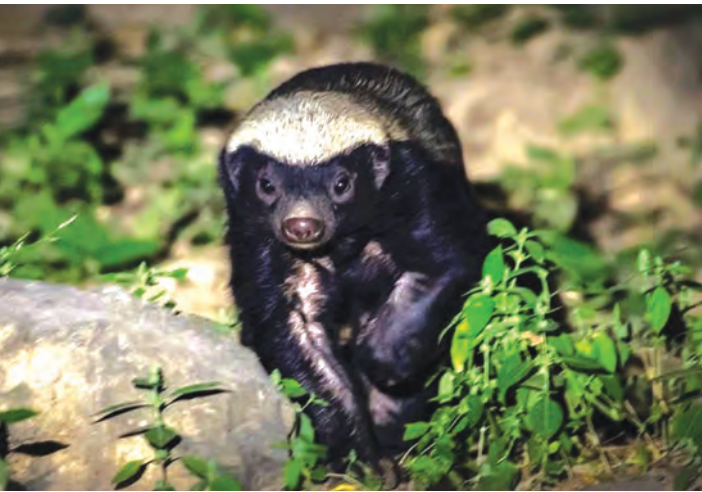
Waiting for the results was an emotional rollercoaster. The period following submission involved weeks of silence, punctuated only by fleeting hopes and doubts. Al Rawas, like many others, likely felt a blend of nervousness and pride — hopeful that his work would be recognised among such an elite field, yet aware of how fierce the competition was. When the announcement finally arrived and his name was called for second place, it would have been a defining moment. The sense of validation — an achievement that transcended personal gratification — resonated far beyond the trophy; it was recognition of Oman’s wilderness and the subtleties of its ecosystem captured through his lens.

His success in that contest paved the way for broader recognition. It came on the heels of earlier milestones, including contributing to the acclaimed National Geographic documentary Arabian Wilderness, which highlighted the region’s ecological diversity and underscored his ability to portray Oman’s natural environment with authenticity. His mastery of

advanced techniques, such as drone photography, has expanded his visual repertoire, allowing him to present Oman’s landscapes and wildlife from perspectives once beyond reach.

Locally, his efforts have been recognised by cultural institutions within the Sultanate of Oman, including an honorary recognition from Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture.

But Al Rawas’s story is about more than personal accolades. It is about his role as a custodian of Oman’s environment and culture, an advocate whose work inspires many. His images serve as a bridge — connecting audiences with the often-hidden beauty of Oman’s wilderness, fostering awareness and respect for biodiversity and ecological preservation.



Today, Al Rawas stands as a shining example of how patience, skill and a deep respect for nature can lead to international recognition in a fiercely competitive arena. His journey reminds us that behind every award-winning image is a story of perseverance — of waiting, hoping and ultimately, being honoured for embodying the very essence of “Diversity” — the core theme that made his achievement resonate worldwide.

In that moment of victory, as he absorbed the significance of the accolade, it wasn’t just a triumph for him personally, but a celebration of Oman’s wilderness and a clarion call for its conservation. His legacy is now etched into the global narrative, inspiring a new generation to see the natural world through the eye of a true visionary.

Discover more inspiring stories like Mohammed al Rawas’ by downloading **The Correspondent: 50 People You Have To Meet in Oman**. This captivating collection highlights some of the most fascinating and inspiring individuals across Oman, revealing their remarkable journeys and contributions. Dive into the extraordinary lives shaping the Sultanate of Oman — get your copy today!

