

O M A N  D A I L Y

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IN BRIEF

HM CONGRATULATES ZAMBIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia on being re-elected for a second presidential term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of success to President Hakainde in leading the people of his country and realising further achievements and aspirations in all spheres. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations of cooperation and friendship further growth and prosperity.

REGISTRATION FOR ‘4TH YOUNG AMBASSADORS’

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has announced the opening of registration for the fourth edition of the Young Ambassadors Programme, scheduled to take place in November of this year in the Governorate of Muscat. This edition follows three highly successful iterations that witnessed significant interest from Omani and Arab youth and contributed to delivering an integrated educational and training experience. The programme enabled participants to explore a wide range of international issues and gain insight into the mechanisms of decision-making and voting procedures within United Nations meetings, through a diverse array of specialised events and activities. **DETAILS ON P2**

QUAKE-DAMAGED TOWER



Cracks on a damaged tower in the aftermath of an earthquake that struck southern Spain, in Granada, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Tea, coffee imports to Oman exceed 49 million

The Sultanate of Oman’s foreign trade in tea and coffee recorded notable growth over the past five years, with the value of imports of both products increasing between 2021 and 2025, according to the latest official statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data showed that the value of tea imports increased from RO



The data showed that the value of tea imports increased from RO 13.9 million in 2021 to RO 28.2 million in 2025.

13.9 million in 2021 to RO 28.2 million in 2025, recording growth of 103.2 per cent. Imported quantities also rose from 9.3 million kg to 26.2 million kg, representing growth of 182.1 per cent over the same period. Coffee imports also recorded notable growth, with their value rising from RO 8.6 million in 2021 to RO 21 million in 2025, an increase of 144.1 per cent.

Imported quantities rose from 6.2 million kg to 7.7 million kg, recording growth of 23.9 per cent. Among supplying countries in 2025, the Republic of Kenya topped the list of tea suppliers to the Sultanate of Oman, with imports valued at RO 20.2 million, followed by the United Arab Emirates at RO 4.7 million and the Republic of India at RO 1.1 million. — ONA

Iran says Hormuz shut till US meets conditions

P R E S I D E N T T R U M P S A Y S N O T A L K S P L A N N E D W I T H T E H R A N

THE Strait of Hormuz will remain shut until the US meets the conditions of an interim deal signed with Iran in June, the top Iranian negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in comments published by state media on Tuesday. These conditions include the US lifting its blockade of Iranian ports, lifting oil sanctions, releasing Tehran’s frozen assets, and ending threats and military operations on all fronts, Qalibaf told parliament. The memorandum of understanding, clinched on June 17, quickly unravelled over a dispute about control of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway through which a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flowed before the war. US President Donald Trump said the deal was “over” on July 7. A week later, Iran’s foreign ministry declared it “suspended”. Under the MoU, Iran and the US had committed to negotiating a final deal — covering broader issues such as the fate of Iran’s nuclear programme — in a maximum of 60 days, extendable by mutual consent. A senior Iranian official said on Monday that Iran would now shift to a “fully offensive” posture due to the stalled diplomatic efforts to secure a permanent end to the conflict. Meanwhile, Trump said no talks were taking place with Iran and none were scheduled, and he insisted that the Strait of Hormuz was open, contradicting an earlier Iranian assertion that the critical waterway remained shut to shipping.



A currency dealer holds Iranian rials in the Grand Bazaar in Tehran, Iran, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Trump said no talks were taking place with Iran and none were scheduled, and he insisted that the Strait was open, contradicting an earlier Iranian assertion that the critical waterway remained shut

The receding prospects of a deal to end the nearly six-month conflict drove up oil prices again on Tuesday, while stock markets sagged and borrowing costs for major economies, including the US, hit multi-decade highs, amid concerns about the long-term inflationary and fiscal impact of the crisis. “There are no talks or conversations going on, or scheduled, with the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Trump said in a post on Truth Social on Tuesday. “The Naval Blockade remains in

full force and effect. The Hormuz Strait is open and operating. All water mines have been removed or detonated,” he added. On Monday, Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and special envoy, had sounded an optimistic note, saying talks with Iran were still under way and were “probably more robust” than they had ever been. Preliminary shipping data on Tuesday showed ship crossings via the Strait of Hormuz were still in single digits on Monday. — Agencies

Oman’s humanitarian action rooted in societal values

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will join nations around the world on Wednesday in observing World Humanitarian Day, reaffirming its active presence and enduring contributions to supporting humanitarian efforts. This commitment is rooted in its firm belief that solidarity, mutual support and standing by people in times of crisis are deeply ingrained values and an enduring extension of Omani society. This approach is embodied in the swift response to various humanitarian issues and

circumstances, and the provision of aid and relief to those in need — reflecting an Omani paradigm in which assistance transcends its material value to carry a humanitarian message founded on compassion, peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples. Badr bin Mohammed al Zaabi, Acting CEO of Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), said that World Humanitarian Day serves as a reminder that regardless of the causes and locations of crises, the human being remains the focal point and ultimate purpose of any



response. In a world witnessing escalating conflicts, disasters and humanitarian challenges, no single country or institution can operate in isolation, he affirmed. He emphasised that international solidarity, the integration of efforts and the rapid delivery of aid to those entitled to it have become shared responsibilities. He further affirmed that Oman’s message is that humanitarian action should not be governed by geography or differences, but rather by human need, respect for human dignity and

the extension of assistance at the time it is most needed. He added that the Sultanate of Oman possesses a deeply rooted humanitarian approach, drawing its strength from a foreign policy based on peace, cooperation and mutual respect — a stance reflected in its regional and international humanitarian presence. What distinguishes this approach, he said, is its quietude and continuity, its focus on the humanitarian dimension and its commitment to reaching affected populations wherever they may be. **SEE ALSO P5**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting aimed to exchange knowledge and expertise. — ONA

BLUE ECONOMY FORUM COMMITTEE DISCUSSES MARINE CAPABILITIES

SUR: The Main Organising Committee for the ‘Blue Economy and Maritime Investment Forum’ in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, scheduled to be held in the coming December of this year, revealed the details and orientations of the forum.

This took place during a meeting chaired by Shaikh Dr Saif bin Mohammed al Ghaithi, Wali of Sur.

The meeting highlighted the importance of marine sectors, projects, and capabilities in the governorate’s wilayats, as well as economic diversification opportunities, in addition to boosting local investment.

The meeting aimed to exchange knowledge and expertise and explore domains that contribute to enhancing the economic value of the governorate’s marine capabilities. It also discussed the main themes, accompanying programmes and participating entities.

The Blue Economy and Maritime Investment Forum represents a space and promising investment opportunities for maritime activities, given the economic capabilities and projects that characterise the governorate’s wilayats in the economy sector. — ONA

OMAN AT ISTANBUL ARAB BOOK FAIR



ISTANBUL: Represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 11th edition of Istanbul International Arab Book Fair, which runs from August 15 to 23. Oman’s participation in the event reflects its keenness to enhance Arab cultural presence and showcase the features of the Omani cultural identity to a wide audience of intellectuals, researchers, publishers and visitors from various countries of the world. — ONA

Registration for 4th young ambassadors programme opens

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has announced the opening of registration for the fourth edition of the Young Ambassadors Programme, scheduled to take place in November of this year in the Governorate of Muscat.

This edition follows three highly successful iterations that witnessed significant interest from Omani and Arab youth and contributed to delivering an integrated educational and training experience. The programme enabled participants to explore a wide range of international issues and gain insight into the mechanisms of decision-making and voting procedures within United Nations meetings, through a diverse array of specialised events and activities.

The programme encompasses a set of core

components, including meetings that bring young participants together with diplomatic leaders, training workshops conducted in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), a specialised workshop on protocol and etiquette, a simulation session as part of the Model United Nations programme, a diplomatic dinner, a daily bulletin detailing session proceedings, as well as sightseeing and orientation tours for participants. Together, these elements provide a comprehensive experience that integrates knowledge acquisition, training, practical application, and networking.

Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director-General of Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, stated that the Young Ambassadors



The programme encompasses a set of core components, including meetings that bring young participants together. — ONA

Programme is one of the flagship specialised initiatives implemented by the ministry in the field of youth empowerment and capacity development. He noted that the programme offers an integrated experience combining knowledge, training, and hands-on practice, and enjoys considerable attention and demand from young people — a trend reflected

in the registration numbers recorded over the past three editions.

Regarding the fourth edition of the programme, he explained that it is expected to witness an expansion in the number of participants, with a target total of 160 participants, alongside an expansion in the scope of participating countries beyond the Sultanate of Oman. He affirmed that

Running from 8 to 20 August, the two-week forum brought together 100 male and female postgraduate researchers who received an intensive training programme focused on equipping themselves with practical skills in Statistical Analysis Software



The forum seeks to improve modern statistical methods to boost the quality of research.

Innovation Authority, the forum aimed to empower postgraduate students and researchers across Oman and enhance the quality of scientific output in line with Oman Vision 2040 priorities for education, research, and innovation.

“The forum seeks to improve modern statistical methods to boost the quality of research and increase peer-reviewed publication rates for national scholars,” the Authority stated. It also emphasised building networking and cooperative

frameworks across local higher education bodies. The closing ceremony will include a review of the forum’s key outcomes and results achieved during the training period. Participants, trainers, and supporting entities that contributed to the success of this edition will also be honoured.

The Research and Innovation Authority extended its appreciation to all the stakeholders for their role in highlighting national programmes.

Bukha waterfront a comprehensive tourist destination

AHMED AL SHUHI
BUKHA, AUGUST 18

The Bukha Waterfront project is one of the development projects being implemented by Musandam Governorate to enhance the urban landscape and boost the wilayat’s position as a tourist and recreational destination.

Asma bint Saleh al Saadi, an engineer in the Projects Department of Musandam Municipality, said that the project aims to improve the quality of life and spur local investment while preserving the distinctive architectural identity of Bukha.

She noted that the RO 1.2-million project is the first of its kind in terms of scale, facilities, and services. It involves



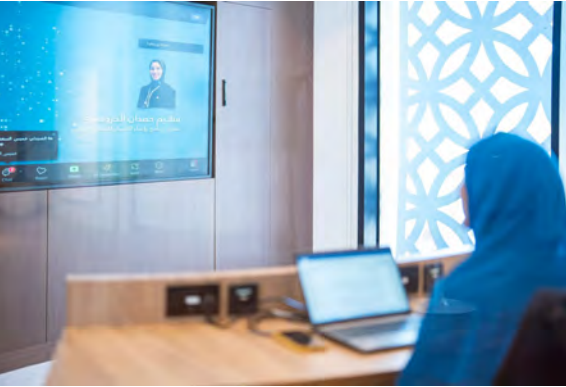
The project is expected to boost tourism, attract more visitors and revitalise commercial activities.

a waterfront promenade and beach park covering an area of 10,000 sq metres, a walkway along the waterfront extending 800 metres in length and ranging from 10 to 15 metres in width. Other facilities include shops, restaurants, and cafes with glass facades overlooking the sea. It also features seating areas, green spaces, a children’s play area, shaded areas, a boat rental shop, water fountains, and parking along the waterfront and in front of the park.

She noted that the project is expected to boost tourism, attract more visitors, revitalise commercial activities, and create investment opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

100 postgraduate statistical researchers to be honoured

SHORT TAKES



Applications for ‘Leading Through Strategic Influence and Design Thinking: A Toolkit for Breakthrough Innovation’ will be open from August 18 to 30.

RAM OPENS APPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE COURSES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has opened applications for two online learning programmes designed to strengthen leadership capabilities and foster a culture of continuous learning. Applications for ‘Leading Through Strategic Influence and Design Thinking: A Toolkit for Breakthrough Innovation’ will be open from August 18 to 30.

The programmes form part of RAM’s wider efforts to equip national talent with the skills and perspectives needed to navigate increasingly complex and fast-changing professional environments. Through flexible, high-quality learning experiences informed by international best practice, RAM continues to support the development of leaders who can drive institutional transformation and contribute to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

‘Leading Through Strategic Influence’ is designed for professionals seeking to strengthen their ability to lead, engage and influence effectively across different organisational settings. The programme focuses on leadership presence, team development, strategic communication and the ability to guide teams towards shared organisational priorities. Participants will gain practical approaches that can be applied directly within their workplace to strengthen collaboration, decision-making and leadership impact. The second programme, ‘Design Thinking: A Toolkit for Breakthrough Innovation’, introduces participants to practical design-thinking approaches that can be used to address organisational challenges and develop more effective solutions. It focuses on turning ideas into practical outcomes, improving services and processes, and embedding a more innovative and user-centred approach to problem-solving within organisations.

The programmes are intended for middle management in the public and private sectors, as well as professionals in equivalent roles across other sectors. ‘Leading Through Strategic Influence’ will accommodate 50 participants, while ‘Design Thinking: A Toolkit for Breakthrough Innovation’ will welcome 100 participants. Both programmes will be delivered in English through an interactive digital learning environment and in collaboration with leading international universities. The learning experience will combine academic insight with practical application, enabling participants to connect international knowledge and contemporary leadership practices with the realities of their own organisations.

URGENT CALL FOR O+ BLOOD DONORS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

The O+ blood stock is experiencing a significant decrease, and the Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) has requested donors to start donating.

The DBBS said there is a need for more than 170 units of blood to reach the safe level. “We urgently appeal to you to donate today in Baushar or Al Seeb as the stock of blood type positive is critically low,” DBBS stated.

A number of haematology



The urgent blood appeal came as O positive blood stocks have fallen significantly.

patients are waiting for this blood type to become available this week. The urgent blood appeal came as O positive blood stocks have fallen

significantly.

Several patients with blood disorders are awaiting this blood group this week.

Blood Bank Bausher is open from 8 am to 8 pm Saturday through Thursday, while on Friday from 8 am to 1 pm. O-positive (O+) blood can donate red blood cells to any person with an Rh-positive blood type.

This includes people with O+, A+, B+, and AB+ blood groups. It is one of the most common and heavily requested blood types in hospitals.

ADAPTING TO SUMMER HEAT, NOT RESISTING IT

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUGUST 18

LIVING WITH extreme heat has been a way of life for people across Al Dhahirah, Al Wusta, Al Batinah North and Rimal Al Sharqiya. They have developed practical habits that blend inherited wisdom with modern technology, proving that resilience is often built through everyday choices.

In Ibri, where summer afternoons can feel relentless, Amal al Khawaldi says adaptation begins with respecting nature rather than resisting it.

“Our grandparents planned every activity around the sun,” she recalled. “Farming started before dawn, children played after sunset, and homes were designed to stay naturally cool. Many of those traditions remain relevant today, even with modern comforts.”

Architecture itself tells part of the story.

Thick walls, narrow streets, shaded courtyards and date palm plantations once created natural cooling systems long before electricity reached many communities. Today, these ideas are inspiring sustainable building practices that reduce dependence on air conditioning while lowering energy consumption.

In Al Suwaiq, environmental manager Hamood al Kharousi believes Oman’s response to rising temperatures must combine heritage with innovation.

“Climate adaptation is no longer a future discussion; it is our daily reality,” he says. “Smart insulation, reflective building materials, solar-powered shading and energy-efficient cooling technologies can significantly improve quality of life while supporting environmental sustainability.”

Further in Bidiyah, camel owner



Summer has also strengthened social traditions across Oman. As temperatures ease after sunset, neighbourhoods come alive.



People think summer stops life. In fact, Life doesn’t stop. We simply change our timetable. Life begins earlier, rests during the hottest hours, and returns after sunset. Adapting has become part of our identity.”

IMAN AL SAIDI

Said al Matani has spent decades working in one of Oman’s harshest environments, and he is originally from Bidiyah itself.

“The desert teaches patience,” he said. “We care for our animals before sunrise and again after sunset. Water management, shaded shelters and careful planning are part of survival. The environment always comes first.”

For many families, adapting to summer is equally about protecting health. In Al Khabourah, Dr Amal al Qutaiti said awareness is the most effective defence against heat-related illnesses.

“People should never underestimate dehydration,” she explained. “Drinking water regularly, avoiding direct sunlight during peak hours and checking on elderly relatives, children and outdoor workers can prevent serious health complications. Small habits save lives.”

Summer has also strengthened

social traditions across Oman. As temperatures ease after sunset, neighbourhoods come alive. Children fill public parks, cafes welcome families, and evening gatherings continue well into the night.

Wafa al Zaabi said, “We spend more time in the evening with friends and families till midnights. In many communities, the hottest season has created a culture that values flexibility, hospitality and stronger family connections.”

In the Wilayat of Al Duqum, company worker Iman al Saidi believes visitors are often surprised by how local communities embrace rather than fear the season.

“People think summer stops life. In fact, Life doesn’t stop. We simply change our timetable. Life begins earlier, rests during the hottest hours, and returns after sunset. Adapting has become part of our identity.”

‘Oman Orbit’ programme offers youths experience in space science

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with ETCO SPACE (a private aerospace and artificial intelligence company based in Oman), the Youth Centre is implementing a training programme codenamed ‘Oman Orbit’ in the field of satellite technologies.

The programme seeks to develop the capabilities of Omani youth in space science and technology, enhance hands-on experience in the field of small satellites and link space technologies with the national priorities of the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme, to be conducted during a two-week

camp, offers an integrated educational experience that begins with an introduction to the general context of activities linked to the space sector, before moving on to practical training on assembling satellite subsystems, conducting experiments related to wireless communications and the Global Positioning System (GPS), analysing Earth observation data, and concluding with the implementation of graduation projects in which the participants showcase the knowledge and skills gained during their training period.

The camp focuses on



giving participants a practical understanding of the subsystems of small

satellites (CubeSats), including satellite structures, power systems, onboard

computing, orientation and control systems, as well as communication systems. It is scheduled to enable the participants to practically comprehend the mechanisms of satellite operation and the integration of their various systems. It also highlights the potential of utilising space technologies in a variety of areas, including early flood warning solutions, marine monitoring systems, agricultural sector observation and combating desertification. It thereby underscores the growing role of space data and technologies in supporting sustainable development and

decision-making.

In addition, the camp includes practical training that contributes to developing the skills of participants in embedded systems, sensor data collection, radio (RF) communications and geospatial data analysis — thus providing scope for combining theoretical knowledge with practical application, besides introducing the participants to the emerging space economy (NewSpace) in the region and elaborating on opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

— ONA



خريف
ظفار
KHAREEF
DHO FAR

Located on Sultan Qaboos Street in eastern Salalah, the farm covers 1,085 acres, of which 900 are cultivated. Bananas are its most widely grown crop, followed by coconuts and papayas



which made the experience worthwhile for all of us.”

The appeal of Razat lies in turning ongoing agricultural production and research into the substance of the visitor experience.

Located on Sultan Qaboos Street in eastern Salalah, the farm covers 1,085 acres, of which 900 are cultivated. Bananas are its most widely grown crop, followed by coconuts and papayas. The estate contains more than 16,000 coconut trees of different ages.

It also produces grapes, local red figs, Omani limes and several tropical and subtropical fruits. Annual organic turmeric production stands at about 50 tonnes, according to the farm, with the crop processed at what it describes as Oman’s first specialised turmeric production facility.

Agricultural research gives the trail an additional educational dimension.

In July, Royal Court Affairs announced that the farm had successfully produced pineapples locally after nearly 15 years of research and cultivation trials.

The work progressed from limited planting in pots to wider cultivation in soil beneath tree cover and inside greenhouses. Researchers tested Queen, Mauritius and MD-2 varieties, with the current MD-2 crop producing fruit weighing between two and more than four kilogrammes.

The farm is also the origin of the Razat banana, which emerged through a natural mutation in a field planted with the Williams variety.

Selection work began in 2015 and was followed by several years of cultivation and observation.

The Razat variety can be harvested about three weeks earlier than Williams and produces heavier bunches, according to Royal Court Affairs.

The site also connects agricultural production with Dhofar’s water and farming heritage.

Part of the estate is irrigated through a falaj extending about 13 kilometres from Ayn Razat, while a preserved agricultural tractor dating to the 1950s reflects the farm’s long history.

When the trail opened last year, Razat Farm Director Mohammad bin Alawi Ibrahim said it would be expanded with additional interactive stations.

Nearly a year later, the sold-out calendar suggests that attracting demand is no longer the immediate test. The next challenge is how the farm manages capacity, develops the visitor experience and sustains interest beyond the peak khareef weeks while preserving the agricultural and educational character that distinguishes it.

SOLD-OUT BOOKINGS SIGNAL DEMAND FOR RAZAT FARM

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 18

EVERY operating date at Razat Royal Farm through September 2 was marked sold out on Thursday, offering the clearest public indication yet that the Salalah attraction is drawing strong demand as it approaches its first anniversary. The farm’s official booking portal showed all 15 operating days from August 13 to September 2 carrying the ‘Tickets Sold Out’ label. September 3 was the first

displayed date not marked sold out when the Observer checked the platform. Royal Court Affairs has not published a cumulative attendance figure for the farm, while the booking platform does not disclose daily capacity. The booking calendar therefore cannot establish the number of visitors, but it provides verifiable evidence that the guided trail has emerged as a sought-after addition to Dhofar’s tourism offering. Demand for the attraction comes as travel and tourism activity across the governorate continues to grow.

Razat’s tourist trail opened on August 18, 2025, under the Royal Orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. This makes 2026 its first full khareef season since the farm began receiving visitors. The guided experience starts at an external reception building, from where visitors are transported through several stations across the working farm. The route introduces them to crops, tropical trees, modern cultivation techniques, livestock and agricultural research before reaching an integrated visitor station with rest and refreshment facilities.

Dhofar resident Ali al Mashaikhi, who visited the farm with his family, said the attraction had added a different dimension to the places local families enjoy during khareef. “As a family from Dhofar, we continue to enjoy visiting the mountains, springs and beaches every khareef. Razat has now given us another option — one that combines a family outing with learning,” he said. “The children could see how crops are grown and learn about agriculture at close range. They enjoyed the visit and came away with new questions and knowledge,

All 15 operating days through September 2 were marked sold out as the attraction entered its first full khareef season

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

OMAN ACTIVE IN CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANITARIAN ACTION

THE Sultanate of Oman will on Wednesday join nations around the world in observing World Humanitarian Day, reaffirming its active presence and enduring contributions to supporting humanitarian efforts. This commitment is rooted in its firm belief that solidarity, mutual support and standing by people in times of crisis are deeply ingrained values and an enduring extension of Omani society.

This approach is embodied in the swift response to various humanitarian issues and circumstances, and the provision of aid and relief to those in need — reflecting an Omani paradigm in which assistance transcends its material value to carry a humanitarian message founded on compassion, peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples.

Badr bin Mohammed al Zaabi, Acting CEO of Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), said that World Humanitarian Day serves as a reminder that regardless of the causes and locations of crises, the human being remains the focal point and ultimate purpose of any response. In a world witnessing escalating conflicts, disasters and humanitarian challenges, no single country or institution can operate in isolation, he affirmed.

He emphasised that international solidarity, the integration of efforts and the rapid delivery of aid to those entitled to it have become shared responsibilities. He further affirmed that Oman’s message is that humanitarian action should not be governed by geography or differences, but rather by human need, respect for human dignity and the extension of assistance at the time it is most needed.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman possesses a deeply rooted humanitarian approach, drawing its strength from a foreign policy based on peace, cooperation and mutual respect — a stance reflected in its regional and international humanitarian presence. What distinguishes this approach, he said, is its quietude and continuity, its focus on the humanitarian dimension and its commitment to reaching affected populations wherever they



Humanitarian action is a shared national responsibility, and its impact multiplies when the efforts of government, the private sector, civil society institutions, and individuals are integrated. — ONA



assistance can be facilitated to reach regions and countries affected by crises and conflicts. Oman’s consistent approach, balanced relations and humanitarian stances have contributed to building this trust — a valuable asset that can be built upon and developed in the forthcoming phase.

He affirmed that the establishment of Oman Red Crescent represents an important step in strengthening the connection between Oman’s humanitarian action system and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and international humanitarian organisations. While cooperation and coordination with many of these institutions have existed for years, the presence of Oman Red Crescent will provide these relationships with a more institutional and structured framework, opening broader avenues for developing partnerships, exchanging expertise and knowledge, and building capacities in disaster and crisis response, as well as volunteer and humanitarian work, he added.

He explained that practical steps have already been initiated in this direction, through a number of coordination meetings with relevant stakeholders to discuss areas of cooperation, priority objectives, and establish the foundations for the next phase. These efforts aim to build effective and sustainable partnerships and facilitate mutual benefit from expertise and capabilities. He noted that these partnerships are viewed as reciprocal relationships that allow Oman to benefit from international expertise and experiences, while in turn contributing its own accumulated humanitarian experience, balanced relationships and international credibility, as well as its potential role in supporting and facilitating humanitarian efforts in crisis-affected regions.

It is noteworthy that World Humanitarian Day is observed on August 19 each year, serving as a global occasion to highlight humanitarian efforts worldwide, honour the sacrifices of humanitarian workers, and reaffirm the importance of solidarity and international cooperation in addressing crises and disasters. — ONA



BADR BIN MOHAMMED AL ZAABI

Acting CEO,
Oman Charitable
Organisation

Oman is keen to ensure that its aid is aligned with actual needs, transitioning from emergency response in times of crisis to supporting recovery and stability whenever feasible.

may be. Oman is keen to ensure that its aid is aligned with actual needs, transitioning from emergency response in times of crisis to supporting recovery and stability whenever feasible.

He explained that the Omani experience is built upon a critical equation: responding to immediate needs without overlooking the long-term requirements of individuals. Omani efforts combine urgent relief assistance with health, educational, housing and developmental programmes, thereby contributing to more sustainable impact. Omani humanitarian action is, by its nature, discreet, prioritising the impact that reaches people over the accompanying visibility.

Regarding the launch of Oman Red Crescent and its significance for the development of the national humanitarian system, Al Zaabi described it as a pivotal milestone in advancing the national humanitarian framework. This is achieved by introducing a specialised institutional structure that enhances Oman’s preparedness and capacity to respond to crises and disasters, while opening broader horizons for volunteering, capacity-building and humanitarian cooperation, he pointed out.

He added that this step gains additional importance from the fact that Oman Red Crescent falls within the purview of Oman Charitable

Organisation and operates under its management, thereby preserving the organisation’s accumulated expertise and reinforcing integration in the management of humanitarian action.

On the external front, Oman Red Crescent represents a significant advancement in organising and expanding Oman’s humanitarian presence, strengthening its relationships and partnerships with the international humanitarian system, and showcasing and institutionalising the aid and humanitarian efforts that Oman provides across various regions of the world within a more prominent and integrated institutional framework.

He stated: “We aspire for Oman Red Crescent to serve as an active humanitarian arm within Oman Charitable Organisation’s system, and to enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s capabilities in humanitarian response, emergency management and disaster relief — through capacity-building, field team training, the development of volunteer work and raising the level of preparedness and readiness for crises.” He further observed that one of the key roles of Oman Red Crescent is to serve as a trusted humanitarian bridge and a platform for coordination and cooperation with international humanitarian institutions and organisations that view the Sultanate of Oman as a reliable partner through which humanitarian efforts and

Al Batinah North Governorate fetes outstanding GED students

SUHAR: The Governorate of Al Batinah North on Tuesday held a ceremony in honour of students who excelled in the General Education Diploma (GED) exams for the 2025-2026 School Year. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North.

In a speech at the ceremony, the chief guest congratulated the students for their outstanding performance, noting that their accomplishments constitute the start of a new phase in which their ambitions and responsibilities would continue to expand. He urged them to uphold the high spirit of learning, develop their skills and dedicate their knowledge and abilities to serve their community and the nation at large.

Al Kindi pointed out that the youth represent a true



The ceremony saw the honouring of 31 male and female students. — ONA

asset in the governorate’s march of development. He added that the governorate looks forward to the contribution of the youth in the fields of science, innovation, entrepreneurship and the development of a more prosperous and sustainable future. He observed that the success of every outstanding student was credited to “dedicated

hands” that lent them support.

The ceremony saw the honouring of 31 male and female students who obtained a percentage of 99 per cent or higher in the General Education Diploma. The event embodied the governorate’s keenness to motivate students and encourage them to pursue their path of excellence and distinction. — ONA

وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health

Announcement

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
3382/2026	Tender for Supply, installation, and commissioning of an automated loading system (Power Load System) for the ambulance stretcher at Al Buraimi Hospital.	Before 2 PM On 22/09/2026	Before 10 AM On 30/09/2026	Specialized companies registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority	• 10 RO Small & Medium Enterprises

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website ([etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](#)), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.
- The ministry is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: ([etendering.tenderboard.gov.om](#))

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A boy walks carrying a table on his back past salvage workers scrapping the rubble of a building in Gaza. — AFP

HAMAS SAYS COMMITTED TO GAZA PEACE DEAL

GAZA: Hamas said on Tuesday it remained committed to the US-backed Gaza peace deal after White House envoy Jared Kushner spoke to Israel about steps towards the group’s disarmament. “Hamas is committed to this agreed-upon process. It is clear that, so far, the Israeli side has not given the mediators clear approval of the road map,” Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said. “There are timelines and procedural steps that need to be worked out in detail, but there must first be Israeli approval of the road map,” he said.

Kushner, President Donald Trump’s son-in-law, held a rare meeting with Hamas in Egypt before meeting the following day in Tel Aviv with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has publicly rejected the latest phase of the deal. Kushner said that Hamas’s disarmament could begin in about 30 days and that reconstruction of Gaza would not begin until that happens.

Trump’s “Board of Peace” implementing the deal has told Netanyahu that Israel does not need to start withdrawing from Gaza until full disarmament, walking back an earlier call for Israel to start a phased pullout. — AFP

PAKISTAN COURT ORDERS EX-PM KHAN MOVED TO HOSPITAL



Pakistan’s former prime minister Imran Khan addresses media representatives at a hospital in Lahore. — AFP file photo

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s Supreme Court ordered authorities on Tuesday to move jailed former prime minister Imran Khan to a hospital for medical checks, after the popular politician’s lawyers complained about his poor health. The court decided that the 73-year-old ex-cricket captain would also be allowed to meet with his family once a week and speak to his sons via telephone twice weekly. “We are mindful of the constitutional and legal obligation... to safeguard the life, health, dignity and security of persons in custody,” the panel wrote.

Khan’s personal physician Faisal Sultan, and sister and medical doctor Uzma Khan, “shall be permitted to remain associated with the prisoner’s medical examination and treatment”. A medical board would be established for Khan’s treatment, the order said.

Tuesday’s ruling granting the petition was “a major step, a major decision, a great blessing”, said Salman Akram Raja, secretary-general of Khan’s political party. He called on the supporters to abide by the party’s agreement with the court that there “must not be any crowding or commotion”. — AFP

POLLS VICTORY

Zambian president wins second term



Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema has won a second term. Hichilema took around 60 per cent, similar to his score at the 2021 polls when he won his first five-year term. The 64-year-old is due to be sworn in seven days after the commission publishes the official results, which is due by August 24. Supporters of his UPND party poured onto the streets of the capital Lusaka after the results were announced, singing and dancing in celebration. — AFP

SEARCH EFFORTS

Nine bodies recovered off eastern Tripoli



Nine bodies of migrants have been recovered in the past two days from the shores of an eastern suburb of the Libyan capital Tripoli after their boat capsized, the Tripoli Red Crescent branch said. The Red Crescent branch said in a statement that the bodies were recovered from Tajoura, some 22 km from Tripoli. More bodies are likely to wash ashore as the boat was carrying about 19 people, Tripoli Red Crescent media officer Muad Zurgani said. — Reuters

VIOLENT COMPETITION

Gunmen kill at least 25 in central Nigeria



Attackers wielding guns and machetes killed at least two dozen people in central Nigeria’s Plateau State, survivors said on Tuesday. Red Cross field officer Biplang Moses confirmed the incident without specifying a toll. Matthew Kwarpo, a representative in the Plateau State Assembly, later put the toll at 25. Land used by farmers and herders is coming under stress from climate change and human expansion, sparking deadly competition for increasingly limited space. — AFP

PHILIPPINE STUDENT KILLED IN LIVESTREAMED SCHOOL SHOOTING

MANILA: A student livestreamed himself shooting another schoolmate dead before taking his own life at a high school in the Philippines on Tuesday, authorities said. The school shooting, the country’s second in as many months, took place at Ateneo de Zamboanga University. “What we know so far is that (the shooter) went to the classroom of our known victim. He shot the victim, and after doing that, he went up to the fifth floor and shot himself,” regional

police spokeswoman Shella Chang said.

In a separate statement, interior secretary Victor Remulla confirmed the ninth-grade suspect had livestreamed the incident on social media. The alleged shooter’s Facebook account has since been disabled. In the video, the barrel of a gun can be seen moving down a hallway in the style of a first-person shooter video game before being pointed into a classroom and fired. Children in school uniforms are

then seen screaming and rushing for an exit. National police are now trying to “establish the motive behind the shooting, determine the ownership and source of the firearm used, and find out how it was brought inside the school campus”, the interior ministry said.

The Philippines’ customs department issued a statement saying it had ordered the “preventive suspension” of an agent who owned the guns “allegedly used by the student involved”. — AFP

Israel strikes Syrian airbase

ISRAEL

bombed an airbase in Syria on Tuesday, Syrian state media said, carrying out what appeared to be its first strike on Syrian government assets since March and drawing criticism from a US envoy who called it an “unnecessary escalation”. Syria’s state-run Ekhhbariya, citing a military source, said Israel carried out eight air strikes targeting the runway and storage facilities at the Abu Al Duhur base, while a separate military source and a civilian who lives near the base said there were no casualties. The Israeli military declined to comment on the strikes, while the Syrian defence ministry did not respond.

“We are deeply concerned that the confirmed Israeli air strikes on Abu Al Duhur Airbase constitute an unnecessary escalation that does not advance regional stability,” Ambassador Tom Barrack, the US special presidential envoy for Syria and Iraq, said on X. “The United States continues to believe that restraint and engagement offer the more constructive course. We encourage all parties to prioritise logical discourse over further military incidents,” he added.

The base, about 70 km from the Turkish border, has been out of service as a dedicated military airfield since 2013 and changed



A man rides a motorbike in the town of Abu Al Duhur, Syria. — Reuters

Israel carried out eight air strikes targeting the runway and storage facilities at the Abu Al Duhur base, while a separate source said there were no casualties. The Israeli military declined to comment on the strikes, while the Syrian defence ministry did not respond

hands several times during Syria’s 14-year civil war between forces loyal to former president Bashar al Assad and opposition factions. Israel has repeatedly struck Syrian forces since Assad was ousted in 2024, viewing the country’s new rulers with deep suspicion due to their militant roots despite President Ahmed al Sharaa’s warm ties with the West.

After Assad was toppled, Israel seized territory in southwest Syria and struck much of the Syrian army’s heavy weapons and equipment.

It has also launched attacks in the name of protecting Syria’s Druze minority, notably during violence between Druze and government

fighters last year. Israel also regularly bombed Syria when Assad was in power, aiming to roll back Iranian influence in the country.

The strikes follow a heightening of security tensions between Israel and Türkiye and increasingly sharp rhetoric between the two countries over Syria. Ankara has accused Israel of trying to destabilise Syria and undermine its new administration.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on August 6 that Israel continued to threaten Syria’s security through its repeated attacks, calling for international pressure on Israel to respect Syria’s territorial integrity.

Türkiye has become one of Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa’s main allies. It has been training Syria’s army, helping it rebuild its state institutions and infrastructure, and providing it military and diplomatic support.

The Turkish ruling AK Party’s spokesperson Omer Celik said the strikes “showed once again that Israeli policies are the greatest enemy of peace and tranquility for the peoples of the region”.

“The entire international community must react to this together,” Celik wrote on X. It was not immediately clear whether Türkiye was involved in renovating the base, but Ankara has said it was helping Damascus across the country. — Reuters

MORE DISPLACED FROM INDONESIA QUAKE

JAKARTA: The number of people displaced and injured by a powerful earthquake three days ago has jumped significantly, emergency officials said on Tuesday, with at least 40,000 people living in temporary shelters. The death toll from the 7.7-magnitude quake that hit Flores Island in Indonesia’s east on Saturday also rose to 70 after two more fatalities were confirmed.

More than 40,000 people were now listed as displaced by the quake, according to the national disaster mitigation agency, BNPB, a sharp jump from the figure of 12,800 provided on Monday. At least 1,100 people were also now listed as injured, an increase of more than tenfold from just a day earlier.

The quake damaged almost 12,000 homes across several towns in Flores, where a BNPB spokesman said many residents were refusing to return home as hundreds of aftershocks rattle the island. “The number of displaced people does not reflect the extent of damage to houses, but rather the psychological impact experienced by residents,” spokesman Berton Suar Pelita Panjaitan told a news conference. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A Belgian firefighter sprays water in a field affected by a wildfire in Waimes, in the High Fens. — Reuters

FIREFIGHTERS
PUSH TO ENCIRCLE
BELGIAN WILDFIRE

SOURBRODT: Firefighters launched a potentially decisive push on Tuesday to encircle Belgium’s largest wildfire in a century, despite wind and rain hampering air support operations over the High Fens nature reserve. The blaze charring the vast expanse of boggy peatlands, pine trees and hiking trails grew over the weekend — 3,000 hectares (7,500 acres) — with hundreds of firefighters working to wrestle it under control. “We are trying to definitively encircle the fire today,” regional government spokesperson Nicolas Yernaux said.

In areas where firefighters could operate, he confirmed the fire was “under control and contained.” But a hard-to-access front towards the German border remains a concern — with residents in the border town of Monschau already under evacuation orders due to the smoke hazard. “We’re talking about one or two kilometres, and we’re on the verge of achieving it,” Yernaux said, despite “sustained winds” blowing towards the German border.

Water-bombing aircraft from several countries have been deployed — with two Norwegian helicopters the latest to fly in on Monday night — but they have been repeatedly grounded by low cloud and rain. There are also aircraft from Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. — AFP

NEW TREMORS JOLT SPAIN’S GRANADA



Tourist access to the medieval Alhambra complex was restricted on Tuesday after three more earthquakes shook Spain’s southern Granada province, causing some damage to buildings in the region and forcing the closure of some museums and sport facilities. At least three people were lightly injured, Andalusia’s regional official Antonio Sanz told reporters, adding that one of them, a minor, was taken to hospital. The provincial authority of Granada said in a statement it was closing administrative buildings, museums and sporting facilities but kept primary health centres open for now. — Reuters

GERMANY
OPENS NEW
DRONE
RESEARCH
CENTRE AS
THREATS
MOUNT

HECKLINGEN: Germany on Tuesday opened a new drone defence research centre, less than two weeks after an explosives-laden unmanned aerial vehicle was found at Leipzig airport, a key logistics hub for weapons sent to Ukraine. “We are significantly strengthening our ability to respond to hostile drones,” German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said at the centre’s opening.

The centre “will constitute a central element of the security

architecture in the face of the hybrid threat posed by drones,” he added at the site on a former commercial airport about 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of Berlin. Berlin uses the term hybrid warfare to refer to hostile actions short of unambiguous military attacks, including espionage, arson and sabotage, by or on behalf of foreign powers.

Last year nearly 1,000 suspicious drones flew over critical infrastructure in Germany,

according to the Federal Criminal Police Office. Speaking at a press conference, Dobrindt warned that the explosive found at Leipzig earlier this month was no “isolated case”. “Leipzig is part of a wider picture,” he said. Berlin has so far refused to speculate on the motives or identity of those responsible for the incident at Leipzig. Flights to the airport were diverted for several hours as police deployed a bomb-disposal robot to remove the explosives’ detonator. — AFP

Allies stress ‘critical’ US
cooperation with S Korea

JAPAN underlined on Tuesday the “critical” importance of security cooperation with the United States and South Korea, after President Donald Trump alarmed allies by scaling back military drills with Seoul while hailing his ties with Pyongyang. Trump abruptly announced on Sunday that he had ordered the Pentagon to scale back “inappropriate and hostile” military drills with South Korea, a day before the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises got underway.

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, on a visit to Australia, supported security cooperation with key defence backer Washington and neighbour Seoul. “As Japan faces the most severe and complicated security environment in the post-war era, the cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea is critical to the peace and stability of the region,” Koizumi told journalists.

Trump on Monday insisted he was making the situation “much safer” through his ties with the North’s Kim Jong Un, whom he met three times in his first term but has yet to encounter since his return to the White House. While praising the leader of nuclear-armed North Korea, Trump rebuked key ally Seoul for failing to help Washington fight Iran — a war Trump says is aimed at stopping Tehran from getting an atomic bomb.

Pressed about whether Kim had responded to his messages, Trump told reporters in the Oval Office: “Yeah, he has.” Trump added that the conversations were “very positive”, but provided no further detail. He then said his ties with Kim have reduced tensions. “Kim Jong



South Korean protesters hold placards as they attend a rally to oppose the joint military exercise between South Korea and the US in Seoul. — AFP

As Japan faces the most severe and complicated security environment in the post-war era, the cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea is critical to the peace and stability of the region

SHINJIRO KOIZUMI
Japanese Defence Minister

Un has always treated me with great respect,” Trump said. “I understand him. He understands me.” Seoul’s unification ministry, responsible for relations with the North, said it “cannot verify the specific content of the exchanges” between Washington and Pyongyang.

The 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises with South Korea are designed to prepare for a possible war with North Korea, which decries the drills as dress rehearsals for an invasion. South Korean officials have said the exercises had begun as planned and that they hoped the personal chemistry between Trump and Kim would bring them back to talks.

Seoul’s presidential office said on Tuesday the drills did not reflect “any intention to attack North Korea or escalate tensions on the Korean peninsula”. North Korea has not responded publicly, although it has previously voiced anger at the regular joint manoeuvres that take place in the South. Australia’s Defence Minister Richard Marles,

hosting his Japanese counterpart, said Canberra was “very concerned about North Korea’s nuclear programme as well as its missile programme”.

Trump again called into question on Monday US support for both South Korea and Nato allies that have refused to contribute to the Iran war. “We have 39,000 soldiers over there, guarding you from Kim Jong Un, your next-door neighbour, and you’re not going to help us on a very easy military operation in Iran. That’s strange,” Trump said in the Oval Office, giving a deployment figure that exceeds official troop numbers.

Seoul said on Tuesday that it had been involved in consultations with the United States and other partners over freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and possible military contributions. South Korea has reviewed “practical military contributions” it could make, while taking into account its defence readiness and domestic legal procedures, national security adviser Wi Sung-lac told reporters.

The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea to bolster the country’s defences, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War that ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty. However, Trump’s repeated criticism of time-honoured alliances has cast doubt on US commitments to security in East Asia.

The announcement of the scaled-down drills came as the only US aircraft carrier operating in the Pacific region, the USS George Washington, is being redeployed to the Middle East to relieve the USS Lincoln. The Lincoln has been the focus of concerns over crew mental health and supply issues after a long deployment. — AFP

Zelensky vows response after Russian missile attack kills 10

KYIV: A Russian missile attack killed 10 people on Tuesday in a village in Ukraine’s northeastern Kharkiv region, President Volodymyr Zelensky said, adding that Kyiv would respond. There was no immediate comment from Russia on the attack, which also injured at least 18 people, according to the regional governor. “This morning the Russians launched a brutal attack on a busy intersection in Pechenihiy, Kharkiv region - a location with a post office and stores, surrounded only by residential buildings,” Zelensky said on X. “We will definitely respond to this Russian strike,” he added.

Reuters video from Pechenihiy showed several covered bodies lying on the ground, burnt-out cars and damaged buildings.

Russia has intensified its air attacks on Ukraine over the summer, trying to exploit its smaller neighbour’s critical shortage of

interceptors to down ballistic missiles. The United Nations said last week that civilian casualties from the war in Ukraine had risen by nearly a third month-on-month in July. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said on X it was gathering information about the attack in Pechenihiy and its impact on civilians.

Ukraine has also increased its attacks on Russia, targeting oil facilities and logistics infrastructure to try to undermine Moscow’s ability to wage war. On Tuesday, Moscow’s mayor said Ukraine had launched 620 drones at the Russian capital and surrounding areas, in one of Kyiv’s biggest air assaults on the region. Drones hit a warehouse of Russian e-commerce company Wildberries and other facilities near Moscow, regional governor Andrei Vorobyov said separately. At least three people, including a 10-year-old girl, were injured in the region, he added.



A resident rides a bicycle at the site of Russian drone strikes in the town of Pechenihiy, Ukraine. — Reuters

Wildberries, a frequent target of Kyiv’s attacks following Russia’s full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022, said drone debris hit a wall at the warehouse, causing minor damage. Several other Russian-controlled regions, including Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, also

reported heavy attacks from Ukraine.

Krymenergo, the Crimean peninsula’s largest power supplier, said southern districts came under Ukrainian drone attacks overnight.

It said several settlements have been cut off from power supplies as a result of the attacks, and that the situation with power deliveries has remained challenging in north-western, eastern and southern parts of the region.

Both Russia and Ukraine deny deliberately targeting civilians in their attacks. The strike on Pechenihiy village injured at least 18 people and damaged 10 private buildings, a cafe, a post office, five stores and 15 cars, the governor of the surrounding region, Oleh Syniehubov, said on the Telegram messaging app. According to preliminary information, Russia used two small Banderol cruise missiles in the attack, the office of

Ukraine’s Prosecutor General said. A local official told public broadcaster Suspilne that the strikes had hit the central part of the village, where the cafe, post office and shops are located.

Meanwhile, Russia warned Britain on Tuesday it would face consequences for supplying drones to Ukraine which are used to attack targets on Russian territory. Russia’s embassy in London was responding to a report in the Times newspaper on Saturday which said British-made drones had been used for long-range strikes against Russia for the first time.

“London’s actions will inevitably carry consequences for which it will have to answer,” the embassy said in a statement posted on its Telegram channel. “The deeper its involvement in the conflict and the greater its support for Kiev’s terrorist machinery, the higher the price it will pay.” — Reuters

OPINION

The routine we hardly question



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

THERE is something powerful about this time of year. Summer loosens its grip, school bags reappear, uniforms come out of cupboards and family calendars start filling again. Work gathers pace, after-school activities return, traffic thickens and mornings once again become a carefully choreographed operation of alarms, breakfast, missing shoes and getting everyone where they need to be.

It is easy to think of this period as simply “getting back to normal.” Yet perhaps that is the part worth questioning. Why do we automatically assume we should return to exactly the same version of normal we left behind?

Summer creates distance. Travel, visitors and changing schedules interrupt our usual patterns enough for us to notice things we may have stopped seeing. We realise which commitments we did not miss. We notice how different a child becomes when they are not rushing from one obligation to another. We remember what it feels like to eat together without watching the clock or have a conversation that is not squeezed between appointments.

Then routine returns, and almost without thinking, we begin rebuilding the same life we had before. Perhaps the beginning of a

new school year could be treated less like pressing “resume” and more like an annual review.

Every organisation periodically stops to ask what is working, what is wasting energy and what needs to change. Families rarely do the same. We tend to inherit our routines from the previous term, add a few more commitments and hope everyone can keep up. Yet, a family schedule is not simply logistical. It quietly reveals what we value.

If every evening is filled, we are making a decision about rest. If children spend most afternoons being instructed, coached or transported somewhere, we are making a decision about freedom. If adults constantly answer work messages during family time, we are making a decision about boundaries. None of these choices are automatically wrong, yet they are still choices, even when they feel like inevitabilities.

Children are growing quickly too, which means the routine that worked last year may not be the one they need now. One child may need more independence, another more recovery time. Someone may be ready for greater responsibility. Families change, yet sometimes our routines fail to change with them. There is an opportunity here for adults too. The return to school can become a reset point for our own habits, not through another

A new school year gives us a natural moment to begin again. We can carry every habit, expectation and commitment back with us, or we can become more selective about what deserves another season of our lives.

list of ambitious goals, but through better questions. What made life feel lighter during summer? What drained us before the break that we are about to invite straight back in? What do we want our evenings to feel like the rest of the year, not merely look like on a calendar? Routine is valuable. Children benefit from predictability and adults often function better with structure. The challenge is remembering that structure was created to support life, not consume it.

Perhaps the most important timetable we create this year will never be printed nor stuck to the fridge. It is the invisible rhythm of our home: whether mornings begin with tension or connection, whether mistakes are met with panic or perspective, whether everyone is permanently rushing or occasionally has permission to simply be.

A new school year gives us a natural moment to begin again. We can carry every habit, expectation and commitment back with us, or we can become more selective about what deserves another season of our lives.

Perhaps the question isn’t, “How do we get back into routine?” Maybe it’s “If the life we are rushing back to left us depleted, disconnected or yearning for the next holiday to feel like ourselves again, is that really a routine worth returning to?”

HOW FAMILIES IN ARGENTINA SANK DEEP INTO DEBT

SONIA AVALOS

Andrea feels deep shame when she thinks about the loan she took out a year ago in Buenos Aires that she is now unable to repay.

She’s not alone. Debt delinquency among Argentine families has tripled in a year, reaching its highest level in two decades under President Javier Milei, a radical free-market champion whose draconian austerity measures have curbed inflation but left many struggling to make ends meet.

Some 5.8 million people are more than 90 days behind on their debt payments, according to the Central Bank of Argentina.

Stagnant incomes, coupled with a cost of living crisis — due in part to Milei slashing subsidies for transportation, gas, medicine and other essentials — have nudged household finances to the brink.

Andrea, a 32-year-old mother who declined to give her surname because she felt ashamed of her predicament, tried to reinvent herself by starting a catering business after the stationery shop where she worked shut down.

But the purchase of a new oven landed her in hot water. “I fell behind on payments, and in a couple of months the debt became too big to repay. It went from one million pesos (about \$670) to five million (about \$3,360),” she said.

In total, some 21 million people, out of Argentina’s population of 46 million, have some type of debt, according to the Central Bank.

Milei has rejected any responsibility for the situation. “Did they have a gun to their head to make them do it (take out a loan)?” he asked curtly in a recent interview.

The president of Buenos Aires’ Banco Provincia, Juan Cuattromo, rejects the notion that Argentines are themselves to blame for getting in over their heads.

He said that debt delinquency was “not a consequence of individual decisions” but the result of “a macroeconomic context that has worsened incomes, employment and economic activity.”

Fintech companies have drawn in adolescents as young as 13, telling them they no longer need to be adults to gain access to “instant cash.”

But eye-watering interest rates soon land them in a debt spiral.

Gabriel Solano, leader of the Workers’ Party, filed a criminal complaint last week against Marcos Galperin, CEO of Mercado Libre, for usury.

“The total effective financial cost (of a loan from Mercado Pago) stands at 1,375%,” Solano wrote on X. — AFP

How Türkiye may have solved a violent uprising

IT is a striking move for a country that has put national security above almost everything else over the past decade. Türkiye’s Parliament last week passed a law providing a partial amnesty for members of the government’s onetime arch nemesis, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, opening the door to ending one of the Middle East’s longest-running insurgencies.

For nearly half a century, the PKK has fought the Turkish state to push for Kurdish rights and autonomy in a conflict that has spilled across Türkiye’s borders into Iraq, Syria and Iran. The new law creates a path for thousands of fighters and supporters in prison or exile to return to civilian life.

The Turkish government will not call this an amnesty. The word remains politically toxic in a country scarred by decades of violence from fighting between the military and PKK forces. Nor is this a sweeping democratisation package.

But it is the closest Türkiye has come in years to some form of national reconciliation. After a year of negotiations, the PKK leadership appears to have accepted that it can no longer advance Kurdish rights through armed struggle. Türkiye, in turn, has implicitly conceded that the Kurdish question cannot be solved by military means alone and that a movement with roots among ordinary Kurds needs a way for their political aspirations to be met.

This weapons-for-politics bargain offers lessons that could be applied to other intractable conflicts with militant groups, namely in Gaza with Hamas and in Lebanon with Hezbollah.

The cases have their differences. But the underlying principle — that rooted armed insurgencies cannot be bombed out of existence — is similar. Disarmament must be phased and



ASLI AYDINTASBAS

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The real victory over an insurgency does not come when every insurgent disappears. It comes when the gunman decides he would rather be a politician.

conditional and have reciprocal steps by the opposing sides and a political endgame in sight. In the Turkish case, it took more than a year of negotiations.

Armed movements rarely give up their weapons simply because their enemies demand it. Many do so when they conclude that armed struggle can no longer deliver their political objectives and they are offered another route through which their constituencies can pursue those objectives.

What is distinct about the Turkish process is its incrementalism and the involvement of the country’s institutions. The PKK first agreed to dissolve last year and staged a symbolic ceremony in northern Iraq to burn its weapons.

Türkiye has now fulfilled its side of the bargain, creating legal protections that could allow thousands of PKK members to return home. The benefits are conditional on Turkish authorities verifying that the group has disarmed, and the law distinguishes between ordinary members and those responsible for the most serious crimes.

Rank-and-file fighters, jailed politicians and political exiles can return and reintegrate into civilian life, while proceedings against many will be suspended by five to 10 years before ultimately being dropped if the individuals stay out of armed activity. The delay gives former fighters, even if they have convictions, a path back to civilian life while giving Türkiye’s security establishment insurance against a return to violence.

Senior PKK commanders are largely excluded for now, though Turkish and Kurdish officials told me that the expectation is that their fate will be addressed gradually. A parliamentary commission will oversee the process while larger

questions of Kurdish rights are left to political debate.

Another matter has made the ground fertile for such agreements: the power of armed non-state actors seems to be waning. Guerrilla warfare traditionally depended on concealment and the ability to outlast a stronger adversary. But no longer. Drones, surveillance technology and AI-driven precision weapons have eroded that advantage. Türkiye used these technologies to constrain the PKK in Syria and Iraq, while Israel has done so against Hamas and Hezbollah, though at enormous cost in destruction and civilian lives in Gaza and Lebanon.

Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned founder and chief negotiator of the PKK, acknowledged the new reality when he said the armed struggle had “run its course.” More tellingly, he argued that disarmament required “the recognition of democratic politics and a legal framework.”

This doesn’t mean nonstate actors everywhere will disappear. The Ansar Allah in Yemen, backed by Iran, shows that armed groups can still inflict enormous disruption.

For years, governments across the Middle East have treated disarmament primarily as a security question: How do you destroy a militia or kill its leaders? That meant open-ended counterinsurgency. Türkiye seems to be trying something different. It is testing whether an armed movement can be transformed into a purely political one.

The outcome is by no means assured, and I am not suggesting any of this is easy. But the larger lesson is worth considering. The real victory over an insurgency does not come when every insurgent disappears. It comes when the gunman decides he would rather be a politician.

— The New York Times

Hollywood’s obsession with being thin is back



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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FOR several years, it appeared that Hollywood was finally moving away from its obsession with extremely thin women. Body positivity became mainstream, plus-size models appeared on magazine covers and actresses increasingly spoke about accepting their natural bodies. Yet that progress now appears to be reversing. Across red carpets, films, fashion shows and social media, extreme thinness is becoming increasingly visible again, raising an uncomfortable question: are we returning to an era where women are expected to make themselves as small as possible?

Weight loss can happen for many reasons, including illness, stress, grief or medically supervised treatment. But the broader cultural change is difficult to ignore. Actress Jameela Jamil recently described a “scarily thin” beauty standard taking hold, while fashion industry figures have similarly reported that models are becoming noticeably smaller. Vogue reported this year that mid-size and plus-size representation on runways had fallen to its lowest level since Vogue Business began tracking the figures.

One major factor is the rapid growth of GLP-1 medications such as Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro. These medications have legitimate medical purposes and can significantly improve the health of patients with diabetes or obesity. The problem is not the existence of the drugs. It is the culture developing around them.

Weight loss medication has become so normalised within celebrity culture that dramatic transformations are now almost expected. Oprah Winfrey, Rosie

O’Donnell and other celebrities have openly discussed using GLP-1 medications, although their individual reasons and experiences differ considerably. Meanwhile, doctors are reporting cases of people with eating disorders obtaining GLP-1 drugs and experiencing relapses or dangerous restrictive behaviours.

Model Lottie Moss has spoken particularly openly about this danger. She previously revealed that misuse of Ozempic resulted in her being taken to hospital. She has since warned about the influence celebrities can have, explaining that people may assume a medication is safe simply because famous people are using it. That influence should not be underestimated.

Hollywood celebrities do not exist in isolation. Millions of young women and girls follow their Instagram accounts, watch their films, copy their clothes and use their photographs as beauty inspiration. When almost every famous woman suddenly appears significantly thinner, audiences inevitably notice. Social media then amplifies the effect through before and after photographs, discussions about weight and algorithms constantly recommending appearance focused content.

The message becomes difficult to escape: being thin is desirable, but being extremely thin is even better. There is also an uncomfortable economic dimension to the conversation. Food prices have risen substantially in recent years.

Pew Research Center found in 2025 that 90 per cent of Americans believed healthy food had become more expensive, while 69 per cent said those higher prices made

Weight loss can happen for many reasons, including illness, stress, grief or medically supervised treatment. But the broader cultural change is difficult to ignore

eating healthily more difficult. Lower-income Americans were particularly affected.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that inflation itself is causing anorexia. However, it is worth examining the strange intersection between economic hardship and beauty culture. While wealthier consumers can spend considerable amounts on medications designed to suppress their appetite, lower-income households may be skipping meals or purchasing cheaper, less nutritious food because groceries have become unaffordable. At opposite ends of the economic spectrum, eating less can occur for completely different reasons.

Meanwhile, thinness is once again becoming associated with status. This represents a striking reversal from the body positive culture that dominated parts of the 2010s. For a while, fashion and entertainment appeared to acknowledge that women naturally exist in different sizes. Now the pendulum seems to be swinging backwards. Fashion insiders interviewed by Vogue explicitly described a return to extreme thinness, with some models reporting that losing weight resulted in more work. That is precisely why Hollywood has a responsibility to think carefully about the images it promotes.

The conversation should focus less on individual women’s bodies and more on the industry surrounding them. Why are actresses still subjected to such intense pressure over their weight? Why is size diversity disappearing from fashion just years after it was supposedly embraced? And why has society become comfortable treating dramatic weight loss as entertainment?

INDONESIA CHASES CLOUDS TO STEM EL NINO FIRES

Indonesia’s Borneo, home to pristine rainforest and protected species, is burning. Meteorologist Safillah Anggie Wahyuni hopes a solution lies in the clouds. Indonesia believes cloud seeding can help it tackle a wildfire season that experts say is on track to be among the worst in years, driven by a strong El Nino.

Indonesia’s government says over 100,000 hectares burned in the first half of the year. Independent analysis by deforestation monitoring site Nusantara Atlas puts the figure through July at over 285,000 hectares - more than four times the size of Jakarta. Cloud seeding, which involves sprinkling silver iodide, salts or other particles into clouds to trigger precipitation, is rarely used to tackle wildfires globally.

But Indonesia is ramping up efforts, scarred by 2015 fires during a previous strong El Nino that burned through millions of hectares and created a regional haze crisis.

“Weather modification does not create clouds: we optimise clouds that have the potential to produce rains,” Safillah said after flying over Palangkaraya in Borneo’s Central Kalimantan.

“Weather modification will only be effective if the conditions are right,” she added. Indonesia carried out 252 cloud-seeding operations between 2021 and August this year - up from 85 in the preceding decade, according to the BMKG weather agency. Most tried to draw rain away from flooded areas, but many sought to douse wildfires or wet flammable peatlands.

In just three years since her first cloud-seeding operation, 25-year-old Safillah has accumulated more than 300 flight hours. The technique was first used in Indonesia in 1977 to top up a dam, and the government has said dozens of helicopters and fixed-wing planes are on standby for cloud seeding nationwide.

“We are on alert to changes in weather, even the slightest, which could result in rain clouds,” Security Minister Djamari Chaniago said.

But the bulk of the country’s firefighting is still done on the ground, with nearly 50,000 firefighters currently deployed.

And experts question the technique’s use during the dry season, when wildfires peak.

“Its effectiveness will be very low because of the lack of clouds,” said Putu Santikayasa, a hydroclimatology lecturer at IPB University south of the capital Jakarta. Research suggests the efficacy of cloud seeding is hard to assess.

It has also raised questions about harms linked to widespread use of silver iodide, as well as the cost. Cloud seeding is “a mitigation effort, not a permanent solution,” acknowledged BMKG weather modification director Budi Harsoyo, insisting there is no evidence of harms. — AFP

Trump sends shock waves by cutting Korean drills

PRESIDENT

Donald Trump’s decision to scale back military drills with close ally South Korea sends an alarming message at a time when the US military is being stretched by the Iran war.



LÉON BRUNEAU

The writer is a journalist with over 25 years of experience and is the AFP’s State Department Correspondent

Trump announced on Sunday that he told the Pentagon to scale back ‘inappropriate and hostile’ yearly military drills with South Korea, hours before they were to begin on Monday



Anti-war protesters at a rally calling for a halt to the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States, in front of the US Embassy in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters

The drills announcement came as the USS George Washington aircraft carrier is being redeployed from the Pacific to the Middle East.

This means that - at least for now - there will be no such vessel in the region, a boon for China.

“The US has long sought to pivot to Asia. Now we are seeing a pivot from Asia as forces depart, munitions grow short, & this Potus (president) chooses totalitarian foes over allies,” Richard Haass, the former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank, wrote Monday on X.

Democrats in Congress also sounded the alarm.

“China and Russia are watching how easily this President abandons America’s allies, and they will remember it the next time they test us,” said Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Victor Cha, the Korea chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said “Trump has been clear about his desire to meet Kim again, and the scaling down of the JME is the latest signal.”

But Kim may be uninterested in meeting Trump until after the US midterm elections in November so

as to gain more leverage, Cha said in an email.

Trump may also be trying to draw Kim away from President Vladimir Putin of Russia, where North Korea has contributed troops and weapons for Moscow’s war on Ukraine, Cha added.

Since the war started, Moscow has steadily boosted its ties with Beijing and Pyongyang.

Trump’s shift could also be about shifting attention away from the unpopular war in Iran, which the United States started in late February along with Israel and is struggling to end, the analyst said.

In a recently released national security strategy reflecting Trump’s “America First” mantra, Trump repeated calls for a “free and open” Asia-Pacific region.

Richard Fontaine, the head of the Center for a New American Security, said it was puzzling for Trump to act like this now towards South Korea when just months ago Washington was praising it as a “model ally.”

“A little more consistency would go a long way. On Korea, for example: the South is our ally, the North is not,” Fontaine wrote on X. “Clarifying that would make a good start.”

SPORTS

TRI-NATIONTOURNEY



The tournament runs from August 20 to 24.

OMAN WOMEN EYE RANKING RISE AT BELT & ROAD T20IS

MUSCAT: Oman’s women cricketers travel to Hangzhou, China, with a clear target – test themselves against stronger opposition and push up the international rankings at the Belt & Road Women’s T20I tournament.

The tournament runs from August 20 to 24, with Oman, captained by Fiza, facing hosts China and higher-ranked Indonesia in a double round-robin format. The top two teams will advance to the final.

Head coach Damith Warusavithana said the tournament offers Oman a valuable opportunity to measure its progress against quality opposition.

“This is an important tournament for Oman women. We know the challenge ahead, particularly with Indonesia being a higher-ranked team, but that is exactly the kind of challenge we want. These opportunities can help us move up the world rankings and measure ourselves against stronger opposition.”

Oman Cricket’s development programme will also come under the spotlight, with Under-19 performers Pia Sharma and Aneeka Ashik earning their first senior international call-ups.

Warusavithana said the youngsters earned their places through their performances and would be given the opportunity to take greater responsibility.

The coach also acknowledged the absence of experienced players Priyanka Mendonca and Jayadhanya Gunasekar, noting it creates an opportunity for others in the squad to step up. “We want the players to believe they belong at this level, play without fear and take every opportunity to move women’s cricket forward,” he said.

All matches will be played at the Zhejiang University of Technology Cricket Field in Hangzhou.

OMAN SQUAD: Fiza (captain), Sameera Khan, Nitya Joshi, Amanda Dcosta, Trupti Pawde, Cynthia Saldanha, Afida Aftab, Hina Javed, Sushanthka Ashok, Lujaina, Pia Sharma, Aneeka Ashik, Kuchi Cherish Egodagamage and Alifiya Asif Sayed; **Support staff:** Damith Warusavithana (head coach), Nadeera Muneer (physiotherapist). **Oman’s fixtures (all Oman time):** Aug 20: China vs Oman (9 am); Aug 21: Oman vs Indonesia (5:30 pm); Aug 22: China vs Oman (8:30 am); Aug 23: Oman vs Indonesia (5:30 pm); Aug 24: Final.

Seeb, Al Nahda drawn in strong AFC CL 2 groups

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

OMAN’S SEEB Club and Al Nahda Club discovered their opponents in the Group Stage of the AFC Champions League Two 2026-27 following the official draw held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Tuesday.

Al Nahda were drawn in Group C alongside Saudi Arabia’s Al Taawoun FC, Qatar’s Al Rayyan SC and Jordan’s Al Faisaly, while Seeb were placed in Group D with Jordan’s Al Hussein, Iraq’s Al Shorta and India’s East Bengal FC.

The two Omani representatives enter the continental campaign with high ambitions after strong domestic seasons. Seeb qualified as Jindal League champions, while Al Nahda earned their place after lifting His Majesty’s Cup.

The competition features 32 teams divided into eight groups, with four groups in the West Region and four in the East. Teams will meet in a home-and-away round-robin format, with the top two from each group advancing to the Round of 16.

The group stage will begin on September 15 and conclude on December 9, 2026. The Round of 16 is scheduled for February 9-18, 2027, followed by the quarterfinals and semifinals, with the final set for May 15, 2027.

SEEB TARGET ANOTHER ASIAN RUN

Seeb head into the tournament after an impressive domestic campaign in which they captured the Jindal League title with 67 points, recording 21 victories and four draws from 26 matches and suffering only one defeat. The Muscat-based club also carry significant continental pedigree. Seeb became the first Omani club to claim a major Asian title when they won the AFC Cup in 2022, defeating Kuala Lumpur City of Malaysia 3-0 in the final.

Their previous Asian campaign proved more difficult. Seeb lost 2-1 to India’s FC Goa in the preliminary stage of the AFC Champions League Two before moving to the AFC Challenge League, where they defeated Bashundhara Kings 3-2, drew 1-1 with Kuwait SC and lost 2-1 to Al Ansar.

The team will enter the new season under Romanian coach Florin Motroc, with the club making several changes while retaining a core group that includes Zahir al Aghbari, Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohammed



Al Nahda edged Sohar 1-0 in a friendly on August 14.

al Amri, Abdulmajeed al Balushi, Arshad al Alawi and Musab al Shaqsi.

Among their key attacking additions is Gabon international Axel Méyé, who joined after representing Sur last season.

Seeb have also produced good pre-season results, beating Oman Club 1-0 before recording a convincing 5-0 win over Fanja.

TOUGH CHALLENGE AWAITS AL NAHDA

Al Nahda return to Asian competition as His Majesty’s Cup champions, having defeated Oman Club 2-0 in last season’s final to secure the trophy for the second time in their history. They finished fourth in the Jindal League with 44 points from 13 wins, five draws and eight defeats.

The Al Buraimi-based side have undergone significant changes during the summer, with English coach Scott Calderwood taking charge, assisted by Dean Martin.

Several key players have remained with the team, including Oman international goalkeeper Fayez al Rushaidi, Thani al Rushaidi, Ghanim al Habashi, Mohammed

Faraj al Rawahi and Said al Alawi.

Al Nahda have also strengthened their squad with a number of additions, including Cameroonian midfielder Petrus Boumal, while Oman international Jameel al Yahmadi returned to domestic football following his spell in Iraq. The club has also added several local players as part of its preparations for a demanding season on domestic and continental fronts.

Al Nahda began preparations on July 13 before holding an overseas camp in Fujairah, UAE. Their pre-season programme included a 2-0 win over Al Ittihad of the UAE, a 1-1 draw with Saham and a 3-2 comeback victory over UAE side Al Arabi. They also defeated Sohar 1-0 on August 14. Al Nahda themselves have enjoyed notable Asian runs, reaching the AFC Cup semifinals in 2008 and the West Zone Final in 2023-24.

With the draw complete, Seeb and Al Nahda will now turn their attention to the final phase of preparations as both sides look to carry Oman’s challenge beyond the group stage and into the knockout rounds.

Dhofar gets ready for fifth School Beach Sports

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

The Sultanate of Oman is preparing to host the fifth School Beach Sports Championship, organised by the Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) from August 29 to September 3, at the beach courts of the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate.

The championship is part of the federation’s efforts to promote school sports, encourage students to adopt an active sporting lifestyle and provide young athletes with a competitive platform to develop their skills and gain valuable experience. The event also aims to strengthen the values of teamwork, discipline and fair competition among school students.

Fahad bin Khalfan al

Mashaikhi, OSSA Vice-Chairman, said the championship represents an important fixture on the school sports calendar as the country’s only school event dedicated to beach sports. He noted that holding it during the summer vacation gives students an opportunity to remain active and develop their skills, while also serving as a platform for identifying promising talent. He added that several former participants have gone on to represent school and age-group national teams, and thanked OQ, Oman Oil, Badr Al Samaa Hospital and Al Waha Water for their continued support of school sports.

102 STUDENTS

The fifth edition will feature 102 male students representing various educational directorates



The beach handball competition will feature nine teams.



FAHAD BIN KHALFAN AL MASHAIKHI
OSSA Vice-Chairman

across Oman, they will compete in two beach sports beach handball and beach volleyball in what is expected to be a competitive gathering of young athletes from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

The beach handball competition will feature nine teams, while 10 teams will take part in the beach

volleyball competition, the two events are expected to provide a strong test for the participating students while giving them an opportunity to compete against teams from other educational directorates and gain experience in beach sports.

More than 50 supervisors and coaches will contribute to the organisation and technical preparation of the championship, the overall number of participants is expected to exceed 150, including students, organisers, referees, administrators, media representatives, supervisors and coaches.

The OSSA has been completing its technical, organisational and logistical preparations ahead of the opening of the championship, with the aim of providing an appropriate environment for the participating teams

and ensuring smooth competition throughout the event. Hosting the championship in Dhofar also highlights the governorate’s growing role in welcoming sporting and youth events, the competition will take place in Salalah during the Khareef Dhofar Season, adding a distinctive setting to an event that combines school sport with the dynamic atmosphere of beach competitions.

The championship is expected to produce several closely contested matches as teams battle for the top positions in both disciplines. Beyond the results, however, the event represents an important opportunity to identify promising young talent, develop students’ sporting abilities and strengthen the foundations of school sport in Oman.

‘STRATEGIC MOVE’



Patrick Vieira’s main mission will be to revitalise the team after Senegal’s bruising loss to Belgium in the last 32 of the World Cup.

Vieira appointed Senegal head coach after World Cup disappointment

DAKAR: Senegal have appointed France’s 1998 World Cup winner Patrick Vieira as head coach, the country’s football federation announced Tuesday, succeeding Pape Thiaw who was dismissed after the World Cup.

The appointment of Vieira, who was born in Senegal, is a “strategic move”, the federation said in a social media post, aiming to “establish a high-level technical staff, in line with our country’s sporting ambitions”.

His main mission will be to revitalise the team after Senegal’s bruising loss to Belgium in the last 32 of the World Cup. Thiaw was sacked less than two weeks later. The 45-year-old former Senegal international had taken over as national team boss in 2024. The Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) president said at the time that toxicity had surrounded the team at the World Cup after Thiaw demanded a pay rise.

The Lions of Teranga had also suffered two defeats in the World Cup group stage, against France and Norway, before a 5-0 victory over Iraq secured their place in the knockout rounds.

The appointment of Vieira, who grew up in France starting at age eight, was ratified on Monday, the FSF said.

The FSF’s announcement on Facebook was accompanied by an image of Vieira smiling and the message “Welcome to Senegal, coach”.

His official presentation as head coach will occur at a future, unspecified date, it added.

STORIED CAREER

Vieira was a key part of a superb Arsenal side which won the English league three times between 1998 and 2004, before moving to Juventus and then Inter Milan in Italy.

After ending his playing career at Manchester City, Vieira cut his coaching teeth at New York City FC from 2016 before taking over French top-flight side Nice from 2018 to 2020.

The 50-year-old returned to England as manager of Premier League side Crystal Palace in 2021 but was sacked in March 2023 after a 12-match winless run. He subsequently had short stints at Strasbourg and Italian side Genoa.

He played 107 times for France and won the World Cup in 1998 as well as the Euros two years later. Under Thiaw, Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations final in January before being stripped of their title as a punishment for walking off the pitch during the chaotic final against Morocco. Senegal have appealed that decision. — AFP



India’s Rishabh Pant plays a shot during the fourth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium. — AFP

India close on victory in first Test against Sri Lanka

INDIA TOOK a big step towards victory in the first Test in Galle on Tuesday after their bowlers reduced Sri Lanka, chasing a daunting 372 to win, to 84-4 on day four.

Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar took two wickets to rattle Sri Lanka’s top-order on a pitch offering big turn.

Earlier, India were bowled out for 193 at tea after Rishabh Pant top-scored with 66 and became the fastest player to hit 100 sixes in Test cricket.

Sri Lanka then slipped to 47-4 before skipper Dhananjaya de Silva, unbeaten on 31, and Sonal Dinusha, 25 not out, put on a stubborn stand to steer their team to stumps.

“In Galle if you look at the history, spin plays a big part in the last couple of days and batting gets tough,” said Sri Lanka’s pace bowling coach Ryan van Niekerk.

“As a bowling group we have tried to improve and continue to find ways to get wickets. A team like India will continue to take the initiative.”

Opener Nishan Madushka Fernando was the first to go in the chase, top-edging a hook off Mohammed Siraj straight to fine leg to be dismissed for six.

Pasindu Sooriyabandara endured a forgettable debut after coming in as a concussion substitute for veteran Dinesh Chandimal, who hurt himself while fielding when he hit his head on the ground and was ruled out of the rest of the match.



India’s Manav Suthar (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka’s Pasindu Sooriyabandara during the fourth day of the first Test in Galle. — AFP

PANT SHINES

Sooriyabandara was trapped lbw by Suthar for a golden duck.

“The wicket was playing well,” said Suthar. “Even when we were bowling in the second innings, we were getting only a little turn. Maybe tomorrow there will be more turn.”

Prasidh Krishna then had Kamindu Mendis caught at the first slip for two.

De Silva survived being caught at slip off a no ball by Ravindra Jadeja when he was on seven.

But Lahiru Udara fell to Suthar after close-in fielder Dhruv Jurel took a low catch, which the TV umpire gave out after several replays.

The Sri Lankan camp were disappointed with the decision, as the ball looked to have

hit the turf before settling into Jurel’s hands.

De Silva and first-innings centurion Dinusha then took Sri Lanka to safety without further drama but the hosts have more than 90 overs ahead of them to draw or win the match.

Weather though could come to Sri Lanka’s rescue, with rain again predicted on the fifth day of a weather-hit match.

Sri Lanka earlier struck regular blows in India’s second innings, but Pant kept his team in a strong position with an excellent knock including eight fours and two sixes.

The swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman became the fastest player to 100 sixes, reaching the mark in 89 Test innings, surpassing Australia’s Adam Gilchrist (130 innings). — AFP

Senior Fifa official Lamour exits after Infantino criticism

Lamour had called scrapped rights-sale proposal project of ‘one person’ last month

FairSquare asks Fifa committee to rule Infantino ineligible for fourth term bid

Scottish Football Association will not support Infantino’s re-election

ZURICH: Fifa said on Monday that Chief Operating Officer Kevin Lamour had left the organisation, weeks after he publicly criticised Gianni Infantino’s plan to sell a stake in the commercial rights of the World Cup and other tournaments.

Lamour joined the senior leadership group of soccer’s global governing body in November 2024, having previously been part of the inner circle that campaigned for Infantino’s election as Fifa president in 2016.

“Fifa can confirm that the working relationship between Fifa and Kevin Lamour as Fifa’s Chief Operating Officer has ended on 17 August 2026,” a Fifa spokesperson said on Monday.

“Fifa thanks Kevin for his two

years of service and wishes him the best of luck for the future. No further comment will be made on the matter.”

Lamour had publicly criticised the proposal last month, saying Fifa staff had been “deceived” over the plan and describing it as “the project of one person”.

“Our mission ... is to serve football, not to serve the personal interests of a person who, unfortunately, believes he embodies Fifa when he is supposed to be at its service,” Lamour said.

Frenchman Lamour’s comments came soon after Carlos Cordeiro, a senior adviser to Infantino, resigned in protest at the proposal, calling it “a bad deal for football”. Infantino withdrew the proposal later the



Kevin Lamour

same day.

The backlash to the plan to create a \$20 billion subsidiary and sell up to a 20 per cent stake to private equity investors to raise \$4.2 billion has not abated, however.

Infantino’s bid for reelection for a fourth term as president in March next year, which once looked a formality, is now far from certain.

Powerful European confederation Uefa, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and Concacaf are ranged in opposition to the 56-year-old Swiss supremo, although he retains the support of the African and South American confederations.

Scottish Football Association Chief Executive Ian Maxwell told the BBC on Monday that his federation would not support Infantino’s

reelection.

Human rights in sport organisation FairSquare confirmed on Monday it had written to Fifa’s Governance, Audit and Compliance Committee (GACC) urging that Infantino be ruled ineligible to seek another term as president.

While Fifa presidents are limited to three terms, Infantino successfully argued in 2022 that his first stint in office from 2016 to 2019 should not count towards that limit because it completed an interrupted mandate.

“The complaint we have filed provides clear evidence that this is a clear breach of the rules and one that sets a very dangerous precedent,” FairSquare director Nicholas McGeehan said. — Reuters

WC BEST PLAYER



New FC Barcelona player, Rodri poses with a shirt during the presentation at Spotify Camp Nou, Barcelona, Spain, on Tuesday. — Reuters

BARCA SIGN RODRI FROM MAN CITY ON CONTRACT UNTIL JUNE 2030

BARCELONA: Barcelona have signed midfielder Rodri from Manchester City on a deal until June 2030, the LaLiga club announced on Tuesday, as the World Cup winner was entering the final year of his contract at the Premier League club.

The 30-year-old Spain international joins Hansi Flick’s side for a reported fee of 65.4 million pounds (\$88.56 million), with Barca beating rivals Real Madrid to the midfielder’s signature.

“FC Barcelona and Manchester City have reached an agreement for the transfer of Rodrigo Hernandez Cascante, known in the football world as Rodri, who is committing to the Catalan club until 30 June 2030,” Barca said in a statement.

Rodri arrives after recently undergoing minor back surgery, a setback that was expected to keep him out for the start of the season.

The 2024 Ballon d’Or winner, who was also part of Spain’s European Championship winning squad, further enhanced his reputation by captaining his country to World Cup glory last month and was named the tournament’s best player.

Rodri spent six seasons at Manchester City, winning multiple major honours and establishing himself as a key figure under Pep Guardiola.

But the last two years have also been marked by injury setbacks.

He spent more than seven months on the sidelines after suffering an anterior cruciate ligament injury in 2024 while he also dealt with knee and hamstring problems last season.

Rodri leaves City after winning four Premier League titles, the Champions League and two FA Cups since joining the English side from Atletico Madrid in 2019.

Rodri was a vital figure for Pep Guardiola at City, leading them to the 2023 Champions League and four Premier League titles among 12 major trophies.

“I am leaving the club with a huge sense of pride about what we have achieved and gratitude too for so many amazing memories,” Rodri said in a statement on City’s website.

“What we have done together in these years is something both very special and unforgettable.”

Rodri becomes Barcelona’s third high-profile arrival this summer, following on from Anthony Gordon from Newcastle and Karim Adeyemi from Borussia Dortmund. — Agencies



Serena Williams and Venus Williams of the United States meet with Peyton Stearns of the United States and Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, after their doubles match during the Cincinnati Open. — Imagin Images

Williams sisters duo fall at Cincinnati, Zverev advances

SERENA AND Venus Williams lost in their first doubles match together since 2022 while men’s top seed Alexander Zverev battled into the fourth round on Monday at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The Williams sisters, with 14 Grand Slam titles and three Olympic gold medals together, were side-by-side for the first time since the 2022 US Open but lost to American Payton Stearns and Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine 6-2, 1-6, 10-8. “It was fun and special. We kicked off a little rust,” Serena Williams said. “I didn’t come here to win this tournament. It’s about having fun and I did want to do the best I could.”

German star Zverev, the reigning French Open champion, won his ATP season-best 46th match of the campaign by defeating Terrance Atmane 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6).

Zverev finished the Frenchman, a 2025 Cincinnati semifinalist, with a sizzling backhand down the line. “He was playing incredibly aggressively, hitting forehands all over the court,” Zverev said. “He made it difficult for you to play aggressive yourself.”

Serena, 44, and Venus, 46, each lost serve once in the first set, dropping six of the final seven games, but dominated the second set and rallied from 8-2 down in the 10-point tie-breaker third set only to lose on a Venus double fault. “It was weird to be in a full stadium. This is not my usual Monday night,” said Serena, who noted with the US Open approaching that their reunion is a limited-

time attraction. “This is not forever. It’s... not long,” she said. “We don’t have to play every week. It’s a bit different.”

Alexandra Eala, the 17th-seeded Filipina, lost to US ninth seed Amanda Anisimova, who recovered after losing a 65-minute opening set for a 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory.

The opener featured a 20-minute fifth game, with Eala, 21, coming back from a break down before Anisimova battled back.

Men’s fifth seed Alex de Minaur battled through multiple rain interruptions to defeat Arthur Fery 7-5, 7-6 (7/3). The Australian was up a set and 5-1 after a 30-minute stoppage before Wimbledon semifinalist Fery caught fire, but he took the tie-break to advance despite 29 unforced errors. “You never want to go into a rain delay leading 5-1,” he said.

He next faces France’s Arthur Fils, who dumped Czech ninth seed Jiri Lehecka 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3. Spanish teen 12th seed Rafael Jodar dominated Alejandro Tabilo of Chile 6-2, 6-1 and next faces Roland Garros finalist Flavio Cobolli of Italy. “A Masters 1000 is something I dreamed of as a kid,” Jodar said. “I’m grateful for the position I’m in now.”

Argentine Thiago Tirante, who ousted Novak Djokovic in the second round, defeated Spain’s Martin Landaluce 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/4).

Brazil’s Joao Fonseca withdrew from the event with an abdominal injury.

‘A CRAZY DAY’

Two-time Grand Slam champion Elena Rybakina shook off two one-hour rain stoppages to beat Magdalena Frech 6-4, 7-6

(7/2). “It was a crazy day, to be honest, coming out every time into clouds and humidity,” Rybakina said. “I was on top of the ball in the tie-break but it was a difficult one.”

There were also wins for Iga Swiatek and US third seed Jessica Pegula.

Former world number one and defending champion Swiatek outlasted Greece’s Maria Sakkari 4-6, 6-1, 6-1. Pegula, a 2024 finalist, dispatched compatriot Emma Navarro 7-5, 6-2.

— AFP

ATP-WTA CINCINNATI RESULTS

Men (third round): Thiago Tirante (ARG) bt Martin Landaluce (ESP) 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/4); Flavio Cobolli (ITA x7) bt Alexander Blockx (BEL x28) 7-5, 4-6, 7-5; Alex De Minaur (AUS x5) bt Arthur Fery (GBR x32) 7-5, 7-6 (7/3); Rafael Jodar (ESP x12) bt Alejandro Tabilo (CHI x22) 6-2, 6-1; Jakub Mensik (CZE x14) bt Rinky Hijikata (AUS) 6-3, 6-4; Alexander Zverev (GER x1) bt Terence Atmane (FRA) 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6); Arthur Fils (FRA) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE x9) 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3; Tommy Paul (USA x18) bt Adolfo Vallejo (PAR) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Chris O’Connell (AUS) bt Joao Fonseca (BRA) by walkover, abdomen

Women (third round): Iga Swiatek (POL x7) bt Maria Sdkkari (GRE x29) 4-6, 6-1, 6-1; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x2) bt Magdalena Frech (POL) 6-4, 7-6 (7/2); Diana Shnaider (RUS x14) bt Maja Chwalinska (POL x19) 6-2, 7-6 (7/3); Sorana Cirstea (ROM x15) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS x18) 6-7 (4/7), 6-1, 5-0, retired; Diane Parry (FRA) bt Lois Boisson (FRA) 4-6, 6-4, 6-3; Jessica Pegula (USA x3) bt Emma Navarro (USA x25) 7-5, 6-2; Linda Noskova (CZE x6) bt Clara Tauson (DEN x27) 7-6 (7/3), 6-2; Amanda Anisimova (USA x9) bt Alexandra Eala (PHI x17) 4-6, 6-4, 6-2

All aboard as Asian Games preparations enter ‘final stages’

TOKYO: The Asian Games begin in Japan next month featuring teenage prodigies, more athletes than the Olympics and a cruise ship that will house competitors in the middle of typhoon season.

About 15,000 competitors and officials are expected at the event, which takes place in Nagoya and the wider Aichi area from September 19 to October 4. Among those in action will be Philippine tennis sensation Alexandra Eala and a pair of world-class talents in 15-year-old Indian cricketer Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and 13-year-old Chinese swimmer Yu Zidi.

Organisers hope the athletes will have a “unique experience” staying in accommodation ranging from a cruise liner and wooden containers to standard hotel rooms.

A flame-lighting ceremony was held in Tokyo on Tuesday, with a similar event planned for 1994 Asian Games host Hiroshima on Thursday, before the flames come together on Saturday in Nagoya to begin the torch relay.

Kazuhiro Yagi, vice-secretary general of the Aichi-Nagoya Games organising committee, said that “it feels like the Games are right



around the corner”. “The final stages of preparation are now upon us,” he said. “We will continue working

as one right until the last moment and we hope that people from all over Asia, not just Japan, will enjoy the event.”

Organisers have opted for temporary athlete accommodation to cut costs, hiring the Italian cruise ship Costa Serena for the event.

Between 4,000 and 5,000 athletes will stay on the ship, which features 571 cabins, seven swimming pools, eight restaurants and nine bars.

Officials are confident that the plan will not be disrupted by Japan’s typhoon season, which is usually in full swing in September-October.

TEEN STARS

A further 2,000 athletes and officials will stay in wooden shipping container-style huts in Nagoya’s Garden Pier

area while the rest will stay in hotels. That includes in Tokyo, where swimming, diving and equestrian events will take place.

“For the athletes the accommodation is a place to relax and socialise with their fellow competitors,” said Yagi.

“To ensure that all athletes can enjoy a comfortable stay and deliver their best performance, preparations for accommodation are entering their final stage.”

Eala will be among the most prominent athletes competing in Nagoya, and the 21-year-old will be looking to continue her rapid rise in women’s tennis. — AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,549.803

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$90.16
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ARA eyes Q3 2027 gas pipeline launch

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

OMANI upstream energy company ARA Petroleum plans to commission a gas export pipeline by the third quarter of 2027 as part of efforts to curb gas flaring and improve the utilisation of natural gas produced from its operations in Oman.

The project, originally scheduled for earlier completion, will transport surplus gas from the Qalah and Burhaan facilities to the Kawther Gas Plant once operational, allowing gas that might otherwise be flared to be recovered and put to productive use.

ARA Petroleum disclosed the revised commissioning timeline in its newly published 2025 Sustainability Report.

“The Gas Export Pipeline project is a key initiative focused on reducing gas flaring while improving the effective use of natural gas across ARA Petroleum’s operations,” the company said, adding that full commissioning is now anticipated by Q3 2027.



The pipeline project forms part of ARA Petroleum’s broader strategy to minimise routine flaring by converting excess gas into a useful energy resource (Picture for illustration).

The project is expected to reduce gas flaring by approximately 93%, according to the report, significantly cutting greenhouse gas emissions while supporting Oman’s broader sustainability objectives and ARA Petroleum’s Net Zero ambitions.

Key components include a Glass Reinforced Epoxy (GRE) pipeline designed for long-term gas transportation and a gas compression unit to facilitate efficient gas flow through the system. Together, the infrastructure will enable ARA to capture and transport surplus gas from its Qarat Al Milh Small Fields (QSF) operations for processing at Kawther. The pipeline project forms part of ARA Petroleum’s broader strategy to minimise routine flaring by converting excess gas into a useful energy resource.

Under its “Flare to Power” approach, the company uses recovered gas as fuel for power generation, improving energy efficiency while reducing reliance on conventional fuels and lowering the carbon intensity of its operations.

Progress was also recorded in gas utilisation during 2025. Burhan operations increased flare-gas utilisation by 7.2% year-on-year, reflecting operational measures to maximise the recovery and productive use of associated gas that would otherwise have been flared.

The improvement contributes to lower greenhouse-gas emissions and greater resource efficiency, while reinforcing ARA Petroleum’s environmental and decarbonisation commitments.

ARA Petroleum, established in 2014 and part of The Zubair Corporation portfolio, operates across the hydrocarbon exploration and production lifecycle, from exploration and appraisal through development and production.

In Oman, its upstream portfolio includes the QSF Area, where it holds a 100% operating interest spanning 15 fields and 132 wells, with production of more than 20,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd). ARA is also the sole operator of Blocks 44 and 31, comprising three fields and 16 wells, with combined production exceeding 600 boepd.

The gas export pipeline therefore represents a significant infrastructure investment in improving the environmental performance and resource efficiency of ARA’s Omani upstream operations, particularly through the recovery of gas currently lost through flaring.

Asyad Shipping takes delivery of two dry bulk carriers



The deployment of the carriers will strengthen Asyad Dry Bulk performance and provide clear commercial visibility: CEO

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

Asyad Shipping Company SAOG has taken delivery of the first of two second-hand baby-Capesize dry bulk carriers, with both ships due to enter three-year time charters with an international freight operator, the company said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Tuesday.

The vessel, ‘Ain Sahlnoot’, has been received, while the second, ‘Ain Hamran’, is scheduled for delivery next week, according to the filing. Asyad Shipping said both would be employed on three-year time-charter

contracts with what it described as a leading international dry bulk freight operator.

The company announced on May 21 that it had signed agreements to acquire the two carriers for a total consideration of approximately RO 29.2 million (about \$75.8 million). ‘Ain Sahlnoot’ was built in 2020 and ‘Ain Hamran’ in 2021, each with a capacity of 100,309 deadweight tonnes.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer, said the acquisitions put the company’s investment strategy into action. “Their immediate deployment on three-year time charter

contracts will strengthen our Dry Bulk performance and provide clear commercial visibility”, he said. “This disciplined approach to fleet growth supports sustainable long-term value for our stakeholders.”

Asyad Shipping, which trades on the MSX under the symbol ASCO, operates one of the largest globally diversified fleets in deep-sea transportation, with approximately 90 vessels serving customers in more than 60 countries.

The company has been operating for more than 20 years across five business segments: crude, dry bulk, gas, liner and products.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (ر.ع.)
NESC/ 2026/033	Vulnerability Assessment & Penetration Testing Service- Framework	30/08/2026	07/09/2026	Specialist	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date.				
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - A certificate confirming Organization achievement, bidder who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Organization. - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The initiative forms part of BankDhofar’s ongoing commitment to equipping SMEs with practical financial solutions that extend beyond traditional banking.

BANK DHOFAR EMPOWERS SMES WITH MASTERCARD BUSINESS CARDS

BankDhofar is strengthening its support for Oman’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with its SME Debit Card and SME Credit Card, powered by Mastercard, offering business owners a smarter, more secure and rewarding way to manage everyday business spending while unlocking exclusive savings and value-added benefits.

Designed specifically for SMEs, entrepreneurs, self-employed professionals, start-ups and growing businesses, BankDhofar’s Business Cards combine the convenience of cashless payments with enhanced financial control and access to a suite of Mastercard business privileges that help businesses reduce operating costs and improve efficiency.

By replacing cash transactions with card payments, businesses can simplify day-to-day operations, maintain better oversight of expenditure and keep an accurate record of purchases, making expense management easier and more transparent.

Whether paying suppliers, purchasing office equipment, booking business travel or subscribing to digital services, BankDhofar’s Business Cards provide a secure and efficient payment solution.

A key advantage of the cards is access to Mastercard’s Easy Savings programme, which enables businesses to benefit from valuable savings across a broad range of products and services.

Through Easy Savings Always On, eligible cardholders receive automatic rebates at more than 50,000 participating merchants and brands worldwide, allowing businesses to save effortlessly on everyday purchases without the need for registration or coupon codes.

Cardholders can also take advantage of Easy Savings Specials, a dedicated platform featuring curated offers on essential business solutions, including cloud computing, software subscriptions, productivity tools, digital marketing services, logistics, business travel and much more. These offers are designed to help SMEs invest in growth while keeping operating costs under control.

In addition, BankDhofar Business Mastercard holders gain access to Mastercard’s Business Subscription Portal, where they can explore exclusive offers on leading digital platforms and business applications that support productivity, collaboration and business expansion.

The initiative forms part of BankDhofar’s ongoing commitment to equipping SMEs with practical financial solutions that extend beyond traditional banking. By combining flexible payment capabilities with global business benefits, the Bank aims to help enterprises operate more efficiently, improve cash flow management and capture new opportunities for growth.

MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING LAUNCHES CREDIT CARD CAMPAIGN WITH ANNUAL FEE WAIVER

The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has launched a Credit Card campaign offering customers an annual fee waiver, reinforcing its commitment to delivering rewarding Sharia compliant banking solutions. The campaign is open to both new-to-bank and existing customers.

Commenting on the campaign, Salima bint Obaid al Marzooqi, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said: “At Muzn Islamic



Banking, our focus is on delivering value that goes beyond everyday banking. Waiving the annual fee on our credit cards shows our commitment to making our products more rewarding and accessible. We will continue to introduce benefits that enhance our customers’ banking experience while supporting their everyday needs and lifestyles.”

The annual fee waiver is available subject to the applicable card spending criteria.

Sohar International & Omantel collaborate

REINFORCING their shared commitment to innovation, digital advancement and sustainable economic growth, Sohar International and Omantel have signed a strategic collaboration programme, establishing a framework for collaboration across a range of business, technology, innovation, people and investment opportunities.

The programme was signed by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International and Eng Aladdin bin Abdullah Baitfadhil, Chief Executive Officer of Omantel, on behalf of their respective organisations.

This partnership unites the complementary strengths of two leading Omani organisations, bringing together Sohar International’s financial expertise and banking capabilities with Omantel’s advanced digital capabilities, technology infrastructure and ecosystem reach.

Through this collaboration, the two organisations will explore opportunities to develop innovative solutions that enhance customer and business experiences, drive digital innovation and unlock sustainable long-term value.

The collaboration reflects a broader shared ambition to contribute to an increasingly connected and digitally enabled



Sohar International and Omantel strengthen collaboration to unlock new opportunities in Oman’s digital economy.

economy. By leveraging their respective expertise, Sohar International and Omantel aim to explore opportunities that can benefit customers and businesses, strengthen the wider innovation ecosystem, support the development of national capabilities and contribute to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on the signing, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, said: “At

Sohar International, we believe meaningful innovation is accelerated when leading organisations come together around a shared ambition to create lasting value.

Our partnership with Omantel brings together complementary capabilities across banking, technology and digital enablement, providing a strong platform from which we can explore new possibilities for our customers, businesses and the wider economy.

MoH honours Wassan Dental for excellence

Wassan Specialty Dental Centre, Al Khuwair, has been honoured by the Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate General of Private Health Establishments (DGPHE), for its outstanding efforts in developing the quality of health services in the private health sector.

During a visit to the Centre, officials from the Directorate General presented Wassan with a commemorative trophy and a Certificate of Appreciation, recognising the Centre’s commitment to implementing the infection control requirements and patient safety standards approved by the Ministry of Health and its continuous efforts to enhance the quality of its services.

The recognition was presented under the signatures of Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Muslihi, Director General of Private Health



Wassan Dental Centre recognised for quality and patient safety.

Establishments; and Dr Said bin Mohammed al Mughairi, Director of the Compliance

Monitoring Department.

Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Muslihi, Director General of Private Health Establishments, commended the Centre, noting the consistently positive feedback the Directorate has received from patients about their experience at Wassan.

He praised the Centre’s efforts to raise the standard of dental care within the private sector and expressed his appreciation for Wassan’s commitment to employing and training Omani nationals, supporting the development of a skilled national workforce in the dental field.

Dr Muhanna said: “The feedback we receive from patients about Wassan Specialty Dental Centre has been consistently positive and that speaks louder than any inspection report”.

Ford Taurus: The smart fusion of everyday efficiency & modern comfort

The Ford Taurus stands out as a practical yet sophisticated choice for motorists seeking a reliable blend of performance, space and modern technology. Engineered to handle everything from daily urban commuting to extended highway travel, the Taurus delivers a balanced drive supported by thoughtful engineering and dependable everyday utility.

Performance and Efficiency
At the core of the Taurus is a responsive 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine delivering 239 horsepower and 382 Nm of torque.

Working in tandem with an 8-speed automatic transmission,



The interior features a 10-way power-adjustable driver seat and a 6-way passenger seat, complemented by dual-zone climate control and ambient lighting in seven distinct hues.

the vehicle offers three selectable drive modes — Normal, Sport and Eco — allowing drivers to tailor responsiveness to changing road conditions. Furthermore, its impressive fuel efficiency of up to 15.5 km/l ensures that long-term driving remains economical without sacrificing capability.

Comfort and Cabin Practicality
Inside the cabin, the Taurus prioritises comfort and an accommodating environment for all occupants. The interior features a 10-way power-adjustable driver seat and a 6-way passenger seat, complemented by dual-zone climate control and ambient lighting in

seven distinct hues.

Advanced sound-deadening materials minimise outside disturbances, while the panoramic dual-panel moonroof introduces natural light, creating an open and restful atmosphere during every journey.

Connectivity and Technology
Technology integration is central to the Taurus experience, anchored by a prominent 13.2-inch touchscreen powered by Ford’s SYNC 4 infotainment system.

Drivers benefit from voice-activated controls, seamless smartphone integration and wireless charging pads.

SHORTTAKES



Al Maha strengthens its fleet fueling business with a five-year Namaa contract.

Al Maha wins 2.37 million contract to supply fuel to Namaa Distribution’s fleet

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 18

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has been awarded a contract by Namaa Distribution Company to supply fuel for its vehicle fleet, following a competitive tender for fuel supply and related services.

The contract is valued at approximately RO 2.367 million and will commence on September 1, 2026, running for a period of five years until August 31, 2031.

The award reinforces Al Maha’s position as a trusted provider of fuel products and fleet fueling solutions to the corporate and business sector. It also reflects customers’ confidence in the company’s ability to deliver reliable and efficient fueling services that meet the operational requirements of large vehicle fleets.

The contract is expected to make a positive contribution to the company’s sales and profitability throughout its term, supporting Al Maha’s overall performance and continued business growth in the coming years.

Al Maha continues to strengthen its partnerships with organisations across Oman and expand its range of fuel products and solutions, in line with its growth strategy and commitment to strengthening its presence in the local market.

OIL RISES AS US-IRAN PEACE HOPES FADE



An employee uses a remote control to update a price board at a Lukoil petrol pump in Moscow. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Oil prices were slightly higher on Tuesday, gaining for a third straight session, as prospects for a US-Iranian peace deal dimmed after Tehran said it would adopt a more offensive stance and Washington ruled out extending a ceasefire deal.

Brent crude futures were up 36 cents, or 0.4 per cent, at \$91.23 a barrel at 11:03 am ET (1503 GMT). US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up 56 cents, or 0.66 per cent, at \$85.06 a barrel. The contracts traded at their highest since July 30 and July 31, respectively, earlier in the session.

Progress on peace talks and the resumption of oil tanker

traffic through the strategic Strait of Hormuz appear to have halted, threatening to extend the conflict that the United States and Israel launched with attacks on Iran on February 28.

Iran will keep the strait closed until the US meets the conditions of the interim deal signed in June, top Iranian negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in comments published by state media on Tuesday.

Trump, who previously labelled that deal “over”, said on Tuesday that talks between Washington and Tehran were neither taking place nor scheduled, but the Strait of Hormuz was open.

His comments were met with a muted market reaction.

“We are not at the pain points yet where either Iran or Trump would seek to make a deal,” Mohit Kumar, an economist at brokerage Jefferies, said. “Hence, we see further pain in the near term and upward pressure on oil prices.”

Qalibaf’s comments came after a senior Iranian official told Reuters on Monday that Iran will shift to a “fully offensive” military posture as efforts have stalled towards a permanent end to the war.

“The lack of any kind of deal will have an impact on oil price expectations further out in 4Q and even in 2027,” said DBS

Bank’s head of energy research Suvro Sarkar.

Some oil is escaping Hormuz however, though crossings are in the single digits. Saudi Aramco has resumed oil loadings from inside the Strait of Hormuz, and is offering cargoes for loading via ship-to-ship transfers off Fujairah in the UAE.

US government bond yields eased slightly on Tuesday, though longer-dated yields remained near multi-year highs after the 30-year Treasury yield earlier touched a level not seen since 2007. The move came as fears of an escalating Middle East conflict stoked inflation worries and weighed on stocks.

— Reuters

Oman-Pakistan Friendship Association holds first meeting

MUSCAT: Oman-Pakistan Friendship Association (OPFA) convened its Founding Board Members Meeting in Muscat to strengthen its mission of promoting friendship, cooperation and mutual understanding between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Discussions focused on developing practical initiatives in tourism, investment, trade, healthcare and education, including promoting bilateral investment opportunities, strengthening business-to-business connections, and encouraging trade and economic partnerships.

The Association will also promote tourism and cultural exchanges, encourage cooperation among tourism organisations and private-



Oman-Pakistan Association explores trade and investment opportunities

sector stakeholders and showcase the rich heritage, natural beauty, and hospitality of both countries.

The meeting highlighted the importance of strengthening the longstanding bonds of friendship, cooperation, and mutual understanding between Oman and Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by Ambassador Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the Department of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and Regional Neighbourhood at the Foreign Ministry; Dr Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman; Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Chairman of the Association, Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Deputy Chairman of the Association and the Founding Board members. — ONA

BOND MARKET

Bonds, stocks jolted by tensions



A selloff in US government bonds picked up pace on Tuesday, sending the 30-year Treasury yield to a near two-decade high as fears of an escalation in the Middle East war fuelled inflation worries and pressured stocks.

Oil prices also climbed for the third consecutive day, with Brent crude hitting its highest since late last month after the latest signals.

— Reuters

CURRENCY MARKETS

Sterling dips as UK labour market cools



The pound fell slightly on Tuesday after data pointed to a slowing labour market as Britain’s unemployment rate came in above expectations in June while vacancies fell in July.

Sterling was last 0.1% lower against the dollar at \$1.352, after rising to its highest level since May on Monday as traders reduced their bets on rate hikes from the US Federal Reserve.

— Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold extends gains to \$4,431.09 per ounce



Gold rose for a third straight session today as fears of a US interest rate hike next month eased, with investors awaiting minutes from the Federal Reserve’s latest meeting for fresh clues on the monetary policy path.

Spot gold was up 0.4% at \$4,431.09 per ounce, while US gold futures for December delivery edged 0.3% higher to \$4,487.70.

— ONA

OPINION

The real competitiveness test



JAN MISCHKE



ANNA KORTIS



CHRIS BRADLEY

The authors work at the McKinsey Global Institute

JAN MISCHKE, ANNA KORTIS & CHRIS BRADLEY

ASK what makes a country competitive and you will drown in answers. Existing frameworks, including those used by the World Bank, rely on hundreds of indicators. In new research, we propose a simpler measure: investment. Where companies choose to build their next factory, laboratory, research centre, or power plant is the clearest indicator and the ultimate test of competitiveness.

At the heart of our study is a line-by-line comparison of investment cases across ten industries, from chemicals and steel to advanced semiconductors and drug discovery. We find that building and operating a factory or research and development facility in Europe or the United States is generally at least 50% more expensive than in today’s leading investment destinations.

In research intensive activities, this gap can approach 300%. Developing a new electric-vehicle platform, for example, costs about \$445 per vehicle in China compared with roughly \$1,600 in Germany.

Is it any wonder, then, that China has become a location of choice for automotive R&D? Capital tends to go where costs are lower, especially in globally traded, footloose industries.

In 1995, investment in productive assets like factories, machinery and production platforms was broadly similar across Europe, the US and China. Since then, however, China

has pulled decisively ahead. Today, its net productive investment is roughly six times that of the US. Each year, it adds three times as much productive capacity as Europe and the US combined.

China now produces 85% of the world’s batteries and one in every two new car models launched globally last year came from a Chinese manufacturer.

Europe has moved in the opposite direction. As a share of GDP, net productive investment has fallen by half since the early 2000s, from roughly 4% to about 2%.

In Germany, Europe’s manufacturing powerhouse, it amounted to just 0.2% of GDP in 2024. The EU’s annual investment shortfall has been estimated at €750–800 billion, or about 4.5% of GDP.

In practical terms, that means fewer factories, less R&D and declining manufacturing capacity.

In the US, investment has shifted towards digital technologies and, more recently, AI.

Seven AI-related companies increased their combined capital spending and R&D 50 fold over the past two decades, from \$15 billion in 2005 to nearly \$750 billion in 2025. By the end of this year, that figure could approach \$1 trillion.

Yet total productive investment as a share of GDP has remained flat and despite recent industrial policy initiatives, manufacturing investment has fallen over the past year.

None of this implies that China is unbeatable.

The country generates about 40% less value from each unit of capital than Europe and the US, prompting the Chinese

The balance of global investment has shifted dramatically over the past three decades, with China emerging as the leading destination for productive capital. Europe and the United States can still narrow the gap, but only by making it cheaper and easier to build, operate and innovate.

government to launch a campaign against what it calls neijuan (“involution”).

Nevertheless, China now attracts more than one-quarter of global investment, absorbing 63 cents of every dollar invested in machinery worldwide.

What explains China’s success and that of other investment magnets? Part of the answer is lower wages combined with productivity that matches or exceeds that of higher-wage economies — not in aggregate but for new investments.

Beyond labor costs, energy and construction are cheaper and projects move much faster. Europe’s industrial heartland, for example, pays well over \$150 per megawatt-hour for electricity — roughly three times the cost in China or the US.

Then there is speed. While a nuclear power plant takes less than six years to build in China and roughly eight in South Korea and the United Arab Emirates, it can take as long as two decades in Europe or the US.

Securing an operating license takes roughly five days in China, 20 in the US and 115 in France.

Rebalancing global investment won’t be easy, but it’s not impossible either. Our research suggests that partly closing the construction-cost gap, using automation and AI to boost productivity by roughly 30% and matching China’s speed could close 50–70% of the cost gap between the US and the world’s leading investment destinations.

In Europe, those same measures could narrow the gap by roughly one-third to three-fifths. These approaches have already been shown to work.

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CHINA EASES IRAN WAR ALUMINIUM SHOCK, BUT AT A COST

ANDY HOME

China has emerged as a significant swing supplier of aluminium to a Western market that is reeling from the loss of production in the Gulf due to the Iran war.

The world’s top aluminium producer has lifted exports of primary metal, alloy and semi-manufactured products (semis), helping cushion the impact on the global supply chain.

From China’s perspective, the timing has been fortuitous. National production is running at record levels even as domestic demand growth stutters. However, while China’s exports have provided short-term relief to the market, there may be a longer-term catch.

The composition of China’s aluminium export flows is determined primarily by tax code. Primary metal attracts a hefty 30% export tax, while both alloy and semis can exit the country at a zero tax rate.

It should come as no surprise, then, that most of China’s current outbound volumes are in the form of alloy and products such as bar, rod and tube.

That’s not to say that exports of primary metal haven’t also responded. First-half volumes rose by 32% year-on-year to 38,400 metric tonnes, but most of this metal is likely Western aluminium stored in bonded warehouses and now being rerouted to Western markets.

For example, China “exported” 9,700 tonnes to the US in January-June but US customs counted only 70 tonnes of Chinese imports over the same time frame.

Exports of alloy are growing faster, nearly doubling to 238,500 tonnes in the first six months of 2026. Indeed, China turned into a net exporter of alloy in June for the first time since 2019.

Meanwhile, the country pumped out an extra 500,000 tonnes of semis, with cumulative volumes up 18% year-on-year at 3.2 million tonnes in January to June.

Shipments are still accelerating. June’s tally of 695,000 tonnes marked a new monthly record.

DISPLACEMENT These product exports can’t directly replace the primary metal and alloy units lost in the Gulf. Instead, they act to suppress demand for unwrought metal by substituting for it further along the processing chain.

Primary aluminium production, meanwhile, grew by 2.2% over the same period, according to the International Aluminium Institute. The country’s smelters are now operating close to or even slightly above Beijing’s mandated 45-million-tonne-per-year capacity cap. — Reuters

How corporations can mitigate AI job losses



RAGHURAM G. RAJAN

The writer a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, writing for PS since 2003.



Corporations urged to retrain workers and support employees as AI reshapes jobs, helping mitigate displacement and build a future-ready workforce.

because of the productivity increases it brings (rather than because it costs less in taxes than human effort), firms’ ability to produce more for less will allow them to reduce prices and increase sales. This is the famous Jevons effect, which should also increase jobs.

Yet another reason for optimism is that AI may help create new businesses. Jill might hesitate to become an entrepreneur selling driftwood furniture pieces because she also needs a web programmer and an accountant to start up.

With AI performing both those roles, perhaps she can set up a sole proprietorship at significantly less cost. The number of startups already increased significantly during the pandemic and has increased further in recent quarters.

As the economist David Autor points out, AI can also equip moderately skilled workers with higher-order skills, as in the case of a nurse practitioner who can diagnose and treat many more illnesses with the help of medical AI. Given the enormous demand for medical services worldwide, and also services more generally, there is plenty of room for further job creation. But even if the jobocalypse is less severe than many feared, minimising its effects is

Even if AI-related job displacement is less severe than many feared, corporations will need to be enlisted in minimising its effects in the name of social solidarity. To that end, governments should consider what policy incentives are in place and large employers should consider their own long-term interests.

AI-related job displacement is coming, though no one knows how fast it will proceed, how far it will go and which sectors it will affect most. Much depends on the pace at which individual firms apply the technology to their operations.

A recent US Census Bureau Business Trends and Outlook Survey indicates that only 20% of firms with fewer than 20 employees currently use AI, compared to 37% of businesses with at least 250 employees.

While larger firms are doing more with the technology, 37% is still quite meager considering the survey’s low threshold for answering in the affirmative (whether AI is used “in any business function”).

For now, adoption is being impeded by the difficulty of integrating already astonishing AI capabilities into existing workflows in a way that will allow companies to reap the benefits fully. Doing so requires models that are not only trained on existing data but also adaptive to new data generated through everyday use.

Another factor inhibiting adoption is uncertainty about cost. Many large firms are still running pilots and postponing hiring or firing decisions as they await more clarity.

Eventually, however, competitive pressures will force them to adopt the technology more fully.

The outlook for jobs is not entirely pessimistic. If companies continue producing the goods and services they currently produce, AI adoption will have the effect that any new technology has.

Yes, some jobs will be rendered redundant (implying displacement); but some jobs will be made more productive and exciting as AI removes drudgery and assists with tasks humans do less well and new jobs will be created (such as AI engineers who supervise the technology’s implementation).

Moreover, if AI adoption occurs

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MECHANICAL engineer with 11+ years experience in projects & marketing in Oman having valid driving licence. Seeking suitable placement. Contact: 91162085

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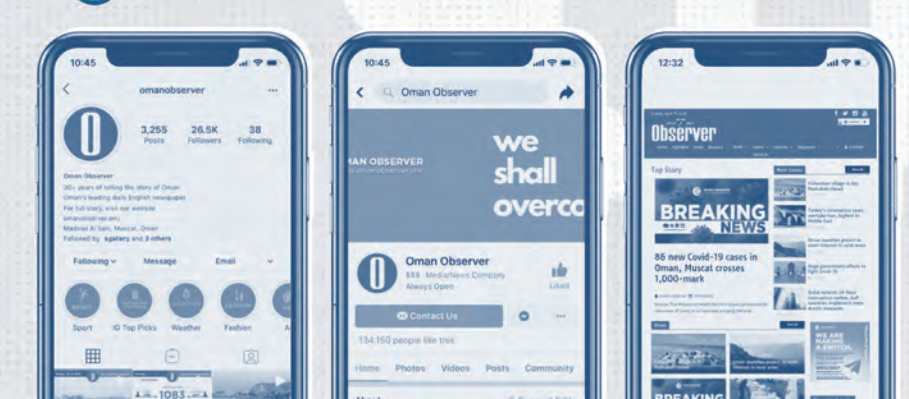
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ART/LIFE



ON SECOND **THOUGHT** THE WILD SIDE OF KHAREEF



Yeru Ebuon
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

Exploring Dhofar during Khareef is beginning to feel like a lesson not only in biology, but also in Oman’s remarkable animal diversity.

Every year, most of us arrive looking for the familiar signs of the season: mountains wrapped in mist, waterfalls returning to life and hillsides transformed into seemingly endless shades of green. This year, however, some of the most fascinating images coming out of Dhofar have not been of the landscape. They have been of the animals living within it.

Across social media, people have shared footage and photographs of Arabian wolves moving through the mountains, an Arabian leopard reportedly seen near Dhalkout, an Arabian caracal, red foxes, Arabian chameleons and eagle-owls resting among rain-soaked branches. The wider Dhofar ecosystem also supports striped

hyenas, Nubian ibex, Arabian gazelles, honey badgers, porcupines and rock hyraxes.

Avoid flash, loud noises and sudden movements. Do not reveal the precise location of rare species online

Many of these animals have probably always been nearby. We are simply seeing more of them because almost everyone now carries a capable camera, while telephoto lenses, camera traps and night-vision devices allow

us to observe what once remained hidden.

There is something worth celebrating in that. Beyond the tourist roads and crowded viewpoints, Dhofar remains wonderfully wild. Seeing an animal moving comfortably through its natural habitat reminds us that the greenery is not merely a beautiful background for photographs. It is shelter, feeding ground and home.

At the same time, a sighting should never become a chase.

The Environment Authority has warned against pursuing or filming wild animals without the required permission. Following an animal for a better video may frighten it, interrupt its feeding or push it towards a road, a crowd or another dangerous situation.

The rules for ordinary visitors can be simple. Keep a generous distance. Stay inside the vehicle when encountering a large or unfamiliar animal. Never surround, follow, feed or touch wildlife. Avoid flash, loud noises and sudden movements. Do not reveal the precise location of rare species online. If an animal appears injured or poses an immediate danger, contact the authorities rather than attempting a rescue yourself.

I am encouraged that many people already appear to understand this. Their response has largely been one of amazement rather than interference and that awareness deserves recognition.

These encounters make Dhofar even more interesting, but they also give visitors a responsibility. A wild animal does not owe us a closer photograph.

Seeing one is already a blessing. May these animals continue to move safely through Dhofar’s mountains, forests and wadis and may future generations experience the same privilege of knowing they are still there.

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



MUSIC

Malian singer, dancer and instrumentalist Mariam Bagayoko sings during a performance at the Palais de la Culture in Bamako. — **AFP**



HOLLYWOOD

Former professional baseball pitcher and sports broadcast analyst Orel Hershiser stands on his new Hollywood Walk of Fame star. — **AFP**



WILDLIFE

A humpback whale surfaces in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New York City.

— **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



The flourishing underwater sea life in Daymaniyat Islands



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SPIDEY SWINGS HIGH FOR THIRD WEEKEND

“Spider-Man: Brand New Day” continued to dominate the North American box office, earning an additional \$70 million in ticket sales during its third weekend, according to industry estimates.

The superhero film, starring Tom Holland and his real-life wife Zendaya, has grossed more than \$2 billion worldwide since its July 31 release, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said. It is now Sony Pictures’ highest-grossing film, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The latest Marvel blockbuster also recorded the biggest domestic debut weekend of all time, earning \$360 million and surpassing Disney’s 2019 “Avengers: Endgame” on a non-inflation-adjusted basis.

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, the film follows Peter Parker as he struggles with changes to his powers and lives in isolation after erasing his identity.

Peter works to reconnect with his former girlfriend MJ (Zendaya) and best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon) while confronting a new force threatening New York City.

A distant second was Christopher Nolan’s epic “The Odyssey”, which collected \$23.2 million domestically for Universal during its fifth weekend in cinemas.

Warner Bros’ sci-fi thriller “The End of Oak Street” took third place, earning \$21 million on its opening weekend. It stars Anne Hathaway and Ewan McGregor as a couple fighting to survive after their



‘Spider-Man: Brand New Day’ is now Sony Picture’s highest ever grossing film, according to the Hollywood Reporter. — AFP

neighbourhood is transported to prehistoric times.

In fourth place, “Paw Patrol: The Dino Movie” earned an estimated \$20.5 million for Paramount on its debut weekend.

“Katseye: Wild Hearts”, chronicling the pop girl group of the same name, debuted in fifth place with \$3.6 million for Trafalgar Releasing.

These five films capped a busy weekend across North American cinemas.

Overall, 2026 continues to be a strong year for Hollywood.

“The box office generally slows during the second half of August as kids start returning to school, but right now business remains extremely strong”, industry analyst David A Gross said. — AFP



Palestinian musicians take part in a final rehearsal before the opening of the Jerusalem Festival, held at the Yabous Cultural Centre after a two-year hiatus, in East Jerusalem. — AFP

PALESTINIANS CELEBRATE JERUSALEM FESTIVAL RETURN



The audience reacts as Palestinian musicians perform on stage during the Jerusalem Festival, held at the Yabous Cultural Centre after a two-year hiatus. — AFP

THREE years after its last edition, hundreds of fans are once again able to enjoy the Jerusalem Festival, a celebration of Palestinian culture that had been placed on hold because of the horrors of the war in Gaza.

The event, which will run for two months, opened on Sunday with a tribute to the late Lebanese musician Ziad Rahbani, a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause.

At the Yabous Cultural Centre in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, the Jerusalem Arabic Music Ensemble performed a selection of Rahbani’s works before an enthusiastic audience.

“An evening dedicated to Ziad Rahbani represents a major part of our memory. Jerusalem needs this kind of event”, filmmaker Yousef al Salhi said.

The Lebanese musician and playwright, the son of iconic singer Fairuz and a musical pioneer in his own right, died last year aged 69. The programme highlighted the breadth of a career that encompassed both music and theatre. Throughout the evening, Rahbani’s varied repertoire, ranging from mawwal — slow, free-form Arabic vocal music — to lively Levantine folk-pop, enthused the



Palestinian musicians perform on stage during the Jerusalem Festival, held at the Yabous Cultural Centre. — AFP

audience and marked the festival’s return after a prolonged absence.

The previous edition of the festival was held in the summer of 2023, before the war erupted in the Gaza Strip following Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel.

“We insist on coming back... Today we return to give people hope. The festival brings hope and brings people together”, said musician Suheil Khoury, chairman of the board of the Yabous Cultural Centre.

The festival’s history now stretches back four decades, although the city’s tumultuous past means that this is only its 30th edition. Several wars, as well as the intifadas, or Palestinian uprisings, of the late 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s, have forced organisers to pause the event over the years.

This year’s festival will continue with musical performances, cultural talks and art exhibitions held at various locations across east Jerusalem until October 15.

“Everyone is thirsty for this kind of gathering amidst the difficult circumstances we are going through — the genocidal war, restrictions on Jerusalem and the West Bank; and the violence being perpetrated against us”, said Mona al Dajani, an academic researcher who attended the opening.

For many attendees, the festival’s return offered an opportunity to gather publicly around Palestinian music, art and cultural identity after three years without the event.

Moussa al Qawasmi, a resident of east Jerusalem, was enthusiastic about attending an event promoting Palestinian culture.

“They (Israel) don’t want us to exist, but no, we are always ready... We will continue to celebrate, sing and dance”. — AFP

FEATURES



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

IDEAS may begin with a small group of people, but with the right partnerships, they can grow into movements that shape communities. This is the thinking behind the third edition of the Cultural Initiatives Forum 2026, bringing together 50 licensed cultural initiatives from across Oman under the theme “Towards a Sustainable Cultural Partnership”. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Department of Cultural Activities, the two-day forum is being held at Bait Al Zubair in Muscat on August 18 and 19. It seeks to create a space where cultural initiatives can exchange experiences, build connections and explore ways to make their work more sustainable and far-reaching. Huda bint Said al Riyami, Director of the Department of Cultural Activities, said the forum reflects the ministry’s cultural strategy by strengthening the role of community institutions in cultural production and encouraging creativity, innovation and new approaches. She noted that this supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in developing stronger institutional partnerships and reinforcing identity and social cohesion. As the number of cultural initiatives continues to grow across the Sultanate of Oman, Al Riyami highlighted the importance of creating a network that brings them together. This year’s forum shifts the conversation beyond activities themselves to the foundations of sustainability, including partnerships, governance, digital transformation, audience development, funding and international outreach. The programme combines interactive workshops, dialogue sessions, a round-table, brainstorming sessions and presentations of inspiring initiatives, alongside a poetry evening featuring participating poets and a visit to a cultural facility in Muscat.



Bringing together 50 cultural initiatives from across Oman, the third Cultural Initiatives Forum explores new paths towards stronger partnerships, digital innovation and sustainable cultural impact.



FROM LOCAL IDEAS TO LASTING CULTURAL IMPACT

For Saleh bin Said al Hamdani, founder and chairman of the Suhar Cultural Council, the forum is also about preparing cultural initiatives for a rapidly changing landscape. He said the gatherings help develop leadership capabilities while introducing participants to developments such as artificial intelligence and emerging digital technologies. Al Hamdani praised workshops led by Dr Salman al Hajri and Dr Jamil al Shaqsi, saying they offered valuable knowledge even to those already familiar with the field. He added that participants can carry these lessons back to their own initiatives. Dr Salman al Hajri, Omani academic and associate professor of art and graphic design at Sultan Qaboos University, described cultural initiatives as part of a

wider cultural movement within society. He stressed the need for those managing them to strengthen their digital awareness, particularly in how their initiatives are represented through social media. For Al Hajri, attending the workshops is only the beginning. The real value, he said, lies in applying what is learned, continuing to develop and building teams with stronger digital knowledge and practical skills. By bringing 50 initiatives under one roof, the forum offers more than a platform for discussion. It creates a meeting point for ideas, experience and collaboration, with the ambition of turning individual cultural efforts into a more connected and sustainable movement across Oman.



Dr Salman al Hajri, Omani academic and associate professor of art and graphic design at Sultan Qaboos University