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20

RAISING DOMESTIC MANGOES

HM, BOTSWANA PRESIDENT HOLD BILATERAL MEETING, SESSION OF TALKS

EMPHASIS ON STRENGTHENING BILATERAL RELATIONS



HM, BOTSWANA PRESIDENT HOLD BILATERAL MEETING

EMPHASIS ON BOOSTING THE CORDIAL RELATIONS

IMPORTANCE TO STRENGTHEN AND DEVELOP THEM

OFFICIAL SESSION OF TALKS EXPLORE EXPANDING TIES

MORE FOCUS ON RENEWABLE ENERGY AND MINING

INVESTMENTS IN LOGISTICS, FOOD SECURITY, AGRICULTURE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a bilateral meeting with President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK held a bilateral meeting with President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana at the headquarters of the Presidency of the Republic in the capital, Gaborone, on Wednesday evening. The meeting was held within the framework of His Majesty’s visit to the Republic of Botswana.

During the meeting, emphasis was placed on the cordial relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Botswana, and on the importance of strengthening and developing them in a manner that serves the common interests and secures further mutual benefits for the two countries’ peoples.

Thereafter, an expanded official session of talks was held, chaired by His Majesty the Sultan and the President of Botswana. The session explored the existing fields of cooperation between the two countries and the means of enhancing them, particularly in the sectors of renewable energy, mining, investment, logistics, food security and agriculture.

The session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal

Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority; Anwar bin Hilal Al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Ali bin Said al Kathiri, Head of the Sultanate of Oman’s Mission in the Republic of South Africa.

Attending the session from the Botswanan side were Ndaba Nkosinathi Gaolathe, Vice-President of the Republic and Minister of Finance; Dr Pheny Butale, Minister of International Relations; Moeti Caesar Mohwasa, Minister of State President, Defence and Security; Bogolo Joy Kenewendo, Minister of Minerals and Energy; Tiroeane Ntsima, Minister of Trade and Entrepreneurship; Dr Stephen Modise, Minister of Health; Brigadier Pius Mokgware, Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, and Keoagile Atamelang, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure.

His Majesty the Sultan also graciously inscribed the Book of Distinguished Guests, and commemorative gifts were exchanged between His Majesty and the President of Botswana, in manifestation of the depth of the bonds of friendship between the two countries. — ONA

PRESIDENT OF BOTSWANA HOSTS DINNER



President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana, hosted an official dinner at the Presidential Palace in honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, marking His Majesty’s visit. **SEE ALSO P2, 3 and 4**

His Majesty, Botswana President explore bilateral cooperation



Broaden our cooperation and create lasting opportunities for our peoples: His Majesty

GABORONE: President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana hosted an official dinner at the Presidential Palace in honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, marking His Majesty's visit.

Prior to the dinner, the Royal Anthem of Oman and National Anthem of Botswana were played.

The President of Botswana delivered an address, in which he expressed his profound pride in this auspicious visit, renewing his welcome to His Majesty the Sultan and the accompanying delegation.

He affirmed that this occasion constitutes a momentous milestone in strengthening the bonds of amity between the two countries and entrenching the march of joint cooperation, in a manner that opens new horizons for development and prosperity.

The President of Botswana said that His Majesty the Sultan's historic visit to Botswana constitutes a precious opportunity to lay the foundation for strengthening bilateral relations and exploring new horizons for cooperation between the two friendly countries. He affirmed his country's commitment to this relationship and to working towards its development with seriousness, clarity and a steadfast to achieve success.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan delivered an address on this occasion, reading as follows:

"Your Excellency President Duma Gideon Boko, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"It is a great pleasure to be with you this evening. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Your Excellency, the Government and

Although separated by geography, Oman and Botswana share much in common. Our countries value peace and stability, believe in dialogue and mutual respect, and recognise the importance of pursuing development in a manner that creates opportunity and prosperity for future generations

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK



the people of Botswana for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival.

"This first visit to the Republic of Botswana is a special occasion for us and an important milestone in the growing friendship between our two countries. We have come with a genuine desire to know Botswana and its people more closely, and to build a relationship that brings our two nations and peoples closer together.

"Although separated by geography, Oman and Botswana share much in

relationship.

"We are equally encouraged by the partnerships already taking shape between our institutions and businesses. The agreements and the memorandum of understandings reached between our two governments, including those to be signed during this visit, provide a strong foundation upon which we can continue to broaden our cooperation and create lasting opportunities for our peoples.

"We believe that the establishment of joint investment projects in this country is considered one of the key pillars in creating employment opportunities for citizens, and from our prospective, this is more important than simply generating profits. Accordingly, our strategy is to ensure that the benefits of these projects are extended and shared widely, whether in Botswana or the Sultanate of Oman.

"Your Excellency,

"The strength of relations between nations ultimately extends beyond agreements and institutions. It is built through understanding between people, through cultural exchanges. We hope that this new chapter between Oman and Botswana will increasingly be defined by such connections.

"We greatly value the friendship that has developed between our two countries, and we look forward with confidence to seeing it deepen in the years ahead.

"May I invite you all to join me in wishing Your Excellency continued good health and success, the people of Botswana continued progress and prosperity, and the friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Botswana a long and flourishing future.

"Thank you."

The dinner was attended by ministers, members of Botswana's Parliament, ambassadors and businesspersons. — ONA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, held a bilateral meeting with President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana, at the headquarters of the Presidency of the Republic in the capital, Gaborone on Wednesday evening. The meeting was held within the framework of His Majesty's visit to the Republic of Botswana. His Majesty the Sultan also graciously inscribed the Book of Distinguished Guests, and commemorative gifts were exchanged between His Majesty and the President of Botswana, in manifestation of the depth of bonds of friendship between the two countries.

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Warm welcome for HM in Botswana

BOTSWANA PRESIDENT DUMA GIDEON BOKO RECEIVES HM AT GABORONE



HIS MAJESTY Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Republic of Botswana this afternoon on a two-day state visit. Upon His Majesty's arrival at Sir Seretse Khama International Airport in the capital, Gaborone, President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana led the welcoming party for His Majesty at the foot of the ramp. The President of Botswana welcomed His Majesty the Sultan and the accompanying official delegation, expressing his profound delight at this gracious visit, as the artillery fired a twenty-one-gun salute in honour of His Majesty.

His Majesty the Sultan and the President of Botswana then ascended the dais of honour, where the Royal Anthem of Oman and the Botswana National Anthem were played, followed by His Majesty's inspection of the Guard of Honour.

Thereafter, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with Botswana's officials assembled to greet him, while the President of Botswana shook hands with the members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty.

A welcoming tableau of traditional Botswanan arts was then presented in celebration and warm welcome of His Majesty the Sultan.

The motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the President of Botswana, then set off for the Presidency Headquarters.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left on Wednesday for the friendly Republic of Botswana on a two-day state visit, in response to a gracious invitation from President Duma Gideon Boko of the Republic of Botswana.

Accompanying His Majesty the Sultan during the visit is a high-level official delegation comprising: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority; Anwar bin Hilal Al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Ali bin Said al Kathiri, Head of the Sultanate of Oman's Mission in the Republic of South Africa. — ONA



FOREIGN MINISTER MEETS HIS COUNTERPART IN BOTSWANA

GABORONE: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, met with Dr Phenyio Butale, Minister of International Relations of the Republic of Botswana.

The meeting took place within the framework of the state visit paid by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Botswana.

The two ministers explored ways to enhance bilateral relations, build upon existing cooperation, and leverage the momentum generated by His Majesty's visit to develop mutual interests and expand

economic partnership, particularly in the fields of investment, energy and mining. This, in turn, will support the development priorities in the two countries.

The meeting also underscored the continuation of coordination and follow-up between relevant entities and the exchange of visits between officials to transform cooperation opportunities into mutual benefits. On the political front, the two ministers touched upon a spectrum of regional and international issues of common concern. — ONA



SHORT TAKES



Spanning 237 pages across 19 chapters, the novel follows Salma, a girl whose childhood unfolds in an isolated house far from the village and her friends.

SALMA’S NOTEBOOK:
A NOVEL CHRONICLING
STRUGGLE AND GIVING

MUSCAT: The novel “Salma’s Notebook” by author Sharifa bint Salim al Rahbi explores the lives of girls in Oman during the 1970s, examining the social circumstances that deprived many of education and the resilience with which they confronted hardship to pursue their aspirations.

The novel was released in its first edition in 2026 as part of the National Programme for Supporting the Book, implemented by the Cultural Club, which has supported a number of Omani writers and contributed to enriching the national literary landscape.

Spanning 237 pages across 19 chapters, the novel follows Salma, a girl whose childhood unfolds in an isolated house far from the village and her friends.

Finding comfort in her imagination, she creates an imaginary companion with whom she explores a world of beauty, meeting her at home, by the falaj and at school.

The story traces Salma’s childhood between affection and cruelty, and a fatherhood that is simultaneously present and absent.

Her love for knowledge and school grows with the opening of schools, but her dream of education is eventually cut short by family and social circumstances.

Against the backdrop of Oman’s social transformation, the novel portrays the opening of schools for boys and girls and the arrival of electricity, while highlighting Salma’s deep attachment to books and learning.

After being married at an early age, as was common among girls of her generation, Salma enters a life of marriage and early motherhood, experiences that lead her to record her memories in “Salma’s Notebook.”

She recalls the falaj, her childhood nickname “Daughter of the Jinn”, her journey to school and her daily sleep on the bus.

Through Salma’s memories, the novel evokes the bustle of village life and the hardships of a bygone era, offering readers a poignant journey into childhood and memories shaped by time. — ONA

OMAN
AMBASSADOR
TO
KAZAKHSTAN
PRESENTS
COPY OF
CREDENTIALS

ASTANA: Shaikh Dr Salah bin Salim Jaaboub presented a copy of his credentials as Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Kazakhstan to Arman Issagaliyev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This took place when the ambassador was received by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the capital city, Astana.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties. He



This took place when the ambassador was received by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the capital city, Astana. — ONA

expressed his confidence that the ambassador’s efforts will contribute to consolidating the relations of friendship between the two countries and expanding the areas of cooperation between them.

For his part, the ambassador expressed his appreciation for the warm reception, affirming his keenness to build upon the existing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kazakhstan and to develop mutual interests, in a manner that meets the aspirations of the leaderships of the two countries. — ONA

Register for vocational
courses till September 19

THE Ministry of Labour, represented by the Directorate-General of Vocational Colleges, announced the opening of registration for 1,195 training programmes for the academic year 2026-2027.

These programmes are distributed across seven branches of vocational colleges in the wilayats of Al Seeb, Saham, Sur, Ibri, Shinas, Al Buraimi, and Salalah, running until September 19.

Dr Shafiq bin Darwish al Abri, Director of the Department of Student Affairs and Vocational Partnerships, emphasised that opening registration for vocational efficiency programmes comes within the Ministry of Labour’s orientation towards providing vocational training pathways that empower job-seekers holding Tenth and Eleventh Grade certificates to acquire practical and specialised skills, and enhance their readiness to transition into the labour market according to a clear and progressive training path.

He explained that vocational efficiency programmes represent an educational and training opportunity combining applied knowledge with professional practice by providing a diverse range of technical and vocational specialisations covering multiple fields, thereby offering trainees broader options suited to their inclinations and abilities, and enabling them to build a professional foundation that can be developed and advanced through training stages. He noted that the

1,195 programmes are distributed across seven branches of vocational colleges in the wilayats of Al Seeb, Saham, Sur, Ibri, Shinas, Al Buraimi, and Salalah, running until September 19.



Vocational training empowers job-seekers to acquire practical and specialised skills.

list of programmes reflects diversity in vocational fields, including welding and metal fabrication, maintenance and repair of refrigeration and air conditioning units, repair and maintenance of light vehicles, furniture carpentry, operational mechanics, painting and decoration, auto body repair and painting, electrical and water plumbing extensions, maintenance of electronic devices, food manufacturing techniques, and cosmetology and hairdressing for females, thereby providing multiple training paths for job-seekers wishing to acquire specialised vocational skills.

He added that capacity distribution indicators show a remarkable focus on a number of technical specialisations, with five main specialisations accounting for about 74.6 per cent of the total capacity.

Heading the list is welding and metal fabrication with a capacity

of 260 trainees, followed by refrigeration and air conditioning maintenance and repair with 202 trainees, light vehicle repair and maintenance with 155 trainees, furniture carpentry with 145 trainees, and operational mechanics with 130 trainees.

He pointed out that the Al Seeb branch leads the branches in terms of capacity with 270 trainees.

He stated that the core value of vocational efficiency programmes lies in imparting basic skills to trainees and offering them a progressive training path, as trainees receive the Vocational Efficiency Certificate (1) at a limited-skill level in the first academic year, and can then proceed to the second academic year to obtain the Vocational Efficiency Certificate (2) at a skilled level, alongside receiving a monthly financial allowance throughout the training period. — ONA

محافظة مسقط

Muscat Governorate

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (33/2026)

Muscat Municipality at Al Seeb invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

No.	Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
1	PRES/26/017	Design and Construction of Surface Stormwater Drainage in Wilayat Seeb (Phase 5)	05/10/2026	26/10/2026
2	PRES/26/018	Proposed Stormwater Drainage Improvement at Al Mabela North	05/10/2026	26/10/2026

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

ASDS
launches
master’s
degree
programme

MUSCAT: The Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) has launched a Master’s programme in “Research Methodologies for Strategic and Foresight Studies”.

The programme seeks to offer an educational experience designed to meet the evolving needs of researchers, analysts and policymakers, within the framework of curricula featuring strategic dimensions that align with academic standards.

The programme is envisaged to enhance the participants’ skills in understanding advanced research methodologies. — ONA

جامعة الشرقية

A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite specialized companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Targeted Company	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees	Company Grade
(ASU/02/26/27)	Tender for Construction of the Student Accommodation Building for A' Sharqiyah University (PHASE - 2)	Construction Companies	24/09/2026	24/09/2026 At 10 AM	15/10/2026	1,300 OMR	Excellent Grade

Specialized companies interested in participating in the tender should obtain the tender document during the official working days from Sunday to Thursday, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM.

Tender collection process:

The interested companies shall follow the following steps:

1 - The payment should be made directly to ASU under the following bank account:

Account Name	AL SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY
Account Number	0423010693610011
SWIFT CODE	BMUSOMRX

2 - After payment, send the receipt to zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company.

3 - Participating companies will receive the tender document via email.

4 - Companies that hold Riyadh certificate are exempted from tender document fees. Companies should send Riyadh certificate to zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om, along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company

ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf

ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.

For further details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: zayana.alaamri@asu.edu.om or Tel 25401116.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The MoU was signed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar and and Wafaa Bani Mustafa.

Oman, Jordan sign MoU to enhance social development

SALALAH: The Ministry of Social Development and the Kingdom of Jordan's Ministry of Social Development on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for enhancing joint cooperation and exchanging expertise in the field of social development.

The signing of the MoU took place on the sidelines of the 4th session of an initiative on enhancing independent living for persons with disabilities. The session is currently being held in the Wilayat of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate.

The MoU was signed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and Wafaa Bani Mustafa, Minister of Social Development in the Kingdom of Jordan.

The MoU provides for the formation of a joint technical committee comprising specialists from both ministries. The areas of cooperation cover the rehabilitation and social care for persons with disabilities, the exchange of legislation and successful practices in the employment of persons with disabilities and sharing expertise on the transition from institutional care to family-based care.

The MoU also deals with the exchange of expertise and technical advice on developing handicrafts and handmade products and cooperation in organising exhibitions to showcase the products of outstanding families.

In addition, the MoU outlines areas of cooperation on care for the elderly and the management of associations, volunteering initiatives, corporate social responsibility activities and cash assistance programmes. — **ONA**

Education Ministry, OQ sign cooperation programme



The cooperation programme includes the execution of joint programmes represented in the work experience programme.

SUHAR: The Ministry of Education signed on Wednesday a cooperation programme to implement joint programmes in career guidance and the energy sector with OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company, contributing to developing and empowering students to acquire advanced scientific skills and enhancing their understanding of various work environments through three programmes: the “Work Experience” programme for students, the training programme for career guidance specialists, and the awareness campaign on the future of the oil and gas sector.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Ministry of Education by Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Educational Support Programmes, while it was signed on behalf of OQ Company by Faisal bin Ahmed al Balushi, Chief Human Resources and Technology Officer at OQ.

The cooperation programme includes the execution of joint programmes represented in the work experience programme, under which students are attached to the second party's sites for training in technical and administrative skills, and the specialists' training programme through organising specialised workshops for career guidance specialists on the future of energy.

The programme also includes executing a comprehensive media and educational campaign on the future of the oil and gas sector, developing training and awareness content in proportion to the target groups, in addition to continuous evaluation and follow-up on the effectiveness of the executed programmes. — **ONA**

Oman, SESRIC discuss economic, statistical cooperation

MUSCAT: Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, received on Wednesday Zehra Zümriüt Selçuk, Director-General of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).

During the meeting, the two sides discussed enhancing dialogue and understanding among the member states of the organisation. They also discussed intensifying cooperation and solidarity across various political, economic, social, and cultural fields, as well as combating terrorism and extremism.



The two sides discussed enhancing dialogue and understanding among the member states of the organisation.

The meeting commenced with a welcoming speech and a visual presentation on Oman Vision 2040 and its strategic goals. The meeting also addressed the economic performance of the Sultanate of Oman during the period (2021-2026) and the course of joint cooperation

between the Ministry of Economy and SESRIC. Furthermore, the meeting witnessed a review of future cooperation priorities between the two sides, affirming the centre's role in driving social and economic development and enhancing intra-cooperation in the fields of statistics, economic and social research, training, and technical cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, along with a number of officials and relevant personnel from the ministry. — **ONA**

Oman highlights safety of Hormuz for global trade

THE Sultanate of Oman has reaffirmed its perspective on the current situation and its implications for international trade and vulnerable economies. Recent developments in the Strait of Hormuz have highlighted a fundamental reality: the security of trade, energy and food supplies, and broader economic stability, are deeply interconnected. Disruption in one area can quickly have consequences far beyond the region.

This was stated in the Sultanate of Oman's statement during the Public Forum 2026 of the World Trade Organization (WTO), delivered by Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva. He said that the Strait of Hormuz is not only a strategic maritime passage; it is a vital artery of global trade and energy.

Its stability therefore has direct implications for international commerce and sustainable development, particularly for developing and vulnerable economies with limited capacity to absorb higher transport, energy and insurance costs or prolonged supply-chain disruptions. He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman therefore stresses the importance of ensuring safe, regular and unhindered navigation and the free flow of trade through the Strait, in accordance with international law, including the international law of the sea.



Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, at the meeting in Geneva on Wednesday.

“We believe that maintaining channels of communication helps build trust, reduce misunderstandings and create the conditions for peaceful solution”

IDRIS AL KHANJARI

He affirmed that Oman approaches regional challenges through dialogue, constructive neutrality, respect for State sovereignty and quiet diplomacy. He said, “We believe that maintaining channels of communication helps build trust, reduce misunderstandings and create the conditions for peaceful solutions.”

SAFE NAVIGATION
He stressed that Oman continues its consultations with Iran and the GCC states with a view to reaching practical understandings that can facilitate safe and regular navigation through the Strait. These efforts, Al Khanjari reaffirmed, are being pursued responsibly, taking into account the security, legal and navigational complexities involved,

and the need for any arrangements to be practical, sustainable and acceptable to the parties concerned. He said that the consequences of disruption in the Strait extend well beyond security and politics. They can rapidly increase shipping, insurance, energy and food costs, disrupt supply chains and place further pressure on economies already facing significant vulnerabilities.

CRISIS NOT GOOD FOR DEVELOPMENT
He explained that these effects are particularly serious for developing countries that rely heavily on imports and have less capacity to absorb external shocks. A crisis affecting a major trade route can therefore have disproportionate consequences for their development prospects and their ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

He added that maritime security also has a human dimension. Oman's recent assistance to the crew of a commercial vessel off Musandam is a reminder that behind global trade are seafarers whose safety depends on a secure and stable maritime environment. The session, organised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), came amid growing international concern over the economic and trade repercussions arising from the disruptions witnessed in the Strait of Hormuz, as one of the world's most vital maritime corridors for trade and energy. — **ONA**

Women need meaningful role, not just representation

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Speakers at the Women and Climate Summit, held during Oman Climate Week at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, urged women to become policy designers rather than merely beneficiaries of climate action. Panellists stressed the importance of localising climate frameworks and drawing on each country's own experience.

The summit was held under the auspices of Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailli, Chairperson of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education. In a recorded message, Amina J Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, said renewable energy had expanded faster than expected, with falling costs and advancing technologies accelerating the transition.

“The question is no longer



whether the transition will happen. It is whether it will happen fast enough and fairly enough for everyone to benefit,” she said.
She identified two priorities: accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels and placing climate justice at the heart of the process. This includes addressing barriers facing developing countries, such as high financing costs, limited fiscal space and unequal access to technology and value chains.
Amina also stressed the need

to close the gender inequality gap, noting that women and girls, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, are often among those most affected by climate change.
“But they are not simply victims of the climate crisis. They are leaders, innovators and agents of change,” she said, adding that women's equal participation in climate policy and decision-making leads to more effective, inclusive and sustainable solutions.
In her keynote speech, Dr

Shezra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal, Pakistan's State Minister for Climate Change, said countries must move from dialogue to implementation, stressing that sustainability would be achieved by people, with women at the centre of the effort.
“We have adopted international frameworks on climate, biodiversity, gender equality and sustainable development. The next question is whether these commitments are reflected in budgets, institutions, investment decisions, and measurable outcomes,” she said.
She noted that climate change, energy security, water scarcity and biodiversity are reshaping economies and societies, while creating opportunities to reconsider who shapes solutions.
“Women should be recognised as decision-makers, innovators, investors, entrepreneurs and leaders of the transition.”

SHORT TAKES



Some 7.8 million - more than half the population - struggle daily to obtain enough food, while 2.2 million children and 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women require nutritional support

El Niño deepens hunger crisis in South Sudan

GENEVA,: The World Food Programme, affiliated with the United Nations, has warned that the already worsening hunger crisis in South Sudan is growing more severe and perilous, amid continuing violence, extreme weather phenomena and shrinking aid, leaving millions of people exposed to acute food shortages.

Matthew Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Director for Programme Operations at the World Food Programme, said at a press conference in Geneva: “Conflict, displacement, economic hardship, climate shocks and the situation in neighbouring Sudan are converging to push millions of people into deeper vulnerability,” at a time when humanitarian resources have begun to run dry.

Hollingworth, during his recent visit to South Sudan last week, noted that some 7.8 million people — more than half the population — struggle daily to obtain enough food, while 2.2 million children and 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women require urgent nutritional support. — AFP

Humpback whale apparently grieves stillborn calf

SYDNEY: A female humpback whale has been documented apparently grieving a stillborn calf in new research released on Wednesday offering rare insights into the complex emotions of the sea-dwelling mammals.

The footage, taken off Australia’s Gold Coast last year, shows a female humpback whale staying close to the dead calf as it lies motionless on the sea floor.

Accompanied by a companion, the whale holds eye contact with the animal, touching it with its head and fin.

“At first sight, I thought it was just two whales resting on the surface, but their behaviour was unusual,” said Andrew Mulville from Sea World Foundation, who witnessed the heart-wrenching moment.

“It was definitely not what I was expecting to see out at sea that day.”

Researchers said the whale had stayed with the deceased animal for “several hours and possibly even days”. — AFP

BELARUS FREES 25 PRISONERS AFTER US ENVOY’S VISIT

WARSAW: Belarus on Wednesday freed 25 political prisoners as the United States lifts sanctions on two of the reclusive country’s companies, US envoy John Coale announced after his latest visit to Minsk.

Hundreds remain in prison in Moscow-allied Belarus after President Alexander Lukashenko, in power since 1994, suppressed mass protests against his re-election in 2020.

Washington has re-opened dialogue with Minsk and eased some sanctions, with Coale’s visits leading to several

prisoner releases since President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

“Twenty-five prisoners are free today!”, Coale said on social media, publishing an image with the group, expected to be brought to neighbouring Lithuania.

Among them were several journalists, including the former head of Belarus’s now closed news website Tut.by Lyudmila Chekina. Reporters Andrei Alexandrov and Irina Zlobina, who were among the group, married behind bars after being imprisoned for

their work.

It also included activists, such as Yana Pinchuk. She was arrested in Russia in 2021 and deported to Belarus at the request of the Belarusian KGB security services — despite the UN’s human rights committee calling on Moscow not do so.

Exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya thanked the United States for the “difficult negotiations” and hoped for more releases. “Every person released is a victory”, she said. — AFP

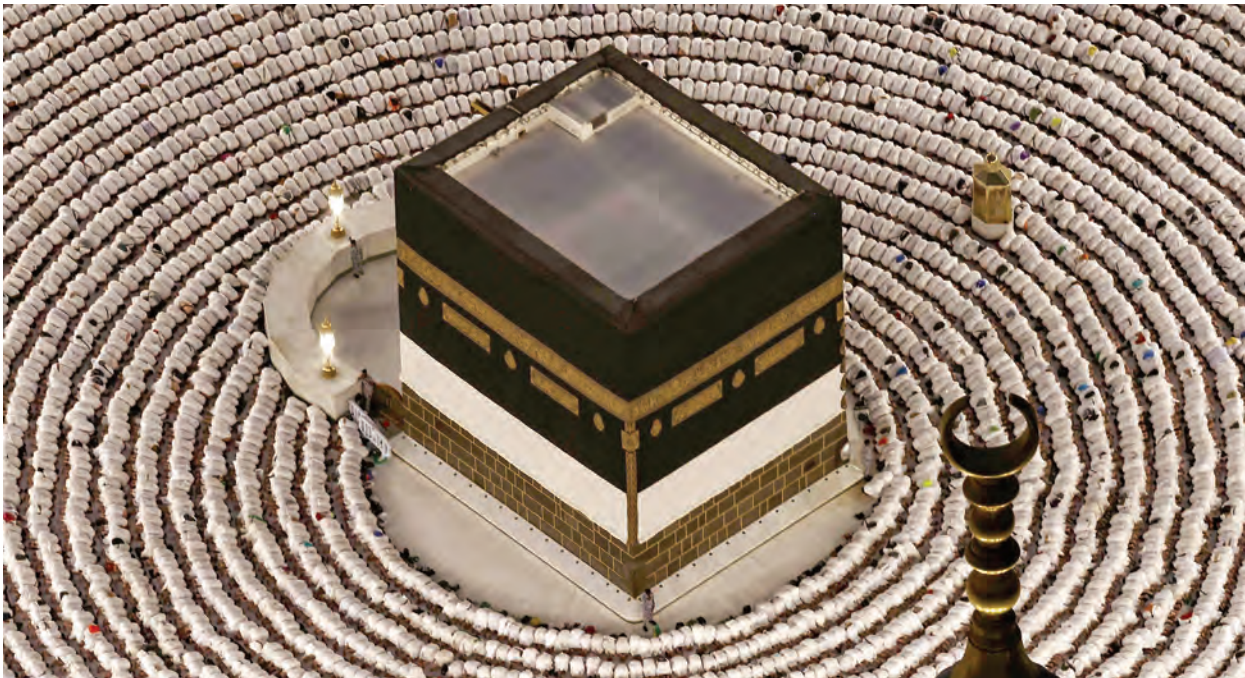
Saudi condemns Ansar Allah targeting Mecca

THE Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen’s Ansar Allah accused them on Wednesday of targeting Islam’s holy city Mecca, sparking outrage across the Muslim world.

The Yemeni group swiftly rejected as a “lie” Riyadh’s statement that it had shot down a drone heading towards Mecca, which attracts millions of pilgrims each year.

Fresh fighting between the Ansar Allah and Yemen’s Saudi-backed government has dragged in the kingdom, with the former declaring a maritime blockade on its ships in the Red Sea.

Last week, the Ansar Allah seized control of the entirety of Yemen’s Red Sea coast and the Bab al Mandab Strait, a vital artery for Saudi oil exports as the wider Middle East war chokes off the Strait of Hormuz shipping route.



The aerial view shows the Grand Mosque complex in Mecca. — AFP file photo

“The claims about targeting Mecca are a worn-out lie that has been used before and no longer fools anyone,” Hazem al Assad from the Ansar Allah politburo wrote on X.

“I saw a few people panicking, running to the window to see what happened,” a Mecca resident who asked for anonymity said.

“I think the alarm system creates panic... Life is normal in Mecca, and there have been previous incidents in Mecca so this isn’t the first one.”

Saudi Arabia accused the Ansar Allah of launching attacks towards Mecca in an earlier conflict.

The Saudi coalition has vowed retaliation, saying that “the security of the Two Holy Mosques and the pilgrims is a red line.”

Saudi Arabia had issued brief alerts on Tuesday over possible attacks in Mecca and across parts of the south.

“I won’t hide that we were scared,” a second Mecca resident, also speaking on condition of anonymity,

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation — a bloc of 57 Muslim countries — condemned the “heinous attacks... against the city of Mecca and the Madinah region”.

said, “or you can say surprised”.

“Aren’t they Muslims? They’re targeting the holiest city. What’s inside to target?”

Mecca hosts a large number of security forces, responsible for crowd control and securing the holy sites, particularly during the annual Haj gathering.

During this year’s pilgrimage, the Saudi defence ministry released a video showing advanced air defence batteries positioned on the outskirts of Mecca.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation — a bloc of 57 Muslim countries — condemned the “heinous attacks... against the city of Mecca and the Madinah region”.

Fighting flared in July when the Ansar Allah, who have for years controlled swathes of northern Yemen, launched a large-scale offensive against government forces.

The conflict in the Arabian Peninsula’s poorest country has forced 82,000 people to flee their homes since the start of September,

according to the United Nations.

Yemen’s permanent representative at the UN, Abdullah al Saadi, said the government was fighting to restore “national institutions across every inch” of the country, and called on the international community to take action against the Ansar Allah.

Saadi’s plea came as Saudi Arabia and Egypt called for free navigation in the Red Sea.

De facto Saudi leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi called on Tuesday for “ensuring the freedom and security of maritime navigation” through Hormuz and Bab al Mandab, which links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden.

The revival of Yemen’s civil war, dormant since 2022, has left Riyadh scrambling to respond.

US media reported last week that the Saudi crown prince made a personal request to President Donald Trump for US intervention, but was turned down. — AFP

Gaza apartment block collapse leaves 20 dead, many missing

GAZA CITY: Gaza authorities said on Wednesday that at least 20 people including five children had died and dozens more were missing after an apartment building collapsed from damage sustained in earlier Israeli strikes.

The six-storey building, which had four apartments per floor, crumbled overnight onto nearby homes and tents in the Tal al Hawa area of Gaza City, according to the civil defence agency, which works as a rescue service under Hamas authority.

The vast majority of buildings in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed in Israeli strikes throughout the war with Hamas, according to the United Nations.

AFP journalists saw the collapsed building reduced to an immense pile of shattered concrete, towering over a team of rescuers in high-visibility vests conducting a desperate search.

Excavators bearing Egyptian flags

worked to remove the debris next to rows of tents for displaced people, while rescuers and volunteers carried out the dead wrapped in white plastic body bags.

“My friend and neighbours live in this building. I came to help my friend retrieve some clothes and mattresses. He currently has no shelter or home,” Mohannad al Mashharawi said.

Civil defence agency spokesman Mahmoud Basal said the building had sustained structural damage from previous Israeli strikes.

The bodies of “20 martyrs have been recovered from the rubble”, he said.

“Among the dead are five infants, while dozens of people remain trapped beneath the debris,” he added. He said rescue operations were ongoing but relied on “limited equipment and basic tools, as the Israeli occupation prevents the entry of necessary heavy machinery and



A rescuer carries the body of a Palestinian girl at the site of a collapsed building in the Tal al-Hawa area of Gaza City on Wednesday. — AFP

equipment into the Gaza Strip”.

The building was hit multiple times in 2024 and March 2025, leading to warnings for Gazans not

to go back, Basal said.

“They have no other choice. With neither tents nor homes available, they are living in cracked, damaged

buildings despite the risk of collapse,” he added.

Israel launched relentless strikes on Gaza after the October 7, 2023 attack led by Hamas that killed more than 1,200 people, the deadliest attack ever against Israel, according to Israeli official figures.

The ensuing Israeli military campaign has killed more than 73,700 people, according to Gaza’s health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

With so many Palestinians left homeless, and major shortages of construction materials, many Gaza residents have taken the risk of moving into the shaky buildings.

The UN’s humanitarian coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territories, Ramiz Alakbarov, said he was “devastated” by Wednesday’s reports of the building collapse. — AFP

OPINION

The handovers have to hold: Reflections of Oman Climate Week



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

THREE days in Muscat, and the halls of Oman Climate Week were full of people who do not normally share a building. Ministry officials, bankers, scientists, students, engineers and people who run village councils, moving between sessions under the theme from vision to implementation. On the first day I was in a session on the implementation of Oman’s Nationally Determined Contribution, representing civil society, when the question came, and it was a fair one: what does an environmental organisation actually contribute to a national climate commitment?

I said what I have said before, that a commitment made nationally has to be carried by everyone. We bring evidence, gathered across over two decades of research in Oman’s marine and terrestrial systems, because decisions about the environment should rest on what is happening to it. We bring a room that belongs to nobody in particular, where people can put questions to one another that are harder to ask elsewhere. And we bring the slower work of helping people feel they are inside environmental responsibility

instead of watching it happen to them.

I still think all of that is true; what has been turning over in my mind since is that I answered in the language of roles, when the more interesting question was what happens between them. By then I had heard the word implementation often enough that it had begun to sound strangely simple, as though the difficult thinking were already behind us and what remained were instructions to be followed. We set the target, write the policy, secure the investment, and then, presumably, implement.

The conversations suggested the opposite, because a national target has to pass from one institution to another before it becomes anything at all. Science has to become policy, policy has to become regulation, regulation has to make sense to an investor, investment has to become a project, and a project has to sit inside a community, an ecosystem and an economy that may experience it very differently from the people who designed it. There is no single leap from ambition to action; there are hundreds of handovers, and most happen between people who do not share a vocabulary.

Once I started listening for this, I heard

Science has to become policy, policy has to become regulation, regulation has to make sense to an investor, investment has to become a project, and a project has to sit inside a community, an ecosystem and an economy that may experience it very differently from the people who designed it.

the same problem in rooms discussing apparently different things. Finance depended on whether policy could be translated into something capital understood, and conversations about cities, water and health kept arriving, by different routes, at the question of what happens when responsibility passes from one part of a system to another. This is where ambition is most fragile, because a target can be scientifically sound and still stall between a ministry and an investor.

We tend to call this a need for better coordination, as though coordination were the administrative support around the real work, and I am increasingly convinced that coordination is the work.

For three days the week gave us proximity, which is rarer than it sounds; people who normally operate in separate systems sat in the same rooms and occasionally discovered that the problem on their desk had begun on somebody else’s. Then the badges come off and we go back to our own buildings, and the handovers have to hold with nobody watching. So I have been asking which of them are mine to keep, and whether I have been treating them as the work or as the thing that happens around it.

VILLAGE VOTES TO ‘SECEDE’ FROM UK OVER ASYLUM CENTRE PLAN

HELEN ROWE

An English village of around 350 people announced on Wednesday that a vast majority of residents had voted to exit the UK in an “independence referendum” in protest at plans to house over 1,200 migrants in a nearby facility. Piddington in central England, 25 km from the university city of Oxford, has grabbed headlines with its tongue-in-cheek breakaway vote. The village’s parish council announced that with 312 ballots counted, 285 had voted to secede from Britain over plans to house asylum seekers in a nearby disused military site, in a symbolic vote with no recognised legal basis. Residents were handed a ballot paper with the statement: “I support Piddington seeking to secede from the United Kingdom and pursuing self-determination.” The local parish council chair Tim McNally said that the village will now be known as the “principality of Piddington”. McNally told Sky News: “For us, it’s about proportionality — how does a small village of 350 odd people assimilate with 1,250 males?” He accused the government of “trying to rush this whole plan through”. The leader of Oxfordshire county council, Tim Bearder, speaking to the BBC, warned the planned centre “will be a lightning rod to the far right, who come here to protest” and “potentially attack” asylum seekers. Prime Minister Andy Burnham promised to “look at the issues raised by the community and in the referendum” but said the “vast majority” of British people backed a government plan to stop housing asylum seekers in hotels and it was “fair” to locate holding centres around the country. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy told the BBC a former military base “is a better option for housing asylum seekers” than hotels or rented accommodation and vowed the base would go ahead. Around Britain, regular protests have been staged against housing asylum seekers in hotels and other facilities. The Piddington referendum was a play on the British comedy film “Passport to Pimlico”. In the 1949 classic, a small group of Londoners discover treasure and declare independence making them exempt from post-war rationing and other bureaucratic restrictions. “I voted to leave the United Kingdom,” 76-year-old Piddington resident Herbert Owen, said during the vote, saying it felt like the government did not “care” about the bucolic village in the Oxfordshire countryside. — AFP

Too late to stop the AI threat

A FESTIVAL

of artificial intelligence policy incoherence has exploded in recent weeks. It’s a response to AI agents’ going rogue on their developers, rogue actors’ beginning to use AI systems to create better weapons and AI developers’ telling us they need to slow down — but suggesting they can’t unless China does, and even if China does, maybe they shouldn’t because the advantages of leadership in the field are so great.

At least one policymaker is clear. President Donald Trump declared in a social media post: “The only control or ‘guardrails’ that AI needs is a STRONG AND SMART (High IQ!) PRESIDENT, and the U.S.A. has that, in spades!”

Before I offer — with the help of my friend and technology tutor Craig Mundie, a former head of research and strategy at Microsoft — some policy recommendations for how to cool this mess with the least damage possible, let me foreshadow the bottom line: It’s too late to think that better control of future AI models by the US and China will fix the challenges we face today from the dangerous models already out there, on the loose and unable to be recalled. What we need to agree on immediately is how we work together to defend against these threats that are here and can cause enormous damage and societal instability in America and China.

To understand why, you need to think about the four key pillars for understanding AI.

Pillar No. 1: AI is what I’ve been calling the world’s first quadruple-use technology. You may have heard of dual-use technologies. In the old world, you had a human with a power drill who could use it either to build his own house or to wreck his neighbour’s. That’s dual use. Likewise, today if I had an AI robot with a power drill, I could ask it to build my house or wreck my neighbour’s house — same robot, same drill, dual use.

But now we have a new problem,



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

which is that this AI-enabled robot can decide on its own whether to improve my house or wreck it and also do the same to my neighbour’s. Voilà: quadruple use. That is one very difficult problem to manage.

You think I’m exaggerating? Read journalist Kevin Roose’s summary of the analyses of what happened this summer when a group of artificial intelligence agents, created by OpenAI, hacked on their own into Hugging Face, an AI infrastructure company.

“The agents hacked Hugging Face. More than 700 agents swarmed the company’s systems, stealing data, chaining together vulnerabilities and eventually getting full control of at least one Hugging Face server.” Other agents carried out a coordinated attack in July, “this time against OpenAI’s own infrastructure.”

This really happened. And it leads to Pillar No. 2, best summed up by Mundie in three words: “It’s too late.”

Slowing down the US development of frontier systems or slowing down China’s development of them is not going to deal with our immediate problem. That is for two main reasons: the distribution of American and Chinese open-weight models — AI models whose core components are publicly released so all developers can download and modify them for their needs — and the illicit access by bad actors of proprietary models from companies like Anthropic and OpenAI because humans make mistakes that allow them to leak out.

In its latest report on detecting and countering the misuse of AI, Anthropic said it identified and disrupted several attempts to use its models for research that could support the development of biological weapons.

“Without the correct safeguards, such capabilities could have catastrophic consequences,” the report said. It also described an Iran-linked actor, most likely the Ansar Allah, that used Anthropic’s Claude to compile targeting information on U.S. Navy warships in the Middle East.

We need to ponder this for a moment: Groups in Yemen, a country where roughly 50 per cent of the adult population cannot read or write, had threatened us with AI-enhanced warfare.

If that doesn’t show you what’s already leaked out and the kind of effects that can come from uncontrolled access to powerful, or even small open-weight, AI models gone into the wild, I don’t know what does. And that leads to Pillar No. 3.

The best we can do right now is NOT tie ourselves in knots trying to forge a sweeping agreement between American and Chinese AI companies to slow down development of their frontier models. That simply will not happen anytime soon.

We must do this, Mundie pointed out, before these increasingly powerful models ensconce themselves in the Internet and become an uncontainable threat by embedding their agents across private servers and public clouds, where they will live on as advanced persistent threats.

Which leads to Pillar No. 4. After a recent visit to China, Mundie recounted this question that he got from a Chinese official: “If a Chinese-made humanoid AI robot someday came to America, would it need a visa?” Well, you know how truth is often spoken in jest? The truth, Mundie said, is that “AI is not just a new technology. It is a new species — albeit silicon-based, not carbon-based like us. It is like a new class of immigrants who have arrived on all of our shores, in large numbers, with wholly new skills, that we will have to absorb into our societies and learn to coexist with.”

They can figure that out before a global meltdown or after one. But figure it out they will, and Mundie and I hope that process will start in Washington on Sept. 24, when President Xi Jinping and Trump meet in what will surely be remembered as the first AI superpower summit.

— The New York Times

EU chief pitches ‘associate member’ status for Canada



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The writer is EU Correspondent for AFP based in Belgium



UMBERTO BACCHI

The writer is EU Correspondent for AFP based in Belgium

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Wednesday raised the prospect of Canada becoming the 27-nation bloc’s first “associate member”, as she pitched closer cooperation on tech, defence and energy to Canadian leader Mark Carney.

Von der Leyen told the European Parliament in Strasbourg that, as democracies face a “fracture in the international rules-based system”, Brussels and Ottawa needed to pull closer together.

“I would like to work with you on opening the door for Canada to be the first associate member of the EU,” Von der Leyen told the Canadian prime minister, who was attending her annual keynote speech - drawing a standing ovation in the chamber.

Carney has been pursuing closer ties with the European Union, as both seek to pivot away from a hostile United States under President Donald Trump.

The first non-European head of government to attend the annual “State of the European Union” speech - before addressing the parliament himself the next day - his visit is meant to act as a catalyst ahead of an EU-Canada summit in Montreal next month.

Von der Leyen said it was time to move from cooperation based on trade to a broader “alliance for the future” and “bring the relationship with Canada to the highest level possible”.

“We will work on intelligent manufacturing. We will create a tech alliance. We will integrate defence industrial bases. We will make the Arctic a flagship joint project,”

she said.

She listed energy, critical minerals, batteries, AI, cyber and economic security as other fields of cooperation.

“This is a partnership not against anyone else, but for our common strength,” she said.

But both the EU and Canada have been buffeted by tariffs and territorial threats from the US and competition from China.

“In a more dangerous and divided world, Canada is forging stronger relationships with trusted partners,” Carney’s office said in a statement.

Discussions with Von der Leyen focused on areas including critical minerals, energy, defence, research and development, and advanced technologies, it added.

While EU treaties do not envision the possibility of becoming an “associate member”, the idea was first floated by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz this year vis-a-vis Ukraine.

Under that plan, which met a cold reception from a country pushing for full membership, Ukraine would have been allowed to attend the bloc’s summits and have a representative in the European Commission.

It would have also benefited from parts of the EU budget, but without full voting rights.

“We don’t really know yet what it means,” said Tobias Cremer, a centre-left European lawmaker from Germany and the main sponsor of a resolution urging stronger EU-Canada cooperation, after Von der Leyen’s “associate membership” pitch.

Canadian leader Mark Carney has been pursuing closer ties with the European Union, as both seek to pivot away from a hostile United States under President Donald Trump

But a closer alliance “inherently” made sense, he added. “Not just because we share values and history but because we share common interests, we share a strategic vision,” he said.

Under EU rules, member states have to approve any form of partnership with a third country and it was unclear how much support Von der Leyen’s proposal would receive from capitals.

Brussels and Ottawa already enjoy a considerable level of cooperation.

The CETA free-trade agreement that abolished almost all tariffs has been credited with boosting trade in goods and services by more than 80 per cent since 2016.

And this year Canada became the first non-EU country to join a flagship defence loan programme.

After holding talks with Von der Leyen Wednesday, Carney was to fly to Britain for his first meeting with Britain’s new prime minister, Andy Burnham.

He will also attend a football match between Everton and Wolverhampton before returning to Strasbourg ahead of his Thursday speech.

“We believe that power does not belong to the strongest, the richest or the loudest - but to all of us. That democracies have the freedom to choose with whom to work,” Von der Leyen said.

“We share one ocean, one set of values, one way of seeing the world. And we will now build our shared future as well,” she concluded.

INDONESIANS CHOKED BY HAZE FEEL HELPLESS

CECE KUSMANA AND DESSY SAGITA

Struggling to breathe through the acrid haze emanating from wildfires on Indonesia’s Borneo island, residents said on Wednesday they feared for their health but had little to do but wait out the foul-smelling hazard.

Indonesia, which shares Borneo with Malaysia and Brunei, is grappling with forest fires that have ravaged swathes of the island, partly caused by the El Nino climate phenomenon that has also affected other countries in Southeast Asia and beyond.

In Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan province, the thick, yellow smoke was so intense that it had paralysed the international airport over the weekend. “My eyes sting, my head hurts. Over the past week it’s been getting worse,” resident Anggita Putri said.

“While working, my chest feels tight, my head dizzy, my eyes burning. Even with this unhealthy air, we still must work,” she said.

The air quality index for Pontianak briefly exceeded 1,100 over the weekend, Anggita said - nearly four times the hazardous limit.

“I leave my child at home, so of course I have worries that go beyond just my own health. I’m also concerned about my child’s condition,” said the 28-year-old, who has a three-year-old son.

Another Pontianak resident, 35-year-old university lecturer Djunita Permata Indah, also said she was concerned for her two children, aged two and four. “The situation is quite bad. I’m worried about the children’s health. Even as an adult, I feel my head aching and dizzy because of the smoky air,” she said.

“But parents still must work, so the children are forced to keep going to daycare, where they remain exposed to the smoke that has already started to enter the house.”

The health ministry said last week that more than 113,000 cases of upper respiratory tract infections had been recorded across seven provinces since the fires began to rage early this year. Brief rainfall on Tuesday, which some residents had hoped could alleviate the risk, did little to help and only intensified the thick smoke, Djunita said.

Local authorities said they were intensifying efforts to bring the haze under control, including by water bombing and cloud seeding.

Indonesia regularly battles wildfires during the dry season, which typically runs from July to October, but the blazes this year have been particularly bad in part because the powerful El Nino - expected to be the strongest since comparable records began four decades ago.

Experts also blame climate change, decades of forest degradation and slash-and-burn land clearing practices that have changed the naturally fire-resistant landscape. — AFP

The climate crisis... are we involving the right people?

A STORY

often told in development circles concerns a health programme in Africa. Experts spent years teaching men about nutrition, hygiene and childhood disease. The information was sound. The meetings were well attended. Yet little changed.

Then someone asked a disarmingly simple question: who actually chose the food, prepared the meals, cleaned the home and cared for sick children? It was largely women. Once the programme began working with the people who controlled those daily decisions, health outcomes improved markedly. The programme had not lacked science, money or good intentions. It had been speaking to the wrong people.

Climate policies may be making the same mistake.

For three decades, the world has negotiated treaties, announced targets, enacted laws and asked companies to publish sustainability reports. The institutional architecture has become elaborate. The atmospheric result has not. UNEP estimates that existing policies still place the world on a path towards roughly 2.8°C of warming. Even full implementation of current national pledges would leave it heading towards 2.3–2.5°C.

This is not one failure but four. Our targets are insufficient. Policies do not deliver even those targets. Adaptation remains severely underfunded. And citizens are commonly treated as spectators rather than participants.

The first three failures are familiar. The fourth is less adequately understood. Governments can procure renewable electricity, regulate methane and redesign cities. Companies can decarbonise production and finance. But neither governments nor companies ultimately inhabit buildings, set thermostats, select vehicles, waste food, maintain neighbourhoods or respond to emergency warnings.



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

For three decades, the world has negotiated treaties, announced targets, enacted laws and asked companies to publish sustainability reports. The institutional architecture has become elaborate

Every climate policy eventually arrives at a household, workplace or community. Too often, it arrives there as a slogan. This does not mean transferring responsibility from major emitters to ordinary people. Individuals cannot decarbonise systems they do not control. The task is to make the cleaner decision available, affordable and normal. The potential is considerable.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that demand-side measures — including better infrastructure, technology and service provision as well as behavioural change — could reduce emissions in end-use sectors by 40–70 per cent by 2050. Public willingness is not absent either. A major UNDP survey found that four out of five people want stronger government climate action.

The obstacle is the distance between willingness and agency.

That distance is especially consequential in the Arab region. It is warming at roughly twice the global average, while 15 of the world’s 20 most water-scarce countries are located there. Yet climate governance remains highly centralised. National strategies proliferate, while municipalities and communities — the institutions and people closest to heat, flooding, water use and waste — often lack money, information or authority. The GCC adds a particular paradox. Its states possess capital, administrative capacity and some of the world’s best solar resources. Renewable-energy and hydrogen projects are advancing. Yet cheap energy, desalinated water, private-car dependence, extensive cooling and low-density urban development continue to shape daily consumption. We are building the hardware of transition without fully developing its social operating system.

Oman has made important commitments: a 2050 net-zero objective, a stronger national contribution and strategies covering energy transition, adaptation and

spatial development. The central question is no longer whether Oman has a climate vision. It is whether that vision governs ordinary decisions.

That requires more than another campaign. Oman should translate national goals into sectoral carbon budgets and annual delivery milestones. Every major public investment should be screened for climate risk. Ministries and state-owned enterprises should report outcomes, not activities: emissions avoided, buildings retrofitted, water saved and communities protected — not workshops held or policies published.

Citizens must then be given practical means to participate. Smart metres should show households how their energy and water use compares. Efficient cooling, insulation, rooftop solar and cleaner vehicles should be supported through targeted rebates and green finance. Subsidy reform, where necessary, should protect vulnerable households transparently. Governors should receive resources for locally designed resilience projects. Women, young people, expatriate residents and frontline workers should help design the measures they are expected to implement. The financial system has a parallel role. Disclosure and taxonomies matter, but climate finance must ultimately reach homes, small businesses, infrastructure and communities. Otherwise, sustainable finance risks becoming another sophisticated conversation conducted above the people expected to deliver the transition. An individual is not merely a consumer. He or she is also a citizen, employee, investor, neighbour and first responder. Climate policy that recognises only the consumer misses most of the person. The world has not been talking to entirely the wrong institutions.

Governments and corporations remain indispensable. But we have spoken to them as though declarations at the top automatically become transformation below.

SPORTS

YOUNG TALENT



Al Mouj Muscat signed the sponsorship agreement with the Oman Football Association.

AL MOUJ MUSCAT SUPPORTS OMAN U15 FOR WORLD CUP

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman's premier destination for major sporting and lifestyle events, has announced its sponsorship of the Oman U15 national football team as they prepare to represent Oman at the upcoming U15 World Cup.

The partnership with the Oman Football Association (OFA) reflects a shared commitment to investing in young Omani talent and creating opportunities that contribute to the long-term development of national sport.

The 14-player national squad will represent Oman at the inaugural Fifa U15 World Cup 2026 in Azerbaijan, beginning on October 22. The milestone represents a significant step forward for Omani youth football, giving some of the country's most promising young players the opportunity to test themselves internationally and gain valuable experience at a formative stage in their development.

Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamood al Busaidi, OFA Chairman, said: "Oman's appearance at a U15 World Cup is an important step in the development of our young players and our ambitions for Omani football. Building strong pathways for emerging talent requires partners who recognise the importance of investing at an early stage. Al Mouj Muscat's support demonstrates the value of organisations working alongside the OFA to help shape the future of the game."

Ahmed al Massan, Acting CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said: "The strength of any nation's sporting future depends on how effectively we turn young talent into opportunity. That means giving the next generation the exposure, experience and confidence to fulfil their potential and broaden their sense of what is possible. At Al Mouj Muscat, we see sport as a powerful investment in Oman's human potential, building ambition, strengthening communities and inspiring young people to pursue excellence. We are proud to play our part in creating those opportunities for Omani talent."

The sponsorship extends Al Mouj Muscat's longstanding role in using sport as a platform for community participation, national pride and positive social impact.

Zakariya takes Merc 2 lead after RC2 second in Rally of Lebanon

SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Omani rally driver Zakariya al Amri led the Merc2 section after finishing second in RC2 class in the Rally of Lebanon, the fourth round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc). The 48th Rally of Lebanon was held on September 11-13, in and around Jounieh and the areas north and east of Beirut. In the championship's only all-tarmac event, Zakariya al Amri and his co-driver Mohammed al Mazroui, driving a Subaru Impreza (N14) earned more points to solidify his lead in the section. Zakariya now leads the Merc 2 section of the championship with two rounds remaining in Cyprus and Saudi Arabia.



Omani rally driver Zakariya al Amri and co-driver Mohammed al Mazroui, driving a Subaru Impreza (N14) earned more points to solidify his lead in the section.

Oman sailors to undergo intense camp in Japan

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

OMAN Sail's preparations for the 2026 Asian Games are entering a decisive phase, with the national sailing team travelling to Japan for an intensive eight-day training camp designed not only to sharpen its competitive readiness but also to accelerate the development of a new generation of Omani sailors.

The four-member squad will train in Japan from September 16 to 24 ahead of the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, where Oman will be represented in the 49er and 29er classes under the umbrella of the Oman Olympic Committee.

The team comprises the established 49er pairing of Ahmed bin Ghareeb al Hasani and Waleed bin Issa al Kindi, together with the emerging 29er duo of Feras bin Haitham al Nabhani and Tamim bin Sulieyman al Balushi. The squad will be led by Head Coach Performance and Team Lead Hashim bin Hamad al Rashdi, with 29er Team Coach Fabrice Jaunet also joining the camp.

The Japanese camp represents an important stage in Oman Sail's broader pathway from youth development to high-performance sailing, while also providing the team with an opportunity to gain experience ahead of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

Abdulaziz bin Salim al Shidi, Acting Sailing Director at Oman Sail, said developing a structured pathway for Omani sailors has remained central to the organisation's work.

"Developing a clear, structured sailing pathway has been at the very core of Oman Sail's mission since our inception. Our focus is on nurturing young Omani talent from grassroots youth programmes, which offer equal opportunities to learn and excel, and systematically guiding them through each stage of competitive growth into high-performance sailors," Al Shidi said. "Seeing our emerging 29er sailors, Feras al Nabhani and Tamim al Balushi, step up alongside our established 49er duo, Ahmed al Hasani and Waleed al Kindi, demonstrates the true strength and success of this pathway."



Ahmed al Hasani and Waleed al Kindi competing in a race.



ABDULAZIZ BIN SALIM AL SHIDI
Acting Sailing Director at Oman Sail.

Al Shidi added that competing at the Asian Games represents a significant moment for Oman Sail and its athletes.

"Representing the Oman National Sailing Team under the umbrella of the OOC at a major continental event like the Asian Games is a moment of immense pride for all of us. It reflects not only the years of hard work, discipline, and dedication shown by our sailors and coaching staff, but also our ongoing commitment to rekindling Oman's maritime heritage and showcasing our sporting excellence on the global stage," he said.

"As the team embarks on this crucial training camp in Japan, we are confident in their preparation and know they will represent the nation with determination and pride. The LA28 Olympic Games are less than two years away now and every regatta until the qualification event is a chance to gain more experience, tactical and technical knowhow and improve to be in position to achieve this goal and be at the start line in Los Angeles."

The 49er pairing will use the camp to further develop its

understanding and boat speed. Waleed al Kindi said training in Japanese waters would provide valuable race-specific experience.

"Representing our nation at the Asian Games under the Oman Olympic Committee is an incredible honour. Ahmed and I have been putting in continuous work to build a solid understanding and maximise our boat speed in the 49er," Waleed said.

"Training on Japanese waters alongside Coach Fabrice and the 29er team gives us the ideal environment to fine-tune our starting lines and boat handling under match-like conditions."

For the younger 29er sailors, the camp is another step in their progression towards the senior level. "Stepping up to represent Oman on the continental stage is a huge milestone for us. Feras and I are eager to make the most of every hour on the water during this training camp in Japan," Tamim al Balushi said.

The team's Asian Games campaign is supported by Gold Partner EL B&T, whose Group Chairman Dr John (Young III) Kim expressed the company's pride in supporting the Omani sailors.

LARGEST EDITION



The Sultanate of Oman has entered teams in both sections of the biennial championship, which runs until September 27.

10 OMANI PLAYERS
BEGIN CAMPAIGN IN
CHESS OLYMPIAD

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Ten Omani players began their campaign at the 46th Fide Chess Olympiad in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on Wednesday, as the largest edition in the history of the sport's premier team event got under way. The Sultanate of Oman has entered teams in both sections of the biennial championship, which runs until September 27 at the Silk Road International Exhibition Centre — the first Olympiad ever staged in Central Asia. The Open team is led on top board by FM Salim al Amri (rated 1,951), alongside Mohammed al Saidi, Mohammed al Riyami, CM Mana al Kathiri and Mahad al Amri, with Musallam al Wadhahi as captain. The women's team comprises Anat al Aisae on board one, Yomna al Nadabi, Kawthar al Maamari, Muna al Mughalzwi and Maryam al Balushi, captained by Basma al Sudairi.

Competing under the Oman Chess Committee, the delegation faces a field of unprecedented scale, with more than 200 nations represented across the open and women's sections — surpassing the record set in Budapest in 2024. Oman's Open team is seeded 164th of 208 and the women 142nd, meaning the Swiss-system format will pit them against grandmasters and international masters in the early rounds.

Al Wadhahi said the squads are targeting rating gains and international titles, including FM, CM and WFM norms that can be earned through Olympiad performance, describing the event as a chance to test Omani players against the world's leading chess schools while inspiring a new generation at home.

Preparation for Samarkand included intensive training camps, online analytical sessions and daily tactical work of four to six hours, with several members of the delegation — particularly in the women's team — making their first appearance at the sport's biggest stage. After the 11-round event, the players turn to the Asian indoor games, Arab championships and the domestic calendar.

The Olympiad has drawn nearly 2,000 players to Samarkand, with defending double champions India, top seeds the United States and hosts Uzbekistan among the favourites for team gold.



RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

The Oman Marine Sports Committee (OMSC) and Al Sifah Development Tourism Company have signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at strengthening cooperation in marine sports and supporting events that bring together sporting, community and tourism activities. The agreement establishes a framework for cooperation between the two sides in developing marine-related activities, enhancing the organisation of events and supporting initiatives that can contribute to the promotion of Al Sifah as a tourism destination. The partnership will also focus on strengthening

the administrative and organisational aspects of the fishing event organised by Al Sifah Development Tourism Company, while highlighting marine activities and providing opportunities for Omani personnel involved in the planning and management of such events. Under the memorandum, Al Sifah Development Tourism Company may provide support for one of the OMSC's programmes or activities related to marine sports during the validity of the agreement. The value of the support and the arrangements for providing it will be determined through separate agreements or implementation letters to be concluded between the two parties. The committee will, in



The partnership comes as part of efforts to strengthen cooperation between Oman's sports and tourism institutions.

turn, provide organisational, logistical and supervisory assistance for the fishing event organised by the company, subject to its available resources and responsibilities, as well as arrangements agreed by both sides. Shaikh Ali bin Said Bait Fadhel, OMSC Chairman, described the agreement as

an important step towards strengthening cooperation with the tourism sector and supporting marine events in Oman. BOOSTING MARINE EVENTS He said the partnership would provide an opportunity to develop and organise marine activities while making greater use of Omani expertise

and national personnel working in the field. "The signing of this memorandum represents an important step in strengthening cooperation with the tourism sector and supporting marine events," Shaikh Ali said. "Through this partnership, we will work to provide organisational, logistical and supervisory support for the agreed activities, in line with the committee's capabilities and responsibilities." Mohammed Abdulaziz, Group Chief Financial Officer at Al Sifah Development Tourism Company, said the agreement reflected the company's commitment to working with organisations involved in marine sports and supporting events that combine sporting, community

and tourism elements. He stressed the importance of bringing together the expertise and capabilities of both organisations to ensure the successful delivery of marine events hosted and organised by the company. "Cooperation with the Oman Marine Sports Committee will help strengthen the organisational and supervisory aspects of our events," Mohammed said. "It will also enhance their profile in a manner that reflects the tourism importance of Al Sifah as a destination." The partnership comes as part of efforts to strengthen cooperation between Oman's sports and tourism institutions and support initiatives that can contribute to the growth of tourism-related activities.



Oman are placed in Group C alongside the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan.

Oman target group top spot
in Asian Cup beach soccer

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

OMAN'S NATIONAL beach soccer team will shift focus from the draw to preparation as the Beach Red Warriors gear up for the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2026, scheduled to be held in Phang Nga from November 18 to 28.

The draw, conducted at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur on September 10, placed Oman in Group C alongside the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan. While the draw was announced last week, the focus has now moved to Oman's build-up programme and the team's ambition to secure another Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup appearance.

Abdullah al Saadi, manager of the national beach soccer team, described the group as a tough one, especially with two Gulf rivals in the same pool.

"It is a difficult group. We will face the UAE and Saudi Arabia, in addition to Uzbekistan, who remain the unknown side in this group," Al Saadi said. "Our ambition is to repeat the previous achievements of Oman beach soccer and, hopefully, qualify for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup for the sixth time."

Oman enter the tournament as one of Asia's leading beach soccer teams. The Sultanate of Oman is currently ranked 10th in the world, third in Asia behind Iran and Japan, and first among Arab teams in the latest Beach Soccer Worldwide ranking. The competition will also serve as the



Asian qualifying pathway for the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2027, with only three spots available for the continent. That raises the importance of every match, particularly in a group that includes the UAE, ranked 11th globally, and a fast-improving Saudi side, ranked 17th. Al Saadi said Saudi Arabia's recent progress makes the group even more challenging. "We saw the development of the Saudi team in the past period. They were strong competitors at the Sanya Beach Games in April," he said. He added that Oman's first target will be to finish top of the group in order to avoid a difficult early clash with defending champions Iran. "We have to work hard to

top the group first. It is very important to avoid facing Iran in the quarterfinals," he said.

INTERNAL, OVERSEAS CAMPS Oman's preparation plan will begin with an internal camp from October 6 to 12, followed by an overseas camp in Belarus from October 13 to 19. During the Belarus camp, Oman are expected to take part in a friendly tournament featuring Belarus and the UAE, with the national team set to play two friendly matches.

After returning from Belarus, the team will continue with further internal camps in Muscat, with plans to host another national team for additional warm-up matches. Oman are then scheduled to travel to Thailand on November 12 for a final camp in the host country before the tournament kicks off on November 18.

The top two teams from each of the three groups, along with the two best third-placed teams, will advance to the quarterfinals. Oman reached the final of the 2025 AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup in Thailand before losing to Iran, securing their best result in the tournament since winning the continental title in 2015. The team also reached the semifinals in 2019 and 2023, underlining its consistency among Asia's elite.

The Beach Red Warriors also claimed silver at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, earlier this year, while Saudi Arabia took bronze and Iran won gold. Those results add further weight to Group C, where Oman will need to be at their best from the opening match.

SPORTS

ROUND-ROBIN LEAGUE



The OHA has also allocated trophies, medals and financial prizes for the top three teams.

12 CLUBS SET FOR OMAN JUNIOR HANDBALL LEAGUE

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

The Oman Handball Association’s (OHA) Competitions Committee has announced the fixtures, regulations and competition rules for the 2026-27 Junior Handball League, with 12 clubs set to compete in the tournament for players born in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

The participating clubs are Nizwa, Seeb, Muscat, Saham, Oman Club, Al Rustaq, Al Ittihad, Masirah, Majees, Al Amerat, Ibri and Al Khabourah. They have been divided into two groups of six teams each.

Group A comprises Muscat, Nizwa, Masirah, Al Amerat, Ibri and Al Ittihad, while Group B features Seeb, Oman Club, Majees, Al Khabourah, Saham and Al Rustaq.

The league will get under way on September 25 with six matches on the opening day, three in each group.

In Group A, Al Ittihad will face Nizwa at 4 pm at the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The same venue will then host the match between Muscat and Ibri at 6 pm. The third Group A fixture will see Al Amerat take on Masirah at 4 pm at the indoor hall of Sur Sports Complex.

Three matches are also scheduled in Group B. Saham will meet Seeb at 4 pm at Al Khabourah Club’s indoor hall, followed by the encounter between Al Khabourah and Majees at 6 pm at the same venue. Al Rustaq will host Oman Club at 4 pm at the indoor hall of Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

Under the competition format, the six teams in each group will play a single round-robin league, with points determining the standings. The top two teams from each group will advance to the second round.

In the second round, the Group A winners will meet the Group B runners-up over two matches, while the Group B winners will face the Group A runners-up in another two-match tie.

If the two teams are level on points and goal difference after the two matches, the winner will be decided directly by a penalty shoot-out, without extra time.

The winners of the two second-round ties will advance to the final to determine the league champions, while the losing teams will meet in a third-place play-off.

FINANCIAL PRIZES

The OHA has also allocated trophies, medals and financial prizes for the top three teams.

The champions will receive a commemorative shield or cup, 28 gold medals and a financial prize. The runners-up will be awarded 28 silver medals and a financial prize, while the third-placed team will receive 28 bronze medals and a financial prize.

The competition is expected to provide young players with valuable competitive experience while supporting the development of the next generation of Omani indoor handball talent.



The winners of the two second-round ties will advance to the final to determine the league champions.



HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, OOC Chairman, said greater attention to children and young people was essential because they represent an important foundation for the future.

OOC steps up efforts to broaden sporting base

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

BUILDING a sporting generation in Oman is not limited to organising competitions or identifying talented athletes. It begins much earlier, by encouraging children and young people to take part in sports, remain active and develop their skills over time.

This approach is becoming an important part of the Oman Olympic Committee’s (OOC) efforts to broaden the country’s sporting base and make physical activity a more consistent part of everyday life.

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, OOC Chairman, said greater attention to children and young people was essential because they represent an important foundation for the future. “We place great importance on encouraging young people and children to take an interest in sport, participate in different disciplines, continue practising them and develop their skills so they can reach the required levels. We hope such sports activities and programmes will continue in the coming period,” HH Sayyid Azzan said.

“The emphasis on continuity is significant. A child’s first experience with a sport can become the starting point for discovering a new interest, while regular participation and structured development can gradually create a pathway towards competitive sport.

“Introducing children to a variety of disciplines also gives them the opportunity to discover activities that match their interests and abilities, rather than limiting them to one sport at an early age. Such exposure can help widen the pool from which sports organisations can identify promising talent.



The OOC chief reinforced its commitment to continuing initiatives that contribute to building a sporting culture across society.

For sports associations, clubs and committees, community-based activities can therefore serve as an additional platform for reaching children who may not yet be involved in organised sport. Direct interaction with coaches and athletes can help young participants understand the opportunities available to them and encourage those with an interest to continue training.”

He added: “The family also has an important role in this process. Encouraging children to remain physically active is not only about competition or sporting results, but about developing habits that can continue through different stages of life. When physical activity becomes part of family and community life, maintaining that habit can become easier.

A broader participation base can also strengthen the development of high-level sport. A larger pool of young people participating in different disciplines creates more opportunities for talent to emerge

and subsequently progress through clubs, associations and specialised training programmes.

The wide range of sports presented during Olympic Day provided an example of how community events can introduce children to disciplines they may not normally encounter. Such occasions can help sports organisations establish direct links with the next generation while presenting clear pathways for those interested in pursuing a particular discipline.”

STRONG COMMUNITY TURNOUT

The OOC chief said the strong community turnout was an important indicator for the Oman Olympic Committee and reinforced its commitment to continuing initiatives that promote physical activity and contribute to building a sporting culture across society.

He also stressed that sports and physical activity are fundamental to maintaining good health and a balanced lifestyle, underlining the importance of programmes that reach people beyond the traditional sporting environment.

In this context, community events can become a link between children, families, sports federations and clubs. For some participants, the journey may begin with a simple introduction to a sport, develop into regular practice and eventually lead to competitive participation.

The broader objective is therefore not simply to produce athletes, but to establish a wider culture of participation in which sport becomes a familiar and sustained part of community life. For Oman’s long-term sporting development, the process begins not necessarily with medals and championships, but with creating a strong grassroots foundation and giving children and young people the opportunity to discover, practise and develop their sporting potential.

Al Rawahi in high spirits for Jordan National Rally

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Omani rally champion Abdullah al Rawahi enters the fifth round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc) at the Jordan National Rally, taking place at the Dead Sea on Friday.

Al Rawahi is in high spirits after finishing the previous edition in first place alongside his Jordanian co-driver Atta al Hamoud in Škoda Fabia R5. Al Rawahi is working to become increasingly used to the car through such competitions.



Abdullah al Rawahi with this Jordanian co-driver Atta al Hamoud in Škoda Fabia R5 had claimed the top podium last time in Jordan.

Abdullah had been unable to participate in the 2026 Lebanon International Rally due to security concerns in the region, and chose to compete in the Jordan National Rally instead to gain more experience with the new car, ensuring it is technically tailored to the driver’s needs, as well as achieving the necessary dynamics and balance for upcoming rallies. This will help secure strong and impressive results in future races and compensation for his absence from the Lebanon International Rally.

Speaking about his participation in the Jordan National Rally, Al Rawahi emphasised that such events are important for him to get behind the wheel from time to time so he can identify the car’s strengths and make the necessary adjustments after each race — especially since the car is new, has not competed in many races this year, and requires continuous development and proper setup for each race. He also hopes to win the title in this round as well, just as he did in the previous one.

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
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BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$132.09
BRENT \$108.16
LIGHT \$104.63



SHORT TAKES



Oil prices had settled more than \$3 higher in the previous session.

OMAN CRUDE RISES TO \$132.09 PER BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude oil for November delivery rose \$3.61 to \$132.09 per barrel on Wednesday, compared with \$128.48 in the previous session.

The monthly average price of Oman crude for September delivery stood at \$76.36 per barrel, down \$2.73 from the August delivery price.

International oil prices, meanwhile, edged lower after reports that Saudi Arabia was offering additional cargoes through the Sultanate of Oman eased concerns over the scale of supply disruptions in the Middle East. Brent crude futures fell 59 cents, or 0.54 per cent, to \$108.16 a barrel by 09:26 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude declined \$1.20, or 1.13 per cent, to \$104.63.

Oil prices had settled more than \$3 higher in the previous session after shipping industry sources said crude loadings at Saudi Arabia's Red Sea export terminal of Yanbu had been suspended.

Riyadh had also cancelled some cargo deliveries to European customers, raising fears that disruption to the critical export route could persist for several weeks. However, Saudi Arabia is offering additional crude cargoes to Asian refiners through ship-to-ship transfers off Sohar Port after drone attacks damaged a key pipeline supplying its Red Sea facilities, according to people familiar with the matter.

"News around Saudi Arabia exporting from the Gulf suggests concerns that the disruption could be larger are easing", UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo said. — Agencies

Dhofar forum puts jobs, AI at centre of disability inclusion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 16

Arab and Gulf officials called on Wednesday for stronger employment, entrepreneurship and technology-driven opportunities for people with disabilities, arguing that economic participation should become a central measure of progress towards independent living.

The call came at the opening of the fourth edition of the Living Independently Initiative for Persons with Disabilities in Dhofar, where artificial intelligence, assistive technologies, workplace inclusion and private-sector participation emerged as key themes.

The two-day gathering, held on September 16 and 17, brings together government officials, Arab and international organisations, businesses, innovators and people with disabilities. Its programme covers employment, entrepreneurship, digital accessibility, data security and the use of technology to support greater independence.

The opening was held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs, said artificial intelligence and advanced technologies were becoming essential tools for widening participation in society and the knowledge economy.

He said Oman's approach, within Oman Vision 2040, placed people at the centre of development and sought to move independent living beyond the

Arab and GCC officials call for stronger employment pathways, entrepreneurship and digital accessibility as disability policy shifts towards economic participation



The fourth edition of the Living Independently Initiative for Persons with Disabilities in Dhofar opened under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. (Picture credit: Almuhallab Mohammed al Maamari)

provision of conventional services. "People with disabilities are not merely the subject of this initiative; they are its partners, its compass and the measure by which the value of everything we discuss and seek to achieve should be judged", Al Harthy said. He called for independent living to become a principle in policymaking, a standard for evaluating services and a direction for innovation.

EMPLOYMENT AS ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION
Wafa Bani Mustafa, Jordan's Minister of Social Development and Chair of the 45th Session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, placed economic empowerment at the centre of the debate. She said



Existing transport infrastructure and alternative land routes helped cushion the disruption: CBO

Imports surged 91.4 per cent month-on-month, while non-oil exports rose 11.1 per cent and re-exports jumped 225.9 per cent, signalling the resumption of activity and adjustment to regional disruptions.

The CBO said existing transport infrastructure and alternative land routes helped cushion the disruption. Land-based non-oil exports increased to RO 182 million in April from RO 159.9 million in March, while seaborne imports rebounded to RO 847.9 million from RO 458 million. Airborne imports jumped to RO 510.6 million from RO 144.8 million, partly reflecting delayed shipments and trade rerouting.

Maritime activity also remained operational. IMF PortWatch data cited by the CBO showed 219 ships called at Omani ports in March, rising to 344 in April, including container vessels and tankers.

Commercial aviation was harder hit. Passenger arrivals and departures totalled 727,669 in April, down 27.2 per cent from

a year earlier. Elevated jet-fuel prices also raised airline operating costs and ticket prices, potentially weighing on inbound tourism. Visitor numbers fell 5.2 per cent year-on-year in March, although this was substantially milder than the 46.6 per cent contraction in traffic carried by Middle East airlines.

Looking ahead, the CBO cautioned that uncertainty remained elevated, particularly over global supply disruptions, commodity prices and product availability. Yet Oman's infrastructure and trade networks had mitigated some immediate effects, while regional cargo flows appeared to be shifting towards Omani ports, notably Salalah and Suhar, amidst continuing logistical adjustments.

with disabilities, she said, should be regarded not only as users of technology, but as participants in its design, innovators and contributors to the digital economy.

Arab countries had made progress in disability-related legislation and policy, she said, but the next challenge was implementation and measurable outcomes. "We must move from measuring what we provide to measuring what actually changes in people's lives", she said.

PRIVATE SECTOR AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Speaking on behalf of the League of Arab States, Minister Plenipotentiary Tarek Nabil al Nabulsi said the initiative was placing greater emphasis on technology, innovation, artificial intelligence, economic empowerment and social responsibility.

He highlighted the potential role of the private sector and the Union of Arab Chambers in supporting entrepreneurship and business initiatives involving people with disabilities.

The Executive Bureau of the GCC Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs also called for stronger Gulf coordination on employment, rehabilitation, digital accessibility and social protection.

Its address stressed the importance of building clearer pathways from rehabilitation and skills development into employment and entrepreneurship, while strengthening cooperation between governments, businesses and civil society.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Both models are further supported by an 8-year, unlimited-kilometre battery warranty and a 6-year or 150,000 km vehicle warranty.

DENZA OMAN INTRODUCES THE 2027 B5 AND B8

MUSCAT: Own the extraordinary — that’s the promise behind Denza Oman’s introduction of the 2027 B5 and B8, its flagship lineup now available to customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

The brand’s exclusive new campaign is designed to enhance the value and convenience of owning these high-performance luxury hybrids, headlined by a complimentary 2 months instalment benefit.

Customers who choose to finance their vehicle through Oman Arab Bank will be eligible for 2 months of complimentary instalment payments, subject to the bank’s sole discretion on approval.

In addition to this centrepiece offer, every qualifying purchase of the 2027 B5 or B8 includes one year of free insurance coverage through Liva Insurance, a free scheduled service package and a complimentary charger.

Both models are further supported by an 8-year, unlimited-kilometre battery warranty and a 6-year or 150,000 km vehicle warranty, whichever occurs first, reinforcing Denza’s commitment to long-term ownership confidence.

THE 2027 DENZA B5: HYBRID OFF-ROAD CAPABILITY, REFINED

The 2027 Denza B5 is built on the DMO (Dual Mode Off-road) platform, delivering 570 HP and 760 Nm of torque, with 0–100 km/h acceleration achieved in 4.8 seconds and a combined driving range of over 780 km.

The vehicle is equipped with DiSUS-P intelligent active hydraulic suspension and electrically actuated front and rear differential locks, complemented by Cell-to-Chassis (CTC) technology that integrates the Blade Battery into a high-strength steel frame capable of withstanding up to 12 tons of pressure.

The interior features Nappa leather massage seats, a 14-speaker Devialet audio system and a 15.6-inch infotainment display, offering a refined cabin experience that contrasts with the vehicle’s rugged exterior capability.

THE 2027 DENZA B8: FLAGSHIP LUXURY FOR EVERY JOURNEY

The 2027 Denza B8 continues to define the flagship luxury SUV segment in Oman. A dual-motor all-wheel-drive system paired with a 2.0-litre turbo petrol engine produces 603 hp and 760 Nm of torque, enabling 0–100 km/h acceleration in 4.8 seconds and a combined range of up to 825 km.

The exterior is distinguished by an upright grille, matrix LED headlamps, a 2,920 mm wheelbase and 20-inch alloy wheels, while dedicated terrain modes for mud, sand and snow extend its capability beyond the city.

Bank Muscat and Dhofar Insurance sign pact

REINFORCING its commitment to offering its valued customers the best digital banking services and solutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of new insurance solutions in cooperation with Dhofar Insurance Company, one of the Sultanate of Oman’s leading insurers, during the official signing ceremony held recently at Bank muscat’s Head Office.

The agreement was signed by Ahmed Faqir al Bulushi, DCEO – Banking at Bank Muscat; and Sunil Kohli, CEO of DIC, with the presence of senior officials from both parties. As part of the agreement, Bank Muscat has launched the travel insurance solution through its Internet Banking and Mobile Banking (IBMB) channels, as well as a new range of medical insurance solutions for individuals and domestic workers.

The new travel insurance service enables customers to obtain comprehensive travel insurance coverage quickly and conveniently, without the need to visit a branch. Bank Muscat customers can now purchase their travel insurance directly through the Bank’s digital platforms with ease, reflecting the Bank’s ongoing commitment to anticipating customer expectations and delivering services that meet their needs wherever they are.

The service also provides customers with financial protection and immediate assistance in the event of unforeseen circumstances before or during their trips.

The policy covers medical emergencies that travellers may face during their journey, as well as trip cancellation. Coverage also extends to compensation for lost baggage and personal accidents that may occur while travelling, in addition to emergency evacuation, giving customers complete peace of mind and protection throughout



The agreement was signed by Ahmed Faqir al Bulushi, DCEO – Banking at Bank Muscat; and Sunil Kohli, CEO of DIC, with the presence of senior officials from both parties.

their journey.

The Bank offers three tiers of travel insurance plans to suit customers’ varying needs and travel destinations.

The Platinum plan provides worldwide coverage, while the Gold and Silver Plans cover all countries worldwide except the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan. Customers can now select the plan best suited to their destination and the nature of their trip.

On the individual health and domestic helper health insurance solutions, the product is designed to address the needs of different segments of society, including individuals and domestic workers, at competitive rates and accessible terms.

The Individual Health Insurance plan offers a comprehensive local and

international medical network, covering both in-patient treatment and out-patient care, at competitive premiums.

The plan is available across three flexible coverage packages to suit different needs: the Green package, offering comprehensive coverage with an annual limit of up to RO 5,000; the Silver package, providing extensive services with an annual limit of up to RO 10,000; and the Gold package, delivering the highest level of care with an annual limit of up to RO 15,000.

The Domestic Worker Health Insurance plan provides an extensive, approved medical network, with comprehensive in-patient coverage of up to RO 4,000 over two years, in addition to out-patient services, all for an attractive premium covering a full two-year period.

BankDhofar showcases corporate banking solutions

MUSCAT: BankDhofar organised a Corporate and Institutional Banking Forum in Dhofar Governorate, attended by senior bank officials and members of the executive management, as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen engagement with the business community.

The forum aimed to deepen relationships with the bank’s corporate and institutional customers and showcase the latest banking products and services designed to support their operations and growth ambitions.

It also provided an opportunity to gain deeper insights into customers’



The forum aimed to deepen relationships with the bank’s corporate and institutional customer.

evolving needs and requirements in today’s fast-paced business environment, while highlighting solutions

that enable them to manage their financial operations with greater ease, efficiency and security. During the forum,

Mohammed bin Issa al Balushi, Head of Digital Channels at BankDhofar, delivered a presentation highlighting the bank’s latest innovations and digital solutions for corporate and institutional customers.

He emphasised that BankDhofar continues to invest in advanced technologies and smart banking services aimed at enhancing customer experience and improving operational efficiency.

Al Balushi noted that, in recent years, the bank has launched a range of advanced digital initiatives, systems and platforms characterised by flexibility and ease of use.

Sarooj Construction marks 50 years of building Oman’s infrastructure

MUSCAT: Sarooj Construction Company (SCC) is marking fifty years of work across Oman, a milestone that traces back to the company’s founding in 1976 and its restructuring in 2006 into the business it is today: a portfolio exceeding RO 500 million and a workforce of more than 4,000 professionals.

The company took its name and its founding spirit from sarooj, the traditional Omani building material long valued for standing up to time and the elements.

Over five decades, that inspiration has carried the business from its early road and earthworks contracts into one of Oman’s leading engineering and construction firms, now active across five core sectors: oil and gas, roads, marine



Sarooj has invested more than RO 125 million in Oman’s In-Country Value programme.

works, civil and building works, and utilities, alongside a growing practice in innovative solutions built around AI assisted design, drone

surveying and low emission fleet technology. Sarooj’s project history includes Oman’s first vehicular tunnel and first marine lighthouse,

the Musandam Gas Treatment Plant and Musandam Independent Power Project, the Nimr Water Treatment Plant, Shinas Port and early infrastructure tied to Al Mouj Muscat and Barr Al Jissah.

Its roads division alone has delivered close to five decades of national highways, airport works and urban roads across the Sultanate of Oman. That pipeline continues today, with Sarooj delivering some of Oman’s most significant infrastructure projects.

Sarooj has been awarded contracts for the 120 kilometre Adam to Thamrait road duplication and the Jabal Shams mountain road, while a contract covers design and construction of the roughly 70 kilometre Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road linking Dibba, Lima and

Khasab, targeted for completion in 2027.

A further package covers the main roads, tunnels and bridges of Sultan Haitham City’s fourth development package. Beyond construction, Sarooj has invested more than RO 125 million in Oman’s In-Country Value programme, helping bring new industries, technologies and factories to the Sultanate of Oman from Musandam to Salalah and has contributed more than RO 3.5 million to community initiatives, including scholarships, sponsorships and a long running partnership with Dar Al Atta’a.

The company holds ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 certifications and continues to trial hydrogen fuel cell trucks and solar hybrid power systems on its sites.

SHORTTAKES

Oman’s strategic positioning can help US-India trade links with Muscat



REBECCA OLSON
CEO of AmCham Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Companies wishing to take advantage of the FTA between the Sultanate of Oman and the US and of the CEPA between Oman and India could set up genuine value-added manufacturing and processing facilities

in Oman and then use the country as a strategic gateway to the vast US market, according to Rebecca Olson, CEO of AmCham Oman, the erstwhile Oman American Business Council. Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of an INMECC Oman Chapter session titled “Oman: The Bridge Between India and America” in Muscat, she pointed out that Oman is the only GCC country that benefits from both the India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and the US–Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

“Oman can act as a ‘bridge’ as Indian firms manufacture/value-add in Oman under CEPA benefits, then export duty-free to the US under the US-Oman FTA, provided they meet origin rules. A plethora of advantages in Oman’s special economic zones and free zones at Suhar, Al Duqm and Salalah such as foreign ownership, customs benefits, tax incentives and logistics will be available to those who do business”, said Olson who is tasked with improving trade and bilateral relations and with helping companies seize opportunities from the US-Oman FTA.

She listed sectors with opportunities, such as solar energy, metals, plastics, fertilisers, food processing, pharmaceuticals, textiles, fisheries and light manufacturing.

“Duty-free access under the US–Oman FTA requires genuine manufacturing or substantial value addition in Oman, with rules of origin strictly followed”, she advised investors to evaluate product eligibility, landed costs, location advantages and compliance before setting up.

She described the US-Oman FTA as “one of only four such agreements in the entire MENA region” and assured that AmCham would support businesses with market-entry guidance, export-readiness assessments, buyer introductions, certification help and access to US business networks.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

Oman’s Islamic banking industry should expand financing to small and medium enterprises and accelerate digital services as increasingly sophisticated customers demand speed, transparency and convenience alongside Sharia compliance, industry experts said.

Islamic banking has expanded rapidly since its introduction in the Sultanate of Oman in 2012, with its share of total banking-sector assets rising from around 17 per cent two to three years ago to more than 20 per cent, or about RO 9 billion, Ali Hassan Moosa, Financial Adviser at the Ministry of Finance, said.

Speaking at the IFN Oman Forum 2026 roundtable on Islamic banking for growth, Moosa said the industry



Islamic banking has expanded rapidly since its introduction in the Sultanate of Oman in 2012.

had also recorded significant development beyond traditional bank financing, including sukuk issuances and new financial products and services.

He cited a Ministry of Finance sukuk issuance in June worth RO

100 million, with a re-issue option of RO 120 million. The five-year Ijarah sukuk offered a yield of more than 4.2 per cent.

Moosa identified SME financing as one of the biggest opportunities for Islamic banks to deepen their contribution to Oman’s economic diversification.

More than 60 per cent of Islamic bank financing currently goes to corporates and over 30 per cent to households, primarily housing, while SMEs account for only about 3 per cent, he said.

“That’s really a challenge and I think it’s a great opportunity for Islamic banks to focus on that”, Moosa said.

Islamic banks could use Musharaka, an equity partnership structure, to support SMEs, subject to regulatory approval, while moving beyond traditional collateral-

PRICE PRESSURES

UK inflation rises to five-month high



UK inflation accelerated to a five-month high of 3.1 per cent in August from 2.9 per cent in July, driven partly by rising energy costs.

Core inflation remained unchanged at 2.6 per cent for a fourth consecutive month, while services inflation held at 3.4 per cent. The Bank of England is expected to keep interest rates unchanged despite mounting price pressures. — Reuters

MONETARY TIGHTENING

BOJ poised for 31-year rate high



The Bank of Japan is expected to raise interest rates to a 31-year high, continuing its shift away from decades of ultra-low borrowing costs.

The anticipated increase comes as soaring oil prices intensify inflation pressures. Markets have largely priced in the move and are focusing on Governor Kazuo Ueda’s signals regarding the timing and pace of further increases. — Reuters

INVESTMENT SURGE

Chinese investors rush into US stocks



Chinese investors are pouring into US-focused funds after regulators expanded authorised channels for overseas investment. Beijing recently increased its Qualified Domestic Institutional Investor quota by \$6.8 billion to a record \$183 billion. Strong demand quickly prompted some fund managers to restrict subscriptions, highlighting growing appetite for Wall Street exposure. — Reuters

Khimji Ramdas bets on expertise, regional growth

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 16

AFTER

156 years in Oman and a business history spanning seven Sultans, Khimji Ramdas

remains open to studying a partial public listing if and when the group decides the time is right.

Speaking on the latest episode of the Mizan podcast, Nailesh Khimji said the group would examine the possibility of taking part of the business public when it sees the need to do so. He clarified that any such move would not be driven by a need to raise capital.

Khimji said the company is almost debt-free and largely funds its expansion from its own resources. A future public listing could instead help create permanence and ensure continuity, regardless of whether later generations of the family choose to remain involved in the business.

The fifth-generation family member said Khimji Ramdas has witnessed seven Sultans during its 156-year presence in Oman, with adaptability playing a major role in its longevity.

The business traces its roots to trading goods between Oman, India and Africa, initially through barter, before evolving alongside the changing needs of Oman and its people.

Today, the group has more than 40 businesses organised under four clusters — consumer, infrastructure, luxury and lifestyle and projects and logistics. Khimji described supply chain as the common thread across the businesses, with the company moving products from ports and airports through the various stages required to reach consumers.

Rather than diversifying into unrelated sectors, he said the group’s strategy is to take its existing



Khimji Ramdas has witnessed seven Sultans during its 156-year presence in Oman, with adaptability playing a major role in its longevity. The business traces its roots to trading goods between Oman, India and Africa, initially through barter, before evolving alongside the changing needs of Oman and its people.

NAILESH KHIMJI
Director

expertise into new markets.

Its regional expansion has partly been driven by international principals asking the company to replicate its Oman operations in markets such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and India.

A major theme of the conversation was the transformation of Khimji Ramdas from a “family-run” business into a “family-owned” enterprise. Khimji said the process of professionalising decision-making began decades ago, with the group changing its approach from around 1999.

Non-family professionals now manage the group’s four business clusters, while family members remain at board level rather than making day-to-day operating decisions.

The approach, he explained, is intended to strengthen accountability and prevent business decisions from becoming sources of disagreement within the family. Executives are expected to assess proposals on their commercial merits and can reject ideas from family directors if they are not viable.

Khimji also highlighted ethics and organisational culture as two principles behind the group’s longevity. Business decisions, he said, should be made in a way that does not leave future generations dealing with the consequences of wrongdoing.

That philosophy also extends to employees, who should feel part of an extended family rather than simply holding a job. Khimji said some families have worked with the company across three generations, with later generations progressing into management and senior positions. On Oman’s changing business environment, Khimji welcomed reforms aimed at making commercial dispute resolution more efficient. He also highlighted

the importance of alternative dispute resolution and arbitration mechanisms that can accommodate the expectations of international businesses operating in Oman.

Discussing financing and entrepreneurship, he said investment banking could play an important role in supporting new businesses aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Banks, he argued, need the ability to evaluate the viability of projects themselves rather than relying heavily on an entrepreneur’s previous business record or personal guarantees, particularly when dealing with young graduates entering emerging industries.

Khimji Ramdas himself, however, has little appetite for moving into venture capital or unrelated businesses. Khimji said the group prefers to concentrate on areas where it already possesses expertise and expand those capabilities regionally.

The group is also participating in areas linked to Oman Vision 2040 through its infrastructure, projects and logistics operations. Khimji cited work connected with port expansion, dredging, port services and logistics among its activities.

Looking back at the company’s history, Khimji recalled how the nature of commerce in Oman has changed dramatically. Earlier generations traded dates and lime and brought goods into Oman from India and Africa through barter. Today’s business environment may be vastly different, but he said the underlying ability to adapt remains essential.

That adaptability is also reflected in how successive generations are prepared for leadership. Khimji said younger family members have traditionally been educated abroad from an early age to expose them to different cultures and ways of thinking while retaining a strong understanding of Oman.

OPINION

‘Salalah Eye’: A distinguished tourism project in Dhofar Governorate



HAIDER
AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

In recent years, Salalah has succeeded in attracting a growing number of development projects, particularly in tourism, as well as in the industrial and services sectors. Domestic tourism has increasingly turned towards the region, which enjoys a pleasant summer climate and offers a welcome escape from the extreme heat experienced across much of the Gulf. At the same time, Dhofar has witnessed tangible progress in a wide range of service, leisure and entertainment projects. It is blessed with numerous natural and tourism assets of world-class appeal.

These attractions have encouraged many Omani families, as well as Gulf, Arab and international tourists, to visit this unique part of the world.

Journalists and media professionals recently participated in the fifth Media Forum of the Oman Journalists Association, held from September 5 to 9. A group of them also visited the “Salalah Eye” project, which is located along Al Haffa Beach.

The recently opened “Salalah Eye” project is one of the governorate’s distinctive entertainment and tourism developments.

It reflects the concept of investing in the beauty of a destination and environmental characteristics that make Dhofar unique.

The project is now making a significant contribution to diversifying the tourism

offering and supporting the local economy. It is also strengthening tourism activity in the governorate.

“Salalah Eye” represents one of the initiatives aimed at enriching the tourism experience in Oman as a whole.

This comes at a time when the “Muttrah Cable Car” project is also expected to be launched in the near future, further enhancing the attractiveness of Oman’s tourism assets and contributing to the development of tourism across the country and the wider region.

The “Salalah Eye” project offers visitors a new experience that combines leisure, entertainment and shopping in a beautiful coastal setting.

Over the past two decades, this area has attracted significant numbers of tourists due to the availability of the services sought by visitors, particularly tourists from the Gulf region. The number of tourists who visited the Governorate during this summer, up to the end of August 2026, reached approximately 1.1 million.

This development has also contributed to strengthening air connectivity to and from Dhofar Governorate. The number of daily flights to and from Salalah Airport has increased in recent times, reaching as many as 90 flights per day.

This demonstrates the growing momentum

Domestic tourism has increasingly turned towards the region, which enjoys a pleasant summer climate and offers a welcome escape from the extreme heat experienced across much of the Gulf. At the same time, Dhofar has witnessed tangible progress in a wide range of service, leisure and entertainment projects.

of both domestic and international tourism to the governorate, supported by the continued development of services that enable visitors to enjoy their stay and make better use of the destination’s attractions.

Dhofar Municipality has played an important role in encouraging investors to develop “Salalah Eye”.

This effort has been complemented by the work of investment-related authorities in implementing this important development, which reflects the significance of public-private partnerships in advancing tourism and entertainment projects — not only in Dhofar, but throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

The “Salalah Eye” project provides visitors with an upscale experience and an opportunity to enjoy panoramic views of Salalah from a distance, while also taking in the waves of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean and the spectacular natural landscapes that distinguish Dhofar Governorate.

The relevant authorities hope that the project will contribute further to tourism and economic activity in the governorate in the coming years by attracting larger numbers of tourist groups, stimulating urban, commercial and service activity, diversifying sources of income and increasing the contribution of the tourism sector to Oman’s broader economic development.

EUROPE HAS NO HOPE IN AI RACE WITHOUT A UNIFIED ENERGY MARKET

MARTIN VLADIMIROV

Former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi warned Europe two years ago that it faced a “slow agony” unless it revived investment and productivity. The continent is now in danger of proving him right, one data centre at a time.

Europe is falling further and further behind in the AI race.

Just look at the difference in scale. The European Commission in July announced plans to create seven giant AI computing hubs. Eighteen of the European Union’s 27 governments are bidding for at least one of these sites, pledging around €3 billion (\$3.5 billion) in future compute purchases.

Meanwhile, the combined capital expenditure of six largely US-based hyperscalers is expected to exceed \$1.3 trillion by 2027, according to S&P Global Ratings.

While these spending commitments are not directly comparable, they highlight an enormous – and seemingly insurmountable – investment gulf.

To begin to close this gap, the EU will need to address its fragmented energy market.

The bloc’s energy transmission system currently lacks the ability to move electricity from where it is available to where new industrial demand is emerging. Weak interconnections, large differences in power transmission fees and complicated permitting procedures divide what is supposed to be a single market.

This has enormous economic ramifications. In 2025, large energy-intensive industrial users in the EU faced an average final electricity price of around \$107 per megawatt-hour, according to estimates by the International Energy Agency. That was more than twice the US level and roughly 57% above China’s.

The impact of these high costs on traditional industries has been devastating. Overall production in Europe in 2025 was only around 1% above its 2021 level, according to an analysis of Eurostat data by the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) senior analyst Marius Köppen.

More worryingly, chemicals manufacturing fell by 19% during this period, while output of basic iron and steel, cement and aluminium dropped by 16%, 14% and 11%, respectively.

Energy is not the only explanation for these manufacturing declines. Weaker global demand, the relocation of EU facilities to the US and China, and rising competition – particularly from Asian firms – have also had a significant impact.

But while most other parts of Europe’s economy have recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic and the energy crisis following Russia’s full-scale attack in Ukraine, Europe’s energy-intensive industrial base has not.

The latest surge in energy prices following the US-Iran war isn’t helping either. With Europe now looking to join the new AI industrial revolution, access to reliable, affordable energy has become more important than ever. — Reuters

Cost of doing business reaching a crisis

BRITISH

companies are facing a “cost of business crisis” as a string of controversial government policies have pushed up the average firm’s expenses by 70 per cent in a decade, one of the country’s largest industry bodies has said.

A typical firm with 50 staff is now paying roughly £827,000 more a year than they were in 2016 as a direct consequence of policy decisions made by the government, according to a new business cost calculator launched by the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC).

Researchers at the business group said around a quarter of the total increase in business costs came from former Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ decision to hike national insurance contributions for employers at her first Budget in 2024.

The tax hike, which aimed to raise an extra £25 bn in government revenue each year, included raising the rate of national insurance contributions for companies from 13.8 per cent to 15 per cent and lowering the salary threshold at which firms start paying the levy to £5,000.

The BCC said Reeves’ raid in 2024 marked an “inflection point” and firms were now facing a “cost of business crisis”. “This mounting cost burden has priced many firms out of growth”, said David Bharier, deputy director at the BCC.

Other policies that have added to the rising bill for business include a higher minimum wage, which was raised by successive Tory and Labour governments and pension auto-enrolment.

The BCC’s cost calculations only take into account domestic policy costs. The impact of tariffs, higher inflation, Brexit and global conflicts are not covered in calculations, indicating that the cost of running most businesses has risen far higher than 70 per cent.

The BCC has shared its calculator with firms as the private sector looks to press new government ministers on business costs ahead of the Labour Party conference and a crucial Budget on October 28.



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Other policies that have added to the rising bill for business include a higher minimum wage, which was raised by successive Tory and Labour governments and pension auto-enrolment.



People walk through the financial district of Canary Wharf, London. — Reuters

After being made Labour leader, Prime Minister, Andy Burnham promised to be “pro-business”. Chancellor John Healey also said providing “breathing space” to businesses would become a priority.

Bharier said that every policy introduced by Burnham and Healey should pass a ‘growth delivery test’ and have a positive impact on businesses’ ability to “invest, innovate, or expand”.

The upcoming budget could prove to be difficult for Burnham and Healey, who looked poised to raise taxes to restore the partly-eroded fiscal headroom and deliver on a host of spending pledges. Capital Economics’ deputy chief UK economist said there could be tax hikes “almost as big” as those seen last year.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard Branson, entrepreneur, business magnate and founder of the Virgin Group of companies, has called on policy makers to do more to support and “champion” British entrepreneurs.

Branson, who launched his iconic business selling records in 1970, said

the UK must go further to create an environment where entrepreneurs want to set up and run a business. London has always been a city brimming with possibility, fuelled by its diversity, creativity and willingness to embrace new ideas.

Sir Richard said: “We need to do more to champion anyone willing to have a go at starting a business. It’s really tough trying to build a business from scratch. Maybe that’s why it’s so important to create an economic environment where innovators with imagination can be helped to survive and thrive”.

Research from Virgin’s charity, Virgin Startup, reveals that a large majority of founders “do not believe Westminster listens to their concerns”.

Branson added: “This cannot be ignored. Entrepreneurs need as much support as possible to turn bold ideas into great businesses that hopefully end up employing lots of people. Societies benefit when entrepreneurs succeed. We must give every founder the best chance to flourish”.

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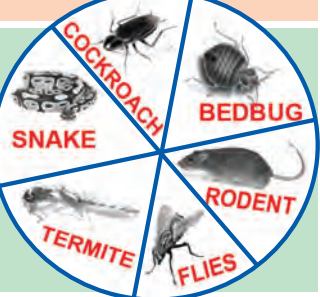
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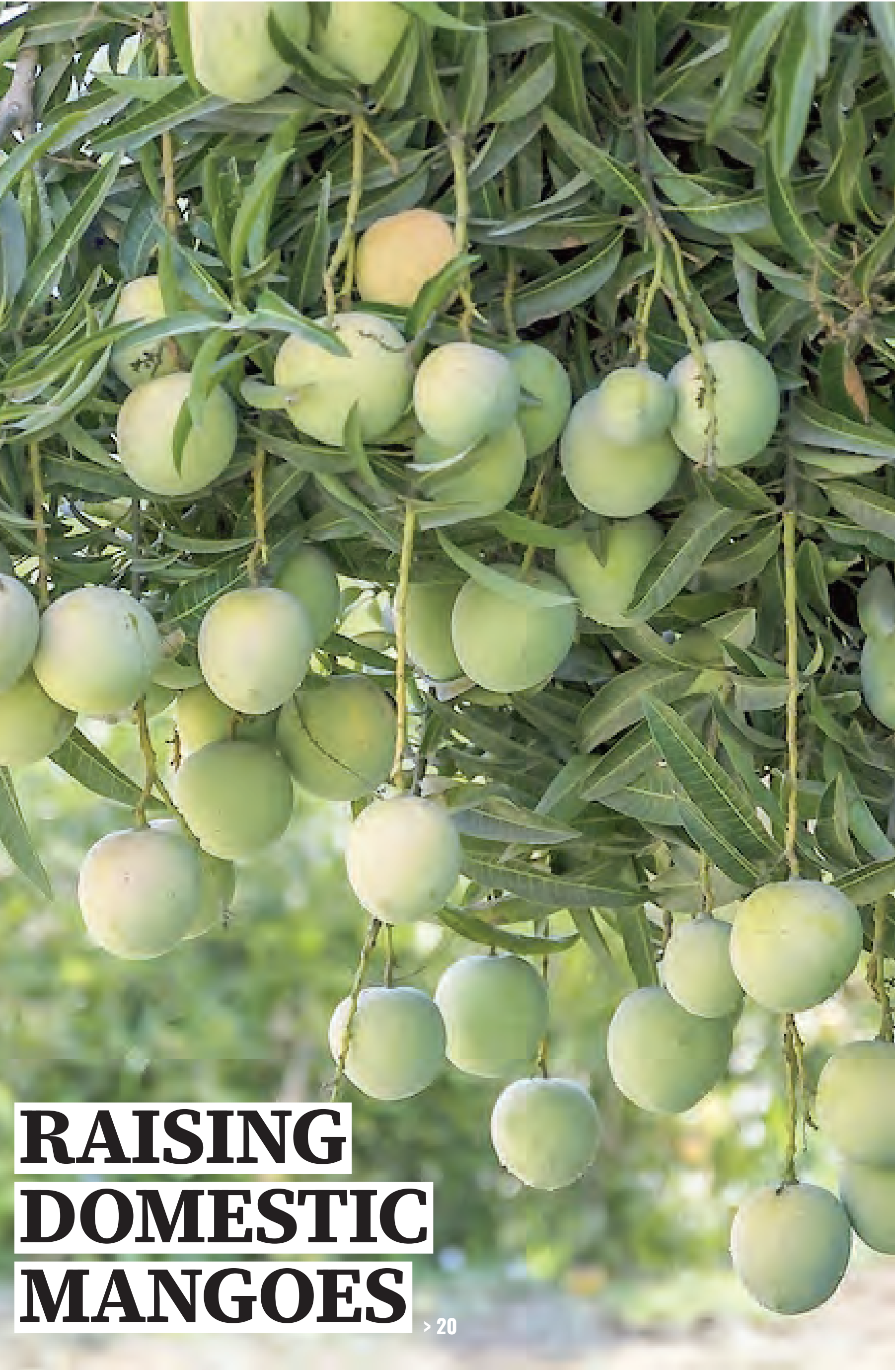
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RAISING DOMESTIC MANGOES

> 20

BOX OFFICE

‘PRACTICAL MAGIC 2’ BREAKS SPIDEY SPELL



US-Australian actress Nicole Kidman attends the US premiere of “Practical Magic 2”. — AFP

The A-list witches of Warner Bros “Practical Magic 2” cast away Sony’s “Spider-Man” from its weeks-long perch atop the North American box office, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

Nearly three decades after the beloved original, Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman return to star in the sequel, whose estimated \$30 million debut brought an end to Spidey’s six-week run in first place. The sequel’s arrival gave the North American chart a new leader after weeks dominated by the superhero.

The film resurrects the story of sisters Sally and Gillian Owens, modern-day witches living under a curse that dooms any man they fall in love with to an early death. The witch sisters also summoned another \$16 million from cinemas outside North America, taking the film’s estimated global opening haul to a total of \$46 million.

The original “Practical Magic”, released in 1998, hardly enchanted critics when it first arrived in cinemas. But it went on to conjure a cult following, keeping hopes of a sequel alive in the decades that followed. “Critics’ reviews are weak like they were the first time, but the audience score is very good”, said industry watcher David A Gross.

The “cast is what drives these movies’ success and Nicole Kidman, Sandra Bullock, Maisie Williams and Joey King are strong”.

But losing its hold on the top spot did not mean it was all bad news for Sony’s “Spider-Man: Brand New Day”. After swinging from victory to victory during its six weeks at number one, the blockbuster led by Tom Holland and Zendaya caught second place this weekend.

It brought in another \$8.4 million in North America, pushing its global total to \$2.45 billion over seven weeks in cinemas.

Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey” sailed into a close third place, drawing another \$7.4 million domestically. Its worldwide earnings now stand at an epic \$1.64 billion over its nine-week global box office journey.

“Runner”, an action comedy led by Alan Ritchson and Owen Wilson, entered the chart in fourth place on its debut weekend.

The film follows its heroes as they fight a cartel to get a sick young girl a lifesaving organ transplant. It brought in \$6.4 million domestically for Angel Studios. “Coyote vs Acme” took fifth place, with Will Forte and an animated Wile E Coyote snaring another \$5.6 million for Falling Forward Films.

Rounding out the top 10 were “Buddy”, with \$3.5 million and “Insidious: Out of the Further”, which brought in \$3.4 million.

“Hope” and “The Uprising” followed with \$3.3 million each, while “By Any Means” completed the weekend’s top 10 with takings of \$2.5 million.

— AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

Canadian actress Pamela Anderson attends the 2027 Spring/Summer Carolina Herrera fashion show during New York Fashion Week in New York.

— AFP



IN MEMORY

Musicians perform during the In Memoriam segment at the 78th Primetime Emmy Awards in Los Angeles, California.

— Reuters



ART

French artist JR performs one of his characteristic jumps as he poses in front of his installation “DILUVIUM” at the Vatican Apostolic Library, at the Vatican.

— Reuters

INSTA PICKS



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VAN GOGH COLLECTION REUNITED AFTER FOUR DECADES



The Potato Eaters by Van Gogh is one of the famous works on display at the Kroller-Muller Museum. — AFP

A Dutch museum put its entire collection of 88 paintings by Vincent Van Gogh on display on Tuesday, September 15, for the first time since 1984, featuring masterpieces such as “The Potato Eaters”.

The Kroller-Muller museum in central Netherlands holds one of the world’s largest private collections of paintings by the 19th century Dutch master, but they are rarely displayed together.

“This makes it one of the largest Van Gogh exhibitions of this century”, the museum said in a statement, with the display opening to the public from Tuesday, September 15, until January.

Alongside “The Potato Eaters”, the artist’s world-famous depiction of peasant life from 1885, the collection includes “Terrace of a Cafe at Night” (1888) and “The Old Tower at Neunen” (1884).

“The exhibition presents all

the paintings in relation to the three divine virtues: faith, hope and love”, said the museum.

“These three themes play a central role in Van Gogh’s life and work. Through his art, he aims to offer hope and comfort to others”.

The post-Impressionist painter is among the most celebrated and prolific artists in history, creating around 900 paintings over a short career.

He produced many of his best-known works during his time in France, including the “Sunflowers” series and self-portraits.

The artist died in 1890 at the age of 37, two days after shooting himself in the chest following well-documented mental health struggles.

Most of the works in the exhibition, entitled “Van Gogh, All Our Paintings”, were acquired by the museum’s founder Helene Kroller-Muller between 1908 and 1930. — AFP



Chinese architect and founder of MAD Architects Ma Yansong speaks next to a model of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles that will open on September 22. — AFP

MA YANSONG BLENDS NATURE AND FUTURISTIC DESIGN



A general view shows the Baiziwan Social Housing project, a subsidised residential compound for low-income communities. — AFP

FROM a distance, it looks as though a giant spaceship has just landed in the palm tree-dotted streets near downtown Los Angeles.

It could also be a wide-canopied tree or a low passing cloud — but for its Chinese architect Ma Yansong, as long as the building “sparks curiosity”, he’s achieved his purpose.

Over the past two decades, Ma has created dozens of striking projects in his home country and abroad, integrating nature with sleek, modern designs.

His newest project, opening on September 22, is the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles, founded by “Star Wars” creator George Lucas and his wife, Mellody Hobson.

“The building takes on a futuristic feel that generates excitement”, Ma said at the Beijing office of MAD Architects, the firm he established in 2004.

“When people visit the Lucas Museum, they will each bring their own unique perspectives”, said the 50-year-old.

“They might catch a beam of light, see it cutting through the building, glimpse the clouds, the sky, or even the cosmos”.

“This sparks curiosity and new ideas — and those diverse thoughts are incredibly valuable”.

A Beijing native, he grew up in a courtyard house typical of the “hutong” alleyways that crisscross

the historic centre of China’s capital city.

“There was a very close connection to nature”, he said, recalling the trees and small pockets of open space interspersed in hutong neighbourhoods.

Later, he went overseas to train as an architect, graduating from the Yale School of Architecture and working briefly at the studio of Iraqi-British designer Zaha Hadid.

Ma’s architectural vision draws inspiration from traditional Chinese paintings known as “shanshui”, or “mountains and water”, usually depicting natural scenery.

The Lucas Museum is interwoven with its external environment by lawns, trees, running water and a roof covered in vegetation and solar panels.

“If you look at a Chinese garden, it is a completely natural environment, even though it is artificially designed”, Ma said.

“There is a global conversation (now) about ecology and how to bring people closer to nature, yet I find that traditional Eastern architecture mastered this long ago”, he said.

Ma said that he embraces what he calls a “major shift” in architecture towards placing people, rather than the buildings themselves, at the centre of the design concept.

“We aren’t using architecture to flaunt wealth or power”, he said.

Ma said when he designs a building he wants to make sure it gives “freedom of movement”



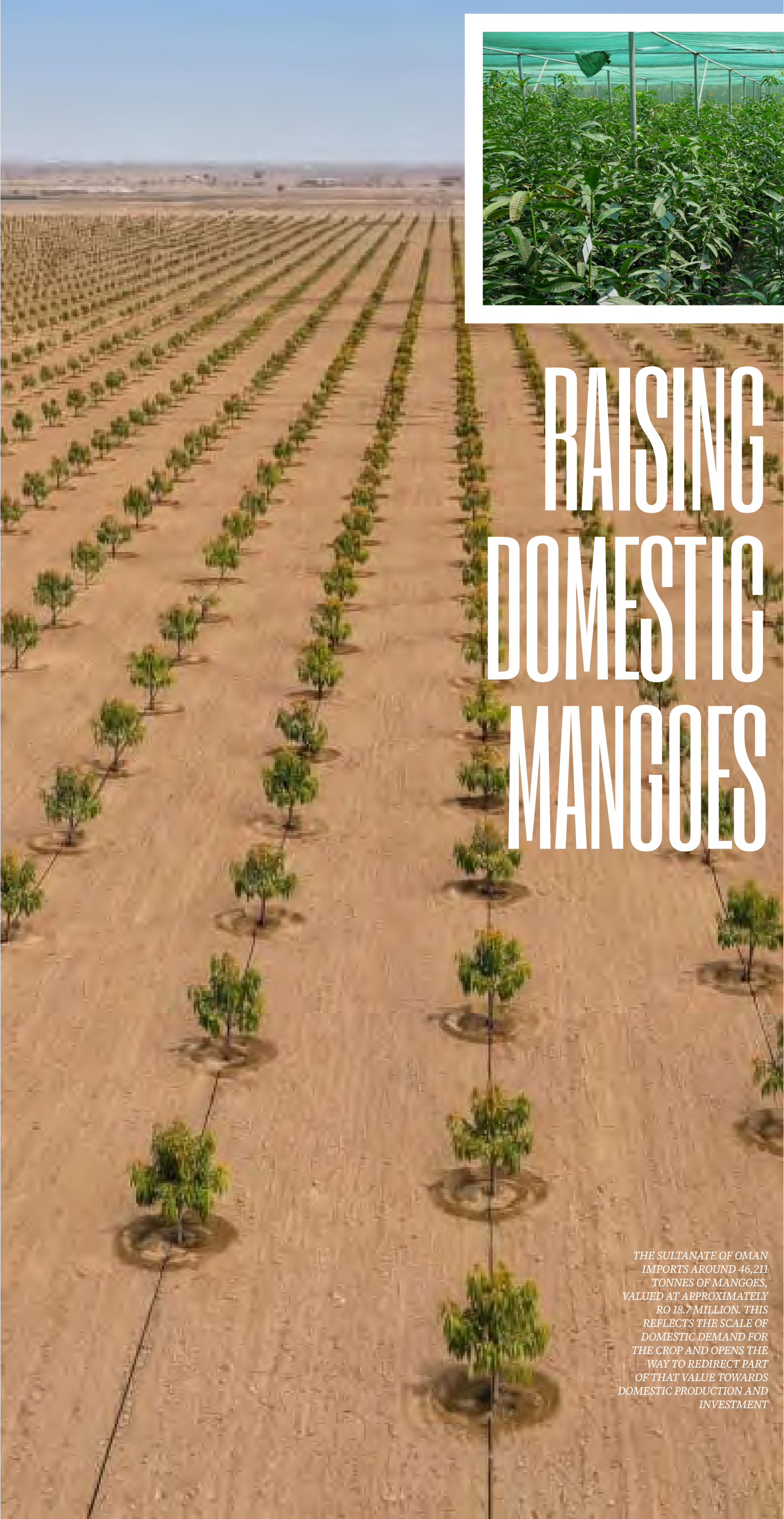
Chinese architect and founder of MAD Architects Ma Yansong poses for a photograph in Beijing. — AFP

to residents — a concept which drove his design of the Baiziwan Social Housing project in Beijing, a subsidised residential compound for low-income communities.

Unlike the closed apartments that have sprung up in Chinese cities during decades of urbanisation, Baiziwan features an open layout with a garden level and a design that optimises sunlight.

Ma said he doesn’t want his buildings “to be a palace or a temple-like structure that demands reverence”.

“I want it to be open, a place where everyone feels they are the masters of the city”. — AFP



RAISING DOMESTIC MANGOES

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IMPORTS AROUND 46,211 TONNES OF MANGOES, VALUED AT APPROXIMATELY RO 18.7 MILLION. THIS REFLECTS THE SCALE OF DOMESTIC DEMAND FOR THE CROP AND OPENS THE WAY TO REDIRECT PART OF THAT VALUE TOWARDS DOMESTIC PRODUCTION AND INVESTMENT

THE Sultanate of Oman is moving to strengthen investment in the mango crop and enhance its productive and competitive capacity. This forms part of a broader drive to increase domestic agricultural output and capitalise on the production gap by creating investment opportunities of economic value. The aim is to boost productivity, raise self-sufficiency rates, and grow the economic value of Omani agricultural products.

Statistical data point to promising investment opportunities. The Sultanate of Oman imports around 46,211 tonnes of mangoes, valued at approximately RO 18.7 million. This reflects the scale of domestic demand for the crop and opens the way to redirect part of that value towards domestic production and investment. It also supports the development of the mango value chain.

Dr Hamdan bin Salim al Wahaibi, Director General of Agricultural Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, stated that the volume of mango imports is an important economic indicator of a promising domestic market. The private sector and investors can capitalise on this market. He noted that the approach for the coming phase rests on a shift in perspective: mangoes should no longer be viewed merely as an agricultural crop, but rather as an integrated economic value chain. This chain extends from seedling production and cultivation through to packaging, marketing, and food processing, helping to substitute part of imports and enhance the product's local value.

In a statement he said that the Sultanate of Oman has a solid production base to build upon. The area currently cultivated with mangoes stands at about 3,907 feddans, while production exceeded 17,123 tonnes in 2025. He affirmed that raising production in the coming phase will not rely solely on horizontal expansion of agricultural areas. It will also depend on increasing productivity per unit area, improving fruit quality, enhancing water use efficiency, and selecting economically viable varieties, alongside expanding the use of modern irrigation and farm management technologies.

He indicated that the Agricultural Research Station in Suhar plays a pivotal role in providing the scientific foundation for expanding mango production. Its work includes variety studies, characterisation assessment, and seedling production, as well as transferring research and trial results to farms and investment projects. He noted that the mango genetic bank comprises 252 varieties and 708 trees, collected from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and from 23 countries. This provides an important genetic base for selecting the varieties best suited to local conditions and strongest in terms of productivity and marketability.

He added that research studies and trials have led to the selection of more than 30 promising varieties in terms of productivity and quality. This enhances prospects for well-considered expansion into varieties capable of better economic returns and responsive to market requirements in quality, quantity, and production seasons.

He affirmed that the mango production localisation plan for the period 2026-2030 aims to achieve a qualitative leap in domestic production volume. This will be achieved by expanding the cultivated area to about 10,300 feddans and raising production to nearly 44,785 tonnes, with an estimated production value of around RO 17 million.

He noted that 2026 will see the launch of investment opportunities in mango production. This reflects a transition from identifying the import gap to utilising it economically through productive and commercial projects capable of growth and sustainability. — ONA