

IN BRIEF

RAFO BAND WINS TOP PRIZES IN SCOTLAND



The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) Band has won advanced positions in the World Music Competition currently being held in Scotland, United Kingdom. The RAFO band secured overall first place in Category 4B in the 'Dundonald' and 'Bridge of Allen' competitions, in addition to overall second place in Category 4A. At the 'Dundonald' competitions, the RAFO's percussion group won first place, in addition to the award set for best military appearance at the general level. At the 'Bridge of Allan' competitions, the RAFO band secured second overall place in infantry and military appearance competitions among non-UK contestants.

4 TEACHERS WIN GLOBAL AWARD

Four teachers from the Sultanate of Oman have achieved a new international milestone by winning the GLOBE International Environmental Competition, held for the first time in conjunction with the Ffia World Cup, in recognition of their outstanding implementation of a project to monitor daily environmental data at football stadiums. The competition winners are Fakhriyah bint Saud al Balushi from Sowdah Umm Al Muminin Basic Education School; Hidayah bint Sulaiman al Farsi from Asma bint Umays Basic Education School in Al Dhahirah Governorate; Yusra bint Humaid al Dhawi from Sumaya Basic Education School; and Ali bin Rashid al Jafli from Abdulrahman bin Abi Bakr Basic Education School in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. **DETAILS ON P2**

WILDFIRE RAGES ON IN GREECE



A helicopter drops water as a wildfire burns near the village Agios Nektarios, Greece. — Reuters



RECORD NUMBERS

More than 50,000 people visited the Shaat Glass Viewpoint in the Wilayat of Rakh'yout, Dhofar Governorate, between its opening on July 16 and August 2, according to Dhofar Municipality, as khareef tourism activities extend further west of Salalah.

The municipality said the site received 50,593 visitors and more than 12,350 vehicles during the period, making it one of the most heavily visited individual attractions reported so far during the Khareef Dhofar Season 2026.

No talks under way with US as attacks stop: Iran

TRUMP AFFIRMS NEGOTIATIONS WITH TEHRAN TO BEGIN

IRAN

SAID on Monday there were no talks under way with the United States and no plans for a summit, contradicting US President Donald Trump, who has said would meet with Kim at afternoon as well as morning for calling off attacks. Trump repeated the claim that it has emerged in the past five months: "We have plans for 'massive' strikes against Iran, only to cancel them at the last minute."

“Would I rather make a deal? I’m not looking to kill people”, Trump said aboard Air Force One on Sunday.

"Now what we're doing is talking to them, in the form of a negotiation. It begins tomorrow afternoon", he said, without identifying a venue or participants for such talks.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei rejected the statement, saying no negotiations with the United States were taking place and no meetings were scheduled. Iran had no plans to host foreign delegations or send negotiators abroad in the coming days, he said. Baghaei added that all Iranian negotiators were currently in the country, apart from Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who was on a religious pilgrimage in Iraq. The only



A woman walks past an anti-US billboard on a street in Tehran, Iran, on Monday. — Reuters

talks under way, he said, were discussions over management of the Strait of Hormuz.

A senior Iranian source also said that no talks were planned and that Araghchi would be unavailable at least until the end of the week.

In a post on Truth Social later on Monday, Trump called Iran's leadership "unbelievably duplicitous", saying they had asked for a meeting and more talks were scheduled for the "immediate future".

He also repeated his assertion that the US Navy had total control over the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flowed before the conflict.

“The United States Wall of Steel! Nothing gets through to Iran, unless we want it to and nothing will get through, unless a Deal, or Total Surrender, is accomplished”, he wrote.

Iran, however, has publicly rejected negotiations with Washington since a June memorandum of understanding aimed at ending the conflict collapsed in early July.

The dispute over the Strait of Hormuz remains a central point of contention. US says the June memorandum required Iran to open the vital waterway, while Tehran argues the text explicitly preserved its authority over shipping traffic. **SEE ALSO P6**

Oman says committed to net-zero emissions by 2050

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, has officially submitted its third Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) report to the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This submission reaffirms Oman's commitment to implementing the requirements of the Paris Agreement and bolstering its national efforts to address climate change. The report serves as the nation's primary policy document, outlining Oman's

climate targets and mitigation measures through to 2035. It articulates the country's strategic direction in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing climate adaptation and resilience; and advancing sustainable development in alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the national goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The NDCs are benchmarked against the base year 2024, with total greenhouse gas emissions recorded at approximately 93.6 million tonnes of CO₂-equivalent.

The report sets forth an unconditional emissions reduction target of 7 per cent by 2035, alongside a conditional reduction of 26 per cent—contingent upon the availability of international finance, technical support, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives. Collectively, these measures yield a potential total reduction of 33 per cent.

Mitigation actions span several key sectors, prominently including energy, industrial processes and product use, agriculture and land

use, and waste management.

The report places particular emphasis on scaling up renewable energy projects, enhancing energy efficiency, facilitating low-carbon industrial transformation, advancing green hydrogen development, promoting circular economy principles, and assessing the feasibility of carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) technologies.

A substantial focus is devoted to climate adaptation, with measures designed to enhance

the preparedness of critical sectors against drought, rising temperatures, tropical cyclones, floods, sea-level rise, and other extreme climate events.

Priority sectors include water resources, agriculture, fisheries and marine resources, public health, tourism, and infrastructure and urban planning.

The Environment Authority affirmed that the report's development was the outcome of an integrated national effort.

SEE ALSO P5

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



RAO secured a number of top international positions in the competitions.

RAO MUSIC BAND SECURES TOP HONOURS

SCOTLAND: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Music Band continued its impressive performance at the World Music Championships in Scotland, securing a number of top international positions in competitions held in Dundonald and Bridge of Allan.

The band claimed first place in the Infantry and Discipline category in Dundonald, in addition to being named the best team from outside the United Kingdom.

It also secured second and third places in the overall international rankings, further highlighting the high level of professionalism and discipline demonstrated by its members.

In the Baton Bearers competition in Dundonald, Staff Sergeant Mahmoud bin Yousuf al Sinani secured first place, while Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri finished third and Captain Hamid bin Sulaiman al Ghafri took fourth place.

The band also maintained its strong showing in Bridge of Allan, where it secured second place globally in Level Three.

In the Baton Bearers competition at the same venue, Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri claimed first place, Captain Hamid bin Sulaiman al Ghafri finished third and Staff Sergeant Nader bin Jamaan al Jabali took fourth place.

Captain (Retired) Ahmed bin Ali al Rashdi, one of the band's trainers, said "the achievements represented a source of pride and reflected the sustained efforts made by the team".

CDAА GETS FIRST BATCH OF FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS



The recruits will undergo a comprehensive training and qualification programme.

MUSCAT: The first batch of Omani female firefighters has joined the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) on Monday.

The recruitment of this group is part of the Authority's strategy to train a cadre of competent and ready national personnel to work in the field of firefighting, contributing to the support of the response system and raising the level of preparedness for dealing with various incidents and emergencies.

The recruits will undergo a comprehensive training and qualification programme that includes theory, practice and field exercises, with the aim of grooming them with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their assigned tasks according to approved professional standards.

The move embodies the CDAA's commitment to investing in human capital and establishing a work environment based on competence and professionalism, keeping pace with the development in civil defence and ambulance to enhance the quality of services provided to the community.

The joining of the first batch of female firefighters also confirms the CDAA's continued implementation of its plans to prepare qualified national cadres capable of keeping pace with the requirements of field work and contributing efficiently to the protection of lives and property.

OMAN AND SRI LANKA DISCUSS ENHANCING BILATERAL COOPERATION

MUSCAT: The fourth round of political consultations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was held in Muscat on Monday. The Omani side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Sri Lankan side was chaired by Aruni Ranaraja, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

During the session, the two sides reviewed the course of bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance



The consultation session was attended by several officials from both sides. — ONA

cooperation in areas of common interest, particularly economic, investment, tourism and cultural fields. The two sides also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of mutual concern.

Both sides emphasised the importance of continued consultation and coordination between the foreign ministries of the two countries and working to explore new horizons for partnership. — ONA

Campaign implemented to protect biodiversity

THE Environment Department in Musandam Governorate implemented a field campaign to retrieve fishing nets snagged on coral reefs at Umm Al Tair Island, as part of its ongoing efforts to protect the marine environment, preserve its natural resources and enhance biodiversity sustainability.

This campaign falls within the Environment Department's programmes aimed at reducing the environmental impacts resulting from abandoned or lost nets, which continue to catch marine life indiscriminately and inflict damage on coral reefs, thereby affecting fish stocks, ecological balance and the sustainability of natural resources.

Abdulwahid bin Hassan al Kumzari, Head of the Environmental Inspection Section at the Environment Department in Musandam Governorate, said that the campaign falls within the continuous efforts carried out by the Department to safeguard marine ecosystems and protect coral reefs.

He pointed out that removing snagged fishing nets represents one of the crucial measures to reduce risks facing marine creatures, enhance the sustainability of fish stocks; and preserve biodiversity and marine habitats.

He added that coral reefs in Musandam Governorate are among the most prominent marine ecosystems, owing to their role as natural habitats for a vast number of marine organisms, their function in supporting biodiversity and protecting coastlines, as well as their contribution to providing suitable environments for the



Coral reefs in Musandam are among the most prominent marine ecosystem.

The campaign falls in line with the continuous efforts carried out by the Department to safeguard marine ecosystems and protect coral reefs.

breeding and growth of numerous economically important fish species.

He noted that Musandam Governorate is characterised by its unique marine biodiversity as a result of its geographical location, harbouring rich marine environments with coral reefs, commercial fish species, sea turtles, dolphins, whales and many other marine organisms that depend for their survival on the health of marine ecosystems.

Al Kumzari explained that the Environment Department continues to carry out monitoring activities, field inspections and responses to environmental reports, alongside awareness campaigns directed at fishermen and sea-goers.

He called upon everyone to cooperate with competent authorities and report any practices or waste that might impact the marine environment, emphasising that environmental protection is a shared national responsibility requiring joint action from all members of society.

It is worth noting that the Environment Department in Musandam Governorate continues to implement environmental monitoring programmes, remove marine debris, monitor the condition of coral reefs and strengthen community partnership to safeguard the marine environment, in alignment with the targets of Oman Vision 2040 and the principles of sustainable development. — ONA

4 Omani teachers win global environmental award

MUSCAT: Four teachers from the Sultanate of Oman have achieved a new international milestone by winning the GLOBE International Environmental Competition, held for the first time in conjunction with the Fifa World Cup, in recognition of their outstanding implementation of a project to monitor daily environmental data at football stadiums.

The competition winners are: Fakhriyah bint Saud al Balushi from Sowdah Umm Al Muminin Basic Education School; Hidayah bint Sulaiman al Farsi from Asma bint Umays Basic Education School in Al Dhahirah Governorate; Yusra bint Humaid al Dhawi from Sumaya Basic Education School; and Ali bin Rashid al Jafili from Abdulrahman bin Abi Bakr Basic Education School in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

This achievement follows the outstanding performance of the Omani participants at the Near East and North Africa regional level, where they executed a project involving the daily monitoring of environmental data at local football stadiums. The project encompassed measurements of air temperature, land surface temperature and



The programme currently involves 127 participating countries worldwide. — ONA

land cover, with data consistently uploaded through the GLOBE Programme's global platform throughout the competition period.

This accomplishment represents a continuation of the successes achieved by the Ministry of Education in the field

of environmental education, reflecting its commitment to fostering a culture of research and empowering educators and students to actively engage in international scientific programmes.

These results further underscore the effectiveness of the Ministry of Education's efforts to integrate environmental scientific practices into the educational process, promote inquiry-based learning, and enable teachers to spearhead environmental initiatives within their schools and communities.

It is noteworthy that the GLOBE Programme (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) is an international science and education initiative launched in 1995 with the support of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) and several other international partners.

The programme currently involves 127 participating countries worldwide and aims to enhance environmental awareness through hands-on field observations, engaging students and teachers in the collection of scientific data. — ONA

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SHORT TAKES



Drama titled ‘A Bite of Bread’ will be staged at Ostrovsky Festival.

OMANI THEATRE
TROUPE AT RUSSIA’S
OSTROVSKY FEST

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s Al Dan Theatre Troupe for Culture and Art will take part in the 8th edition of Ostrovsky Fest due to be held in the city of Kineshma, Russia, from August 18-23.

At the festival, Al Dan will stage a drama titled ‘A Bite of Bread’ authored by Omani dramaturg Mohammed bin Said al Rawahi.

Mohammed bin Salim al Nabhani, Head of Al Dan Theatre Troupe for Culture and Art, said, “The troupe’s participation in the Russian festival is the outcome of a long march of planning and international communication. Besides building bridges of cultural dialogue, the troupe’s participation aims to spread national artistic experiences via international platforms”.

For his part, scenographer Mahmoud bin Salim al Makhroumi pointed out that “The participation of Al Dan in this international event is in pursuance of a responsibility to convey the honourable image of development in Omani theatre and to showcase the growing cultural cooperation between the Omani and Russian sides”. — ONA

SCIENCE INDIA
FORUM ON AUGUST 14

MUSCAT: In a major milestone for the Science India Forum (SIF) Oman, its Sastrapratibhas and outstanding science performers were invited for an exclusive interaction by the Lt Governor of Delhi, Taranjit Singh Sandhu, at his residence in New Delhi.

The reception recognised the students’ dedication to scientific inquiry during their experiential tour of India’s elite research facilities, including IIT New Delhi, AIIMS, NIPGR, IUAC, ICGEB and BrahMos Aerospace.

Building on these successes, SIF Oman has announced its annual gala event to be held on August 14 at the College of Banking and Financial Studies, Bausher, which will celebrate the outstanding achievements of young Oman-based Indian school students across various science talent contests. Indian School students from Oman achieved unprecedented success at the Vidyarthi Vigyan Manthan (VVM) National Camp held at IIT Gandhinagar, Gujarat, securing both national and zonal laurels.

Ayn Khor awaits peak flow
as Khareef rains continue

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
SALALAH, AUGUST 3

AS THE Khareef Dhofar Season transforms Dhofar into a lush green paradise, Ayn Khor Waterfall continues to attract visitors with its serene beauty, even as the iconic cascade awaits the heavier rainfall needed to reach its full seasonal splendour.

Nestled in the Wilayat of Salalah, Ayn Khor is one of Dhofar’s best-known natural attractions, celebrated for its cascading waterfalls, freshwater springs, verdant valleys and rich biodiversity.

Every year, the seasonal monsoon breathes new life into the surrounding mountains and forests, creating one of the Arabian Peninsula’s most distinctive natural landscapes.

Although Khareef has already drawn thousands of visitors to the governorate, the waterfall has yet to attain the powerful flow typically witnessed during the height of the season. The current water volume reflects rainfall received so far and represents a natural phase in the annual hydrological cycle.

Local observers say the intensity of the waterfall depends entirely on cumulative rainfall throughout the Khareef months. Continued precipitation over the coming weeks is expected to replenish underground aquifers, increase spring discharge and restore the waterfall to the spectacular torrents for which it is renowned.

The journey to Ayn Khor is itself a memorable part of the experience. Visitors travel approximately 20 kilometres from Raysut Roundabout along a paved road that winds through open plains and picturesque countryside before continuing for about two kilometres on an unpaved track leading into the valley.

Along the route, travellers are treated to ever-changing scenery, including rolling green hills, dramatic mountain landscapes, seasonal streams and clusters of native trees. Low-hanging clouds and drifting mist—hallmarks of the



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Khareef Dhofar Season—add to the region’s enchanting atmosphere.

Upon reaching the valley, visitors are welcomed by the soothing sound of flowing water descending from the surrounding highlands. Cool mountain air, gentle mist and abundant greenery create a tranquil setting ideal for relaxation, photography and nature appreciation. Families, adventure enthusiasts and photographers alike continue to be drawn to the site’s scenic beauty.

Ayn Khor has also become a favourite destination for photographers, videographers and social media content creators, offering dramatic backdrops of waterfalls, mist-covered cliffs and vibrant vegetation that capture the essence of Dhofar’s monsoon season.

“I make it a point to visit Ayn Khor every Khareef because each season offers a different experience”, said Salim bin Mohammed al Maqimi. “While the waterfall has not yet reached its usual volume, the surrounding scenery remains exceptional. The peaceful atmosphere and natural beauty alone make the trip worthwhile, and I expect the site to become even more spectacular as rainfall increases”. Ahmed al Katbi, a visitor from the UAE

experiencing Ayn Khor for the first time, described the destination as unforgettable.

“The drive to Ayn Khor is part of the attraction. Every turn reveals a different landscape and although the waterfall is still building up, the destination offers an authentic nature experience unlike many places in the region. I look forward to returning later in the season when the water flow reaches its peak”, he said.

Tourism observers regard Ayn Khor as one of Dhofar’s premier eco-tourism destinations, highlighting the governorate’s diverse natural heritage through its mountains, valleys, freshwater springs and seasonal waterfalls.

The site continues to attract both domestic and international visitors eager to experience the unique landscapes that have made the Khareef Dhofar Season synonymous with tourism in Oman. As the rainy season progresses, anticipation is building for further downpours that will replenish the springs and strengthen the waterfall, allowing Ayn Khor to reveal its full grandeur.

Until then, the destination remains a testament to the gradual transformation that makes Dhofar one of the region’s most remarkable seasonal landscapes.

NRAA’s archives open to public during Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 3

Oman’s rich documentary heritage is reaching a wider audience as the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) showcases thousands of historical records at the Return of the Past site in Al Saadah during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

The exhibition, titled ‘A Nation’s Memory in the Land of Frankincense’, is bringing the country’s archives beyond traditional research institutions and into a public setting, allowing citizens, residents and tourists to explore Oman’s historical records.

Hatim bin Abdulkarim bin Ali al

Shahi, Cultural Activity Specialist at the Authority, said the exhibition is attracting an estimated more than 2,000 visitors daily, reflecting growing public interest in Oman’s documentary heritage. Featuring more than 4,000 printed and digital documents, the exhibition highlights key stages in Oman’s political, cultural and diplomatic history.

The displays include photographs of Oman’s imams and sultans, historical records from the Al Busaid era in Zanzibar, documents related to Dhofar and material covering Oman’s relations with Gulf countries and the wider world.

Visitors can also view rare



The exhibition combines traditional displays with digital and interactive sections.

manuscripts, distinctive historical records and publications from conferences and seminars organised by the Authority in Oman and abroad.

The exhibition combines traditional displays with digital and interactive sections, enabling visitors to explore archival material electronically through educational applications.

Special attention has also been given to younger visitors through educational booklets and activities aimed at introducing the importance of historical documentation and preservation.

To ensure wider accessibility, the exhibition includes interactive content in sign language and

Braille, allowing visitors with hearing and visual impairments to engage with Oman’s historical records. Al Shahi said the exhibition aims to make archival collections accessible to the public, strengthen national identity, promote awareness of documentary preservation and highlight the Authority’s role in safeguarding Oman’s historical memory. Held annually during the Khareef Dhofar Season, the exhibition uses the large number of visitors in Dhofar as an opportunity to connect people with Oman’s heritage.

The exhibition will continue until August 20 and is open daily from 5 pm to 10:30 pm.

SPOTLIGHT



THE SMALL STEP THAT CAN SAVE A LIFE

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

ROUTINE MEDICAL check-ups remain one of the most effective ways to maintain good health. They are not only aimed at detecting diseases but also identifying early warning signs before they develop into serious conditions. Early diagnosis often allows simpler treatment, better recovery outcomes and reduced healthcare costs.

Modern medicine has transformed the management of many illnesses. Conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and some cancers can progress silently for years without noticeable symptoms. By the time warning signs appear, the disease may already have advanced.

Regular screenings provide an opportunity to detect health concerns at an early stage, when treatment and lifestyle changes are most effective.

According to Dr Ahmed al Badri, Family Medicine Consultant, routine health assessments should be viewed as an investment rather than an expense.

“People often wait until they feel unwell before seeking medical attention. Unfortunately, many chronic diseases do not produce symptoms in their early stages. Regular check-ups allow physicians to identify risk factors early and intervene before complications occur. Prevention remains one of the most powerful forms of healthcare,” he says.

He explains that screening recommendations depend on several factors, including age, gender, family history and lifestyle. Individuals with a family history of diabetes or cardiovascular disease may require earlier or more frequent monitoring.

Beyond disease detection, regular check-ups create opportunities for valuable discussions between patients and healthcare providers about nutrition, exercise, mental well-being, sleep patterns and other lifestyle choices that influence long-term health.

Despite these benefits, many people continue to avoid routine examinations. Some fear discovering an illness, while others assume they are healthy because they feel well. Medical experts warn that this assumption can be

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Many chronic diseases do not produce symptoms in their early stages. Regular check-ups allow physicians to identify risk factors early and intervene before complications occur. Prevention remains one of the most powerful forms of healthcare.
DR AHMED AL BADRI
Family medicine consultant

dangerous, as many conditions develop without obvious symptoms. High blood pressure, often called a ‘silent killer’, may cause no early warning signs while gradually increasing the risk of serious complications. Similarly, high blood sugar and cholesterol levels can remain unnoticed until they begin affecting overall health. Routine screening acts as an early warning system, helping individuals make necessary lifestyle changes or begin treatment before complications develop. For Hood al Kindi, a routine health examination proved to be a life-changing decision. “I always believed I was healthy because I felt fine. My family encouraged me to have an annual check-up and the tests showed that my blood sugar was higher than normal. It had not developed

diabetes, but it was a warning sign. I changed my diet, started exercising regularly and followed my doctor’s advice. Looking back, that appointment may have prevented years of health problems,” he recalls. His experience highlights the growing importance of preventive healthcare, which empowers people to take control of their health before illness affects their lives. Healthcare systems worldwide are increasingly focusing on preventive medicine through awareness campaigns, vaccination programmes, screening initiatives and promotion of healthier lifestyles. These measures improve individual health outcomes while reducing pressure on hospitals and lowering long-term healthcare costs. Employers are also recognising the benefits of workplace wellness programmes by encouraging

regular health assessments and healthier habits among employees. However, creating a culture of prevention requires collective effort. Families, schools, communities and the media all play important roles in improving health awareness and encouraging people to seek medical advice before problems arise. Ultimately, routine health check-ups are not about searching for disease — they are about protecting health. They provide reassurance when results are normal and create opportunities for early action when concerns are identified. Good health is built through informed choices, consistent habits and timely decisions. Setting aside one appointment each year for a health assessment may seem like a small step, but it can help prevent serious illness, extend healthy years of life and provide peace of mind.

WAR

TRUMP TELLS IRAN TO MAKE A DEAL

Oil prices tumbled and stocks mostly rose after US President Donald Trump said he was preparing for new talks with Iran

Iran's foreign ministry said there were currently no negotiations with the United States but talks were taking place on Hormuz

An Iranian lawmaker said that mediators were seeking to revive a deal that briefly halted the war between Iran and the US in June

Six Saudi-flagged supertankers have changed course in the Gulf of Aden in recent days and are heading to southern Africa

Manufacturing activity in China slowed in July as war delivered weaker demand and elevated costs for the exporting powerhouse

US President Donald Trump again called on oil companies to lower gasoline prices for American consumers on Monday

US President Donald Trump lashed out on Monday after Iran denied it was in negotiations with the United States, declaring in an angry social media post that a US military blockade will continue until there is a “Deal, or Total surrender.” Calling Iran “duplicitous” for “openly and proudly” saying it was not negotiating, Trump wrote: “Whether Iran wants to admit it or not, we are, in fact, talking of a solution to a problem that they have caused, for decades.”

Trump’s statement on Truth Social came after Iran said there were no direct talks with Washington, as Trump had insisted there would be when he called off a threatened round of heavy bombing against Iran over the weekend, citing what he said were appeals from regional powers and Tehran.

The Iranian foreign ministry said on Monday that the only talks it was holding were with Oman to discuss plans for sharing control over the Strait of Hormuz, a vital passage for the global energy trade.

Trump insisted Iran had asked for talks — “some would say ‘beg’” — but was now giving “their usual blather” about controlling Hormuz. The strait, Trump insisted, “is already completely controlled by the United States Navy and our ‘Blockade’ or, as some say, ‘The United States Wall of Steel!’ Nothing gets through to Iran, unless we want it to, and nothing will get through, unless a Deal, or Total Surrender, is accomplished.”

Original goals included destruction of the country’s nuclear industry, missiles and backing for a popular uprising against the government. More than five months later, Iran remains able to fire missiles and drones at US and allied targets in the region, and retains its enriched uranium stockpiles. Despite the US pressure, Iranian attacks on ships in Hormuz have severely impacted



An Iranian man walks past an anti-US billboard at Enghelab Square in central Tehran. — AFP

global energy trading, giving Tehran a strong new card in the standoff. Trump last week threatened to hit Iran “very hard”, with the US leader reportedly considering renewed attacks including against energy infrastructure. But the president pulled back from that threat on Saturday, saying the “perimeters” of a deal were there. Iran’s foreign ministry however denied there were currently negotiations taking place. “We are not currently negotiating with the United States. Our negotiations are with Oman to

secure passage through the Strait of Hormuz,” said foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei during a weekly press briefing.

The Hormuz shipping route is a major sticking point in efforts to end the war. Iran has obstructed vessels attempting to pass the critical trade corridor, firing on commercial ships. Before the war, there was free passage through the strait, but Iran now insists on retaining control and charging fees, something the US rejects.

Tehran has refused to let ships travel any route other than one

which hugs the Iranian coast. On Sunday, Baqaei told state television that a deal was close on managing Hormuz. “We are now going to reach an understanding on a route acceptable to both sides — neither the northern route nor the southern route — but one that respects the sovereign rights of both sides and safeguards our national interests and security,” he said. But he insisted that such an agreement did not mean the reopening of the strait.

On Sunday, a tanker reported hearing an explosion nearby, the

United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre reported, but the ship and crew were all reported safe. Trump told reporters on Sunday that the new talks with Iran would cover Hormuz and ultimately the denuclearisation of Iran. The US president said at the start of the conflict that the war was necessary to deal with Iran’s nuclear programme.

Western nations accuse Iran of seeking a bomb, though Tehran insists the programme is entirely civilian in nature. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A ship off the port of Aden, where traffic remained steady after the Ansar Allah said their forces had carried out missile and drone strikes on Saudi oil tankers, in Aden. — Reuters file photo

SIX SAUDI TANKERS TURN AWAY FROM GULF OF ADEN

LONDON: Six Saudi-flagged supertankers have changed course in the Gulf of Aden in recent days and are heading to southern Africa following threats by Yemen’s Ansar Allah movement to target Saudi shipping, tracking data showed on Monday. The tankers, which were empty of cargo after returning from destinations in Asia, were sailing in formation towards southern Africa, rather than opting to transit the southern Red Sea via the Bab el Mandeb chokepoint, according to AIS ship-tracking on LSEG and MarineTraffic.

One of the tankers, Dilam, had Gibraltar as its destination, ship tracking showed. The vessels’ Saudi-based operator Bahri and other Saudi officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The tankers, each of which can carry a maximum of two million barrels of crude oil, had opted to re-route via the Cape taking into account the security situation, two trade sources said, based on their assessments. — Reuters

Israel conveys ‘concerns’ to US on Gaza plan

TEL AVIV: Israel said on Monday it had expressed concern to the United States about a plan to end the Gaza war hailed by President Donald Trump, as it kept up strikes on the Palestinian territory. It marks the latest sign of disconnect between Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces a tough reelection fight in October and has heavily promoted his relationship with the US leader, whom he met again last week.

Netanyahu’s office demanded more concrete disarmament by Hamas, which on Friday announced it would give up weapons under the Trump plan to a nascent Palestinian governing committee. “Israel has conveyed its comments and concerns on the proposed framework to our American counterparts. The version that has been made public does not reflect Israel’s positions,” Doron Spielman, spokesman for the prime minister’s office, said. He said that Israeli intelligence had found that Hamas had been rearming and recruiting forces since a ceasefire announced by Trump in October.

The ceasefire has reduced the level of violence, but Israel still controls more than 60 per cent of the Gaza Strip and since the truce



Palestinian children play near the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza. — AFP

more than 1,200 Palestinians have been killed, according to Gaza authorities. The Israeli military says it has lost five soldiers in Gaza over the same period, as well as one civilian contractor.

Trump called the disarmament move a “major milestone” in ending the devastating war that began when Hamas carried out the attack against Israel on October 7,

2023. Trump told reporters that Israel was “very happy” with the development, but Netanyahu has not spoken about it publicly.

A road map released by the Board of Peace called for Israel to complete “fully” and “without delay” commitments to cease military operations in Gaza. While calling for verification of commitments, the road map also called for a “phased withdrawal” from Gaza by Israel, which has

insisted on its presence until Hamas disarmament.

A security official in Gaza said that since early on Sunday, Israeli strikes have killed 19 Palestinians, including women and children. Palestinian authorities also said that an Israeli strike on Saturday destroyed a large number of medical supplies. Israel has repeatedly accused Hamas of using civilian infrastructure to conceal weapons and fighters and said it had destroyed arms depots across Gaza. The Israeli military also identified two people it said it killed on Saturday, charging that they were planning attacks on Israeli civilians and troops.

Gaza is not the only point of divergence between Trump and Netanyahu. Israel has also been sceptical of Trump’s pursuit of diplomacy to end the war on Iran launched by the two countries in late February. Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who holds a largely ceremonial role, offered a more upbeat take on Trump’s Gaza efforts, saying they “bring a certain vision of hope”. The latest development marks “a very positive step with the clear caveat and undertaking that Hamas must be disarmed”, he said as he received foreign ambassadors. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Pedestrians walk along a mist-spraying zone to cool off on a street in Seoul. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA ISSUES FIRST ‘SEVERE HEATWAVE WARNING’

SEOUL: South Korea’s weather agency issued a “severe heatwave warning” for Seoul on Monday, the first such advisory since introducing the designation this year to alert the public about extreme temperatures. New national heat records were set on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with the mercury soaring up to 42.5C, leading to nearly 300 people being hospitalised.

The sweltering heatwave continued on Monday, albeit without breaking the weekend’s all-time record. But the Korea Meteorological Administration issued its first “severe heatwave warning” for Seoul, saying some districts in the city of nine million people could expect more roasting temperatures to come.

The agency said marked the second consecutive day when the apparent, or “feels-like”, temperature forecast figures as high as 38C. “Outdoor activities and work should be halted or postponed as much as possible,” says the heat warning. “Individuals should move to cool locations, such as air-conditioned indoor spaces or designated heat relief shelters.” The “severe heatwave warning” category was introduced in South Korea this year, mirroring similar designations other countries have brought in. — AFP

WILDFIRES RAZE IN US NORTHWEST CITY OF SPOKANE



A woman looks at her grandparents’ home after it was destroyed by a wildfire, in Spokane. — Reuters

SPOKANE: Firefighters worked to contain huge blazes in the northwestern US city of Spokane early on Monday after officials reported hundreds of structures had been reduced to cinders. Tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate their homes over the weekend, as three separate fires broke out in and around the city in the east of Washington state.

The National Weather Service (NWS) had warned of “extremely critical fire weather conditions” in the area due to strong winds and exceptional dryness. Video of the aftermath on Sunday showed scores of homes burned to the ground, with only their brick fireplaces and foundations remaining.

About 60,000 people within Spokane’s city limits have been evacuated under the authorities’ highest-level alert, “Go now,” police chief Kevin Hall said on Sunday. Mayor Lisa Brown told a press briefing: “Hundreds of homes and structures have been lost. We are still assessing the potential for lives to be lost.” “To the people who are suffering right now in our region from either loss or uncertainty... our hearts go out to you. We are here for you for the long term,” she said. — AFP

FIGHTING DROUGHT

Romania blasts rocks to reroute Danube



BUDAPEST: Romania blew up a rock outcrop to help redirect vital cooling water from the drought-hit Danube to its last working nuclear reactor, as neighbouring Hungary said it might be able to eke out two more days of power from its only atomic plant. The controlled blast sent a tower of water into the air - an extraordinary measure underlining the scale of the crisis in Europe, where heat and drought have lowered river levels. — Reuters

EU URGES ‘UNITED ACTION’ AFTER CEUTA MIGRANT RUSH

BRUSSELS: EU chief, Ursula von der Leyen, called on Monday for “united action” on border security after a migrant rush on Spain’s North African enclave of Ceuta triggered a public spat between Madrid and several European partners. “From this incident, it is clear that we must do more to further strengthen our borders at critical points,” von der Leyen wrote in a letter to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. “The protection of all our external borders is a

shared European responsibility,” she warned, calling for “vigilant monitoring and the use of physical barriers where needed.”

The unprecedented scenes in Ceuta triggered sharp tensions among the European Union’s 27 member states, with migration hawks Italy and Denmark in particular calling for Spain to be suspended from the Schengen free-travel area.

The videoconference set for Tuesday will be a chance to draw “lessons” from the Ceuta episode,

von der Leyen said, warning the challenges of illegal immigration require “a common European response, united action and solidarity”.

The commission chief urged the bloc to “double down” in five areas: preventing irregular migration in the first place via cooperation with partner states; strengthening external borders; implementing early warning systems; dismantling smuggling networks and reinforcing returns. — AFP

Water bombers take to skies in Greece wildfires



An Erickson firefighting helicopter makes strategic water drops as a wildfire burns in Mount Kitheronas, west of Athens. — Reuters

Authorities ordered new evacuations on Monday morning in villages near Kandyli, about 45 kilometres west of the capital. The wildfires have claimed five lives since last week. On Sunday, two Bell helicopters collided while conducting firefighting operations near Psatha

early on Monday, a department spokesperson said. The fire service said 13 aeroplanes, 12 helicopters and about 450 firefighters were battling the flames in the regions of Boeotia and Attica. In recent days, wind gusts reaching 80 kilometres per hour had grounded aircraft for safety reasons, hampering firefighting efforts.

Authorities ordered new evacuations on Monday morning in villages near Kandyli, about 45 kilometres west of the capital, Greece’s Civil Protection agency said. “The battle against the fires is uneven,” Deputy Minister for Civil Protection and Climate Crisis Kostas Katsafados told public broadcaster ERTNews on Monday.

The wildfires have claimed five lives since last week. On Sunday, two Bell helicopters collided while conducting firefighting operations near Psatha.

Local media said a Danish pilot and a Greek co-pilot aboard one of the aircraft were killed, while the British pilot and Greek co-pilot of the other aircraft were injured and taken to hospital.

Pending the outcome of an official investigation, all Bell helicopters deployed to the firefighting operation have been grounded, public broadcaster ERT reported. The helicopters were leased from Australia’s McDermott Aviation as part of a fleet of 15 aircraft. The company said it has supported operations in Greece for the past seven years. The pilot’s deaths followed those of three firefighters who died last week while battling separate wildfires in Crete and the Peloponnese.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warned that Greece faced “extremely difficult” days ahead, as high temperatures and dry conditions continued to fuel the flames. More than 12,000 hectares of forest and agricultural land have burned over the past week, according to analyses from the European Union’s Copernicus Earth observation programme cited by local media. — AFP

UKRAINIAN DRONES HIT RUSSIA’S WILDBERRIES

MOSCOW: More than 200 firefighters were battling a fire at a warehouse run by Russian online retailer Wildberries east of Moscow following a Ukrainian drone attack on Monday, as Kyiv’s campaign against the e-commerce giant intensified. Alexander Avdeyev, the regional governor of Vladimir, said 203 firefighters and 67 pieces of equipment had been deployed to tackle Monday’s blaze, which measured 100,000 square metres (1.07 million square feet), equivalent to about 14 soccer fields.

Wildberries confirmed the attack and said all staff had been evacuated and deliveries and shipping orders had been rerouted to other warehouses. The company’s founder and CEO, Tatyana Kim, has called the Ukrainian attacks - which have targeted more than a dozen Wildberries sites since July 18 - “acts of terrorism”. Kyiv has sought to disrupt the operations of the company that is often described as Russia’s answer to Amazon and is a linchpin of the consumer economy.

Kim said businesses across 10 countries had suffered significant losses as a result of the attacks and that Wildberries was working with the Russian government to mitigate the impact on vendors using its platform. Avdeyev said a young man had sustained a non-life-threatening head wound in the attack and was being taken to hospital. Another young man had an injured finger, while a woman had also suffered what the governor described as minor injuries to one of her legs. — Reuters

TREMOR SHOCKS

5.6 earthquake strikes near Egypt’s Suez



A magnitude 5.6 earthquake shook eastern Egypt, prompting authorities to activate response plans although there were no immediate reports of casualties. The quake struck about 40 kilometres north of the city of Suez at 3 am and was followed by five aftershocks. Egypt’s Health Minister Khaled Abdel Ghaffar ordered emergency response plans activated across the country and directed ambulance services to be at “maximum levels of preparedness”. — AFP

ELECTRIC GRID COLLAPSE

Cuba reports new nationwide blackout



Cuba’s power grid failed, causing another nationwide blackout. State-run UNE said there was a “total disconnection” of the national electricity system, plunging the country, including the capital, into abrupt darkness. The Ministry of Energy said that protocols to reactivate the grid were underway. Washington has authorized the arrival of only one Russian tanker — carrying 100,000 tons of crude — which came in March. Those reserves have since been exhausted. — AFP

OPINION

The framework is sitting on the shelf. What changed?



DR MARYAM TUBEILEH

The writer is an Innovation Governance Advisor & Strategist and Founder of Oman’s first boutique innovation management consultancy

THREE YEARS ago, I walked into a government office with a simple proposition. They had a problem — one I’d heard across the Omani ecosystem: innovation initiatives never made it past ideation. Ideas came in; nothing came out the other end. Strategy remained aspiration. I proposed a solution: adopt a structured framework that would give the organisation a shared language and discipline for managing innovation systematically.

Their response came in two flavours. One organisation told me they’d already developed their own innovation management framework and distributed it across their entities. They appreciated the offer but didn’t need outside help.

Another was visibly proud — they’d recently received international recognition and awards for developing an innovation governance guidebook.

Distinguished recognition. Among the top innovation enablers celebrated globally. Why would they need a new framework? I left. They had their answer. I had mine.

Last month, I visited organisations across Oman. I asked about that framework. The most common response: “What guide?”

The organisations that had championed these frameworks —that won international recognition for developing them —weren’t visibly implementing what they’d created. When I circled back, the question hung unanswered:

What has changed since we last spoke?

Innovation activities were still unstructured. Organisations still relied on heroic individual effort. The gap between ideation and execution remained wide. Nothing. Had. Changed.

This is not a failure of the frameworks themselves. It’s a failure of something more fundamental: we have confused the creation of governance artefacts with governance itself.

We celebrate the guidebook. We award the teams that built them. We communicate progress through rankings and recognition. And then we move to the next initiative, the next award, the next proof that we are serious about innovation.

But a framework sitting on a shelf — unread, unimplemented, unadopted — changes nothing.

A guidebook distributed to organisations that don’t use it doesn’t close the innovation-to-execution gap. An award for developing a system you haven’t deployed is, at best, premature. At worst, it’s theatre.

The real work isn’t in the creation of standards or frameworks. It’s in the discipline of adoption. It’s in the unglamorous, ongoing work of organisational change: aligning accountabilities, building capability, measuring performance and holding leadership accountable for outcomes— not outputs.

Here’s what I observe: organisations get excited about frameworks because frameworks are credible, exportable and quickly turned into achievements. They can be published, championed, awarded, communicated as progress.

Standardisation and structured frameworks for innovation are vital. But only if they are deployed with discipline and measured for results

Oman’s innovation ecosystem has built significant capacity. Rankings have moved. Guidebooks exist. International recognition has followed. But capacity-building and innovation performance are not the same thing. One is hygiene. One is impact.

Standardisation and structured frameworks for innovation are vital. But only if they are deployed with discipline and measured for results.

‘Here are my recommendations for moving forward:

First: Framework developers must pilot their own work. If you create a governance system — whether homegrown or adopted from an international standard — you deploy it within your own organisation first.

Not as a side project. As your primary operation. You don’t award yourself for writing a playbook— you show results from running it.

Second: Measure adoption and impact, not recognition. How many organisations have implemented this framework? What changed in their innovation output, speed, quality and strategic alignment? What problems were solved?

Did innovation performance move? Until we ask and answer these questions, we’re still celebrating theatre.

Third: Bring in external accountability. Organisations implementing new systems need external guidance and challenge — not just internal pride in what they built.

The question isn’t whether we have a guide. The question is: what are you doing differently because of it?

LESSONS FROM AUSTRALIA’S ‘BLACK SUMMER’ WILDFIRES

OLIVER HOTHAM

Australians who faced a ‘Black Summer’ blaze that scorched millions of hectares say they may have lessons for European countries hit by some of the fiercest fires in living memory.

Firefighters in Europe and around the world are encountering wildfires of a new intensity -- extreme weather events scientists have linked to human-made climate change.

For Australians, such fires are too familiar. The country has long been prone to brutal wildfires -- notably the ‘Black Summer’ bushfires from late 2019 to early 2020, which razed millions of hectares, destroyed thousands of homes and blanketed cities in noxious smoke.

Here’s what experts in Australia think the world can learn from the country’s long experience fighting bushfires on a vast dry continent.

For Australia’s firefighters, the key is to prepare and try to prevent or reduce the risk of a catastrophic blaze. Fires are uncontrollable when they exceed the firefighters’ ability to “put the wet stuff onto the red stuff fast enough to put them out”, bushfire consultant Roger Fenwick said.

Carrying out controlled fires on a regular basis ensures that when the big one comes, its spread is contained. “You have to do hazard reduction burning to get the fuel level down so that the fire cannot develop an intensity beyond what we are capable of dealing with,” Fenwick says.

Besides controlled burning of bushland, that work can also involve clearing undergrowth with machines or even by hand.

While this does not prevent fires, it can dramatically reduce the risk of a catastrophic blaze. Communities are kept alert about controlled burns through a website and mobile app run by the fire department.

Another key to preparation is creating so-called asset protection zones -- meaning fuel for the fire is kept away from where people live.

“Even a simple 10 metres can dramatically increase the building’s chance of survival,” David Peterson, an expert in managing bushfire risk, said.

Fires in Europe have even experienced the outbreak of a “fire cloud” or pyrocumulonimbus that can generate wind and lighting — also seen in Australia during the “Black Summer”. — AFP

Nadhira’s legacy of courage and inspiration

THIS WEEKEND, Oman on social media mourned the death of Nadhira al Harthy, the pioneering mountaineer who lost her life in an avalanche on Broad Peak in Pakistan. The sadness was immediate and heartfelt. Omanis remembered not only the first woman from the country to stand on the summit of Mount Everest, but also an educator, mentor and public servant whose life inspired thousands.

Yet now that the first shock has passed, perhaps the most important question is not how she died but what her life teaches us.

Nadhira did not begin her career as a mountaineer. She studied social and geographic studies and devoted many years to education as a teacher, curriculum developer, administrator and leader in youth and environmental programmes.

Climbing entered her life only after she accompanied Omani students to Mount Kilimanjaro in 2015.

Although she did not reach the summit because of altitude sickness, the experience changed the course of her life. Instead of accepting defeat, she accepted a challenge.

Her achievements are now well known. Inspired by Khalid al Siyabi, the first Omani man to climb Mount Everest, she followed in his footsteps and became the first Omani woman to summit Mount Everest in 2019. Later, she became the first Arab woman to summit Ama Dablam and the first Omani to reach K2, the world’s second-highest mountain. She went on to climb other demanding peaks, including



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Nadhira’s true legacy is far greater than the mountain where she took her last steps.

the Matterhorn in 2023 and Nanga Parbat in 2024. These achievements made her the first Omani woman to climb four mountains higher than 8,000 metres.

Nadhira also became a familiar and admired figure on Instagram. She shared not only moments of success but also the preparation, fear, difficulty and patience behind them. This honesty made her achievements more meaningful.

Young Omani women could see someone from their own society entering a field that few had imagined for them. She showed that ambition has no fixed age, background or traditional path.

What many people saw on social media, however, was only the visible part of her journey. Behind every summit were years of training, discipline, setbacks and determination. She succeeded not

because the mountains became easier, but because she became stronger.

For me, this is the most important lesson from Nadhira’s exceptional life. Many people have ambitions. Many believe they are capable of achieving great things.

The difference is that very few are willing to accept the daily effort, discomfort and uncertainty that meaningful dreams demand. Nadhira did. She trained after work, returned after disappointment and refused to let failure become the final chapter.

She also understood something else that is often forgotten. Courage is not the absence of fear. Experienced climbers know the dangers of the mountains better than anyone else.

They prepare carefully, rely on experienced teams and make difficult decisions in unforgiving conditions. Nadhira accepted those risks with open eyes and a beautiful smile. That awareness did not prevent her from pursuing what she loved.

The avalanche on Broad Peak in Pakistan ended Nadhira al Harthy’s life — and the lives of many other brave souls including the renowned Nirmal Purja, whose achievements were featured in the Netflix documentary 14 Peaks.

But this end should not define her journey. Her true legacy is far greater than the mountain on which she took her last steps.

She showed us that purpose can be discovered at any stage of life, that failure can become a beginning rather than an end and that the greatest achievements belong to those who are willing to act. That is how Oman should remember her.

Nadhira taught us to dream and dream big



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

MET Nadhira al Harthy for the first time when I was invited by the ambassador of Nepal to Oman, then Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, to join the reception for her at the airport as she returned after making history - reaching the summit of Mount Everest. “You made it!” read the banner that her family members had made then. There was excitement in the air. “We are proud of Nadhira’s remarkable feat, making her an unstoppable winner and becoming the first Omani woman to summit the Mount Everest. Nadhira’s win has gone a long way in demonstrating that women can achieve any goal that they are passionately determined to achieve and also put the Sultanate of Oman on international map,” one of her supporters had said. As reporters, we are trained to learn quickly about the topics and subjects of our interviews. Nadhira, I felt, had that quiet confidence in her. And from the very first interview her qualities were clear. When asked what she would like to tell her beloved country and its people, she said, “I hope I did something for my country when I raised our Omani flag on top of the world. I am elated to see how happy everyone is to witness what we have achieved.” The quiet mountaineer, who went on to climb many summits, was a geography teacher and I believe she would have talked about the summits in her classrooms. Each time I interviewed her or heard her deliver speeches, she was teaching me things – things which no school can teach!

The most important one was gratitude. When she was accorded a warm welcome on her return in Muscat this is what the jubilant Nadhira expressed her gratitude: “I am grateful to God that I made it to the top of the Mount Everest making my biggest dream come true.” She taught us to dream and dream big. She urged us to climb our personal Mount Everest. She taught me that to achieve a dream we have to sacrifice. I had asked her what was the most challenging part of it all and she replied with a smile, “The challenging part was to stay at the base camp. It was not easy. The food and water and everything we are used to in a day to day lifestyle are all different when you decide to live in nature. We are very far away and we must accept the way things are to stay healthy and do what we have to do.” Staying healthy was the most significant aspect to achieve her goal of reaching the summit and she had always stayed focused. But it all had one important element - discipline. She worked and trained hard. She did not just wake up one day and climb a mountain. What is interesting was that she even suffered from altitude sickness when she took her students to the Mount Kilimanjaro. Then she got inspired. She clubbed the inspiration with determination, where she found her mentor the mountaineer Khalid al Siyab, the first Omani man to summit the Mount Everest. Once her training began there was no looking back. Her patriotism has been inspiring. She took her country wherever she went.

Staying healthy was the most significant aspect to achieve her goal of reaching the summit and she had always stayed focused. But it all had one important element – discipline

Why mountaineering? She had begun climbing as a mission from the Ministry of Education with the students to climb the Kilimanjaro and from that time on she never lost sight of the mountains – she was always climbing. What Nadhira taught us was to follow our hearts. “Climbing makes me happy and complete. It touched my heart in a big way and I feel it is something I can do, so then I decided I will do something big. I went on to dream big,” Nadhira said, when speaking to the Observer at the reception that was hosted by the Embassy of Nepal just before her departure to Nepal on April 1, 2019. Not many of us find our purpose in life easily. She found it and start to pursue it. Yet another meeting was during the Sagarmatha Day celebration hosted by Nepal Ambassador to Oman, Dornath Aryal. Nadhira was a speaker and this is what she said that day “We could hear the sound of avalanches every day, but I was ready to go to the top of the world. Every step had a risk, but every risk was a step forward. I wanted to be on the Mount Everest summit.” She explained at length about her training and how she prepared herself for the big climb. Her training was done on the Omani mountains in Al Rustaq, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Jabal Shams and so on and by participating in marathons. “Mountains can tell you everything,” she said. You will continue to inspire generations to come. N is definitely for the National treasure called Nadhira Al Harthy.

Malaysia’s former ruling party boosted by state poll wins

ISAAC CHONG

A coalition led by Malaysia’s former ruling UMNO party may be on a path back to national power after winning back-to-back state elections, analysts say. The coalition, Barisan Nasional, took control of Negeri Sembilan state in a vote on Saturday by teaming up with government opponents. It secured a significant majority, inflicting a stinging defeat on Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim’s ruling Pakatan Harapan alliance. The result was Barisan Nasional’s second state win in weeks, with analysts citing clever vote wrangling and disaffection among some ethnic Chinese voters with one of the governing coalition’s parties. The state results were a warning to the prime minister, said Bridget Welsh, an expert on Malaysian politics at the University of Nottingham Malaysia. “The bell is ringing. The bell is ringing so loud that they seem to be deaf,” she said. State elections do not necessarily translate into success at the national level and Anwar remains prime minister, the analyst said. But Welsh said the prime minister had linked both campaigns to his leadership and lost. “It was a test, and it’s a test that they failed and they failed quite significantly.” Barisan Nasional - of which UMNO is the biggest political party - ruled Malaysia for decades before losing power in 2018, brought down by a corruption scandal involving its leader at the time, Najib Razak, who is now in jail. Political instability followed: three governments in quick succession until Anwar’s coalition won the most seats in 2022 though not enough to govern alone. Malaysia’s king then asked him to form a “unity government” with his old rivals, including Barisan Nasional. UMNO has long positioned itself as a champion of Malay political and economic interests. By contrast, Anwar’s People’s Justice Party has built its support on a multiracial and secular base including members of the country’s Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. The results of the two state elections do not immediately alter Anwar’s grip on power nationally, analysts said. For one thing, Barisan Nasional is officially still part of the prime minister’s governing coalition in parliament. But the back-to-back state wins could encourage major shifts in political alliances ahead of the next general elections, due by February 2028. Mohammad Azizuddin Muhammad Sani, a professor of politics and international relations at the Universiti Utara Malaysia, said he expects Anwar to delay calling the next general election for as long as possible. If the current momentum was maintained, the Malaysian government’s hold on power could be at risk in the next federal election, he said. — AFP

Training the UK ‘surgeons of the future’ using robots

PULLING HIS face away from an immersive 3D headset looking deep inside a patient’s lung, doctor Sasha Stamenkovic recounted the final steps of an operation using robots to remove a tumour. “We’ve done some very, very intricate operating today,” said the 60-year-old consultant thoracic surgeon. “We’ve saved a lot of lung, we’ve gone around some really, really small vessels and really small airways.” He was addressing three surgeons from another English hospital observing Stamenkovic using the new da Vinci 5 robotic-assisted surgical system, made by US company Intuitive. The equipment will arrive in their operating theatre later this year, part of a drive to increase the use of robotics in keyhole surgery across the UK’s National Health Service. Throughout the roughly two-hour operation, Stamenkovic’s instructions echoed through a microphone to his surgical team, which includes nurses specially trained as robotic surgical first assistants. As director of robotic surgery and research at Barts Health NHS Trust, he runs fellowships at St Bartholomew’s Hospital in central London, shaping what he says will be the “surgeon of the future.”

The government has set a target for robotic assistance to be used in 9 out of 10 keyhole surgeries in England by 2035. At first glance, the setup looks like a video game. Stamenkovic carried out the operation via a console at the side of the room, his hand movements translating into the actions of three robotic arms holding operating instruments, looming over a patient lying a few metres away. A fourth arm holds a camera, providing the 3D stream for the surgeon, as well as two screens in the operating theatre. The robotic systems can be used across a range of specialities including urology, gynaecology, colorectal, thoracic and abdominal



KIMBERLEY MANNION

The writer is a producer and journalist at AFPTV Europe



This photo shows surgeons and nurses using the new Da Vinci 5 robotic-assisted surgical system while performing surgery, at St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London. — AFP

or general surgery. Ali Ansari pour, a senior cardiothoracic trainee on a year-long fellowship, is one of the doctors under his wing. “Stepping away” from the patient and adjusting to this setup was the “biggest challenge,” Ansari pour said. “I think that almost kind of separates you from the patient slightly,” he said. “But it gives you incredible vision and makes you very objective in terms of how you deal with the patient.” Despite the futuristic appearance, Stamenkovic argued robotics has actually returned keyhole surgery closer to “how the original open surgery used to be”. This is because the slim robotic arms can move more easily than humans holding tools inside the restricted space of a keyhole surgery. “Robotic surgery has brought you back to what surgeons wanted to do, which was to have an art form able to create something with their hands,” he said. The greater precision also reduces the risk of complications like air leaks, a common cause of longer hospital stays following lung surgery. This more precise surgery within a smaller wound should mean a shorter hospital stay and recovery time. For an overstretched public health service, the hope is patients will

leave hospitals sooner, freeing up bed space and reducing waiting lists. Ian Macleod “didn’t realise” until he was wearing a surgical gown and about to be anaesthetised that he would be the first patient in the NHS to undergo lung cancer surgery using the new system. The 76-year-old retired detective said the news “didn’t faze” him and he was back on his feet 30 minutes after returning to the ward. The recovery was “extraordinary,” said Macleod. He had undergone non-robotic keyhole surgery for a different cancer in the past and says that recovery time was “much longer”. Leaving hospital with just one stitch this time, he was driving his wife to the garden centre for coffee less than a week later. The government highlighted robotics as one of five “big bets” in a 10-year health plan for England. But the Royal College of Nursing has slammed the existence of a “postcode lottery” in the availability of the surgery in different parts of the country. The body also criticised the lack of a “standard, consistent funding model” for robotics across the NHS, which has left some hospitals relying on charitable donations to fund the equipment.

SPORTS



Young players sharpen their technical and physical skills during preparations for the Alexandria training camp.



Abubakr al Jahwari, Vice-Chairman of OBA, with Iskandar al Nabli, General Technical Supervisor of the Athlete Development Centres, during the players' preparation programme.

OMAN BASKETBALL PROSPECTS BEGIN ALEXANDRIA TRAINING CAMP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 3

ELITE PLAYERS from the Oman Basketball Association's Athlete Development Centres have begun an overseas training camp in Alexandria, Egypt, aimed at enhancing their technical abilities and providing valuable international exposure.

The camp, organised by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), will continue until August 11. It forms part of the association's long-term programme to develop national basketball talent through intensive training and competitive matches against different basketball schools.

The delegation travelled to Egypt following the conclusion of a domestic training camp, which included a friendly match against Nizwa Club.

Prior to the team's departure, Abubakr al Jahwari, Vice-Chairman of the OBA and Chairman of the Athlete Development Centres Supervisory Committee, met the

technical and administrative staff, players and their parents to outline the camp's programme and its various stages.

Al Jahwari said the Alexandria camp represented an important phase of a long-term player development project designed to provide young talents with diverse training environments that would help improve their skills and maximise their potential.

He explained that the association viewed such camps as an investment in the future of Omani basketball, with the programme focusing on the technical, physical and psychological development of players rather than preparing them for a specific tournament.

"The programme will continue after the delegation returns to Oman through another domestic camp, ensuring that the development process proceeds in accordance with the approved plan," he said.

Al Jahwari also praised the continued support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the cooperation of parents, noting that their contribution played a major role in the successful implementation of the association's player development programmes.

Ghassan al Busaidy, General Coordinator of the Athlete Development Centres, said the players participating in the camp were selected following a detailed assessment of their performances and progress during the previous training stages.

He noted that the camp would not be limited to technical development, but would also focus on strengthening the players' personalities, building their self-confidence and familiarising them with the demands of overseas competitions.

Exposure to different coaching methods and competitive environments would also help the players become more adaptable and prepared for future challenges, he added.

Al Busaidy confirmed that the development programme would continue after the team's return through successive training phases leading up to the start of the new academic year.

Iskandar al Nabli, General Technical Supervisor of the Athlete Development Centres, said the technical programme included intensive daily training sessions and a series of friendly matches against leading Alexandria clubs.

The Omani players are scheduled to face

Al Ittihad Alexandria, Sporting, Smouha, Al Tram and Al Olympi during the camp.

Al Nabli said the matches would allow the coaching staff to assess the players under genuine competitive conditions and evaluate their technical and tactical progress. The encounters would also provide valuable indicators regarding their readiness for the next phases of the development programme.

Meanwhile, Mohammed al Amin, Physical Preparation Supervisor at the Oman Basketball Association, said the camp represented an important opportunity to evaluate the results of the physical conditioning programme implemented during the previous period.

He explained that the training loads and friendly matches had been carefully structured according to scientific principles, enabling the technical staff to assess the players' ability to maintain their physical and technical performance under the pressure of successive matches.

The results will provide the coaching staff with accurate data to guide the remaining stages of the preparation programme and ensure the players continue to develop efficiently.

Oman forward Tariq Al Sadi signs a short-term contract for Leyton Orient

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 3

Oman international Tariq al Sadi has joined English League One side Leyton Orient on a short-term contract running until February 2027, marking an important new stage in the promising forward's European career.

The East London club officially announced the signing of the 20-year-old after he trained with the squad throughout their pre-season preparations. Al Sadi had been awaiting the completion of his work-permit process before finalising the agreement.

Al Sadi strengthened his case for a contract through a series of encouraging pre-season appearances. He

provided the build-up for a goal in Orient's 4-1 win over Enfield Town, driving down the flank, beating two defenders and delivering the ball for Phil Chinedu to score.

He was subsequently included in the squad for the club's training camp in Spain and found the net during a 2-0 victory over fellow League One side Lincoln City. He also featured as Orient completed their preparations with a 2-1 home win against Belgian club Royal Antwerp.

The agreement represents a return to familiar surroundings for Al Sadi, who first joined Leyton Orient's academy set-up in early 2024. He made a strong impression



The forward's progress in Europe earned him a place in the Oman senior national team in May 2025.



Al Sadi will seek to establish himself under head coach Richie Wellens and compete for first-team opportunities in League One.

with the club's under-18 team, scoring in a 4-2 victory over Stevenage and opening the scoring in a 3-3 draw against Oxford United.

He also struck twice as Orient began their Merit League One campaign with a victory, while his cross created the winning goal for a Leyton Orient XI in a 3-2 friendly triumph over Southend United.

Al Sadi later continued his development in Spain with the youth side of Barcelona-based UE Sant Andreu during the 2024-25 season. Available competition records list him as having made 12 appearances, including eight starts, and scored two goals in the Liga Nacional Juvenil.

The forward's progress in Europe earned him a place in the Oman senior national team in May 2025. He marked his international debut by converting a penalty in Oman's 4-1 friendly victory over Niger at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Al Sadi will now seek to establish himself under head coach Richie Wellens and compete for first-team opportunities in League One, the third tier of English football.

His move gives another young Omani player the opportunity to develop in a highly competitive European environment and could provide a valuable boost to the national team as he gains further experience at professional level.

OHF TO APPROVE CLUB ENTRIES, REVIEW 2028 BEACH WORLDS BID



An attempt by player Mohammed al Hasani to score an individual goal.

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 2

THE OMAN Handball Federation (OHF) will hold its regular Board of Directors meeting on Thursday under the chairmanship of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, OHF President to discuss a range of strategic and administrative matters as preparations continue for the 2026/2027 season.

Ahead of the board meeting, the National Teams and Coaches Committee will convene to review technical and administrative issues related to the national teams before submitting its recommendations for final approval.

One of the meeting's key agenda items will be an update on Oman's bid to host the 2028 IHF Men's and Women's Beach Handball World Championship. The federation is seeking to bring the prestigious global event back to the Sultanate of Oman for a second time after successfully staging the championship in 2012 at the Sports City in Al Musannah, an event widely regarded as a milestone in the development of beach handball in the region.

The board will also finalise preparations for the new domestic season by approving club participation across the federation's competitions. A total of

29 clubs have confirmed their intention to compete in the upcoming campaign, which will feature eight competitions: the Youth League, Junior League, Super Cup, First Division League, Second Division League, Federation Cup, Beach Handball League and the Women's League.

The participating clubs are Al Ittihad, Oman Club, Muscat, Masirah, Al Tali'a, Nizwa, Al Salam, Al Nasr, Al Amerat, Al Musannah, Qurayat, Majees, Al Seeb, Al Suwaiq, Al Rustaq, Sohar, Mirbat, Ahli Sidab, Al Oruba, Al Khabourah, Al Shabab, Saham, Salalah, Al Nahda, Khasab, Taqah, Dhofar, Ibri and Al Bashayer.

Board members will also review administrative and technical reports on Oman's participation in the IHF Beach Handball World Championship held from June 23 to 28, as well as assess the national youth team's campaign at the 19th Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship, staged in Zhuzhou, China, from July 15 to 26. The evaluation is expected to identify key technical and organisational lessons to strengthen future national team preparations.

The meeting will conclude with a review of the federation's financial position and incoming correspondence as officials continue planning for the new season and the federation's upcoming development programmes.



An attempt by player Aws al Balushi to shoot the ball and score an individual goal.

An attempt by player Said al Hasani to shoot the ball and score an individual goal.

Cycling superstar Pogacar to ride in Vuelta



XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates his overall victory as he crosses the finish line of the 21st stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race. — AFP

BARCELONA: Slovenian cycling great Tadej Pogacar will bid to win the one Grand Tour missing from his achievements the Vuelta a Espana when he rides in this year's race for the first time since 2019, his team announced on Monday.

"It's true - he's coming back," wrote the five-time Tour de France winner's UAE Team Emirates on social media platform X to announce his participation in the race which starts on August 22.

The 27-year-old Slovenian will be favourite to triumph in the gruelling 21-stage race which begins in his home city of Monaco.

Pogacar came third in the 2019 Vuelta and won three stages to announce himself to the cycling

world. "I'm excited to say I'm going back to La Vuelta. It was my first ever Grand Tour back in 2019 and an amazing experience," Pogacar told the UAE Team Emirates website. "Spain is a country I love to visit and race in and I think the time is right to go back."

"The motivation is high to finish off the year in a good way and the Vuelta will be a big target. The team is strong and we hope to do good things."

Pogacar, who won the Tour de France in style in July, could become only the fourth rider to win both that and La Vuelta in the same year, and only the ninth to win all three Grand Tours in their career.

He won the Giro in 2024. — AFP



Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar celebrates his third place on the podium with the Slovenian flag. — AFP

SPORTS

INFANTINO SOUGHT TRUMP BACKING AFTER WORLD CUP PLAN FAILED



US President Donald Trump and Fifa President Gianni Infantino during the trophy presentation after the match. — Reuters

FIFA PRESIDENT Gianni Infantino sought support from the Trump administration amid mounting criticism after his abandoned plan to sell a stake in World Cup commercial rights, the New York Post said on Monday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The Post reported that Infantino had repeatedly tried and failed to reach US President Donald Trump by phone since the proposal collapsed on Friday, and that the Fifa chief felt “isolated” by an avalanche of negative media coverage. Fifa had no immediate comment. Criticism has intensified over Infantino’s failed plan to spin off the world soccer governing body’s commercial assets into a new entity backed by private investors.

Fifa’s plan to unlock up to \$4.2 billion from private investors by selling a roughly 20% stake in a new entity overseeing competitions including the World Cup ended in retreat on Friday after fierce resistance from stakeholders. With the idea abandoned, attention has now turned to the potential repercussions for Infantino, whose bid for



President of the United States Soccer Federation Carlos Cordeiro looks on as Fifa President Gianni Infantino presents US President Donald Trump with a gift in the Oval Office of the White House during a visit by members of Italian soccer club Juventus in Washington. — AFP

another term as Fifa president from 2027 to 2031 faces increased scrutiny following the failed initiative. Trump and Infantino have forged a close relationship, with the two appearing together at major soccer events including this year’s World Cup co-hosted by the US, Mexico and Canada. The bond was highlighted in December 2025 when Infantino presented Trump with the inaugural Fifa Peace Prize, making him the first recipient of the award. The relationship has drawn further attention over Fifa’s World Cup sell-off plan, a deal that was set to be anchored by Thrive Capital, founded by Joshua Kushner. The Post also reported that Infantino had scheduled private talks with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, with two sources familiar with the matter saying the Fifa boss was due to hold a call with America’s top diplomat shortly after 9 am. However, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Global Public Affairs Dylan Johnson said in a post on X that there were “no plans” for Rubio to speak with 56-year-old Swiss-Italian Infantino and that “there is no call this morning.” — Reuters

Pochettino to stay as USA coach until 2030 World Cup

PARIS: Mauricio Pochettino has signed a contract extension to remain the head coach of the United States national team until the 2030 World Cup, US Soccer announced on Monday. The 54-year-old took over in 2024 and led the USA to the last 16 at the recent World Cup, which they co-hosted with Canada and Mexico.

“It has become clear to us that there is tremendous potential to make the men’s national team programme even stronger,” said Argentinian Pochettino, whose coaching staff have also agreed new

contracts.

“The passion we experienced from the fans throughout the World Cup only strengthened our belief in what is possible here.

“We want to try to have a lasting impact on the sport in the country that has welcomed us so warmly and for that impact to extend beyond results on the field.”

The Americans won three matches at a World Cup for the first time before being knocked out by Belgium, following a huge controversy over Fifa’s decision to suspend striker Folarin



US coach Mauricio Pochettino looks dejected after the match following their elimination from the World Cup. — Reuters

Balogun’s ban for a red card.

Former Tottenham and Paris Saint-Germain boss Pochettino was named coach two years ago, after previous boss Gregg Berhalter left following a group-stage exit from the 2024 Copa America which the USA hosted.

Pochettino helped turn things around and led the team to the 2025 CONCACAF Gold Cup final, which they lost 2-1 to Mexico.

He had been linked with a return to European club football, but will instead stay with the US until the next World Cup, slated

to be largely held in Spain, Portugal and Morocco.

“Mauricio has built a culture where players trust the group, trust the process and trust each other,” said US Soccer president Cindy Parlow Cone.

“We saw the impact of that belief in the way the team grew, competed and performed on the world’s biggest stage.”

The USA have not reached the quarterfinals of a men’s World Cup since 2002, and hopes were high a partisan home crowd could carry them to at least that stage.

— AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,349.07

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$78.26
BRENT \$83.48
LIGHT \$79.61



SHORT TAKES



The successful completion of the issue further strengthens Sohar International's capital base.

Sohar International completes 149.3m rights issue

BALARAB AL TAMIMI

Sohar International Bank has completed a rights issue that raised gross proceeds of RO 149.3 million, with the offering fully subscribed, the bank said in a disclosure issued on Monday.

The bank issued 1,058,759,403 shares at a price of 141 baisas per share, comprising a share price of 139 baisas plus issue expenses of 2 baisas per share.

Following the rights issue, Sohar International's paid-up capital stands at RO 849,675,744, divided into 7,676,005,673 ordinary shares.

The bank said the offering being fully subscribed demonstrated strong support from its shareholders and investors, and that successful completion of the issue further strengthens its capital base, positioning it to achieve its strategic objectives.

The disclosure was signed by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer.

The completion follows regulatory clearance secured a day earlier. In a separate disclosure dated on August 2, the bank said it had received the approval of the Financial Services Authority, pursuant to Decision No FSAP-2026/875, for the allotment of the shares issued under the rights issue.

In that filing, the bank told shareholders it had received a high volume of subscription applications, which caused a delay in the allotment and listing of the shares.

The necessary procedures for the listing of the shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange and the updating of the records of Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC were being completed at the time of the disclosure, the bank added.

Oman seen backing OPEC+ output strategy

CONRAD PRABHU

OMAN is expected to support a cautious, phased approach to future oil production increases as OPEC+ prepares for a key meeting that could reshape production quotas and baseline calculations for all member countries, according to Ali al Riyami, a well-known Omani energy analyst.

Speaking to Al Arabiya Business, Al Riyami said the producer alliance has now implemented production increases for the sixth consecutive month, adding around 188,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month as part of the gradual unwinding of voluntary supply cuts.

He noted that OPEC+ has effectively completed the restoration of around 1.065 million bpd of previously withheld production, leaving approximately 2 million bpd of voluntary cuts yet to be returned to the market.

"I believe this is now the sixth consecutive increase in production by OPEC+, with each increase amounting to around 188,000 barrels per day," Al Riyami, a former high-level official of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said. "This means the tranche of about 1.065 million barrels per day has now largely been completed, while another tranche of roughly two million barrels per day remains."

According to Al Riyami, attention is now shifting to an important OPEC+ meeting expected in the coming months, where member countries will review the group's production quota framework and the baseline production levels used to determine each country's output allocation.

He said the meeting is likely to be pivotal because member states are expected to negotiate a revised methodology for calculating production quotas across the



Attention is now shifting to an important OPEC+ meeting expected in the coming months.



ALI AL RIYAMI
The writer is an energy analyst

alliance. "Based on what we have learned from various sources, the upcoming meeting will review the quota mechanism and agree on a new method for calculating quotas and baseline production levels for all OPEC+ countries," he said.

Given the significance of those discussions, Al Riyami expects OPEC+ to temporarily pause further production increases until agreement is reached.

"I expect there will be a hold for a certain period until an agreement is reached," he said. "After that, the remaining two million barrels per day could begin to be gradually restored."

Al Riyami also believes there is a direct connection between the timing of restoring the remaining voluntary cuts and the resolution of longstanding disagreements over production baselines.

"There is naturally a linkage between restoring the remaining two million barrels and resolving the baseline issue," he said.

While Iraq has publicly sought a higher production baseline, Al Riyami said it is not alone.

Before its withdrawal from OPEC+, the UAE had also argued for revisions, while Kazakhstan

is among other countries seeking adjustments.

"Iraq has raised many observations, and before its withdrawal the UAE had also sought changes. Kazakhstan is another country that wants its baseline reviewed," he said.

According to Al Riyami, OPEC+ commissioned a study around two years ago to evaluate possible revisions to production baselines, and he believes that work is now nearing completion despite continuing geopolitical tensions in the region.

"If members agree to maintain production at current levels for a period while the quota issue is resolved, I believe the study is essentially ready," he said.

He expects broad agreement on revised baseline production levels for the alliance's 21 or 22 participating countries to be reached within the next three to four months, before the end of the year.

Such an outcome, he suggested, would provide the foundation for OPEC+ to proceed with the next phase of restoring the remaining voluntary production cuts in an orderly and coordinated manner.

Labour Ministry reinforces insurance contribution compliance

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour, in coordination with the Social Protection Fund, affirmed that employers' commitment to paying insurance contributions is a fundamental pillar for the sustainability of the social protection system and ensures the continuity of insurance coverage for workers in the Sultanate of Oman, both citizens and expatriates.

This, in turn, enhances the stability of the labour market and improves the efficiency of insurance compliance.

The ministry explained that employers are obligated to pay a monthly contribution of 1 per cent of the employee's total wage, with no upper salary cap. The contribution is calculated daily and covers all employees in the establishment without exception.

The ministry clarified that the Social Protection Fund issues a contribution payment notice at the end of each month, including the employer's contribution and the contributions of all employees, in addition to the various branches of social insurance. The ministry also noted the inclusion of sick leave and special leave within

The Labour Ministry emphasises the importance of employers ensuring the accuracy of employee data and regularly updating wage data with the Social Protection Fund



Insurance contributions from private sector establishments support the financial sustainability of the social protection system.

the system, effective on July 19, 2026.

The ministry emphasised the importance of employers ensuring the accuracy of employee data, both Omani and non-Omani, and regularly updating wage data with the Social

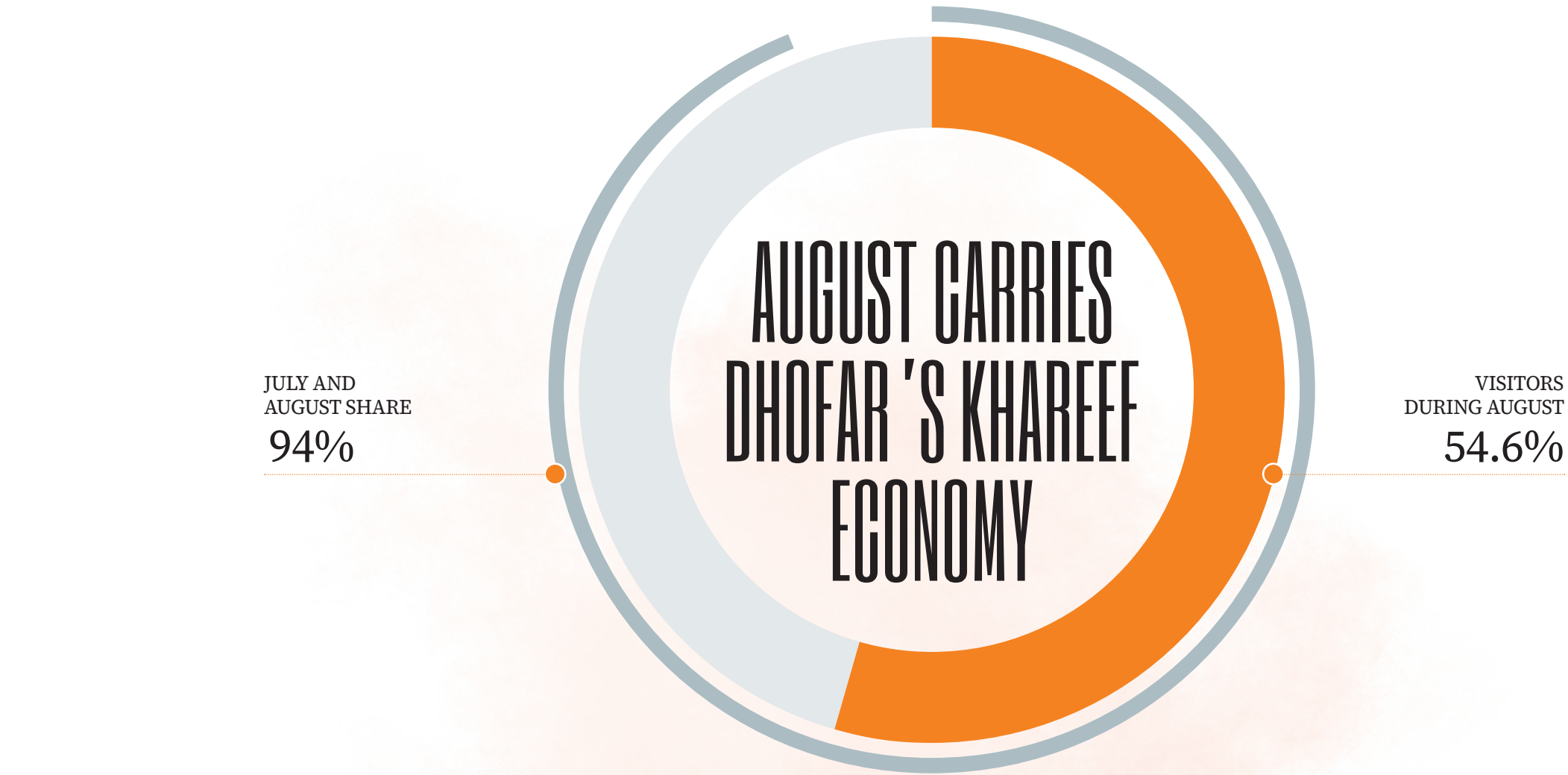
Protection Fund. It also stressed the importance of paying contributions on time to guarantee the accurate calculation of benefits and the continuity of insurance payments.

Additionally, the monthly invoice

issued by the Social Protection Fund is directly based on the data registered with the Fund, according to the ministry. This necessitates that establishments monitor and update their employee data continuously, enhancing the efficiency of managing insurance obligations and minimising any discrepancies or issues that may arise from outdated data.

Strengthening the commitment of private sector establishments to paying insurance contributions contributes to supporting the financial sustainability of the social protection system and provides regular cash flows that enhance the Fund's ability to meet its future obligations. This also positively impacts the business environment by raising compliance and governance levels, and improving the reliability of labour market data, which supports economic decision-making and enhances the attractiveness of Oman for local and foreign investments under a more efficient and stable insurance system.

BUSINESS FEATURE



Khareef 2025 in numbers

DHO FAR ENTERS the most important month of its tourism year today.

August alone accounted for 585,155 visitors during the 2025 Khareef season — 54.6 per cent of the season's estimated total of about 1.07 million.

The figure illustrates the scale of the opportunity facing hotels, restaurants, retailers, transport operators and small businesses. It also exposes the commercial risk of depending so heavily on a single month.

By the end of July last year, Dhofar had received 442,100 visitors since the season began on June 21. The total rose to 1,027,255 by the end of August, meaning more visitors arrived during August than in all the preceding 41 days combined.

Only 43,483 additional visitors were recorded between September 1 and 21, despite the official season continuing and much of the governorate remaining green.

July and August together accounted for 94 per cent of all visitors during the 2025 season.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information had not released preliminary visitor figures for the 2026 Khareef by press time. But last year's pattern shows why August matters more to Dhofar's tourism businesses than the headline season total alone.

THIRTY-ONE DAYS OF DEMAND

A concentrated peak creates an unusual business model.

Hotels and furnished apartments must prepare enough rooms and staff for the busiest weeks. Restaurants purchase additional stock and expand shifts. Rental companies add vehicles, while seasonal outlets commit money to rents, permits, equipment and temporary workers.

Businesses that prepare only for average demand risk losing customers during the peak. Those that invest enough to handle August may be left with underused staff, premises and vehicles when demand falls in September.

The problem is therefore not a shortage of visitors. It is that the visitors arrive within an unusually narrow window.

Ahmed bin Salim al Mahri, Chief Executive of Gloria Tourism, said Dhofar could expand its tourism services and events, but development should not weaken the characteristics that draw visitors to the governorate.

“Services can be developed and new events added, but local culture and nature must stay a genuine part of the experience, not just a backdrop for commercial projects,” he said.

The challenge for tourism planners is to increase the economic return from the season without turning its natural and cultural assets into an overdeveloped commercial product.

SPENDING FOLLOWS THE PEAK

Visitor expenditure during the 2025 Khareef was estimated at RO 124.64 million.

Accommodation accounted for the largest share at RO 49.24 million, followed by food and beverages at RO 28.51 million. Travel tickets accounted for RO 19.22 million, while shopping, entertainment and other services generated an estimated RO 27.67 million.

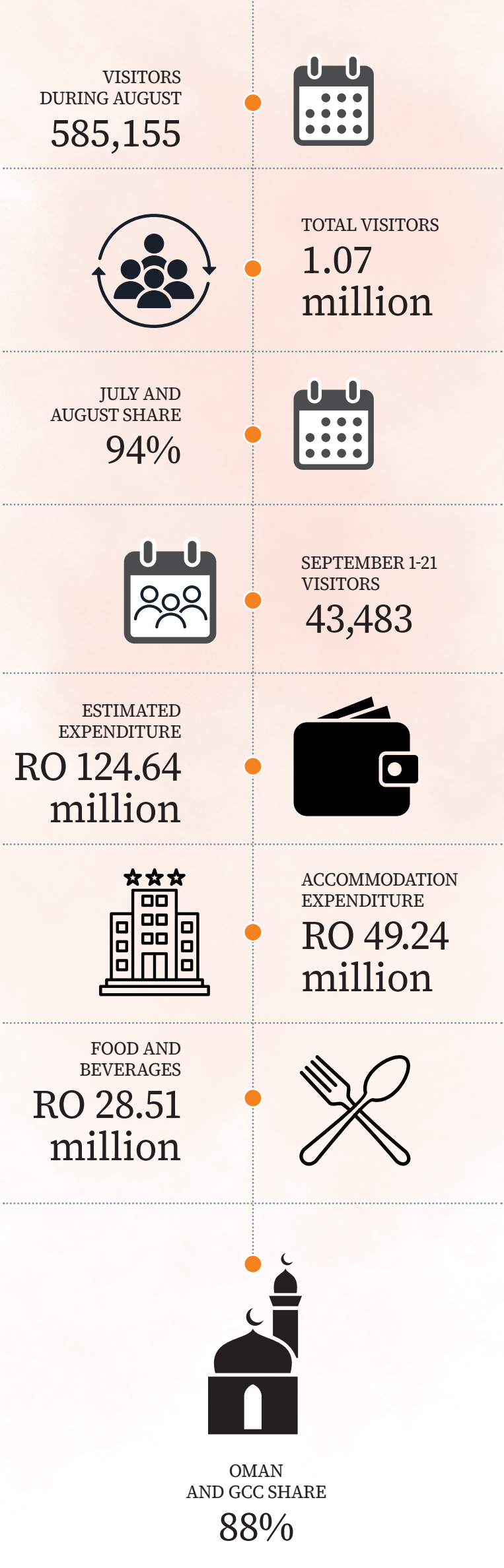
These businesses sell capacity that cannot be stored.

A hotel room left empty in September cannot be transferred to August. Neither can an unused restaurant table, rental vehicle, airline seat or tour departure.

The heavy concentration of visitors therefore affects not only total revenue but also how efficiently tourism investments are used.

Official tourism indicators show that occupancy at three- to five-star hotels in Dhofar stood at 49.3 per cent during September 2025. Less than half of the available classified hotel capacity was occupied on average during the closing month of the Khareef.

That does not mean September lacks a market. It indicates that substantial capacity remains available



once the main family-travel period ends.

The economic gain from extending the season would not necessarily require another record visitor total. Moving part of the existing demand from August into late June and September could improve occupancy, reduce congestion and allow businesses to use their staff and assets for longer.

THE CALENDAR SHAPES THE MARKET

The nationality profile helps explain why the peak is difficult to move.

Omanis represented 70.7 per cent of visitors during the 2025 season. Visitors from other GCC countries accounted for a further 17.3 per cent. Nearly nine out of every 10 visitors therefore came from nearby markets in which family travel is closely linked to school holidays.

This makes the Khareef a predominantly regional, family-driven tourism season. Weather may remain attractive into September, but many families must return before the beginning of the school year.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has previously acknowledged that visitor movement weakens at the beginning and end of the season because the Khareef weather is not fully established in June and schools reopen towards the end. The ministry has sought to support those quieter periods through adventure tourism, sporting events, conferences and specialised exhibitions.

The policy question is whether these activities are changing travel dates or primarily adding more events for visitors who would have travelled during the peak anyway. A useful measure would be the proportion of visitors arriving outside July and August. That would show whether the commercial season is actually becoming longer.

FLIGHTS REINFORCE ESTABLISHED DEMAND

Airline schedules also remain concentrated around the established peak.

Oman Air's additional seasonal operations on the Muscat-Salalah

route run from early July until September 5, while SalamAir's additional operations continue until August 31.

The flights provide essential capacity during the busiest weeks, but their operating periods largely follow existing demand rather than creating a significant new travel window in late June or September.

Air transport also serves a minority of Khareef visitors.

Almost three-quarters of visitors in 2025 arrived by road, making the school calendar, family holiday plans and conditions on long-distance routes at least as important as airline capacity.

This is why adding flights alone cannot substantially extend the season.

VISITOR NUMBERS ARE ONLY ONE MEASURE

The estimated RO 124.64 million represents visitor expenditure, not the amount ultimately retained by businesses and workers in Dhofar.

Part of the spending on tickets, imported products, national retail companies and online platforms will flow outside the governorate. A detailed governorate-level measure of locally retained tourism value was not available in the material reviewed for this report.

That question is separate from the immediate issue of seasonality, but it matters when judging the broader economic impact of Khareef.

Higher visitor numbers do not automatically mean that every tourism business earns more, that investment is being used efficiently or that benefits are distributed evenly across the governorate.

For businesses, the quality of demand matters alongside its volume: how long visitors stay, when they arrive, where they travel and what they purchase locally.

Dhofar has demonstrated that it can attract more than one million visitors during Khareef.

As August begins, the more difficult test is whether the governorate can turn a powerful one-month peak into a stronger three-month tourism economy.

SELECTIVEGROWTH



OMAN AIRPORTS
HANDLE 6.28M
PASSENGERS BY
END OF JUNE

The total number of passengers (arrivals, departures, and transit) travelling through the airports of the Sultanate of Oman reached 6,276,117 passengers by the end of June 2026, representing a 9.3% decline compared with the corresponding period in 2025, when the total stood at 6,921,569 passengers, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total number of international flights (arrivals and departures) through Muscat, Salalah, and Sohar airports reached 38,203 flights by the end of June 2026, a decrease of 10.7% compared with 42,778 flights during the corresponding period in 2025.

Statistics showed that Muscat International Airport recorded an 8.3% decline in the total number of flights (international and domestic), reaching 41,022 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 44,743 flights during the same period in 2025. The total number of passengers also fell by 8.8% to 5,688,276 passengers, compared with 6,233,954 passengers in the corresponding period of the previous year.

In terms of passenger traffic through Muscat International Airport during June 2026, Indian nationals accounted for the largest share of arriving and departing passengers, with a total of 173,156 passengers, comprising 76,271 arrivals and 96,885 departures. Omanis ranked second with 125,560 passengers, including 54,222 arrivals and 71,338 departures, while Bangladeshi nationals ranked third with 47,822 passengers, comprising 20,092 arrivals and 27,730 departures.

Salalah Airport recorded a 12.8% decline in the total number of flights (international and domestic), reaching 3,945 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 4,526 flights during the corresponding period in 2025. — ONA

HOTELS
REVENUES
EXCEED
RO 124.2M BY
JUNE END

The number of guests staying at three- to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman reached 992,009 by the end of June 2026, marking a 13% decline compared to the same period in 2025, when the number stood at 1,140,086, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data also showed that total hotel revenues fell by 12.3% to RO 124.177 million, down from RO 141.520 million during the



corresponding period in 2025. Hotel occupancy declined to 46.3%, compared to 54.6% in the same

period last year, representing a 15.3% relative decrease.

Meanwhile, the number of Omani guests increased to 395,659 guests, up from 383,783 during the corresponding period in 2025.

According to the data, European visitors remained the largest group of non-Omani hotel guests during the first half of 2026, totalling 246,603 guests. They were followed by Asian guests with 162,978, and visitors from the GCC countries with 69,289 guests. — ONA

OIA revamp drives state
companies to profit

BALARAB AL TAMIMI

OMAN Investment Authority's (OIA) restructuring programme has significantly improved the financial performance of a string of state-owned companies, with OQ Group cutting its total debt by 48 per cent and OQ Refineries and Petrochemicals posting its first profit in more than two decades, according to the authority's latest quarterly bulletin.

The details were disclosed in Issue 17 of Enjaz & Eejaz, OIA's quarterly publication, in an interview with Thuraiya bint Ahmed al Balushi, Acting Chief Investment Officer for Economic Diversification Investments.

Since the ownership of government companies was transferred to OIA in 2020, the authority has pursued a far-reaching transformation of its portfolio. Al Balushi said the programme was a direct response to operational and financial challenges that had affected certain companies, alongside a clear need to sharpen performance, strengthen governance and put finances on a more sustainable footing.



OIA's restructuring drives stronger performance across state-owned companies.

“Our success in steering companies to profitability is a true testament to our core role,” she said. Across the portfolio, several companies have posted profits for the first time since their establishment, while debt levels have come down and credit ratings improved, according to the interview. Al Balushi added that the collective progress of OIA companies has played a part in lifting Oman's sovereign credit rating.

OQ Group underwent a comprehensive restructuring that strengthened synergies, reorganised its capital base and

reduced debt, with the group going on to secure investment-grade credit ratings from both Fitch and S&P. The return to profit at OQ Refineries and Petrochemicals — its first in over two decades — was attributed to a strategic transformation focused on operational efficiency, asset reliability and the restructuring of financial obligations.

In the food sector, the merger of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj) with Fisheries Development Oman created synergies that lifted revenues and improved performance across several

of their companies, while a thorough overhaul of Mazoon Dairy's operations and distribution channels brought the company to financial break-even and, ultimately, to its first operating profit.

Asyad Drydock built a more diversified and resilient business by pushing into higher-value services, delivering record operational results, while the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre — once heavily reliant on government support — recorded its first-ever operating profits by broadening its income streams and drawing in more regional and international events.

Al Balushi said OIA will continue to focus on making its companies more competitive, deepening synergies across the portfolio and building partnerships that serve Oman Vision 2040. “The goal, ultimately, is real and lasting benefit for the country and its people,” she said.

The bulletin follows OIA's announcement of record 2025 results, with profits of RO 2.9 billion and a return on investment of 14.6 per cent, bringing its five-year average return to 10.4 per cent.

Investment opportunities showcased at Foreign Investors’ Meet

KABEER YOUSUF

A plethora of the Sultanate of Oman's investment opportunities was showcased at the Investors Meet held at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) headquarters recently, bringing together prominent business leaders, investors, entrepreneurs, golden visa holders, and members of the expatriate business community to explore Oman's evolving investment landscape and strengthen economic collaboration.

Organised by the Foreign Investment Committee of the OCCI, in association with the Indian Social Club - Malabar Wing, the programme featured keynote addresses, expert presentations, a panel discussion, and networking sessions aimed at promoting Oman



The forum was organised by the Foreign Investment Committee of the OCCI, in association with the Indian Social Club - Malabar Wing

as a preferred destination for global investment.

Dr Yousuf bin Hamed al Balushi, a leading Omani economist, said that the country still has abundant potential which is not explored by local or foreign investors and they are spread over different areas.

“This abundant potential of Oman is spread over tourism, manufacturing, logistics and transport, mining, and agriculture and fisheries and the opportunities are numerous. They still are high-yielding segments and Oman has made it easier for a foreign investor

to venture into these areas,” said Dr Al Balushi. In his presentation titled ‘Oman's New Growth Era,’ he further explored Oman's transformation under Vision 2040, emphasising the country's transition towards a diversified, private sector-led economy.

Addressing the gathering, Prashant Pise, Ambassador of India to Oman, emphasised the transformative potential of the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in enhancing bilateral trade, investment, and business cooperation. He encouraged investors to explore opportunities across logistics, manufacturing, food processing, digital economy, AI, innovation, and cybersecurity.

Delivering the keynote address, Abdul Latheef Moiden Kunji,

OCCI Member of the Board of Directors, emphasised the vital role of international investors in contributing to Oman's economic diversification.

Dr Thomas Alexander, Member of the Foreign Investment Committee and founder of Al Adrak Trading & Contracting Co LLC, showcased Oman's remarkable progress across multiple sectors and highlighted Oman's investor-friendly policies and world-class infrastructure.

Noushad Kakkeri, Convener, Malabar Wing, delivered the welcome address, followed by Dr Davis Kallukaran, Deputy Chairman of the Committee, who detailed about the formation of the Foreign Investment Committee, its objectives, and its growing role in representing and engaging the expatriate business community.

CURRENCY MARKETS

Yen team-up deepens BOJ dilemma



The goal of the latest yen intervention is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. Following a coordinated action by the US and Japan, the currency's dollar exchange rate stands more than 4% firmer. But the underlying drivers of weakness remain, raising the question of what the push hopes to achieve in the longer term. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold up, Mideast hopes weigh on oil



Gold prices gained on Monday as the dollar weakened and optimism over a possible US-Iran agreement sent oil prices sharply lower, tempering inflation fears and expectations of prolonged high interest rates. Spot gold was up 0.4% at \$4,055.36 per ounce. The precious metal posted its first monthly rise in five in July, rising about 1%. — Reuters

ENERGY SUPPLIES

Oil slips as Iran tensions ease



Oil prices fell more than \$4 a barrel on Monday after US President Donald Trump held off a fresh attack on Iran as he sought a quick deal that would halt Tehran's nuclear ambitions and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Brent crude futures fell \$4.65, or 5.29%, to \$83.28 by 0702 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$79.47 a barrel, down \$5.20, or 6.14%. — Reuters

OPINION

Beyond the numbers: The real worth beyond followers



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

LAST week, my article explored whether social media followers truly define the value of their owners. I argued that follower counts are not an accurate representation of the worth of an individual or a business. The response was overwhelming. I received messages from professionals, business owners, students and content creators. Despite their different backgrounds, many shared one common observation: social media often tells a story that is far from reality.

This week, rather than sharing my own perspective, I would like to share some of the experiences readers entrusted me with.

Some admitted that although they have a large number of followers, very few are genuine. They confessed to buying followers because they believed bigger numbers would make them appear more successful and influential. For a while, it felt rewarding. Eventually, however, they realised those numbers brought neither meaningful relationships nor business opportunities. The numbers made them feel important, but they never made them valuable. Unfortunately, this is the reality for many people chasing online popularity.

Others shared the exact opposite experience. They have only a modest number of followers, yet they run successful

projects, initiatives and businesses with loyal customers. They rarely chase viral trends or post simply to gain attention. Instead, they focus on building trust, delivering value and nurturing long-term relationships. Their customers come through referrals and credibility. Their conclusion was simple: they would rather have a small community of genuine followers than thousands who never engage or buy.

Another group admitted they had become trapped in the comparison game. Every day they watched friends travelling, buying new cars, celebrating promotions and appearing to live perfect lives. Gradually, they began to feel that their own lives were falling behind. Then they realised a powerful truth: they were comparing their everyday reality with everyone else's carefully curated highlights. Does that sound familiar? I suspect many have experienced the same feeling at some point.

Perhaps the most refreshing confessions came from people who rarely use social media at all. They intentionally reduced their screen time and stopped measuring themselves against others online. Instead, they spent more time with family and friends, read more books, pursued hobbies and became more present in their daily lives. Almost all of them described feeling calmer, happier and less anxious. Their happiness

A social media profile is carefully curated. It rarely shows rejection, debt, anxiety, disappointment, family struggles, or sleepless nights

was no longer dictated by someone else's post.

These stories remind us that social media itself is not the problem. It is a remarkable platform for learning, networking, promoting businesses and staying connected. The problem begins when we mistake what we see online for the whole picture of someone's life.

A social media profile is carefully curated. It rarely shows rejection, debt, anxiety, disappointment, family struggles or sleepless nights. Yet those experiences are just as real as the smiling photos we scroll through every day.

Whether you have 500 followers or 500,000, the questions that truly matter remain the same: Are you creating value? Are you building genuine relationships? Are you becoming a better version of yourself? And are you living a life that makes you happy, even when nobody is watching?

My humble advice is simple: stop chasing online validation and start investing in real-world impact. Followers may come and go and algorithms will continue to change, but your character, your contribution and the positive difference you make in the lives of others will always matter far more than the numbers on a screen.

Until we catch up again next week, stay real.

OPEC+ OIL OUTPUT HIKE IS IRRELEVANT FOR NOW, NOT FOR LATER

CLYDE RUSSELL

It's easy to dismiss the decision by the core members of OPEC+ to increase their crude oil production quotas for September as a meaningless gesture in the face of disruptions caused by the Iran conflict.

Certainly, as long as the Strait of Hormuz remains largely closed and the threat to the nearby Bab el Mandeb waterway remains unresolved, there is little chance of the oil-exporting group being able to ship what they have agreed to produce.

The seven members of OPEC+ undertaking voluntary output cuts — Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Kazakhstan and Oman — agreed at a meeting on Sunday to increase production by 188,000 barrels per day (bpd) for September.

This completes the phased rollback of a 1.65 million bpd supply cut originally agreed in 2023, when the group still included the United Arab Emirates, which left the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in May.

For the moment, it matters little what the production quotas are, with the latest data from a Reuters survey showing the eight members of OPEC with quotas pumped 20.276 million bpd in June, which was 6.246 million bpd below the agreed target. Russia, the main non-OPEC member of the wider OPEC+ group, had production of 8.928 million bpd in June, according to OPEC data, which was almost 1 million bpd below its agreed quota.

While OPEC+'s decision to wind back voluntary production cuts carries little weight in the current market, it does highlight the challenges facing oil exporters and importers.

There are three main scenarios facing the crude oil market and there is still a high degree of uncertainty as to which is the most likely.

The first is that Iran and the United States manage to reach a peace deal that allows sustained and unfettered passage through the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el Mandeb.

The second is that the conflict continues in fits and starts, with periods of escalation followed by hopes of a ceasefire and a deal, before these are dashed and missile and drone strikes resume.

The third is that the escalation cycle continues, US President Donald Trump orders strikes against civilian and energy infrastructure and Iran retaliates by doing the same against the Gulf states that host US bases, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. If the first scenario unfolds, then crude oil is likely to drop rapidly from current levels.

It's likely that OPEC+ members will be able to ramp up production relatively quickly and will put more barrels into the market at a time when other producers are also trying to maximise exports. — Reuters

Oman's role in keeping global trade routes stable

THE world is witnessing a profound reshaping of trade, energy and supply chains. Maritime routes are no longer merely passages for ships and goods; they have become integral to global economic security and a determining factor in investment decisions, energy pricing, market stability and the broader equilibrium between nations.

What was once the quiet domain of shipping schedules and port authorities now sits at the centre of boardroom strategy and national planning alike.

The figures explain why. In normal times, roughly 20 million barrels of oil, about one-fifth of global consumption and a quarter of all seaborne crude pass daily through the Strait of Hormuz, together with nearly a fifth of the world's liquefied natural gas, according to the US Energy Information Administration. The Bab el Mandeb Strait and the Suez corridor carry an estimated 12 to 15 per cent of global trade and close to 30 per cent of container traffic, by UNCTAD's reckoning. A handful of narrow waterways, in other words, quietly underpin the daily functioning of the world economy.

Recent disruptions in these waters have shown how quickly that foundation can be shaken and how far the consequences travel. When transits through the Red Sea corridor fell, UNCTAD recorded container rates from Shanghai to Europe rising more than 250 per cent within weeks; Suez transits dropped by some 70 per cent from 2023 levels; and rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope absorbed roughly a fifth of the world's effective shipping capacity while adding up to two weeks per voyage. Insurance premiums for regional transits multiplied. Food supply chains felt the strain, since a substantial share of global grain also moves through these corridors and UNCTAD warned that sustained freight increases could lift consumer prices worldwide, with the poorest and most import-dependent economies hit hardest.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway

Global maritime trade growth, the agency estimates, slowed from 2.2 per cent in 2024 to just 0.5 per cent in 2025. A disturbance in a strait a few kilometres wide, it is now clear, can ripple through oil markets, insurance costs, container schedules, dinner tables and stock exchanges on every continent.

Two conclusions follow and both counsel cooperation rather than confrontation. The first is that over-reliance on a limited number of chokepoints is no longer a safe option for countries or corporations. Prudent diversification — additional port capacity, overland corridors, regional logistics networks and digital systems that allow cargo to reroute quickly — strengthens everyone, because a more flexible system is a more stable one. This is not a zero-sum contest between routes; every alternative pathway added to the network reduces the pressure on the entire global trading system.

The second conclusion is more fundamental: no amount of infrastructure can substitute for de-escalation. The cheapest form of economic stimulus available to the world today is calm. Every degree of reduced tension returns value immediately in lower insurance premiums, restored shipping confidence, steadier energy prices and revived investment appetite. Stability, in this sense, is not merely a diplomatic aspiration; it is a global public good with measurable economic returns and investing in it deserves the same seriousness that the world devotes to producing energy, food and critical infrastructure.

This is where a country like the Sultanate of Oman can play a crucial role. For decades, Oman has pursued a consistent foreign policy of peace, moderation and good neighbourliness, maintaining respectful relations with all parties and offering its good offices whenever dialogue is needed. That patient consistency has earned something no economy can manufacture quickly: trust. As a trusted mediator, Oman is well placed to help facilitate the

conversations through which tensions ease and safe, predictable navigation is restored quietly, impartially and in the service of regional and global stability rather than any narrow interest. History suggests that such facilitation works best precisely when it seeks no credit.

Oman's contribution to stability also has a practical, economic dimension. Its long-term investment in connectivity — the ports of Salalah, Al Duqm and Suhar on the open Indian Ocean, the special economic zones and the logistics agenda of Oman Vision 2040 — helps keep regional trade flowing smoothly and offers the wider system valuable flexibility. International confidence in this steady course is visible in the data: foreign direct investment stock reached RO 32.19 billion (about \$83.7 billion) in the first quarter of 2026, up 8.7 per cent year on year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information; all three major credit-rating agencies restored Oman to investment grade between 2024 and 2025; and the IMF projects growth accelerating to around 4 per cent in 2026. These numbers tell a simple story: markets place a premium on predictability and on partners who pursue it.

The reshaping of global trade now under way is real and it will not reverse. But its direction is still a choice.

The world can drift towards fragmentation, with each disruption feeding the next, or it can invest, deliberately, in the two things that make commerce resilient: diversified connectivity and sustained dialogue. Governments, international institutions and the private sector all have a part to play, from financing new corridors to supporting the quiet diplomacy that keeps sea lanes open for everyone.

The sea has carried humanity's prosperity for centuries. Keeping its waters calm is not one nation's burden or another's advantage; it is a shared responsibility and, increasingly, the soundest investment the world can make.

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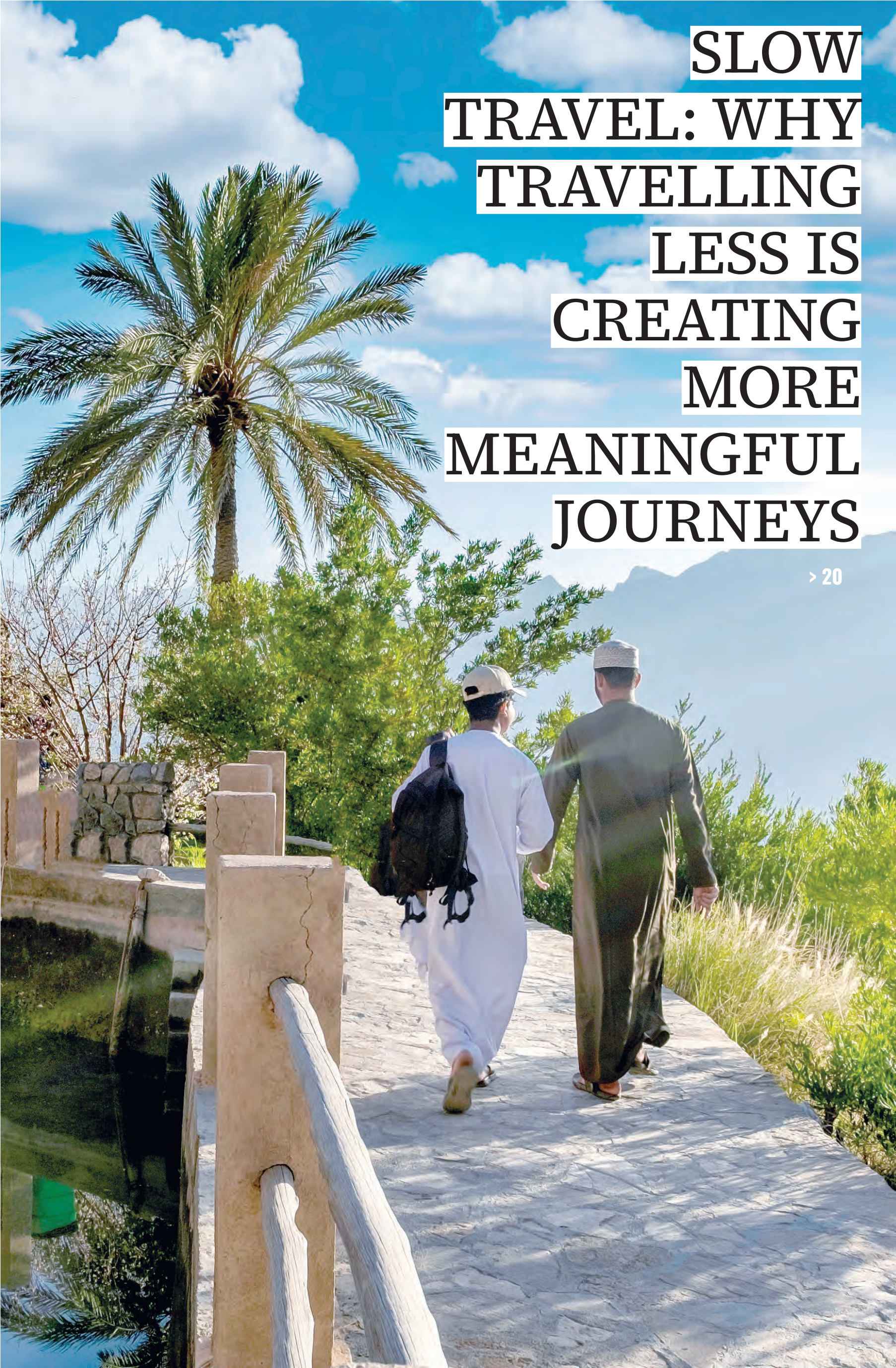


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MUSICAL EXIT

ARIANA GRANDE WITHDRAWS FROM LONDON MUSICAL, SEEKS TO ‘STEP BACK’



Pop star Ariana Grande has dropped out of what would have been her debut appearance in London’s West End, the show’s producers said on Sunday, as a representative for the singer said she wants to take a “step back” from the public eye.

The 33-year-old Grande had been slated to star opposite her “Wicked” castmate Jonathan Bailey in the Stephen Sondheim musical “Sunday in The Park with George” in the summer of 2027 at London’s Barbican theatre.

But amid renewed public scrutiny of the singer’s health, especially on social media, her representative said she wanted a “much-deserved break from public-facing work and appearances” when her “Eternal Sunshine” tour wraps in London on September 1.

“We can confirm that she has decided to step back from ‘Sunday in The Park with George,’” producers said in a statement carried on the show’s official X account, without providing a reason for Grande’s withdrawal.

“We know this cannot have been an easy decision, and she makes it with our complete understanding and support,” the statement said, adding that the show would go ahead as planned and casting would be announced, “in due course.”

“We wish her nothing but the best.”

Grande’s representative told People magazine that while the Grammy-winning artist is eager to complete her tour, she wants to take a “step back from visibility,” as her many appearances have “led to endless, ongoing public scrutiny.”

Fans have expressed growing concern for her health, particularly after Friday’s release of a music video for “Petal” in which the pint-sized singer appears to have lost significant weight.

Grande has said before that body-shaming comments are “really dangerous.”

She began her career as a teen on Broadway before embarking on a hugely successful pop career. Her star turn as Glinda in the film adaptation of “Wicked” earned her an Oscar nomination for best supporting actress.

But the massive success of the film and its sequel “Wicked: For Good” meant Grande was doing constant media appearances for the better part of two years.

She is set to appear in the comedy “Focker-in-Law” opposite Ben Stiller and Robert De Niro, which hits theatres in November. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CINEMA

South African-US actress Charlize Theron attends a press conference for the film “The Odyssey” in Seoul. — AFP



CULTURE

Carys Cassidy reacts as she warms up before her performance on the first day of the Irish traditional music festival, Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann, in Belfast. — Reuters



EVENTS

An attendee launches a hot-air balloon during the International Cantoya Festival in Patzcuaro, Michoacan State, Mexico. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Sun-yellow birds hunt for worms together

roy.subhajit9
Hafa Beach, Salalah



Salalah Eye, Dhofar's latest attraction

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HOW AI IS RESHAPING THE FUTURE OF DENTISTRY

DR QUDSIYA NOOREEN

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming modern dentistry by making diagnosis, treatment planning and patient care more accurate and personalised. AI-powered software can analyse dental X-rays and scans within seconds, helping dentists detect cavities, gum disease, bone loss and even early signs of oral cancer at an earlier stage. Early detection enables timely treatment, reduces complications and improves long-term oral health outcomes.

AI is also revolutionising orthodontics by predicting tooth movement and designing customised aligners, making treatment faster, more precise and comfortable for patients. In cosmetic dentistry, AI-driven smile design allows patients to preview virtual simulations of their future smile before treatment begins, increasing confidence and acceptance of procedures.

Preventive dentistry is another area benefiting from AI. AI also streamlines dental practice management by automating appointment scheduling, sending reminders and improving patient communication, allowing dental professionals to devote more time to quality patient care.

The integration of AI with teledentistry is further expanding access to dental services. Remote consultations and AI-assisted screening enable the early identification

of dental problems, particularly for people living in underserved or rural communities.

Robotic dentistry is pushing these advances even further. Using sophisticated tele-operated systems, specialist dentists can perform certain procedures from distant locations by controlling robotic arms and precision instruments through a computer interface. Supported by high-speed internet, real-time imaging and 3D visualisation, these systems enable procedures such as implant placement, cavity preparation and minor surgical treatments with exceptional precision. AI enhances safety by stabilising movements, minimising human error and improving procedural accuracy.

This technology has the potential to bring specialist dental care to remote regions, reducing the need for patients to travel long distances.

Despite these remarkable advances, AI is designed to support — not replace — dentists. Clinical expertise, professional judgement and compassionate patient communication remain central to successful dental care. As AI, robotics and digital technologies continue to evolve, dentistry is becoming more precise, preventive and patient-centred, promising better oral health outcomes and an enhanced treatment experience for patients worldwide.



DR QUDSIYA NOOREEN



Cosplayers (L) gather at the Osu Kannon temple before the Osu Cosplay Parade. — AFP

LAST SUMMER FOR JAPAN COSPLAY EXTRAVAGANZA

SHAWN, like her sister Whitney dressed as a character from Demon Slayer, had two words to describe the weather as she waited to watch the grand parade at Japan's annual World Cosplay Summit: "Extremely hot".

"I have had about five of these (bottles of water). I have on full sleeves, socks and whoo! When we first came outside we were just drenched in sweat", the Houston, Texas native said at the event in Nagoya.

But relief is coming for the more than 250,000 people from around the world who attend the WCS each year to embody characters from manga, animation and video games.

From next year, the three-day event in the central Japanese city will move to November, bringing more pleasant autumn temperatures instead of the oppressive 40C (104F) forecast for this year's final day.

"Since around the end of the COVID pandemic, Japan has been getting increasingly warmer", said Tokumaru Oguri, chief executive of the WCS.

"The heat can genuinely put people's lives at risk", Oguri said, urging participants to take precautions, get enough sleep and stay hydrated.

MONSTERS TO MEMES

A Japanese journalist coined the term "cosplay", combining "costume" and "play", in 1984 after seeing people dressed as monsters and aliens at a science-fiction convention in Los Angeles.

The concept later exploded in Japan before becoming a global phenomenon in the 1990s and 2000s.

Today, cosplayers portray characters from movies, series, comics, fantasy and video games, while others embody fast-food brands, internet browsers, memes and even intangible ideas such as gravity or hunger.

Scientists say human-induced climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events in Japan. The country



A cosplayer attends the Osu Cosplay Parade. — AFP



Cosplayers take part in the Osu Cosplay Parade. — AFP



Cosplayers take part in the Osu Cosplay Parade. — AFP

recorded its hottest summer on record last year, while many areas have recently experienced "kokushobi", a new official classification for "cruelly hot days".

The extreme temperatures are also forcing cosplayers to adapt their costumes.

"Orena", 40, from France, chose linen and cotton for her Haku costume from Studio Ghibli's Spirited

Away to keep cool.

"At major competitions such as the World Cosplay Summit, people tend to want to wear costumes that involve a certain level of technical complexity and often have several layers", she said.

"When it gets hot, there comes a point when you cannot take off any more layers". For other participants, comfort has become essential. — AFP

FEATURES

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

In an age of packed itineraries, social media checklists and whirlwind city breaks, a growing number of travellers are embracing a different philosophy: slowing down. Rather than racing from one landmark to the next, slow travel encourages visitors to spend more time in fewer places, immersing themselves in local culture, supporting communities and experiencing destinations at a more natural pace.

The movement has gained momentum as travellers increasingly seek authenticity over quantity. Instead of measuring a successful holiday by the number of countries visited or attractions photographed, many are prioritising meaningful experiences, from sharing a meal with locals and learning traditional crafts to hiking through mountain villages or simply spending an afternoon in a neighbourhood café.

Slow travel is rooted in the broader “slow movement”, which began with the slow food movement in Italy during the 1980s. Its philosophy of valuing quality over speed has since expanded into tourism. It is not about travelling slowly for its own sake, but about travelling with greater intention.

Longer stays can reduce the stress associated with tightly packed schedules, allowing visitors to appreciate destinations beyond their most famous attractions and understand the rhythm of local life. This approach can also benefit host communities. Visitors who stay longer are more likely to dine at locally owned restaurants, purchase handmade crafts, hire local guides and choose independent accommodation, helping spread tourism income more widely.

Environmental considerations have also strengthened interest in slow travel. Travelling less frequently while staying longer can reduce the impact associated with repeated flights and short breaks. Walking, cycling or using public transport where possible can further support sustainable tourism while offering a more intimate view of a destination.

Oman is well positioned to benefit from this global shift. Its diverse landscapes and strong cultural identity naturally encourage exploration at a relaxed pace. Rather than spending a single day moving between attractions, visitors can take time to discover the unique character of each region.

In the mountains, traditional villages offer opportunities to experience local hospitality, terraced agriculture and centuries-old architecture. Along the coastline, fishing communities continue practices passed down through generations, while inland wadis invite visitors to linger rather than simply stop for photographs. In the south, Dhofar offers a distinct rhythm during the khareef season, when mist-covered hills, waterfalls and cooler temperatures transform the landscape.

Oman’s heritage also lends itself to immersive travel. Historic forts, ancient aflaj irrigation systems, bustling souqs and Unesco-recognised archaeological sites reveal stories that cannot be fully appreciated during hurried visits. Spending more time in these places allows travellers to better understand the country’s history, traditions and people.

Food is another important part of the experience. Sampling regional dishes, visiting local markets and discovering traditional ingredients such as dates, frankincense and fresh seafood offers insight into Oman’s cultural identity while supporting local producers and family-run businesses.

The growth of heritage guesthouses and boutique accommodation has further strengthened Oman’s appeal to travellers seeking authentic experiences. Restored traditional homes can allow visitors to stay within historic communities while contributing directly to local economies.

Digital technology has also helped promote slower journeys. Remote working enables some travellers to spend weeks or months in one destination, while growing awareness of wellbeing has encouraged people to disconnect from busy schedules and reconnect with nature.

For Oman, the trend presents an opportunity to attract visitors who value quality over quantity. Longer stays can generate greater economic benefits while placing less pressure on popular attractions than high-volume tourism.

Ultimately, slow travel is less about moving at a slower speed than changing perspective. It encourages travellers to exchange hurried sightseeing for genuine connection, allowing destinations to be experienced rather than simply visited. For Oman, where hospitality, heritage and spectacular landscapes come together, slowing down may be the best way to discover what makes Oman truly unique.



SLOW TRAVEL: WHY TRAVELLING LESS IS CREATING MORE MEANINGFUL JOURNEYS

