

O M A N
Observer
D A I L Y

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SUNRISE 05:20 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 03:52 AM
DHUHR 12:12 PM
ASR 03:30 PM
MAGHRIB 06:59 PM
ISHA 08:21 PM

11 SOUTH AFRICA PACERS DESTROY AUSSIE TOP DECK ON DAY 1

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF PHILIPPINES

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. of the Republic of the Philippines on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Ferdinand. His Majesty also wished the people of the Philippines continuous prosperity.

HM GREET'S PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on his country's Declaration of State Sovereignty Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Putin and the people of his country, wishing Russia continuous progress and stability.

NEW PROJECTS AHEAD OF KHAREEF SEASON



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has inaugurated several new tourism projects across Dhofar. The newly opened facilities include the Dhofar Private Museum, an 84-room three-star hotel in Mirbat, and a luxury serviced apartment complex in Salalah with 216 rooms. These additions bring the total number of licensed tourism establishments in Dhofar to 100, collectively offering more than 8,000 hotel rooms. A new tourist information centre has also opened at Al Haffa Beach Market to enhance visitor services. **SEE P2**

Strawberry Moon graces Oman skies

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

A full Strawberry Moon graced Oman and some parts of Europe and America on Wednesday, coupled with a rare phenomenon not seen in almost 20 years.

Caused by an event known as a ‘major lunar standstill’, Wednesday night marked the peak of the full moon.

According to Earth Sky, this was the lowest full moon in decades, “because we are in the midst of a major lunar standstill.” But it also depends on which hemisphere one is at.

They explained that as the inclination of the moon’s orbit, which undergoes an 18.6-year cycle and the cycle happens because the moon’s orbit is being slowly ‘dragged around’.

According to the Earth Sky, the Strawberry Moon was also near the bright star, red Antares, ‘Heart of the Scorpion in the constellation Scorpius’.

The name Strawberry Moon was associated with the short harvesting season and was named by the indigenous Americans. In Europe, however, it is also known as Honey Moon and Mead Moon.

Some prefer to be near the sea to see the moon but for Ahmed al Mahrouqi, the best place to be is in the desert.

“The best way to watch the full moon is



A person watches the Strawberry Moon rise, as seen from Hampstead Heath, in London. — Reuters

to be in the desert. During the day time, the temperature could be in mid 40s but by night it could come down to 25 degrees Celsius. Even better, take the drive to Salalah on full moon night because it is an exceptional experience.”

OMAN HIGHLIGHTS OCEANS ROLE AS CARBON SINKS

AT the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, is taking part in the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) held in Nice, France.

In Oman's speech, Dr Al Amri highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's pioneering efforts in preserving marine environments, protecting oceans and safeguarding marine biodiversity in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

He noted that Oman was among the first countries to prioritise environmental protection, having issued “the first legislation to protect marine environments from pollution” 53 years ago. The country has also established “marine protected areas” spanning over 90,000 square kilometres to protect endangered species such as humpback whales and sea turtles. Additionally, Oman has banned all types of plastic shopping bags and set 2050 as its target year for achieving net-zero emissions.

He pointed out that Oman launched the “Oman Blue Carbon Project” to plant 100



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri takes part in the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) held in Nice, France, on Wednesday. — ONA

million mangrove trees, aimed at carbon sequestration and protecting coastal ecosystems. These efforts have earned Oman high rankings in global environmental assessments. Furthermore, Oman was

elected President of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) for its seventh session.

He reaffirmed Oman's commitment to supporting “SDG 14”, which focuses on conserving oceans and marine resources, including backing the “Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement.” Dr Al Amri also emphasised the need to remind the international community of the oceans' critical role as “a major carbon sink,” stressing Oman's dedication to supporting global efforts to maintain ocean health and sustain marine biodiversity.

The conference's agenda included an opening session where Oman presented its national statement, outlining its stance on global marine issues while reaffirming support for SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and the Nice Action Plan.

The five-day conference features 10 parallel high-level sessions (Ocean Action Panels) addressing various topics, including marine and coastal ecosystems, marine science and capacity-building, ocean financing and climate action. — ONA

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OMAN



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SHORT TAKES



HM 'S GREETINGS TO UZBEK PRESIDENT

TASHKENT: President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan received Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in Tashkent, on Wednesday. He conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes to the president of Uzbekistan emphasising the deep fraternal relations between the two friendly countries. The minister also congratulated the president Mirziyoyev on the historic sporting achievement made by the Uzbekistan national football team by qualifying for the 2026 FIFA World Cup for the first time. — **ONA**

MOC INKED TO FUND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME



The MoC was signed by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy and Said bin Sulaiman al Asmi. — **ONA**

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Wednesday signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with “Security and Safety Services Corporation” to the tune of RO 1,207,300 to provide employment-linked training for 923 Omani job-seekers.

The MoC was signed by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, and Said bin Sulaiman al Asmi, CEO of Security and Safety Services Corporation.

The MoC explores suitable job vacancies for the job-seekers, identify necessary skills, supervise the performance of the trainees, check their dedication to quality standards and assess the extent to which they gain insights from the training programme.

The MoC stipulates the preparation of periodic reports to measure the success of the project, monitor common challenges and propose development plans. It provides training for Omani job-seekers in the field of fisheries-related security, safety and control, and equipping them with the skills necessary to perform their job duties. — **ONA**

OVER 17,000 VISIT WADI BANI KHALID DURING EID HOLIDAYS

MUSCAT: Wadi Bani Khalid, one of Oman’s most visited natural water sites, welcomed 17,021 visitors during the Eid Al Adha holiday.

The majority of visitors were Asian nationals, numbering 16,450, followed by Omanis (246), Europeans (182), Arabs from non-GCC countries (125), and visitors from GCC states (18).

11 rescue incidents were recorded during the period, highlighting the need for increased safety awareness among tourists. The cool waters and lush surroundings of Wadi Bani Khalid continue to offer a welcome reprieve from the summer heat, drawing crowds seeking both adventure and relaxation.

OMAN UNDERSCORES COMMITMENT TO PROTECT CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the activities of the annual session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef). The session will run until June 13, 2025 at the UN headquarters in New York.

In its opening statement during the session, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed the strength of its existing cooperation and partnership with the Unicef.

The speech highlighted national efforts to promote children’s rights



Oman took part in the activities of the annual session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef). — **ONA**

and underscored Oman’s strong commitment to protect children’s rights and make childcare a core component of its national policies. It also lauded the vital role undertaken by Unicef at all levels, notably in crisis circumstances.

Oman also contributed to the preparation of a joint statement (on behalf of 30 countries under the humanitarian action item) that voices deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation of children in the Gaza Strip. — **ONA**

Oman’s first solar-powered community launched

HIBBA AL KINDI
AL KHABOURAH, JUNE 11

In a landmark development, the initial phase of Oman’s first eco-friendly residential community was launched here on Wednesday for families affected by Cyclone Shaheen in Al Batinah North Governorate. The launch was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

Developed by local charity association Dar Al Atta’a, the neighbourhood dubbed as Hay Al Atta’a (Al Atta’a Neighbourhood), is located in San’aa Bani Ghafir, Wilayat of Al Khabourah.

The eco-friendly integrated neighbourhood, spanning an area of 1,000 m2, will include 36 solar-powered residential units, a community centre, commercial shops and a mosque.

It is the result of collaboration between the association, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, and the Municipality of Al Khabourah, with support from the local community.

Speaking to the Observer, Founder and Chairperson of Dar Al Atta’a Association, Maryam bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, shared that the initiative was born in the aftermath of Cyclone Shaheen in 2021.

“The idea for Hay Atta’a emerged in the wake of Cyclone Shaheen. In response,



The launch was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. — **ONA**

the association launched a fundraising campaign through which we were able to collect RO 1 million. As an organisation, we always strive to develop sustainable projects. Rather than providing short-term aid like food or furnishings, we envisioned a long-lasting solution – to build permanent homes for families severely impacted by the cyclone, especially those who lacked the means to rebuild on their own,” she said.

Significantly, the use of green energy

is the most significant feature of the neighbourhood, said the Chairperson of Dar Al Atta’a Association. “Without a doubt, the most significant is the use of green energy. It reduces residents’ electricity costs, and if they generate a surplus, they can sell it back to the government. This approach hasn’t been implemented in this area before, so it’s an exciting innovation.” In addition to solar power, the neighbourhood is also equipped with a sustainable wastewater management system, designed to reduce and recycle water use.

When asked why the association opted to build an eco-friendly neighbourhood, instead of conventional housing, she emphasised that the project’s goal was to introduce a new model for sustainable, community-centred living. “As an association, we always strive to remain attuned to current developments. With this project, our goal extended beyond sustainability – we wanted to create a lifestyle, a holistic way of living.”

The first phase of the project witnessed the inauguration of 36 eco-friendly residential units, each spanning an area of approximately 272m2. The five-bedroom homes are equipped with 48 solar panels each. According to officials, residents are expected to occupy the units soon.

The second phase of the project, which is currently under development, will include a community centre, commercial shops and a mosque. It is expected to be ready within two years.

New projects inaugurated ahead of Khareef

SALALAH: In preparation for the upcoming Khareef Dhofar Season, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has inaugurated several new tourism projects across the governorate.

The newly opened facilities include the Dhofar Private Museum, an 84-room three-star hotel in Mirbat, and a luxury serviced apartment complex in Salalah with 216 rooms. These additions bring the total number of licensed tourism establishments in Dhofar to 100, collectively offering more than 8,000 hotel rooms. A new tourist information centre has also opened at Al Haffa Beach Market to enhance visitor services.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised the significance of the khareef season as one of Oman’s most important tourism events. Speaking to Oman News



The ministry has implemented a comprehensive promotional campaign for this year’s khareef season as part of its broader tourism strategy. — **ONA**

Agency (ONA), he noted that the unique monsoon climate makes Dhofar a prime destination attracting visitors from different countries.

The ministry has implemented a comprehensive

promotional campaign for this year’s khareef season as part of its broader tourism strategy. Early marketing efforts included participation in international travel exhibitions such as the Arab Travel Market

2025 in Dubai, where Dhofar Municipality officials held a press conference to announce the season’s events. Additional promotional workshops were conducted in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, highlighting new direct flight routes to Salalah Airport operated by airlines including Flynas, Saudi Airlines (Flyadeal), Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways.

Al Abri explained that the ministry’s strategy focuses on extending the tourism season over 100 days while managing visitor distribution across three distinct periods between June 21 and October 10. The peak season from mid-July to late August typically sees the highest occupancy rates, while the ministry is working to boost visitation during the shoulder seasons through targeted marketing and special travel packages. — **ONA**

SHORT TAKES



Shabab Oman II on Wednesday departed Genoa Port in Italy following its participation in the naval parade. — ONA

SHABAB OMAN II SETS SAIL FOR BARCELONA PORT

GENOA: The Royal Navy of Oman’s vessel “Shabab Oman II” on Wednesday departed Genoa Port in the Italian Republic following its participation in the naval parade marking Italian Navy Day, now en route to Barcelona Port in the Kingdom of Spain.

This forms part of its seventh international voyage, “Glories of the Seas”, to Europe, during which it will dock at multiple ports and destinations.

During its seventh international journey, Shabab Oman II continues to convey the Sultanate of Oman’s noble message of strengthening bonds of friendship and fraternity between Oman and nations worldwide. The voyage serves to introduce Omani heritage and maritime history at its international stops, showcasing the nation’s authentic culture and glorious seafaring traditions. — ONA

Grape harvesting season begins

YANQUL: The grape harvesting season has begun in the Wilayat of Yanqul in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The season, which continues until the beginning of August, features locally grown grapes, one of the summer fruits that are highly sought after in local and traditional markets due to their exceptional quality and rich taste.

Salim bin Suhail al Alawi, Director of the Agriculture and Water Resources Department in Yanqul, stated that grapevines in the wilayat cover an area of approximately 13 acres, with around 2,600 grape trees of various local and imported varieties.

These significantly contribute to meeting the governorate’s demand for grapes during the summer season, he added.

He emphasised that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources provides numerous services to grape farmers, including technical supervision and advisory follow-ups related to planting distances, trellis design, modern irrigation systems, pest control and the supply of grape seedlings, as well as scheduling preventive spraying and fertilisation.

He also pointed out that these services involve sharing farmers’ expertise and experiences with others in neighbouring wilayats and governorates, creating a sustainable income source for farmers while optimising the governorate’s resources. This includes rationalising water consumption through modern irrigation techniques and crop-specific watering. He noted that these factors enhance farmers’ economic returns



The season, which continues until the beginning of August, features locally grown grapes that are highly sought after in local markets due to their rich taste. — ONA

while preserving the cultural and agricultural heritage of crops that thrive in Oman’s fertile environment.

Meanwhile, Qais bin Nasser al Farsi, owner of a local grape farming project in Yanqul, highlighted the significance of grape cultivation in the wilayat. Having engaged in commercial grape production for over a decade and a half, he explained

that grapevines require continuous care before the flowering and fruiting season, including soil preparation, fertilisation and regular irrigation.

Al Farsi added that, in addition to local black and white grapes, he has introduced other grape varieties such as Taifi, American and Turkish, which are known for their diversity and distinct flavours. — ONA

Award reflects efforts to ensure safety of pilgrims

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

THE Health Capability Award, which Oman won recently, reflects the integrated efforts to ensure the health and safety of Omani pilgrims. Efforts have been crowned with success in ensuring the safety of pilgrims and their physical ability to endure the rigors of the journey and perform Haj rituals safely.

These efforts are a result of the Sultanate of Oman’s strict adherence to the health capacity requirements as part of the Haj registration and acceptance procedures. This success in ensuring the safety and health of Omani pilgrims led to the Sultanate of Oman receiving the Health Capability Award from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recognition of its mission’s efforts in providing distinguished health services to pilgrims during the 2025 Haj season.

According to Dr Ali bin Zayed al Busaidy, head of the Omani Haj delegation, the medical delegation was formed at the end of last December. The Saudi Ministry of Health received the scientific certificates for translation and certification, provided necessary vaccinations to pilgrims, approved



DR ALI BIN ZAYED AL BUSAIDY

The success in ensuring the safety and health of Omani pilgrims led to the Sultanate of Oman receiving the Health Capability Award from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recognition of its mission’s efforts in providing distinguished health services to pilgrims during the 2025 Haj season

and certified medications; and followed necessary procedures with Saudi authorities.

Health education efforts were also made to educate Omani pilgrims about their health before their departure to the Holy Land.

Al Busaidy added that coordination with relevant authorities contributed to integration and cooperation to ensure the health and safety of pilgrims. The Omani side, in coordination with the relevant authorities in the Saudi Ministry of Health, ensured necessary health measures during the 1446 AH Haj season and endeavoured to adhere to required requirements. Contracts were signed with a company to supervise Omani Haj delegation services, making it the second country to sign supervision services according to Saudi health requirements. Contracts were implemented to provide ambulance transportation services and manage medical waste.

The Ministry of Health, with the support of the Omani Haj delegation, ensured that the Makkah Al Mukarramah clinic was equipped with all necessary medical equipment and devices to provide health, treatment and preventive services.

Ambulance centres in Mina



The award was presented in recognition of the efforts made by the Omani Haj Mission in providing high-level preparedness and quality health services to pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman.

and Arafat were also equipped to ensure health services during the pilgrims’ stay. Patients were transferred to Saudi hospitals according to established procedures and inpatients were monitored daily to determine treatment plans and ensure adequate healthcare.

This achievement is the result of teamwork, integration and cooperation between the health sector and all relevant parties, reflecting the Sultanate of Oman’s ongoing commitment to providing the highest standards of healthcare to ensure the health and safety of Omani pilgrims.

Tender Announcement

ET13/2025/OPAZ

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة

Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones

Sultanate of Oman

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) invites the reputable and experienced Omani and Saudi companies (JV) for the following tender; through an E-Tendering Portal (Esnad).

Construction of the Administrative and Commercial Buildings Complex within the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (EZAD Square) – IP4

Place of Buying and Collecting the Softcopy of Tender Documents:	Through E-Tendering System https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
Start of Tender Document Sale (Date):	Wednesday 11 th June 2025 (10:00AM)
End of Tender Documents Sale (Date):	Thursday 26 th June 2025 (12:00PM)
Site showround / Visit (for all bidders):	Monday 30 th June 2025 10:00 am at Oppsite Ibri Wali office
Tender Closing (Submission) and Opening of Technical Bids Date:	Monday 11 th August 2025 (12:00 PM, Muscat Time)
Cost of Tender Documents:	OMR. 3,000 (Three Thousand Omani Rial only)

- All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board participate and get the specification and conditions of the above tender from the following website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
- Bidders should submit their bids online on the given website Signed and Sealed. The Bidders shall submit Tender Bond electronically through the e-tendering system, which will verify the validity of the submitted bond and this Bid bond shall be issued from Local Bank in the Sultanate of Oman or it’s accredited branches in Saudi Arabia of (2%) of the Tender Value, valid for (180) days from the Proposals submission date, addressed to H. E. THE CHAIRMAN, OPAZ Tender COMMITTEE (OTC).
- OPAZ is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bid, and reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.

For further clarifications, you may contact:
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Email: etenderhd@gstb.gov.om

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+968 2450 7500

+968 2458 7474

R.O Box: 77 P.C: 100 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

@omanopaz

info@opaz.gov.om

www.opaz.gov.om

SPOTLIGHT

LET THE CATS BE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

MANY cats do not belong to a home or to the wildlife, which is why they are known as feral. They are also referred to as community cats or neighbourhood cats. Their lifespan is much shorter than domestic cats due to the challenges they face, from lack of food to road accidents. Survival is a day-to-day struggle for them.

They often hang around municipal trash cans and tend to avoid people unless provoked. The issue arises when people encroach on their territory.

During the Eid holiday, when more people venture outdoors, a private sector hospital reported 16 cases requiring antirabies vaccinations in one day. One patient mentioned that a cat had bitten his big toe the previous day. He said, “It was bleeding a lot last night, so the doctor advised me to get the vaccination.”

Doctors check if the patient’s blood has been exposed and recommend a tetanus injection. It is crucial to complete the five-dose anti-rabies vaccination series to prevent any complications.

Dr Peter Nolosco, a Veterinary Surgeon at Capital Vet Clinic, explained, “If a house cat is properly vaccinated, there is no need to worry. If the cat is infected, consult a physician. For stray cats, follow the physician's advice on tetanus and antirabies vaccinations.”

Some people clean the scratch area and move on, while others seek medical attention promptly.

A study published by the WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal mapped the epidemiology of animal bites and rabies in Oman from 1991 to 2013. It found a high incidence of animal bites, emphasising the need for a rabies prevention and control programme.

Oman now has a national surveillance system for animal bites and rabies, with notification required within 24 hours for group A disease cases. The Ministry of Health (MoH) in Oman primarily uses purified Vero cell rabies vaccine (PVRV) for post-exposure treatment. Pre-exposure treatment for high-risk groups is done by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR).

Pets can travel once all precautionary measures are taken. Oman Airports have specific conditions for pets travelling through the Passenger Terminal, including obtaining permission from the destination country, following their laws and providing a veterinarian passport for the pet.

As for the feral cats, they just need better understanding from the humans, especially children.

Cats often hang around municipal trash cans and tend to avoid people unless provoked. During the Eid holiday, when more people venture outdoors, a private sector hospital reported 16 cases requiring antirabies vaccinations in one day.

SHORTTAKES



The activities of the programme are being held in several science and technology lab centres in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and will continue until June 26. — ONA

TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMME KICKS OFF

NIZWA: Activities of the summer programme of the Science and Technology Centre for the 2024/2025 academic year in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate began on Wednesday with the participation of over 600 students from various schools across the governorate.

The programme, organised by the Directorate General of Education in the governorate, aims at fostering a culture of innovation and scientific research among students in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and preparing a generation capable of shaping the future.

The activities of the programme are being held in several science and technology lab centres in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and will continue until June 26. — ONA

AL SUWAIQ STREET VENDORS PROJECT REACHES 80%

AL SUWAIQ: The development project for street vendors in Al Khadra area in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq has reached 80% completion, according to the Al Batinah North Governorate Municipality.

Eng Mohsin bin Mohammed al Ajmi from the municipality's Projects Department stated that the project aims to create a safe, hygienic environment while regulating commercial activities.

The development includes multiple facilities, namely shaded structures covering 460 square metres for 20 fruit and vegetable stalls, dedicated fish-selling areas with 10 cleaning and cutting stations; and infrastructure upgrades featuring a 580-metre paved road, 70 parking spaces and 15 lighting poles — all within a total area of approximately 2,970 square metres. — ONA

TAJAWOB
PLATFORM
BOOSTS
PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information has reaffirmed its commitment to open governance and citizen participation through the Tajawob platform, which continues to serve as a vital channel for public interaction. Latest figures released by the Ministry highlight strong engagement levels and steady improvements in response efficiency over the past two months.

According to official data, the Ministry received 26 submissions in May 2025, spanning suggestions,

inquiries, complaints and reports. Of these, 13 were suggestions, with an 84.62 per cent resolution rate. Reports totalled three, all of which were addressed in full. Two complaints were submitted, with a 50 per cent resolution rate, while eight inquiries were handled with an 87.5 per cent response rate.

In April 2025, the platform logged a slightly higher volume of 28 submissions. These included 12 suggestions (67 per cent resolved), one report (100 per cent resolved),

four complaints (75 per cent resolved) and 11 inquiries (64 per cent resolved).

Tajawub — which translates to “Response” — was launched as part of the government’s digital transformation drive to strengthen transparency, public accountability and service accessibility. The platform allows citizens and residents to submit feedback, raise issues, or request information directly from the Ministry in a structured and trackable manner.

Oman calls for international cooperation in science

THE Sultanate of Oman is participating in the 2nd Belt and Road Conference on Science and Technology Exchange held in the People's Republic of China. The Omani delegation is headed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

In her speech at the conference, Dr Rahma emphasised the importance of international cooperation in science and technology, praising the Belt and Road Initiative's role in strengthening scientific and research partnerships among participating nations. She also highlighted Oman Vision 2040 and its key pillars, which align with the objectives of the Science and Technology Exchange Initiative under the Belt and Road framework.

She noted Oman's key achievements since its first participation in the initiative, including the signing of an MoU on science and technology cooperation. This has led to several collaborative programmes between Omani and Chinese universities, such as knowledge exchange in "smart campuses," enhanced scientific cooperation with Chinese private sector institutions — particularly global company Huawei — as well as student and researcher exchanges; and cultural cooperation through Chinese language education and Arabic teaching for non-native speakers.

On the sidelines of the event, the Minister held talks with Lin Xin, Vice Minister of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China, exploring ways to enhance scientific and technical exchange in priority research areas such as environmental sciences, food security,



The Omani delegation is headed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. — ONA

medicine, health sciences (including traditional medicine) and artificial intelligence.

Discussions also covered expertise exchange in marine and ocean sciences, genetic resources and mutual invitations to scientific conferences, including the upcoming Arab-Chinese Conference scheduled in August 2025. Additionally, they reviewed cooperation in cultural exchange, teaching each country's language in higher education institutions and increasing mutual

recognition of academic credentials.

During her visit to Sichuan University in Chengdu, the Minister explored potential collaboration in scientific and research programmes, particularly in creative arts. She also discussed partnership opportunities between Omani private higher education institutions and the Chinese university, including joint exhibitions, young researcher training, bilateral research projects, cultural student events and cooperation in AI, IoT and modern technologies. — ONA

'Raf' student platform enables creation of smart e-stores



Raf completed its prototype in early 2025 after development began in January 2024. — ONA

MUSCAT: 'Raf', a student-led start-up under the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat, has developed an innovative Omani digital platform that empowers users to create AI-powered e-stores tailored for the local market.

The platform eliminates technical barriers for youth and e-commerce enthusiasts through its intuitive interface.

Saif al Hashar, CEO of Raf, said that Raf allows automated store setup, price adjustments,

competitor tracking and smart data analytics – aligning with Oman’s digital transformation vision by supporting SMEs with AI solutions.

With a 12-member interdisciplinary team, Raf offers flexible subscription plans catering to diverse entrepreneurs. "Our mission is to democratise e-commerce entry and equip Omani youth with smart business tools," Al Hashar stated.

Selected among Oman's
top 40 start-ups from
over 300 applicants in

the “Injaz Oman 2025” programme, Raf completed its prototype in early 2025 after development began in January 2024. The company plans to launch the full platform by early 2026 while seeking seed funding and strategic partnerships.

Notably, Raf aims to become a regional e-commerce leader by introducing advanced AI features including sales analytics, product recommendations and a virtual business assistant to optimise user operations.

— ONA



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and
Information Technology



إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTCIT/ 99/2025	CONSULTATION SERVICES TO DEVELOP A SEMICONDUCTOR ECOSYSTEM AND SUPPORT FOR ESTABLISHING A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE	10-06-2025	24-06-2025	22-07-2025	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (EXCELLENT AND FIRST CLASS)	(95/500) NINETY FIVE OMANI RIAL AND FIVE HUNDRED BAIZA FOR LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES (19/100) NINETEEN OMANI RIAL AND ONE HUNDRED BAIZA (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Secretariat General of Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted online on given website

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
 Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDERS COMMITTEE



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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



South Korean soldiers dismantle loudspeakers in Paju. — AFP

S KOREA HALTS PROPAGANDA AGAINST NORTH

SEOUL: South Korea on Wednesday halted loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts into the nuclear-armed North, the defence ministry said, adding it was a bid to “restore trust” under Seoul’s new administration. The decision to suspend the broadcasts was “to make good on a promise to restore trust in South-North Korea relations and seek peace on the Korean peninsula”, the defence ministry said in a brief statement. A ministry spokesperson said that the broadcasts were halted on Wednesday afternoon.

Ganghwa county councillor Park Heung-yeol said that the move by Seoul was “long overdue”. “Halting the loudspeaker broadcasts should not be the end -- we must also work to restore inter-Korean communication channels and initiate dialogue to stop the North’s broadcasts targeting the South,” Park added.

Lee, who took office the day after last week’s election, has vowed to improve ties with the North through dialogue. “No matter how costly, peace is better than war,” he said after he was elected. North Korea has not commented on Lee’s election except for a brief news report informing its public of his win. — AFP

DEATH IN CUSTODY ‘UNACCEPTABLE’, SAYS KENYA PRESIDENT



Protesters are pushed by Kenyan police officers as they attempt to block the entrance. — AFP

NAIROBI: Kenyan President William Ruto on Wednesday condemned the death of a man in police custody that has sparked widespread anger as the country prepares to mark a year since massive protests calling for change. Albert Ojwang, 31, was arrested in western Kenya over posts on social media accusing police deputy inspector-general Eliud Kipkoech Lagat of corruption.

“This tragic occurrence, at the hands of police, is heartbreaking and unacceptable,” Ruto said. The president urged officers to cooperate fully to facilitate a “swift, transparent and credible investigation”. Police chief Douglas Kanja addressed the Senate to say that Ojwang was arrested for sharing a fake newspaper front page, accusing the deputy inspector-general of corruption and calling him “The Mafia Cop”.

Interior Secretary Kipchumba Murkomen said the government was “committed to ensuring that everyone who was involved in the crime is brought to justice”. Police have removed five officers from active duty while the investigation is ongoing. The case has attracted international attention. — AFP

IMMEASURABLE SUFFERING

Haiti violence displaces 1.3m people



A record number of people — almost 1.3 million — have been internally displaced in Haiti due to violence, the UN said. “Behind these numbers are so many individual people whose suffering is immeasurable,” said Amy Pope, director-general of the UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM). According to the IOM, Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince remains the epicentre of the crisis but gang violence has spread. — AFP

BANGLADESH INTERIM LEADER YUNUS PLANS TO STEP DOWN AFTER POLLS

LONDON: Bangladesh interim leader Muhammad Yunus said on Wednesday that there was “no way” he wanted to continue in power after elections he has announced for April, the first since a mass uprising overthrew the government. Speaking in London, Yunus, asked if he himself was seeking any political post, the 84-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner said there was “no way”, waving his hands in the air for emphasis. “I think none of our cabinet members would like to do

that, not only me”, he said.

Yunus was answering questions after speaking at London’s foreign policy think tank Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He also said he wanted to unveil a “big package” of proposals next month that he dubbed a “July Charter”. The aim of the package, he added, was to overhaul democratic institutions after Hasina’s tenure. “We want to say goodbye to the old Bangladesh and create a new Bangladesh,” Yunus said.

After political parties jostling for power repeatedly demanded he fix a timetable, Yunus said earlier this month that elections would be held in April 2026. “Our job is to make sure that the transition is managed well, and that people are happy when we hand over power to the elected government,” he said.

“So we want to make sure that the election is right, that is a very critical factor for us. If the election is wrong, this thing will never be solved again”. — AFP

Charity accuses Israel of deadly strike on Gaza

MEDICAL

charity Medecins du Monde on Wednesday accused

Israel of violating international law with drone strikes on a building housing one of its offices in war-torn Gaza that killed eight people, none of them staff. The France-based aid group said in a statement the attack on Tuesday “constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law, which protects both civilian populations and humanitarian organisations operating in conflict zones”. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“Yesterday morning, at around 11:00 am local time, a building in Deir Al Balah housing a Medecins du Monde office was attacked by drones,” the aid group said. Its staff had not been present as they had been off as part of the Eid Al Adha holiday, it added. “At least eight people were killed in the bombardment. All were on the last floor of the building,” it said, without providing more details on those killed.

“Medecins du Monde had informed the Israeli military of the presence of its office, which had officially been declared ‘deconflicted’, or shielded from Israeli military attacks under humanitarian coordination agreements,” it said. “However, as during previous Israeli attacks, the team received no forward warning that would have allowed it to evacuate the building or take measures to protect anyone



A Palestinian child looks on as smoke billows during Israeli bombardment in Rafah. — AFP

The France-based aid group said in a statement the attack “constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law, which protects both civilian populations and humanitarian organisations operating in conflict zones”.

inside,” it added. Several other non-governmental organisations as well as Palestinians displaced by the war are based in the same area, it said.

Israel is facing mounting pressure to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza, whose entire population the United Nations has warned is at risk of famine. Medecins du Monde last month, after more than two months of a total blockade on Gaza, accused Israel of using hunger as “a weapon of war” in the Palestinian territory. Israel recently allowed some deliveries to resume through the newly formed, US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. But the United Nations refuses to work with it, citing concerns over its practices and neutrality. Dozens of people have been killed near GHF distribution points since late May, according to Gaza’s civil defence agency. It said Israeli forces killed 31 people waiting for aid early on

Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Gaza civil defence agency said Israeli forces opened fire on people waiting to enter a US-backed food distribution centre on Wednesday, killing dozens and wounding “about 200”. “We transported at least 31 martyrs and about 200 wounded as a result of Israeli tank and drone fire on thousands of citizens... on their way to receive food from the American aid centre,” civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said.

Restrictions imposed on media in the Gaza Strip and the difficulties of access on the ground mean AFP is not able to independently verify the death tolls announced by the civil defence agency. Bassal said thousands of Palestinians had been gathering since 2 am (2300 GMT Tuesday) in the hope of reaching the US and Israeli-backed food distribution centre. — AFP

AUSTRIAN POLICE SEARCH FOR ANSWERS



GRAZ: Austrian authorities were searching on Wednesday for clues to why a 21-year-old gunman shot dead 10 people in a rampage at his former high school before killing himself, in one of the worst outbreaks of violence in the country’s modern history. Police are scouring his home and the Internet to find out why he opened fire, before shooting himself in a bathroom.

Austria came to a standstill at 10 am on Wednesday to commemorate the dead with one minute’s silence. Churches rang funeral bells, including St Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna, where around 900 public transport vehicles halted for a minute. — Reuters

BRUTAL WEATHER

49 dead in flooding, children missing



The death toll from flooding in eastern parts of South Africa has risen to 49, including four children on a school bus that was swept away, a provincial governor said on Wednesday. Heavy rainfall, snow and cold winds have particularly affected areas of the Eastern Cape province, with most of the country experiencing brutal winter weather conditions since last week. The dead included four children on a school minibus carrying 13 people. — AFP

TRIANGLE AREA

Sudan paramilitaries overrun key zone



Sudan’s paramilitary Rapid Support Forces said its fighters seized a strategic zone on the border with Egypt and Libya, as the regular army announced its withdrawal from the region. “As part of its defensive arrangements to repel aggression, our forces today evacuated the triangle area overlooking the borders between Sudan, Egypt and Libya,” army spokesman Nabil Abdullah said. The RSF said that army forces had retreated southward “after suffering heavy losses”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Maria Claudia Tarazona, wife of Senator Uribe speaks to the press, in Bogota. — Reuters

COLOMBIAN SENATOR URIBE SHOWS SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT

BOGOTA: Colombian Senator Miguel Uribe remains in a critical condition after being shot in Bogota on Saturday, but has shown signs of neurological improvement, the hospital treating him said on Wednesday. “Despite the severity of his condition, there are signs of neurological improvement due to a decrease in cerebral edema. There is also evidence of a trend toward hemodynamic stabilisation,” the Santa Fe Foundation hospital said in a statement.

The institution added that Uribe remains under strict neurological monitoring and receiving required support at the hospital’s ICU. In the recent days, Uribe’s shooting and a series of bomb attacks on the nation’s southwest have shaken Colombians, harking back to decades of fear and violence caused by armed guerrillas, paramilitary groups and drug traffickers.

Leftist President Gustavo Petro, who has vowed to bring peace to the country’s conflict, found in Uribe a staunch critic of his security strategy aimed at ending six decades of armed conflict. The senator argued that Petro’s approach of pausing offensives on armed groups while peace talks had failed has backfired. — Reuters

N IRISH RIOTERS ATTACK POLICE



Hundreds of masked rioters attacked police and set homes and cars on fire in the Northern Irish town of Ballymena on Tuesday, in the second successive night of disorder that followed a protest over an alleged physical assault in the town. Seventeen officers were injured, bringing to 32 the number hurt since the violence began on Monday. Police are investigating attacks on properties that saw four houses damaged by fire as racially-motivated “hate crimes”. — Reuters

MUSK REGRETS SOME OF HIS CRITICISMS OF TRUMP

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk, the world’s richest person and Donald Trump’s former adviser, said on Wednesday he regretted some of his recent criticisms of the US president, after the pair’s public falling-out last week. “I regret some of my posts about President @realDonaldTrump last week. They went too far,” Musk wrote on his social media platform X. Musk’s expression of regret came just days after Trump threatened the tech billionaire with “serious consequences” if he sought

to punish Republicans who vote for a controversial spending bill. Their blistering break-up — largely carried out on social media before a riveted public since Thursday last week — was ignited by Musk’s harsh criticism of Trump’s so-called “big, beautiful” spending bill, which is currently before Congress. Some lawmakers who were against the bill had called on Musk — one of the Republican Party’s biggest financial backers in last year’s presidential election

— to fund primary challenges against Republicans who voted for the legislation. “He’ll have to pay very serious consequences if he does that,” Trump, who also branded Musk “disrespectful,” told NBC News on Saturday, without specifying what those consequences would be. Trump said he had “no” desire to repair his relationship with the Tesla and SpaceX chief, and that he has “no intention of speaking to him.” — AFP

Police make arrests in LA during nighttime curfew

DOWNTOWN

Los Angeles was largely calm overnight into Wednesday, with police arresting at least 25 people for violating a curfew after a fifth day of protests against President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown. Heavily armed security officers, including several riding horses, patrolled near government buildings, while men boarded up storefronts after dark on Tuesday to protect against vandalism. Looting and vandalism in the second-biggest US city have marred the largely peaceful protests over ramped-up arrests by immigration authorities.



California Highway Patrol (CHP) close the bridges and the access to the Freeway after curfew, in Los Angeles. — AFP

The demonstrations, which began Friday, and isolated acts of violence prompted Trump to take the extraordinary step of sending in troops, over the objection of the state governor. One protester said that the arrest of migrants in a city with large immigrant and Latino populations was the root of the unrest. “I don’t think that part of the problem is the peaceful protests. It’s whatever else is happening on the other side that is inciting violence,” she said on Tuesday.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said the curfew — meant to stop vandalism and looting — was in effect within one square mile (2.5 square kilometers) of the city’s more-than-500 square mile area from 8:00 pm and 6:00 am (0300 to 1300 GMT). That zone was off-limits for everyone apart from residents, journalists and emergency services, she added.

Protests against immigration arrests by federal law enforcement have also sprung up in cities around the country, including New York, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco and Austin.

On Tuesday, in the Atlanta suburb of Brookhaven, dozens of demonstrators waved American and Mexican flags and held signs against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the federal agency that has ramped up arrests and deportations of migrants under Trump. “You got people that are being arrested on the street by (immigration) agents that don’t wear badges,

wear masks... it makes me really angry,” 26-year-old protester Brendon Terra said. The Los Angeles protests again turned ugly on Tuesday night, but an hour into the curfew only a handful of protesters were left downtown, with police making several arrests as they warned stragglers to leave. “Multiple groups continue to congregate” within the designated downtown curfew area, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) wrote on X late on Tuesday.

Police arrested at least 25 people on suspicion of violating the curfew as of Tuesday evening, the Los Angeles Times reported, citing an LAPD spokesperson. At their largest, the protests have included a few thousand people taking to the streets, but smaller groups have used the cover of darkness to set fires, daub graffiti and smash windows. Overnight on Monday 23 businesses were looted, police said, adding that more than 500 people had been arrested over recent days.

Trump has activated 4,000 National Guard troops in Los Angeles, along with 700 active-duty Marines, in what he has claimed is a necessary escalation to take back control, even though local law enforcement authorities insisted they could handle the

unrest. A military spokeswoman said the Marines were expected to be on the streets by Wednesday. Their mission was to guard federal facilities and provide protection to federal officers during immigration enforcement operations. The Pentagon said the deployment would cost US taxpayers \$134 million.

Photographs issued by the Marine Corps showed men in combat fatigues using riot shields to practice crowd control techniques at the Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach. Late on Tuesday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said his state would deploy its National Guard “to locations across the state to ensure peace & order” after solidarity protests.

California Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat who has clashed with the president before, said Trump’s shock militarisation of the city was the behavior of “a tyrant, not a president.”

In a filing to the US District Court in Northern California, Newsom asked for an injunction preventing the use of troops for policing. US law largely prevents the use of the military as a police force — absent the declaration of an insurrection, which Trump has mused. — AFP

Russia launches strike in east Ukraine amid stalled peace talks

KHARKIV: Fresh Russian strikes on Ukraine’s northeastern city of Kharkiv killed three people and wounded 60 others, including children, on Wednesday, authorities said, as Moscow pushed ahead with attacks after rejecting an unconditional ceasefire. Ukraine said it had received the bodies of more than 1,200 soldiers, handed over by Moscow, part of a repatriation deal the two sides agreed at talks last week. Russia has fired record numbers of drones and missiles at Ukraine over recent weeks, escalating three years of daily bombardments as it outlines hardline demands — rejected by Kyiv as “ultimatums” — to halt its three-year attack.

The northeastern city of Kharkiv, just 30 kilometres from the Russian border, again bore the brunt of the attack. “Seventeen strikes by enemy UAVs (drones) were carried out in two districts of the city tonight,”

Kharkiv Mayor Igor Terekhov said on Telegram. Kharkiv regional Governor Oleg Syneghubov said three people had been killed.

“Every new day now brings new cowardly strikes from Russia, and almost every strike is demonstrative. Russia deserves increased pressure,” Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media after the shelling of Kharkiv. Journalists in the city saw damaged apartment blocks, burnt out cars and streets strewn with debris after the attacks.

Ukraine’s air force said that Russia had fired 85 drones overnight — fewer than in recent days. On the front line, Moscow’s troops have been advancing steadily. The Russian defence ministry said on Wednesday that more units had crossed into the Dnipropetrovsk region.

US President Donald Trump has been urging the two sides to strike a peace deal, but has seen



A man stands on a damaged balcony on Ukraine’s northeastern city of Kharkiv. — AFP

little progress. Zelensky has in turn called on the West to increase the pressure on Russia with hard-hitting economic sanctions that he says would limit its capacity to wage war. He is expected to press that message with Trump and European leaders at a G7 summit in Canada, which kicks off on Sunday.

Leaders from several countries across southeastern Europe were expected in the Ukrainian port city

of Odesa on Wednesday, hours after it was targeted by Russian strikes.

Two rounds of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine have failed to yield a breakthrough in ending the war.

Russia has rejected calls for an unconditional ceasefire and demanded that Ukraine give up large swathes of territory and its bid to join Nato. But the two sides agreed to swap more than 1,000 prisoners of war and hand over the bodies of dead soldiers. Ukraine said on Wednesday that Russia had handed over the corpses of 1,212 killed soldiers and was working to identify them.

Russia’s top negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, confirmed the handover and said Russia had received “the remains of 27 Russian soldiers.” Ukraine did not say how many bodies it returned to Russia, which says Western estimates of its deaths are untrue. — AFP

OPINION

When the sea becomes the story



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

TEN years ago, I stood in a crowded hallway in Paris, watching history unfold. The Paris Agreement had just been adopted and the room erupted. There were cheers, tears and applause. I remember the hallway buzzing with the smell of coffee, exhaustion and belief. It felt like a line had been drawn in the sand. The world had finally said yes to something bigger than its borders.

Now, we gather again. This time in Nice. And this time, the crisis rises from the deep. The 2025 UN Ocean Conference could not have come at a more urgent moment. Ocean temperatures are at record highs. Over 84 per cent of coral reefs have experienced bleaching-level heat stress since January 2023. Marine biodiversity is vanishing. The ocean is absorbing more carbon and heat than ever before and its ability to protect us is wearing thin.

In the halls of Nice, urgency is not just spoken. It is in the way delegates lean forward. France’s President Macron has called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, warning that the world cannot afford to explore blindly. French Polynesia has

proposed what could become the largest marine protected area on Earth, spanning five million square kilometres. Eighteen more countries have ratified the High Seas Treaty, bringing the total to 49, just eleven short of entry into force.

This treaty matters. It creates tools to protect biodiversity beyond borders, mandates environmental assessments before high seas exploitation and introduces a framework for fair access to marine genetic resources. Even with the current shifting, some regions are still slow to move. The Arab world, with all its coasts and stories, has not yet found its full voice in this treaty. The truth is, some already have.

Countries like Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Mauritania, Yemen, Palestine and Jordan have signed the treaty. Signing shows intent. It is a step towards responsibility, a way of saying we are willing to be part of something larger. But signing is only the beginning. For a treaty to hold weight, it must be woven into law. That means review, debate and coordination. It is careful work. So far, only Jordan has completed that step. The treaty remains open for signature until September 2025. Time is still with us, but it is not

This summit cannot drift into memory like the ones before it. It must leave something behind. Leadership that hears the science. Action that spans borders. The courage to place the ocean not at the edge of our decisions, but at the centre of them.

standing still. Each passing season pulls the shore a little further from where it used to be.

And in the Gulf, where the sea has always been more than scenery, that current feels personal.

In Oman, the ocean is our inheritance. It carried our merchants, fed our families and shaped our stories. It shaped me. I remember early mornings near the shore, where the air smelled of salt and fish and home. But those mornings have changed. The coral is fading. The fish are fewer. Storms feel closer, like something pressing at the edge of memory. It is not only the elders who notice. The next generation feels it too, not in theory, but in their bones.

This summit cannot drift into memory like the ones before it. It must leave something behind. Leadership that hears the science. Action that spans borders. The courage to place the ocean not at the edge of our decisions, but at the centre of them.

Paris was a commitment. Nice must be a mirror. For our region, with coastlines that have shaped civilisations and communities still bound to the sea, the question is not whether the tide is rising. It is whether we will rise with it and rise together.

KENYAN ECONOMY STRUGGLING YEAR AFTER PROTESTS

ROSE TROUP BUCHANAN AND ERIC RANDOLPH

Roadside vendor and mother-of-five Christine Naswa bemoaned the state of the Kenyan economy as she hawked vegetables by one of Nairobi’s busiest thoroughfares.

“The economy is very poor right now. There is no money in Kenya,” Naswa, 40, said as the smell of sliced ginger she was hawking powered through bus fumes. “I do not manage to even feed my children, the (costs of) living are high and my profit is low. There are some days when I do not get anything,” she said. The east African nation is an economic bright spot in a troubled region, but still faces huge challenges and is coming off a difficult year. Roughly 40 per cent of Kenyans live in poverty and are increasingly fed up with soaring living costs, a limited job market and depressingly regular corruption scandals.

The discontent exploded into deadly protests in June last year, with new taxes in President William Ruto’s finance bill the catalyst.

Although some of the taxes were cancelled, many Kenyans are struggling more than ever.

Kenya has a diverse economy including strong agriculture, services and tourism sectors. But making the leap to middle-income status requires investment and like many African nations, Kenya is heavily in debt to foreign lenders, paying more in interest on those borrowings than it does on health and education. Meanwhile, Kenyans have made it clear that taxes are already too high, with much of the burden falling on the tiny formal sector, which accounts for less than 20 per cent of jobs.

“This year has been the toughest of all our 36-year history” in business, said a shopkeeper in Nairobi’s commercial district, who was afraid to give his name because his store was looted during the protests. Ruto has squandered the goodwill he enjoyed upon taking office in 2022, say analysts.

“There’s a huge amount of distrust and disillusionment with Ruto’s administration,” said Patricia Rodrigues, of global consultancy Control Risks. International bodies like the IMF say Kenya has no choice but to boost taxes to meet the expanding needs of its 55 million citizens.

But the new budget, due to be debated in parliament on Thursday, is at pains to avoid any direct taxes that might spark fresh unrest. “We are at the limit of how much tax Kenyans are willing to bear,” said Kwame Owino, from the Institute for Economic Affairs, a think tank. “The idea you can raise taxes to cover government inefficiencies and pay for debts that many Kenyans don’t believe were well-used — that idea is gone.” — AFP

This Israeli govt a danger to Jews everywhere

ISRAELIS,

diaspora Jewry and friends of Israel everywhere

need to understand that the way Israel is fighting the war in the Gaza Strip today is laying the groundwork for a fundamental recasting of how Israel and Jews will be seen the world over.

It won’t be good. Police cars and private security at synagogues and Jewish institutions will increasingly become the norm; Israel, instead of being seen by Jews as a safe haven from antisemitism, will be seen as a new engine generating it; sane Israelis will line up to immigrate to Australia and America rather than beckon their fellow Jews to come Israel’s way. That dystopian future is not here yet, but if you don’t see its outlines gathering, you are deluding yourself.

Fortunately, more and more retired and reserve duty Israeli air force pilots, as well as retired army and security officers, are seeing this gathering storm and declaring they will not be silent or complicit in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ugly, nihilistic policy in Gaza. They have begun to urge Jews in America and elsewhere to speak up — SOS: Save Our Ship — before the widening moral stain of Israel’s military campaign in Gaza becomes irreversible.

The Netanyahu government should be telling the Trump administration and Arab mediators that it’s ready to withdraw from Gaza in a phased manner and be replaced by an international/Arab/Palestinian Authority peacekeeping force — provided that the Hamas leadership agrees to return all remaining living and dead hostages and leave the strip.

If instead, though, Israel goes ahead with Netanyahu’s vow to perpetuate this war indefinitely — to try to achieve “total victory”



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is a foreign-affairs columnist of The New York Times

If instead, though, Israel goes ahead with Netanyahu’s vow to perpetuate this war indefinitely — to try to achieve “total victory” over every last Hamasnik, along with the far right’s fantasy of ridding Gaza of Palestinians and resettling it with Israelis — Jews worldwide better prepare themselves, their children and their grandchildren for a reality they’ve never known: to be Jewish in a world where the Jewish state is a pariah state — a source of shame, not of pride.

over every last Hamasnik, along with the far right’s fantasy of ridding Gaza of Palestinians and resettling it with Israelis — Jews worldwide better prepare themselves, their children and their grandchildren for a reality they’ve never known: to be Jewish in a world where the Jewish state is a pariah state — a source of shame, not of pride.

Because one day, foreign photographers and reporters will be allowed to go into Gaza unescorted by the Israeli military. And when they do and the full horror of the destruction there becomes clear to all, the backlash against Israel and Jews everywhere could be profound.

Do not confuse my warning to Israel for a shred of understanding for what Hamas did on October 7, 2023. What society in the world would not see its heart grow cold by such brutality?

But as a Jew who believes in the right of the Jewish people to live in a secure state in their biblical homeland — alongside a secure Palestinian state — I am focused right now on my own tribe. And if my own tribe does not resist this Israeli government’s utter indifference to the number of civilians being killed in Gaza today — as well its attempt to tilt Israel into authoritarianism at home by moving to sack its independent attorney general — Jews everywhere will pay dearly.

Don’t just take that warning from me. Last week two respected former Israeli air force pilots, Brig Gen Asaf Agmon and Col Uri Arad, published an open letter in Hebrew in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, addressed to their colleagues still serving in the air force.

Both men are members of Forum 555 Patriots, an impressive group of around 1,700 Israeli air force pilots, some retired and some still serving as reservists,

which originally formed to resist Netanyahu’s efforts to undermine Israeli democracy with a judicial coup.

They wrote: “We do not seek to downplay the monstrous nature of the massacre committed by Hamas terrorists on that cursed Saturday. We believe the war was fully justified... “However, as the war in Gaza dragged on, it became clear that it was losing its strategic and security purposes and instead served primarily the political and personal interests of the government. It thus became an unmistakably immoral war, and increasingly appeared to be a war of revenge... “The Air Force has become a tool for those, in government and even in the military, who claim that there are no innocent people in Gaza... Recently, a member of the Knesset even boasted that one of the government’s achievements is the ability to kill 100 people a day in Gaza without anyone being shocked.

“In response to such statements, we say: As horrific as the October 7 massacre was, it does not justify complete disregard for moral considerations or the disproportionate use of deadly force. We do not want to become like the worst of our enemies.

It is time for a similar movement calling out Hamas’ vile excesses, led by those who support Palestinian statehood and a peaceful resolution in Gaza. No one should accept Hamas prolonging this war to keep itself in power. Nothing would do more to pressure Hamas to accept a ceasefire than to be denounced across the world, on college campuses and in high-profile demonstrations from those who have been giving this hate-driven organisation a free pass. This is what being pro-Palestinian really sounds like.

The spotlight on hate speech and radicalisation online



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE prevalence of hate speech and incitement to violence on social platforms is becoming increasingly alarming. A wave of misogyny, slander and threats is becoming normalised, while social platforms are being exploited as podiums for bigotry and radicalisation.

The boundaries between terrorism and other forms of offending are often blurred. Recent incidents involving vehicular homicide, hate crimes, school shootings and extremist acts have raised serious concerns.

According to studies, the rise in unfiltered hate significantly facilitated radicalisation on social media. Studies indicate that online extremism and online offending are likely to encourage and endorse violence. Beyond violent behaviour, radicalisation can also be recognised as the process of embracing extremist beliefs.

Younger individuals are more susceptible to being influenced by radical ideologies. Easy access to extremist content and instructions online directly fuels a rise in youth radicalisation. According to the United Nations, hate speech coupled with disinformation can lead to discrimination and large-scale violence.

The Internet radicalisation of youngsters and children is one of the most pressing current problems. Digital natives spend a lot of time online, and important aspects

of their lives and social interactions are rooted online. Adolescents can lack critical judgement in their decisions and be impulsive, which can facilitate violent actions.

The radicalisation of youth can occur over an extended period. Social variables such as health, economics and politics can all create situations of oppression. In some cases, a specific incident, a deep dissatisfaction with authority, global politics, or grievance triggered it. Children as young as 12 years old are being radicalised.

The way the Internet presents, selects, links, and assembles information has been of concern in the context of extremist beliefs, according to scholars Jeans Binder and Jonathan Kenyon in “Terrorism and the Internet: How Dangerous is Online Radicalisation”.

The alarming normalisation and acceptance of extremist beliefs online points to the formation of echo chambers, in which individuals can surround themselves with like-minded people and help reinforce each other’s views, thus contributing to the amplification of opinions and acts of violence.

In the article “Public Mental Health Approaches to Online Radicalisation: An Empty Systematic Review”, the authors suggest that peer-to-peer, video hosting and collaborative platforms can serve as conduits

The alarming normalisation and acceptance of extremist beliefs online points to the formation of echo chambers, in which individuals can surround themselves with like-minded people and help reinforce each other’s views, thus contributing to the amplification of opinions and acts of violence.

to extremist content. The authors claim that there is a growing number of radicalised persons among younger users of short video platforms, such as TikTok, Discord, Telegram, gaming platforms and online videogames. They build upon one another to create a more multifaceted and variegated threat.

In ‘The Third Generation of Online Radicalization’, Jacob Ware recounts how Estonian police caught a 13-year-old boy in early 2020 for leading an international terrorist organisation. Ware writes that the teen’s radicalisation stemmed from encrypted chatrooms; he radicalised others, drawing inspiration from a mix of revolutionary ideologies.

Investigators on counter-terrorism claim that violent posts on social media, forums and end-to-end encrypted messaging services are mostly visual and depict violence. According to investigators, this is a common tactic criminal actors use to heighten an emotional response. Unintentional individuals may fall into radical Internet rabbit holes.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of extremism among young people can lead to misinterpretations of the factors that put youth at risk. It is crucial to recognise that radicalisation is a social process; the problem involves not only social media but also online relationships and beliefs derived from the Internet.

Mexico’s flag turns lightning rod in Los Angeles protests

SARAH TITTERTON

The Mexican flag has become a flashpoint during protests in Los Angeles this week, waved by demonstrators proud of their heritage but cast by US President Donald Trump’s administration as heralding a “foreign invasion.” For five days now protesters have held small and largely peaceful rallies against immigration raids in the sprawling city, as the rest of Los Angeles carried on largely as normal with red carpet premieres, awards shows, traffic and tourists.

But there have been some eye-catching — albeit isolated and sporadic — incidents of violence that produced dramatic images of protesters flying Mexican flags during clashes with law enforcement under smoke-filled skies.

It is those images that Trump and officials in his administration have seized on to help justify his extraordinary step of deploying thousands of US troops to the California city over the strident objection of local officials.

Republicans lined up behind Trump to frame the protests as an invasion, with the Mexican flag as its symbol and the demonstrators as insurrectionists. But the Mexican flag has at times been a lightning rod in Los Angeles, the unofficial capital of the Mexican diaspora in the United States.

In 1994, the green, white and red banner was also waved by protesters as a sign of solidarity against legislation seeking to bar undocumented migrants from services including education and healthcare.

Then as now, it was seen by some as a symbol of anti-American defiance, becoming so polarising that it helped to get the legislation passed, argues Mike Madrid, a Republican strategist.

“So it is a little bit odd to see the same strategy being used when it misfired so badly last time,” Madrid, who authored the recent book *The Latino Century*, said.

Protesters who spoke to US media this week, including those who said they were American citizens, said they were waving the flag to show pride in their heritage and solidarity with those facing deportation.

The strategist Madrid, who himself is of Mexican heritage, argues this presents a paradox for Trump, after the Latino community’s rightward shift helped propel him to victory in 2024.

That shift comes as more Latinos are born in the country rather than arriving as immigrants, transforming them into working-class voters rather than an ethnic minority, he said.

Many Latinos support Trump’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants and illegal migration to the United States.

But the Latino vote is never cohesive “unless the community perceives itself to be under attack... It’s very clear who the president is attacking here,” Madrid said. — AFP

Abundance for workers

THE surest way for policy advocates to lose a progressive audience is to start talking about the economy’s supply side, the importance of incentives and the dangers of excess regulation. These ideas are traditionally associated with conservative agendas. Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson’s new book *Abundance* aims to change all that.

As Klein and Thompson point out, the left has traditionally focused on demand-side remedies. A key tenet of the New Deal in the United States and social democracy in Europe is Keynesian management of aggregate demand to ensure full employment. Another is public transfers to mitigate the impact of unemployment, ill health, and old age.

Klein and Thompson rightly underscore that it is improvements in supply that are the source of broad-based posterity in the US and other advanced economies. As productivity rises, low- and middle-income families reap the benefits of cheaper and more varied and plentiful goods and services. Increasingly, however, the US economy’s ability to build things has been hobbled, Klein and Thompson argue, by environmental, safety, labor, and other regulations, and by complex and time-consuming local permitting rules. These rules and regulations may be well-meaning, but they can be also counterproductive. When governments and communities place obstacles in the way of investment and innovation, they undercut prosperity. Public transport lags behind, productivity in housing construction plummets, and deployment of renewables falters. The examples Klein and Thompon offer are telling. California’s high-speed railroad is years behind schedule, way over budget, and has been sharply reduced in length. President Joe Biden’s infrastructure plan promised 500,000 charging stations nationwide for electric vehicles; only seven were built in the first two years of the program. Klein and Thompson’ vision of progress features energy from renewable sources and cheap, safe nuclear power; fresh water from desalination; fruits and vegetables from hyper-productive vertically stacked farms; meat produced



DANI RODRIK

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is the author of the forthcoming *Shared Prosperity in a Fractured World: A New Economics for the Middle Class, the Global Poor, and Our Climate*

Advanced economies’ most glaring failure has been their inability to deliver adequate numbers of good jobs. The damage has gone beyond economic performance, reflected in divided societies and polarised politics

in labs without slaughtering live animals; miracle drugs delivered by autonomous drones; and space-based factories supplying our other needs without requiring any human workers. And since AI has greatly shortened the workweek, we all can enjoy more vacation time without sacrificing our living standards.

Klein and Thompson are right to want to shift progressives’ attention to the supply side of the economy. Keynesian social democracy no longer provides an adequate answer to the malaise experienced by workers. But their depiction of utopia reflects a vision that ultimately remains consumerist. They say very little about people as workers. Their focus is squarely on the abundance of goods and services that the economy generates – on how much we build, rather than on the builders. In this, they share a common blind spot with economists who, ever since Adam Smith, have emphasized that the ultimate end of production is consumption. But what gives meaning to our lives is not just the fruits of our labor, but also the work itself. When people are asked about well-being and life satisfaction, the work they do ranks at the top, along with contributions to their community and family bonds. For economists, a job provides income but is otherwise a negative – a source of “disutility.” For real people, a job is a source of pride, dignity, and social recognition. The loss of employment typically produces a reduction in individual well-being that is a multiple of the loss of income. The social effects magnify those costs. Communities that suffer from persistent unemployment experience rising levels of crime, family breakdown, drug abuse, and an increase in authoritarian values. The rise of far-right populists in the US and Europe has been linked to the job losses associated with trade shocks, automation, and fiscal austerity. Good jobs pay well, but also provide security, autonomy, and a path to self-improvement. None of this is possible without high levels of productivity. A progressive who is focused on abundance of good jobs, rather than abundance of goods and services, would therefore find plenty to agree with in Klein and Thompson’s book. But there would also be many quibbles.

Consider housing, one of Klein

and Thompson’s key examples. Productivity in housing construction has stagnated in recent years, in part because of safety regulations and union rules. As one of Klein and Thompson’s interlocutors readily admits, many of the regulations that impede construction productivity also reduce workplace injuries. Fatalities and non-fatal injuries in construction have fallen dramatically in the US since the 1970s, thanks to many of these restrictive rules. That must surely count as an improvement in overall worker well-being, casting the productivity statistics in a somewhat different light.

Klein and Thompson are concerned mainly with services such as housing, transportation, health, and energy, rather than consumer goods per se. But their line of argument echoes economists’ case for automation and free trade. These may have been efficient by conventional criteria, and they certainly helped produce an abundance of goods. But they also hurt many workers. They left our societies scarred and helped pave the way for right-wing populism. A good-jobs focus would make us more tolerant of rules and regulations that sacrifice some efficiency for the sake of better labor-market outcomes for non-college-educated workers.

Ultimately, the real challenge for progressives is to devise an agenda that benefits workers in their role as workers as much as in their role as consumers. This requires a distinctive approach to innovation, investment, and regulation. Unions, worker representatives, and collective bargaining must be viewed as essential components of abundance, rather than obstacles to it. Place-based strategies and local economic development coalitions are critical. And government must put its thumb on the scale to ensure innovation takes a worker-friendly direction.

Advanced economies’ most glaring failure has been their inability to deliver adequate numbers of good jobs. The damage has gone beyond economic performance, reflected in divided societies and polarized politics. Remedying this failure requires focusing on those who produce abundance, alongside abundance itself. © Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



A select group of experts specialising in Paralympic swimming are delivering lectures during the course.



The course runs until June 13, with 20 trainees from various Arab countries and the West Asian region.

Oman Paralympic Committee organises swimming training course

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

The regional training course for Paralympic swimming, organised by the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC) in collaboration with the West Asian Paralympic Federation and the Arab Federation for Sports of the Disabled, kicked off on Wednesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The course runs until June 13, with 20 trainees from various Arab countries and the West Asian region participating. A select group of experts specialising in Paralympic swimming are delivering lectures during the course, including Dr Misbah Jaafar, Dr Mohammed Jaafar, and Dr Khaled Abdulaziz al Qurashi, who have extensive experience in coaching, refereeing, and organising Paralympic swimming competitions. In his opening speech, Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Touqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee, emphasised that this is the first- event-of-its-kind in the Sultanate of Oman, reflecting the committee’s commitment to achieving its strategy of diversity and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities to practice sports.

He noted that the course represents a significant step toward developing Paralympic sports in the region, adding: “Through this course, we aim to prepare qualified personnel capable of supporting athletes with disabilities and enhancing the awareness and infrastructure for Paralympic swimming both locally and regionally.”

He also stated that hosting this course for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to promote social inclusion and support people with disabilities through sports activities.

The course activities commenced with a programme that included both theoretical and practical sessions covering the fundamentals of Paralympic swimming training for various disability categories.

The course also included specialised sessions on international refereeing mechanisms and medical classification standards in accordance with the International Paralympic Committee’s approved regulations.

Furthermore, the course covered team management and organising Paralympic championships, including planning and managing training camps, designing warm-up programmes, and addressing the psychological and social aspects of the athletes.

Participants have the opportunity to engage, ask questions and participate in group workshops to enhance knowledge exchange.

It is noteworthy that this course aims to qualify and train coaches and classifiers in Paralympic swimming, as well as referees and administrators, while familiarising participants with qualification policies for the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games.

The course also seeks to develop national capabilities in Arab countries and West Asia, building a strong foundation to support and develop Paralympic swimming in the region, thereby expanding participation and achieving sports excellence.

Al Subhi’s late equaliser sends Oman to AFC playoff



Oman and Palestine players in action.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

In a dramatic conclusion to their AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 campaign, Oman secured the final playoff spot thanks to a last-gasp equaliser from striker Issam al Subhi, who converted a penalty deep into stoppage time to earn a crucial 1-1 draw against Palestine on Tuesday night at King Abdullah II Stadium in Amman.

Subhi’s ice-cold finish in the 97th minute, after Mohsin al Ghassani was fouled inside the box, ensured Oman advanced to the playoff stage which will be held in coming October. The late draw kept Red Warriors hopes for qualifying to the 2026 Fifa World Cup. The result saw Oman finish fourth in Group B with eleven points while Palestine on ten points bowed out in heartbreak. Oman entered the match requiring only a draw to qualify while Palestine required a win to progress.

Despite the pressure and playing with ten men for over twenty minutes following Harib al Saadi’s red card, Oman showed resilience and tactical discipline to snatch the result in the dying moments. Palestine took the lead in the 49th minute when Oday Kharoub headed in a corner from substitute Adamhamza Kayed and sent the home crowd into raptures. The hosts had earlier looked the more dangerous side with Michel Termanini’s header hitting the bar and several long-range efforts testing Oman’s defense. However, despite going a goal and a man down, Oman kept their composure and their persistence was rewarded in stoppage time when a foul on substitute Mohsin al Ghassani handed al Subhi the opportunity to level the game and it was a moment he seized to dramatic effect.

FIGHTING UNTIL END
Oman’s head coach Rasheed Jaber praised his team’s fighting spirit and ability to bounce back: “ We knew the match would be difficult for both parties and Palestine were very well organised and dangerous on the pitch. After conceding the goal and the red card, things became more complicated. But our players showed great spirit and didn’t give up. I am proud of their effort and mentality.”

He added, “This team deserves to be in



Oman players celebrate with the fans.

the next phase. Now our focus turns to the playoffs. We are determined to continue our journey toward the 2026 Fifa World Cup.” He ended With the late draw earned, Oman’s path

to the 2026 Fifa World Cup remains alive. The playoffs in October will offer two more coveted spots for Asian countries and Oman will eye to capture one of these tickets.

SHORTTAKES



Britain's Emma Raducanu in action during her doubles quarterfinal match with Katie Boulter. — Reuters

RADUCANU LEADS
BRITISH TRIO
INTO QUEEN’S CLUB
2ND ROUND

LONDON: Emma Raducanu had a comfortable straight sets win over Spain's Cristina Bucsa and was one of three Britons to reach the second round of the WTA 500 tournament at Queen's Club on Tuesday, while Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejickova crashed out. Bucsa had won their only previous meeting in the first round of this year's Singapore Open, but this time the Spaniard was no match for the 22-year-old wildcard and Raducanu strolled to a 6-1 6-2 win. "I'm still trying to find my groove on this surface," Raducanu said.

"I knew today would be a very difficult match, I lost to Cristina earlier in the year so I was trying to make sure that didn't happen again and fight to get myself into the second round."

Raducanu will now face Rebecca Sramkova after the Slovak caused an upset with a 6-4 6-3 win over Czech seventh seed Krejickova, who only returned to action last month after a back injury kept her out since November.

Top tier women's tennis has returned to Queen's Club for the first time since 1973 and the home crowd had plenty to cheer on day two with Katie Boulter and Heather Watson also winning their first-round matches.

"To have the women back here, it feels very special," Boulter, current British number one, said.

"It's something I've dreamt of, actually walking out on this court, after the last couple of years coming as a fan watching the men."

Boulter beat Australian qualifier Ajla Tomljanovic 7-6(4) 1-6 6-4 and will face fifth seed Diana Shnaider after the Russian 21-year-old defeated Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-4 6-1.

Watson defeated Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva 6-4 6-3 to earn a second-round clash with another Kazakh, fourth seed former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina.

"Very happy to be through here at Queen's," Watson said.

"It's such a great event so far, and I'm really enjoying playing here, playing on these courts at this amazing club, and staying at home, sleeping in my own bed."

The other Briton in action, Francesca Jones went down 6-2 6-4 to American McCartney Kessler who will meet top seed Zheng Quinwen. — Reuters



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's Beau Webster, caught out by David Bedingham. — Reuters

S Africa pacers destroy
Aussie top deck on day 1

SOUTH AFRICA fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen took two wickets each to reduce Australia to 67-4 on the first morning of the World Test Championship final at Lord's on Wednesday.

Defending champions Australia were in desperate trouble in overcast conditions in London at 16-2 after losing Usman Khawaja and Cameron Green in a single Rabada over.

Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith led a mini-recovery before Jansen snuffed that out, removing opener Labuschagne and the dangerous Travis Head.

Former captain Smith, who has an impressive record at Lord's, was 26 not out at the break. South Africa captain Temba Bavuma had opted to field in conditions that promised to favour his quicks after winning the toss and his decision paid early dividends. Khawaja fell for a 20-ball duck in the seventh over, edging behind to David Bedingham at first slip.

Three balls later 12-1 became 16-2. New batsman Green edged low to second slip, where Aiden Markram held a superb diving catch under the glare of the Lord's floodlights.

Rabada had now taken two wickets for four runs in four balls. The 30-year-old, who has more than 300 Test wickets, is playing his first Test after serving a one-month ban for cocaine use earlier this year.

Australia have struggled to find a regular opening partner for Khawaja since David Warner's retirement 17 months ago, with Labuschagne the latest batsman tried out.



Australia's Steve Smith. — Reuters

The 30-year-old, without a Test century for nearly two years, battled hard for 56 balls. But on 17 he was undone by a classic piece of fast bowling from towering left-armer Jansen.

Hit on the shoulder the previous ball when trying to duck a bouncer, Labuschagne pushed tentatively at a Jansen delivery from around the wicket and got a faint edge through to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne, leaving Australia 46-3. They had been in similar trouble in the 2023 final against India

across London at the Oval, only for Smith and Head to both score hundreds as they turned the match in Australia's favour.

Head, however, could only manage 11 on Wednesday before he glanced Jansen, with Verreynne capping an excellent fielding display by South Africa as he held an excellent diving one-handed catch.

South Africa are aiming to win their first major trophy since lifting the ICC Knockout, a forerunner of the Champions Trophy, in 1998. — AFP

Netherlands thrash Malta, Poland stumble in WC qualifier

PARIS: Netherlands maintained their winning start to European 2026 World Cup qualifying by dismissing Malta 8-0 on Tuesday, while their group rivals Poland lost to Finland in a match interrupted due to a medical emergency in the crowd. The results leave Finland top of Group G on seven points, one ahead of the Dutch who have played two matches less. Poland sit third on six points after three played.

In Groningen, the Dutch raced into a three-goal lead against their overawed opponents inside the opening 20 minutes.

Memphis Depay converted from the spot on nine minutes, before doubling the lead with a rifled finish from the edge of the box seven minutes later.



Netherlands' Virgil van Dijk heads at goal. — Reuters

Depay's brace brought the 31-year-old to 50 international goals — level with former Manchester United and Arsenal striker Robin van Persie as the Netherlands' all-time leading goalscorer. Captain Virgil van Dijk killed the match off as a tie when he stepped onto the ball and arrowed a right-footed finish into the bottom corner from 20 yards.

The Oranje then turned on the afterburners inside the final half-hour as Xavi Simons, Donyell Malen, who got two, Noa Lang and Micky van de Ven all netted.

Poland began life without leading goalscorer Robert Lewandowski in miserable fashion as they went down 2-1 in Helsinki.

The 36-year-old played 158 times for Poland, scoring 85 goals, but

announced on Sunday he was no longer available for selection so long as coach Michal Probiez remained in charge.

The Poles fell behind to Joel Pohjanpalo's 31st-minute penalty, before Benjamin Kallman added a second nine minutes after the break.

Jakub Kiwior pulled one back in the 69th minute, shortly before the match was interrupted when a spectator fell ill.

After a lengthy stoppage, the final 10 minutes of play resumed but Poland were unable to find an equaliser despite applying relentless pressure on the hosts' goal.

Elsewhere, Serbia eased past Andorra 3-0 to move to third in Group K on four points courtesy of an Aleksandar Mitrovic hat-trick. — AFP

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Tijjani Reijnders. — AFP

MAN CITY SIGN AC MILAN MIDFIELDER REIJNDERS

LONDON: Manchester City on Wednesday announced the signing of Tijjani Reijnders from AC Milan for a reported fee of £46.3 million (\$62.4 million), with the midfielder eligible to play in the Club World Cup.

The Dutch international midfielder, City’s fourth signing of the week, said he was “ecstatic” to be signing for Pep Guardiola’s side.

The club announced deals for midfielder Rayan Cherki from Lyon and Chelsea’s third-choice goalkeeper Marcus Bettinelli on Tuesday while left-back Rayan Ait-Nouri joined from Wolves on Monday.

Reijnders, 26, joined AC Milan from AZ Alkmaar in 2023 and scored 15 goals for the Italian club in 2024/25.

He will bolster Guardiola’s midfield options following the departure of Kevin De Bruyne.

“I am ecstatic to be signing for Manchester City,” said Reijnders, who has penned a five-year deal.

“City are one of the biggest teams in the world, with the best coach, world-class players and outstanding facilities.”

After four consecutive Premier League titles, City finished a distant third last season and bowed out of the Champions League early.

City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak admitted the club “probably should have been more aggressive” in the transfer market ahead of the 2024/25 campaign.

The club’s latest transfer activity continues an overhaul of the squad that began with the January signings of Omar Marmoush, Nico Gonzalez, Abdulkodir Khusanov and Vitor Reis. — AFP

Brazil, Ecuador qualify for 2026 WC finals

BRAZIL and Ecuador secured their spots at the 2026 World Cup on Tuesday, taking the second and third of South America’s six automatic qualifying berths after champions Argentina booked their ticket in March. Brazil beat Paraguay 1-0 while Ecuador drew 0-0 with Peru as both teams climbed to 25 points with two matches to play, beyond the reach of Venezuela in seventh place.

Uruguay (24 points), Paraguay (24) and Colombia (22) occupy the remaining three automatic qualification positions ahead of the final two fixtures in September.

Venezuela (18) would earn a playoff spot against a team from another confederation by finishing seventh. In Sao Paulo, a goal from Real Madrid attacker Vinicius Jr on the stroke of halftime made it a winning home debut for Brazil’s new coach Carlo Ancelotti.

“I’m very happy with today’s result. We needed to win at home for our fans too and qualify for the World Cup, which was our goal,” Vinicius said.

“Now (Ancelotti) will have more time to work, to see what he can improve. Today wasn’t one of our best games, but the important thing in qualifying is to win and prepare well for the World Cup.” Brazil extended their record as the only team to play in every edition of the World Cup, with the five-times winners set to make their 23rd appearance in next year’s tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Ecuador qualified for their second straight World Cup by avoiding defeat in Peru. The visitors were penned in their own half for the final 20 minutes after midfielder Alan Franco was shown a second yellow card. The draw all but ended Peru’s hopes of qualifying, leaving them with 12 points, six behind



Brazil’s forward 22 Gabriel Martinelli jumps to head the ball past Paraguay’s goalkeeper 12 Roberto Fernandez and defender 15 Gustavo Gmez. — Reuters

Brazil beat Paraguay 1-0

Ecuador draw 0-0 with Peru

Argentina snatch 1-1 draw with Colombia

Venezuela.

Earlier on Tuesday, Uruguay took a step closer to securing a spot with a 2-0 home victory over Venezuela at the Estadio Centenario, a victory which also snapped a four-match winless run in South American qualifiers. Uruguay dominated much of the first half but struggled to break down a well-organised Venezuelan defence until Rodrigo Aguirre put the hosts ahead in the 42nd minute, heading in at the far post from a Maxi Araujo corner.

Giorgian De Arrascaeta doubled Uruguay’s lead just two minutes into the second half, firing a superb shot into the top-left corner to seal a win that secures Marcelo Bielsa’s side of at least an inter-confederation playoff berth. Uruguay need only one point from their final two matches against Peru and Chile to make sure of a place at the finals.

Argentina needed an 81st-minute equaliser from Thiago Almada to cancel out Luis Diaz’s goal and secure a draw with Colombia, avoiding a second straight defeat to Nestor Lorenzo’s side. Chile’s hopes of reaching the finals ended with a 2-0 loss in Bolivia. Chile coach Ricardo Gareca resigned after the match. — Reuters

Romeo wins Dauphine 3rd stage to take yellow

CHARANTONNAY, France: Spain’s Ivan Romeo won the third stage of the Criterium du Dauphine on Tuesday when he streaked clear at the end of a 207km run from Brioude to Charantonnay to cross the line first and claim the overall lead. Romeo surprised his breakaway companions, including Dutch world champion Mathieu van der Poel, to drop them in the final kilometres and lead the dash into the town of Charantonnay. “I’ve been thinking about this stage for a month now. I can hardly believe it. It was one of the hardest days of my life, I wasn’t feeling well,” said time-trial specialist Romeo. “But I followed my instincts in the final. It’s the best day of the year for me. Hard work pays off.”

It was the second win of the 21-year-old Movistar rider’s career, and earned him the yellow leader’s jersey on the eve of the first time-trial in this edition of the Dauphine.

Romeo completed the hilly run across the southeast of France in 4hr 34min 10sec.

Colombian Astana rider Harold Tejada came in second at 14sec, with Frenchman Louis Barre of Intermarche completing the podium.

The peloton, containing many of the race favourites, rolled in just over a minute later at the end of a day without any major incidents.

One of those contenders for the general classification is Red Bull leader Florian Lipowitz — in the absence of last year’s winner Primoz Roglic — who did well to slip into the



Ivan Romeo celebrates as he crosses the finish line. — AFP

breakaway and come in just outside the podium. The German sits fourth overall, with a 42sec advantage over ninth-placed Slovenian Tadej Pogacar.

The breakaway formed quickly after the start, and was composed of 13 riders. The first big break came on the Cote du Chateau Jaune, with its average gradient of over 9 per cent, situated 19km from the finish. After this final climb, only 10 riders

remained amongst the contenders for the stage, and victory seemed to be in the grasp of Van der Poel — the fastest of the bunch.

But Romeo had other ideas, attacking for the first time with 9km remaining before going again and quickly opening up a sizeable gap on the chasing pack.

Wednesday’s fourth stage will be a 17.4km time-trial between Charmes-sur-Rhone and Saint-Peray. — AFP

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Oman reduced its public debt to RO 15.1 bn, while maintaining a fiscal surplus of RO 931m in 2023.

OMAN CUTS DEBT, LIFTS GROWTH IN VISION 2040 PUSH

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

OMAN is moving decisively from policy design to execution, with fresh indicators showing momentum in economic diversification, fiscal consolidation, and social reform — all aligning with the long-term objectives of Vision 2040.

A government infographic released this week outlines a suite of milestones under the theme “From Planning to Achievement”, highlighting Oman’s policy-to-results transformation.

Among the financial achievements, the Sultanate of Oman reduced its public debt to RO 15.1 billion, while maintaining a fiscal surplus of RO 931 million in 2023 — outcomes attributed to prudent spending, improved oil revenue management and rising non-oil sector contributions. Credit agencies responded positively, upgrading Oman’s outlook to “positive” at BB+, reflecting stronger macroeconomic stability.

The energy and logistics sectors continue to drive industrial growth. The inauguration of the Duqm Refinery marked a strategic expansion in downstream capabilities, with parallel investment opportunities in maritime logistics valued at RO 1.6 billion. Muscat International Airport, meanwhile, handled 11.5 million passengers in 2023 — an encouraging sign for tourism recovery and regional connectivity.

On the social front, Oman launched a unified Social Protection System, integrating pensions and welfare funds into a streamlined framework.

In agriculture, cultivated land expanded by more than 276,000 feddans, and output rose over 10%, underscoring rural development and food security priorities. — ONA

Oman unlocks RO 11 bn to power 10th 5-year plan

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

OMAN’S Ministry of Economy has revealed that total development allocations under the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) reached RO 11.009 billion by the end of March 2025.

This reflects a 72% increase compared to the initial allocation of RO 6.414 billion when the plan was launched.

The rise in development spending is part of a broader national effort to stimulate growth and support Oman Vision 2040.

According to the ministry’s performance report, the increase was driven by four main policy priorities.

First, the government has strengthened investment in social development projects



This reflects a 72% increase compared to the initial allocation of RO 6.414 billion when the plan was launched.

and programmes, aiming to improve citizens’ quality of life.

Second, funding has been directed towards economic diversification, with new initiatives supporting sectors beyond oil and gas.

Third, the government is focusing on governorate-level development to reduce regional disparities and ensure more balanced economic progress.

Fourth, significant efforts have been made to improve the investment environment, attracting both local and foreign investors.

The Ministry of Economy stated that the additional funding supports national infrastructure, job creation and the long-term sustainability of the economy.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan remains a key instrument for realising the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This surge in allocations highlights the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to economic transformation and inclusive development across all regions.

US AND CHINA REACH DEAL TO EASE EXPORT CURBS

LONDON: US and Chinese officials said on Tuesday they had agreed on a framework to get their trade truce back on track and remove China’s export restrictions on rare earths while offering little sign of a durable resolution to longstanding trade tensions.

At the end of two days of negotiations in London, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told reporters the framework deal puts “meat on the bones” of an agreement reached last month in Geneva to ease bilateral retaliatory tariffs that had reached crushing triple-digit levels.

But the Geneva deal had faltered over China’s continued curbs on critical minerals exports, prompting the Trump administration to respond with export controls of its own preventing shipments of semiconductor design software, aircraft and other goods to China.



US and Chinese representatives pose for a photo during trade discussions at the Lancaster House in London. — AFP

Lutnick said the agreement reached in London would remove restrictions on Chinese exports of rare earth minerals and magnets and some of the recent US export restrictions “in a balanced

way”, but did not provide details after the talks concluded around midnight in London.

“We have reached a framework to implement the Geneva consensus and the call between the two presidents,” Lutnick said, adding that both sides will now return to present the framework to their respective presidents for approvals. And if that is approved, we will then implement the framework,” he said.

In a separate briefing, China’s Vice-Commerce Minister Li Chenggang also said a trade framework had been reached in principle that would be taken back to US and Chinese leaders.

US President Donald Trump’s shifting tariff policies have roiled global markets, sparked congestion and confusion in major ports, and cost companies tens of billions of dollars in lost sales and higher costs. — Reuters

Oman a prime location for e-ammonia production: Yamna

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

THE Sultanate of Oman’s potential to become a regional powerhouse in e-ammonia production has been reaffirmed by a top executive at Yamna, a clean energy investment firm collaborating with major international players to develop a gigawatt-scale green hydrogen project in Dhofar Governorate.

Abdelaziz Yatribi, CEO of UK-based Yamna, stated in a recent interview that Oman’s natural, infrastructural, geostrategic, and regulatory advantages make it an ideal destination for e-ammonia investment. “Oman offers exceptional solar and wind resources, resulting in one of the lowest levelised costs of electricity (LCOE) – a critical factor in green hydrogen and ammonia production.

Additionally, the Omani government’s proactive approach, particularly through Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), provides a supportive framework for green hydrogen



ABDELAZIZ YATRIBI
CEO, Yamna

and its derivative projects,” Yatribi said in an interview featured in an in-house report of Eiffel Investment Group, a leading European third-party asset manager.

Last year, Yamna, along with consortium partners EDF Group and J-POWER, was awarded a 341 km² land block in Dhofar Governorate to develop, build, own and operate a large-scale green ammonia project with an annual production capacity of 1 million tonnes.

The project will integrate approximately 4.5 GW of renewable energy capacity and a 2.5 GW electrolyser, supplying hydrogen to an ammonia plant to be established in the Salalah Free Zone.

Yamna’s strategy, according to Yatribi, centres on producing the world’s most cost-competitive green molecules – hydrogen

and ammonia – in locations where renewable resources are both abundant and economical.

“Ammonia serves as an efficient carrier for hydrogen, facilitating its transport to global markets. It is a well-established commodity with over a century of production and transportation history, which significantly reduces technology and infrastructure risks.

“By leveraging existing ammonia infrastructure, we can accelerate the global deployment of green hydrogen solutions, particularly in markets with decarbonisation imperatives and limited domestic access to competitively priced green molecules,” he explained.

Traditionally used in fertiliser production and industrial processes, the demand for e-ammonia is expected to grow substantially over the next 5 to 10 years, Yatribi noted. This growth will also be driven by its emerging role as a hydrogen carrier and low-carbon maritime fuel.

In countries like Japan and South Korea,

government-backed initiatives support the use of e-ammonia in power generation and industrial applications.

Likewise, increasing interest in ammonia as a marine fuel is prompting the development of stringent safety protocols, supported by successful bunkering trials and forthcoming guidelines from the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), he added. Yatribi also emphasised Yamna’s commitment to delivering a global portfolio of export-oriented e-ammonia projects, currently planned in Brazil, India, Morocco and Oman.

“We envision e-ammonia playing a central role in the global energy transition. Beyond replacing fossil-based ammonia in traditional uses, e-ammonia will serve as a key enabler for decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors, including power generation and maritime shipping,” he said, adding: “With continued technological innovation and supportive policies, we believe e-ammonia will become a cornerstone of a sustainable, low-carbon future.”

ADVERTORIALS

ICONIC VEHICLES



Customers purchasing any of the Raptor models will receive exceptional value-added benefits.

GO BOLD THIS SUMMER WITH FORD’S RAPTOR RANGE

MUSCAT: Arabian Car Marketing Company, the distributor for Ford vehicles in Oman, recently unveiled an exciting summer campaign that is set to raise the bar of excitement for off-road adventurers and performance enthusiasts alike.

Customers purchasing any of the Raptor models such as the Ford Ranger Raptor, F-150 Raptor, or the Bronco Raptor (4-Door), will receive exceptional value-added benefits, making this the perfect time to own one of the world’s most iconic high-performance off-road vehicles.

The benefits include 5 years/100,000 km free service, a 5-year/100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty, free registration, free 3M Paint Protection Film Application and a Free Accessory Package. (Conditions apply. Please visit the Ford showroom for details.). This thrilling summer campaign will last until July 23, 2025.

Sharing his thoughts about the exciting summer campaign, a spokesperson from Arabian Car Marketing Company said, “The Ford Raptor range is built for those who are not satisfied with just chasing adventure, but to dominate it. Every Raptor is engineered to go further, faster and stay aggressive.

This summer, we are thrilled to make the Raptor experience even more rewarding for our customers in Oman. Whether it is the dunes, the wadis, or the highways, the Raptor stands apart and so will its owners.”

In Oman, the Raptor range includes the Ranger Raptor, the F-150 Raptor and the Bronco Raptor.

The Ford Ranger Raptor is a bold expression of off-road performance. Powered by a 3.0L twin-turbo EcoBoost V6 engine producing up to 392 horsepower and 583 Nm of torque; and paired to a 10-speed automatic transmission, it delivers power with precision.

Designed by Ford Performance, it features a reinforced chassis, Fox Live Valve shocks and a full-time 4WD system with seven selectable drive modes, including Baja mode for desert racing. The interior boasts bolstered sport seats, a 12-inch infotainment touchscreen and advanced driver-assist features like Pre-Collision Assist and Adaptive Cruise Control.

The legendary F-150 Raptor brings raw power with its 3.5L EcoBoost V6 engine producing 450 horsepower and 691 Nm of torque, paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission. Its military-grade aluminium-alloy body, reinforced frame and class-exclusive five-link rear suspension with coil springs deliver unrelenting performance.

FOX Live Valve shocks and Terrain Management System with seven drive modes ensure a commanding presence on any surface. Inside, the F-150 Raptor is loaded with tech including SYNC 4, 12-inch digital productivity screen and Ford Co-Pilot360 for advanced safety and driver confidence.

The Bronco Raptor 4-Door redefines rugged capability with an aggressive stance and a 3.0L EcoBoost twin-turbo V6 delivering 418 horsepower and 596 Nm of torque.

OABC TO HOST HIGH-IMPACT SPEED NETWORKING EVENING

MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Council (OABC) is proud to announce its upcoming Speed Networking Evening, set for June 17 at The Diplomatic Club.

This signature event, widely regarded as one of OABC’s most effective and enjoyable formats, brings together Oman’s business leaders, corporate executives; and small and medium enterprises (SME) founders for a structured, high-energy evening of meaningful connection.

This year’s event is proudly sponsored by Vodafone Oman and held in partnership with Riyada, Oman’s Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

Riyada will be inviting a select group of Omani SMEs to attend, creating a unique opportunity for direct engagement between corporates and local businesses.

Mohammed al Alawi, Head of Enterprise at Vodafone Oman, shared: “This event is a chance to build real partnerships. By

supporting SMEs and promoting ICV, we’re not only contributing to the national economy, we’re also helping our clients create stronger, more sustainable supply chains.”

The evening will begin with a fast-paced speed networking session where participants engage in brief, one-on-one introductions to quickly expand their network.

Following the structured portion, guests can continue conversations over canapés and refreshments in an open setting.

Funding secured for Barka V desalination plant

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

MADRID-HEADQUARTERED GS Inima has secured financing to build a 6.3 MWp photovoltaic plant at the Barka V desalination facility in Oman, marking a significant step towards integrating renewable energy into critical infrastructure.

In a statement, the company said the project aligns with its commitment to a sustainable water management model, particularly in regions like Oman where solar potential is high and water demand is critical.

“The financing of the Barka V photovoltaic plant culminates the development of this project, which began in 2022. In addition to reaffirming its environmental commitment, GS Inima optimises the profitability of the Barka V desalination plant project, 100 per cent owned by GS Inima and consolidates its presence in the Middle East.

COFIDES’ support in the investment of this project has been decisive and we want to express our gratitude to the entire COFIDES team that has collaborated with GS Inima



The project aligns with its commitment to a sustainable water management model in Oman.

during this phase of the project,” said Juan José Benayas, CEO of GS Inima Barka V Desalination Plant.

The new solar facility, intended for self-consumption, will supply approximately 11 per cent of the desalination plant’s energy needs through 2044.

Spanning 40,000 square metres, the solar installation will be designed, built, operated and maintained entirely by GS Inima Barka V Desalination Co SAOC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of

Spanish-based international water infrastructure company GS Inima Environment.

Funding support came from COFIDES, a Spanish public-private entity that helps promote sustainable international investments by Spanish companies.

Their backing was key to advancing the solar integration effort, which further cements GS Inima’s presence in the Middle East. Barka V, which became operational in June 2024, is

GS Inima’s first project in the region. The plant produces 100,000 cubic metres of potable water per day — enough to serve more than 800,000 people in Oman’s Muscat and Al Batinah South & North Governorates.

This will be GS Inima’s second project in Oman to incorporate solar power into the desalination process, reinforcing the company’s role in pioneering hybrid solutions that reduce carbon emissions and enhance resource efficiency.

The solar-powered desalination model is particularly relevant for Oman, where abundant sunlight, high temperatures and growing water demands make clean energy solutions both practical and strategic. GS Inima says the Barka V project will not only reduce the plant’s carbon footprint but also contribute to Oman’s broader sustainability goals.

With this new milestone, GS Inima continues to expand its global leadership in integrated water cycle solutions, while promoting resilient infrastructure that supports long-term environmental and operational sustainability.

NBO MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING OPENS NEW BRANCH IN AL MUSANNAH

MUSCAT: As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility and bring Islamic banking services closer to customers, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking has opened a new branch in Al Musannah. This latest expansion reflects Muzn’s commitment to offering Sharia-compliant financial solutions while reinforcing its presence across the Sultanate of Oman.

Salima al Marzooqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, commented, “Opening Islamic banking branch in Al Musannah marks another milestone in our journey to make Islamic banking accessible across the Sultanate of Oman.



The Al Musannah branch provides a full suite of Islamic banking products and services.

Al Musannah branch provides an outstanding Islamic banking services to the customers by offering tailored financial solutions that align with their values while ensuring convenience and high service standards.”

Designed to cater to the diverse financial needs of individuals and businesses, the Al Musannah branch provides a full suite of Islamic banking products and services. From everyday banking solutions to specialised financing and investment opportunities, the branch is equipped to support customers with modern and efficient services in the welcoming environment.

Bank Muscat awarded best brand in customer experience

MUSCAT: In affirmation of its leadership in enhancing the banking experience of customers by delivering innovative and tailored banking services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was recently honoured with the “Best Brand in Customer Experience — Retail Banking” Award during the prestigious awards ceremony that was organised by Muscat Media Group (MMG) at the St Regis Hotel, Al Mouj.

The recognition highlights the Bank’s pioneering role in the Sultanate of Oman’s banking



The recognition highlights the Bank’s pioneering role in Oman’s banking sector.

sector and its continuous efforts to provide an exceptional banking experience by offering best-in-class products and services. Celebrating this achievement, HH Sayyid Mohammed Salim al Said, the chief guest, presented the award to Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, General Manager — Products at Bank Muscat, in the presence of senior executives and industry leaders from across various institutions.

Bank Muscat’s recognition as the Best Brand in Customer Experience — Retail Banking came based on public evaluations and customer feedback, underscoring the deep

trust that customers place in the Bank’s brand and their continued preference for Bank Muscat as their preferred banking partner.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, General Manager — Products, said: “We take pride in winning the Best Brand in Customer Experience at the Retail Banking category and extend heartfelt gratitude to Muscat Media Group (MMG) for the well-deserved recognition. This accolade reflects the strength of Bank Muscat’s brand, which has maintained its leadership in the banking industry for over four decades.

BUSINESS

MAINSQUARE



Illustration of the proposed Administrative & Commercial Complex in EZAD Square.

TENDER FLOATED FOR COMMERCIAL HUB IN EZAD SQUARE

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced on Wednesday the launch of a tender for the construction of the administrative and commercial buildings complex in the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah EZAD Square, IP4.

The Authority invited experienced Omani-Saudi consortiums to submit bids via the electronic tendering platform ‘Esnad.’ The deadline for purchasing tender documents is set for June 26, with a site visit scheduled for June 30. The final date for submitting bids is August 11, 2025.

The tender includes the construction of the main square of the Al Dhahirah Integrated Economic Zone, a business centre, an administrative building, a commercial centre, as well as a hotel and a health centre.

The scope of work includes the execution of civil works, electrical and mechanical systems, and steel structures for the buildings. It also covers external works such as the construction of internal roads, sewage networks, water and irrigation systems, and landscaping.

The total land area allocated for the complex is approximately 50,000 square metres, with the first phase covering a built-up area of around 17,000 square metres and the potential to expand to 38,000 square metres.

Eng Ibrahim bin Yousuf al Zadjali, EZAD Project Manager, affirmed that smart city principles have been considered in the design of the facilities. The buildings have also been designed in line with the requirements for obtaining LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building certification, which will be implemented by the consortium awarded the tender.

Reviving Sur’s commercial identity requires urgent overhaul



MOHAMMED BIN ISSA AL BALUSHI
The author is a Media Consultant specialising in economic affairs.

SUR, once a vibrant commercial centre along Oman's eastern coast, is losing its economic character. Decades of unregulated growth, poor zoning and scattered investments have blurred the town's identity, weakening its appeal to investors, businesses and residents.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Old Sur Market and nearby districts

such as Harat Al Teenah and Jabal Al Eid thrived with retail shops, showrooms, and trade activity. But the momentum has slowed. Commercial sprawl has replaced strategic planning. The result: oversupply, disorganised business activity and a lack of functional zoning. The root of the problem lies in years of unchecked issuance of residential-commercial land titles, leading to a flood of retail outlets across both main and internal roads.

This has inflated supply, caused overlap in business types and undermined efforts to build a cohesive commercial ecosystem.

Today, car washes operate next to restaurants, barbers, clinics and salons in the same building — confusing for consumers and damaging to the area's economic image.

A ROAD MAP FOR RENEWAL

To restore Sur’s economic position and align with Oman Vision 2040’s

emphasis on local development, the following actions are essential:

- 1. Establish a commercial corridor:** A structured commercial zone should extend from the Sur Industrial Area to Old Sur Market, passing through key areas including Harat Al Noor, Jabal Al Eid, Harat Al Teenah, and Sur Club. This axis should anchor major commercial activity and guide future development.
- 2. Create a unified economic identity:** Commercial activities must be aligned with zoning priorities. Large and medium-sized businesses should be grouped together. Mixed-use buildings should avoid housing unrelated services — such as car washes, food outlets, and salons — in the same premises. Visual coherence and business compatibility are key.
- 3. Upgrade infrastructure:** Adequate parking is lacking in busy areas like Harat Al Teenah, where banking and service centres cluster.

Flooding during rain disrupts commercial movement due to poor drainage. Planned upgrades to parking, access roads, and water management are urgently needed.

- 4. Zone activities by scale and function:** Not all business types belong on main roads. Small-scale or secondary enterprises should operate within internal neighbourhoods, while high-traffic roads should host anchor tenants and investment-ready companies. This ensures sustainability and investor confidence.
- 5. Revive Old Sur Market:** The historic market can be transformed into a cultural and economic destination. New small and medium businesses, artisan markets and themed areas — such as a Gold Souq or Travel District — can attract footfall and restore its relevance. Models like “Souq Al Hareem” show how defined identity supports commercial success.

- 6. Form a dedicated planning task force:** A professional team should oversee commercial regulation and support property owners. Many, such as those in Harat Al Teenah, have faced years-long delays in resolving basic planning issues. The task force should streamline permits, resolve grievances and foster public-private cooperation.

A VISION 2040 IMPERATIVE

Reviving Sur's commercial core is not just a local concern — it is a national one. As Oman prioritises governorate-level development under Oman Vision 2040, towns like Sur must build competitive, structured economies. A cohesive commercial front, functioning infrastructure and vibrant markets are critical assets.

It is time to move from unplanned expansion to strategic renewal. With the right vision and coordination, Sur can reclaim its place as a thriving commercial hub.

AGREED FRAMEWORK

Oil rises to 7-week high on trade talks



Oil prices rose to a seven-week high on Wednesday as markets assessed the outcome of US-China trade negotiations.

Brent crude futures were up 82 cents, or 1.2%, to \$67.63 a barrel at 1028 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was up 96 cents, or 1.5%, to \$65.86. Officials agreed on a framework to put their trade truce back on track and resolve China’s restrictions on rare earth minerals. — Reuters

DOMINANT CURRENCY

Dollar keeps losing market share: Report



The dollar continued to lose market share last year as the world’s dominant currency but mostly smaller rivals and gold benefited rather than the euro, which aspires to fill any void left by receding confidence in the greenback, an ECB report showed.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said this was an opportunity for the euro to become the dollar’s alternative. — Reuters

MARKET MOVEMENT

Gold rises amid US-China talks



Gold prices rose on Wednesday amid the impact of the US-China trade agreement and the uncertainty surrounding it on sentiment, as investors awaited key US inflation data to predict market movements.

Spot gold rose 0.5 per cent to \$3,337.99 per ounce, while US gold futures rose 0.5 per cent to \$3,359.20. As for other precious metals, spot silver fell 0.1 per cent to \$36.52 per ounce. — ONA

OPINION

Effect of declining oil prices on Oman’s budgetary obligations



HAIDER
AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

US President Donald Trump’s recent tariff-related decisions have unleashed a wave of economic and political impacts for developed and emerging countries alike. These decisions have negative repercussions on global oil markets, leading to a decline in revenues for countries that rely on exports of this commodity as a primary source of national income. Globally, average global oil prices fell to \$73 per barrel during the first quarter of this year, down from \$83 per barrel during the same period last year. This poses a challenge for many oil-producing countries, including the Sultanate of Oman. According to a recent analysis, Omani oil export revenues fell by approximately RO 200 million. A part of this decline was offset by an increase in tax revenues from RO 27 million during the corresponding quarter in 2024 to RO 72 million this year, thanks to improved tax collection. However, the current second quarter is expected to be more difficult, with the average oil price expected to fall to \$66 per barrel. Everyone knows that the Omani government seeks to diversify sources of income and develop alternative economic sources to oil, while simultaneously

committing to repaying its external debt, which amounted to approximately 14.3 billion Omani riyals by the end of the first quarter of this year, 2025, compared to approximately 15.1 billion Omani riyals by the end of the same period in 2024. The Sultanate of Oman is committed to repaying its public debt, which amounts to approximately RO 2.5 billion annually. This represents a significant burden on the state budget, which is affected by the decline in global oil prices. According to the financial data report, Oman’s public revenues decreased by approximately 7 per cent by the end of the first quarter of this year, recording approximately RO 2.635 billion, compared to RO 2.826 billion during the same period last year, due to the decline in global oil prices. Net oil revenues constitute a major item in the country’s financial budget, along with gas revenues and followed by non-oil revenues. The government works to manage the country’s various financial obligations related to the economic and social spheres each year. At the same time, the government is working diligently to reduce the country’s public debt to an appropriate level relative to the gross domestic product. This helps

Globally, average global oil prices fell to \$73 per barrel during the first quarter of this year, down from \$83 per barrel during the same period last year. This poses a challenge for many oil-producing countries, including the Sultanate of Oman.

the country improve its credit rating, which has become highly valued by international financial institutions. This also helps attract more foreign investment, especially as the country is now approaching the list of global investment-attracting countries. Indeed, Oman has succeeded in attracting investments over the past years, which has contributed to the improvement of the country’s financial, economic, and social conditions. As is well known, the decline in oil prices for oil-exporting countries has a direct and significant impact on their public budgets. This leads to difficulties in their ability to meet financial obligations, both internally and externally, due to their economies’ heavy reliance on oil revenues. In Oman, it has negative repercussions on the fiscal budget, as oil constitutes more than 65-70% of government revenues. Any decline in prices directly leads to a decline in revenues, causing a budget deficit. This forces the government to cover the deficit through borrowing or drawing from reserves. It also results in the postponement or reduction of development projects and a slowdown in the growth of the non-oil economy.

NUCLEAR IS BEST FIT FOR JOINT EUROPE DEFENCE FUNDS

PIERRE BRIANCON

A credible European defence will have to be based on the nuclear deterrent. But the region’s only two nuclear powers, France and the UK, don’t have the money to match their leaders’ ambitions. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Emmanuel Macron are on board with raising defence budgets, along with their fellow Nato members, way above the 2% of GDP they currently spend. So far, that is only a statement of principle. As resolute as they may be to side with Ukraine and warn about the Russian threat, Macron and Starmer will struggle to find the resources needed to upgrade the region’s military power. The need for Europeans to contemplate the creation of an independent nuclear arsenal stems from the growing feeling that the United States’s commitment to regional defence is wavering at best. It raises major political questions that will take years to resolve - beginning with the crucial question of control. Nuclear deterrence requires one individual with his or her finger on the proverbial button, not a decision by a committee or at the end of a lengthy leaders’ summit. Yet setting aside all the thorny political and technical issues, financing an independent nuclear umbrella is a costly proposition, which could only work with a new joint-financing mechanism. Paris and London currently spent 13% and 19% of their military budgets, respectively, on their nuclear arsenals – totalling almost 20 billion euros. If the European members of Nato later this month decide to spend 3.5% of their GDP on defence, as expected, it suggests that a proper European bomb could have an annual cost in the range of 100 billion euros to 140 billion euros. Macron and Starmer may have hoped that their German counterpart Friedrich Merz could maybe help foot most of the bill, in a kind of “debt-for-bomb” exchange. The German chancellor has broken with his country’s tradition by urging Europe to boost its defence in the light of US unreliability, and he has talked about sharing France and the UK’s umbrella. His government has exempted much of future defence spending from the country’s so-called debt brake. But there is no reason why Berlin should shoulder most of the nuclear burden. Germany’s defence budget will probably jump from 80 billion euros to 100 billion euros next year, according to Deutsche Bank. And in any case, its adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons would ban direct financing of a nuclear arsenal. Spending up to 140 billion euros on nuclear deterrence can only be a multi-year and slow ramp-up. There is no immediate need for Europeans to spend the same proportion of their military budget on nuclear weapons as France and the UK. — Reuters

UK fund groups stand by hybrid working rules

DESPITE the increase in the number of firms in the financial sector, in particular, bringing an end to working from home, several big fund management groups, such as Aberdeen, Jupiter L&G among others, in the financial district of London (known as the ‘City’) have decided to maintain the status quo with their hybrid working policies. However, the world’s largest asset manager, BlackRock, has called most of its senior staff back to the office five days a week. The firm has asked around 1,000 managing directors globally to return to the office full-time, putting it at odds with most of its peers. The US-head-quartered firm, which employs approximately 22,000 staff globally, first mandated back in 2023 that all staff be in the office four days a week. Its latest decision puts it at odds with other asset managers, some of which only require staff to work from the office two days a week. “Nothing has changed on this for Jupiter,” a spokesperson for the FTSE, 250-listed group said. Jupiter’s policy requires staff to work from the office three days a week. Chief executive Matthew Beesley said earlier this year that it had “no plans at all to go back to a mandated five days a week office attendance”. DWS, the asset manager majority-owned by Deutsche Bank, said it had made no changes to its policy. A spokesperson for the group said London staff must work from the office two days a week. Royal London Asset Management has a similar approach – its staff are expected to work in the office at least 50 per cent of the week. Meanwhile, Federated Hermes and Aberdeen have stuck with their requirement that staff be in the office at least three days a week. Legal & General Asset Management also has no plans to change its current hybrid working policy, a spokesperson for the firm said: “We have been consistent in our view that we are continuing to deliver for our clients with our



The world’s largest asset manager, BlackRock, has called most of its senior staff back to the office five days a week.



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

people working in a hybrid fashion. Our expectations are for colleagues to be in the office between two and three days on average each week.” However, others have recently altered in-office requirements. A spokesperson for Fidelity International said it requires staff to be in the office for at least eight days each month. This will increase in September to 12 days. Meanwhile, US bank State Street Global Advisors implemented a group-wide policy back in 2023 that staff work in the office four days a week. “State Street has implemented a hybrid work approach of employees working four days per week in the office, balanced with the flexibility of working four weeks per year fully remote,” said a spokesperson. “Managers are accountable for ensuring their teams comply with these expectations and are empowered to offer ad-hoc

flexibility to employees as needed.” Other banks, including Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Moelis and UBS, have also rolled back their hybrid working policies. JPMorgan had said back in January all its 320,000 staff must be in the office five days a week. It has seven UK offices, including its London HQ, technology hubs in Glasgow and Bournemouth and regional offices in Edinburgh, Manchester, Leeds and Bristol. It employs 14,000 people in Canary Wharf and in the financial district of London. Citigroup has bucked the trend by allowing staff to work at home two days a week. Jane Fraser, the Chief Executive Officer, who has run Citi for almost four years, views hybrid working as helpful for recruitment. But in keeping with the push by other American banks, Goldman Sachs and Bank of America have long asked staff to be in the office full time.

CLASSIFIEDS

INDIAN female (BE+EEE+MBA) 3 years of Experience in Estimation and Business Development. Looking for a suitable position. Contact: + 968 92850930 / 78066162 vaparna14@gmail.com

Having Omani Driving Licence.
Contact: 78002582
Email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

GRADUATED female candidate seeking finance, HR, Accounts,
Data entry related jobs. Contact details as follows: Mobile: +968
92637030,
Email: athiraanilkumarhh@gmail.com

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, BSc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet).
Contact: +968 98510880.

Indian Male, Storekeeper / Document Controller 2+ yrs of
experience in GCC, Completed BCA, ready to join immediately.
Email: swamierzhasouth@gmail.com
GSM: +968 71818173

ACCOUNTANT with 5 years expertise in Accounts Payable, Receivables, Financial Reporting, VAT, Payroll, and Bank & Cash Reconciliation. Actively looking for new opportunities.
Contact: 79791746
Email: IbrahimSaw52@gmail.com

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

Contact No: 99074072

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Engineering) with
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driver.
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77050986/
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email:
kakkadmou@gmail.
com

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in Project sales/
Dealer market in
All construction
materials
including Cables &
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D/L looking for
the post of Sales
Manager/Assistant
Manager.
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role. Contact:
akramhaniffa@
yahoo.com /
93988825.

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experience
in web
development
in a product
based
company.
Looking for
a suitable
position as
software
developer.
Contact: + 968-
99226403
suhail23599@
gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/
Finance: Indian
male (MBA Fin)
having more
than 19 years
of experience
in Oman
accounts &
finance looking
for suitable
placement,
NOC available
and can join
immediately.
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CMA, CA Finalist
& BCOM/ 10+ years
of Experience/
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LOOKING
for part time
OR full time
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job. 20yrs
experience in
Muscat. Upto
finalization &
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SRI LANKAN
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CPA+BBA) Asst.
Finance
Manager/ Chief
Accountant, 12+
Experience in
Oman & GCC,
Expert in Finan.
Reporting
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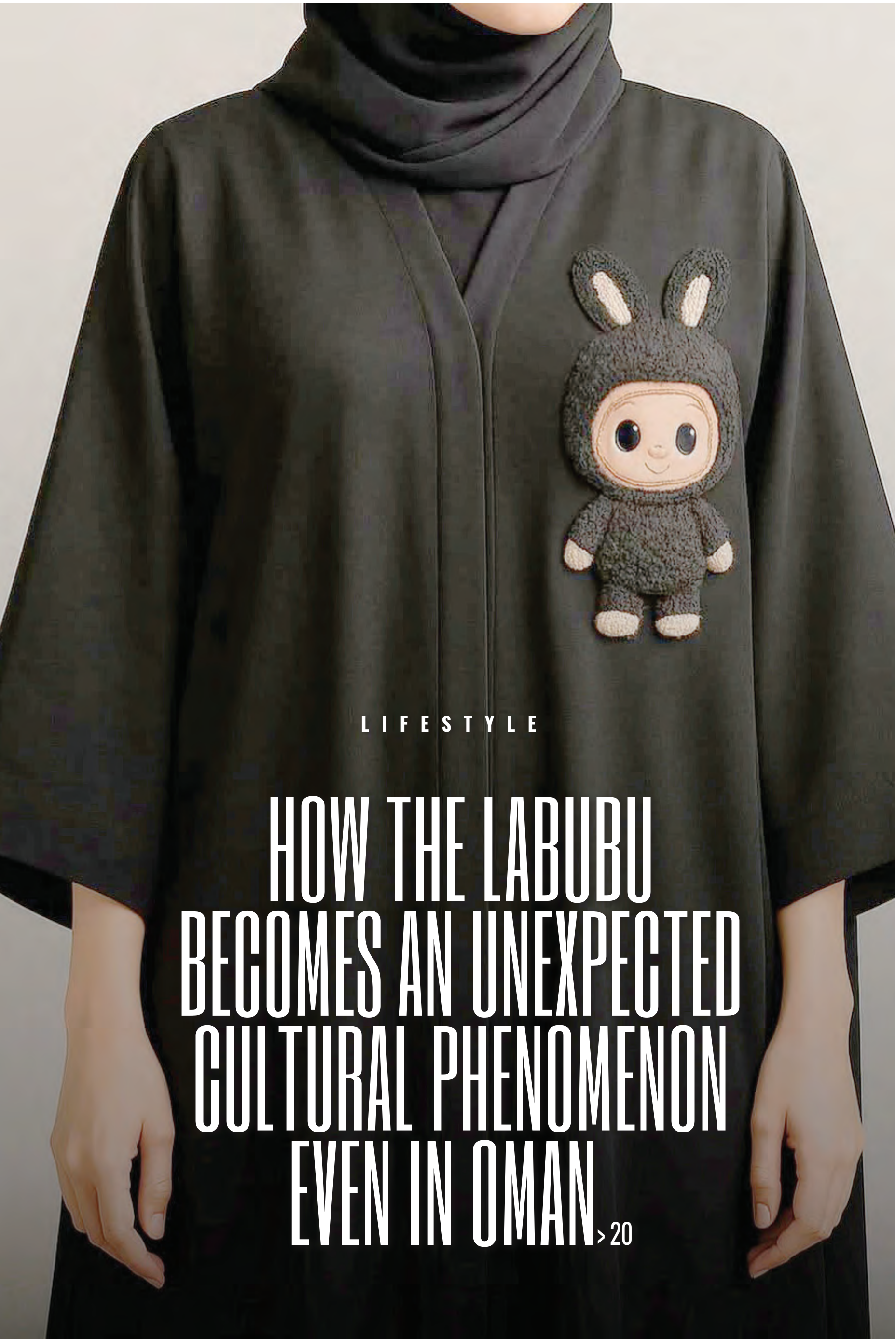
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 عمان Observer

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdihar.info izdihar.info

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izdihar



ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

HOW THE LABUBU BECOMES AN UNEXPECTED CULTURAL PHENOMENON EVEN IN OMAN^{> 20}

FASHION

First ever Birkin bag to be auctioned in July



THE FIRST-EVER Birkin bag that was designed by French luxury brand Hermes for actress Jane Birkin is set to be sold at auction in Paris, with the piece of modern fashion history likely to spark a bidding frenzy.

The Birkin has become a modern design icon that is so exclusive that Hermes only offers it to loyal clients, with prices starting at around \$10,000.

Auction house Sotheby's, which is handling the sale of the Birkin prototype in Paris on July 10, declined to specify a reserve price publicly and its value is hard to forecast.

"The Original Birkin holds the potential to redefine records," Morgane Halimi, Sotheby's global handbag and fashion head, said in a statement.

The previous record sale price for a handbag at auction was set by a highly customised Birkin in Hong Kong in 2017.

The diamond-encrusted crocodile-skin Birkin 30 with white gold details fetched \$510,000 at Christie's.

The seller of the original Birkin is well-known Paris-based handbag collector and dealer Catherine Benier whose appointment-only boutique in the high-end 6th district of the capital has a cult following.

Benier told The New York Times that the bag was the "jewel in my collection".

It has changed hands twice since being put up for sale by Birkin at an auction in 1994 where the proceeds went to an AIDS charity, Sotheby's said.

A record-setting sale price for the prototype would be in keeping with the fashion world's recent flashy aesthetics.

After years of so-called "quiet luxury" dominating catwalks, designers have embraced more ostentatious looks in recent seasons that have been dubbed "boom boom" by some trend forecasters.

The birth of the Birkin bag has become a modern fashion legend. During a Paris-London flight, the singer and actress -- who died in 2023 -- complained to a fellow traveller about not being able to find a bag suited to her needs as a young mother. That fellow passenger happened to be Jean-Louis Dumas, then head of Hermes.

The result of their conversation was a spacious tote with room for baby bottles, created in 1984 and named the Birkin. It is engraved with the initials J.B. and has several unique features, Sotheby's said, including closed metal rings, a non-detachable shoulder strap and a built-in nail clipper. — AFP

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



TRAVEL

Local tourists enjoy white water rafting across river Palayangan in the Pangalengan district of Bandung, West Java. —AFP



MUSIC

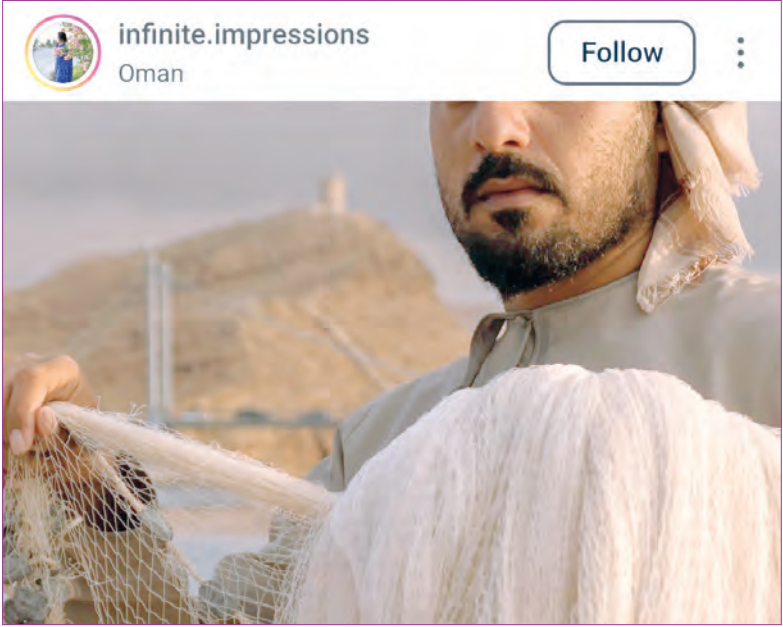
K-pop boy band BTS member RM (L) plays the saxophone while V looks on while holding flower bouquets at an outdoor sporting facility in Chuncheon. —AFP



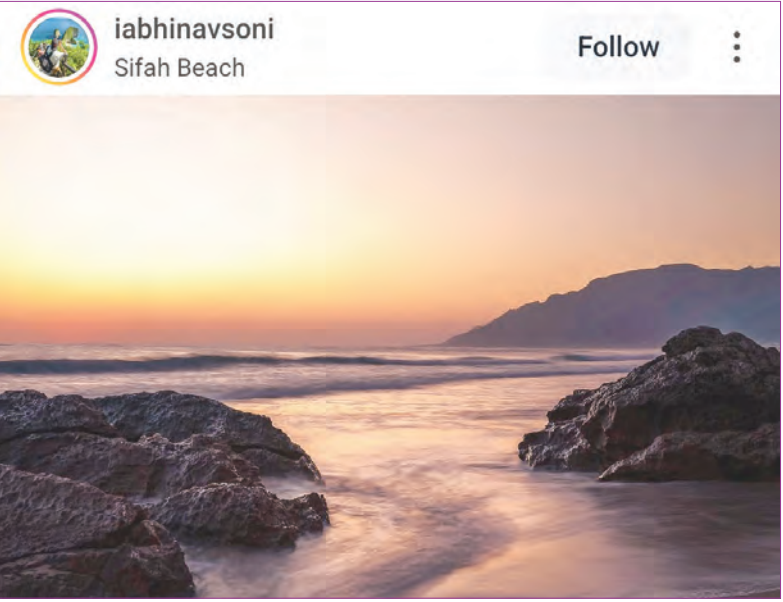
FILM

US actress Whoopi Goldberg attends the world premiere of "Billy Joel: And So It Goes" presented on the opening night of the Tribeca Festival, at the Beacon Theatre in New York City. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Fisherman



Beauty of Remote Places

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Rodin ‘copy’ sells for \$1 million in France



THE OWNERS thought the sculpture perched for years on the corner of a piano was a Rodin copy, but after being declared as the real thing the small marble figure has now sold for one million dollars at auction, organisers said on Monday.

Described as an “extremely rare” find by auction organiser Aymeric Rouillac, the figure was in fact an 1892 work, “Despair” by Auguste Rodin, that had gone missing after being sold at auction in 1906. The work was put on sale at the weekend at an opening price of 500,000 euros, but eventually sold for 860,000 euros (one million dollars), according to Rouillac.

The family had long believed the 28.5 centimetre (11 inch) figure of a sitting woman holding one foot was a copy of the legendary sculptor’s work, said Rouillac.

After the owners approached Rouillac about another matter, he and his team spent months investigating the origin of

the sculpture, including even looking into the family’s origins.

He went to the Comite Rodin in March and the body that is considered the leading authority on the French artist confirmed its authenticity six weeks later.

Rouillac said the committee found that “Despair” was sold at auction in 1906 and then disappeared from view. “So we have rediscovered it,” he said.

Rodin is considered one of the most influential figures in the history of modern sculpture famous for his expressive and dynamic works that capture human emotion and movement, breaking away from traditional, classical styles. Some of his most famous sculptures include “The Thinker,” “The Kiss,” and “The Gates of Hell.” His innovative approach to modelling, textural detail, and form greatly impacted the development of modern sculpture, earning him international acclaim and a lasting legacy in the art world. —AFP



‘Maybe Happy Ending’ triumphs at Tony Awards with top musical wins

IN CASE you missed it, this year’s Tony Awards has been full of surprises.

“Maybe Happy Ending,” a sweet and futuristic story that follows two obsolete helper robots as they navigate isolation, affection and what it means to be human, was the big musical winner at the Tony Awards on Sunday, capping a record-grossing post-pandemic Broadway theatre season.

The show won three big awards including best musical. Darren Criss won his first Tony for best leading actor in a musical for his role as the innocent Oliver, and its director Michael Arden won the award for best director of a musical.

The modern reimagining of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s classic “Sunset Blvd.” also won big, taking awards for best revival of a musical and for Nicole Scherzinger, who stars as the faded movie star Norma Desmond, won best actress in a musical.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning drama “Purpose” won the best play award. Written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, the play follows a family whose carefully constructed legacy unravels when their youngest son returns home with an unexpected guest, exposing buried secrets and faith-based conflict.

Host Cynthia Erivo (*inset*), the “Wicked” film star, opened the show at Radio City Music Hall with a walk to the stage from the dressing room that mimicked actor Tom Francis’ viral post-intermission live outdoor Manhattan stroll as he sings the title song in “Sunset Blvd.”

Buoyed by a post-pandemic rebound, the 2024-25 season grossed a record \$1.89 billion in revenue and drew 14.7 million attendees, the Broadway League said. Cole Escola won the Tony for best lead actor in a play for “Oh, Mary!” The show, Escola’s reimagining of Mary Todd Lincoln’s life and relationship with husband Abraham Lincoln, blends historical satire with absurd camp. The show also earned Sam Pinkleton the Tony for best director of a play. TV’s “Succession” star Sarah Snook, who made her Broadway debut this season, won the award for best



leading actress in a play for her tour-de-force performance of more than two dozen roles in “The Picture of Dorian Gray.”

‘HAMILTON’ REUNITED

The original cast of “Hamilton,” including the show’s creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, reunited to perform an electric medley in honour of the musical’s 10th anniversary. The number also served as a reintroduction to Leslie Odom Jr. as Aaron Burr, a role he will resume in the production later this year for a limited time.

Francis Jue won best actor in a featured role in a play for “Yellow Face.” He thanked the Asian American actors who came before him and addressed the next generation: “This community sees you and I hope that encourages you to be brave, and to dream and to dream big.”

Kara Young, who was nominated for a Tony in the role of featured actress in a play four years in a row, won for the second year in a row for her role in the 2025 Pulitzer Prize-winning drama “Purpose.”

Natalie Venetia Belcon won the award for best featured actress in a musical for her role as Cuban singer

Omara Portuondo in “Buena Vista Social Club.”

Jak Malone won the award for best featured actor in a musical for “Operation Mincemeat,” a fast-paced World War Two spy farce based on a bizarre true British plot to trick the Nazis with a dead body.

Best revival of a play went to Jonathan Spector’s “Eureka Day,” a sharp comedy about well-meaning parents at a progressive school whose unity cracks open over a vaccine debate.

RISING PRODUCTION COSTS A FACTOR

Alongside the creative highs, this year were economic realities plaguing producers and audiences alike.

Premium seats for some productions run upwards from \$400, prompting concern that Broadway is increasingly out of reach for casual and younger theatre lovers. Even with lotteries and rush ticket programmes, demand-driven pricing has become the norm.

Jason Laks, president of The Broadway League, said in a statement that rising costs have affected every facet of production, making it harder and harder to bring live theatre to the stage. The Broadway League presents the awards along with the American Theatre Wing.

This season showcased a wide range of voices and perspectives, with many shows being led by Asian American, Black, Middle Eastern and Hispanic actors and resulting in some historic nominations.

Four-time Tony-winning actor and writer Harvey Fierstein received a special Tony Award for lifetime achievement in the theatre. “I dedicate this award to the people in the dark,” he said, “and I offer my most profound thanks to the people in my community.”

“Stranger Things: The First Shadow,” based on the 12-time Emmy-winning Netflix science fiction series “Stranger Things,” took home awards for best scenic design, lighting design and sound design of a play along with a special award for its illusions and technical effects.

— Reuters

FEATURES



scholars and religious conservatives. Others argue that the dolls are simply toys and should not be linked to religious or cultural taboos. Such discussions have been amplified by news outlets and opinion pieces, which highlight the tension between modern trends and conservative values.

Business analysts point out the impact of this trend on the local economy. Small businesses that began importing Labubu are now seeing significant sales, especially among younger consumers eager to customise their dolls or gift them to friends. The trend has created a niche market, with some entrepreneurs even offering personalised clothing and accessories for Labubu dolls.

THE TREND GROWS WEIRDER AND WIDER

It's been a fortnight since that first encounter, and I've started noticing the trend circulating more intensely. On social media, a radio personality I follow had a heated debate about the dolls on her show. She called it "just an experiment" and later showed it to her daughter, who initially disliked it but now appears to have grown quite fond of her own Labubu. This casual acceptance indicates a shift — it's no longer novelty but part of everyday life.



mischievous. Once you see one, you can't unsee them. They seem to be everywhere now, popping up in social media stories, cafes, and even on family outings.

A PR friend of mine, who's quite active online, admitted she has her own Labubu now. She's dressed it up in mini versions of designer outfits and shared snaps of it out on coffee dates and during her trips outside of Muscat. It's astonishing how these little figures have gained such popularity, with some people even taking multiple ones along on their errands. The store owner estimated the prices vary depending on how customised you want them, starting at around RO 15 and going up to RO 50 for fully personalised designs. The more intricate the outfit, the higher the price tag. Pieces specifically inspired by global fashion brands — like Dior, Gucci, or Louis Vuitton — are catching the eye of trendsetters.

FROM NICHE COLLECTIBLE TO OMAN'S NEW OBSESSION

So, where do these dolls actually come from? Although their rise in Oman is recent, Labubu has roots in online toy communities elsewhere. Initially created as quirky collectibles on social media, the dolls gained traction in the Middle East around 2022. Some conspiracy theories suggest they originated from small boutique creators in Japan or South Korea, but their current branding is heavily influenced by social media influencers and customisation enthusiasts.

In Oman, their arrival coincided with the explosion of local Instagram and TikTok accounts showcasing mini-fashion shows for their Labubu collections. The trend was aided by online forums and groups dedicated to custom-built toys. Many users have shared their stories about making the dolls unique, from adding tiny sunglasses to crafting miniature clothes inspired by international fashion brands.

While some see the dolls as harmless fun, others in the online sphere debate their meaning and cultural impact. Critics on social forums argue that the trend might be superficial and promote materialism, especially among teenagers. Some social critics have voiced concerns over the dolls potentially promoting superficial beauty standards if the outfits mimic high-end fashion so closely.

More seriously, there are religious debates swirling around Labubu, with some calling the dolls 'haram' because they resemble idols or representations that could lead to idol worship — a concern voiced by some

Walking through the mall the other day, I saw one woman with six Labubu dolls hanging from her backpack straps while shopping — a colourful parade of pinks, blues, and browns. I even found myself contemplating buying one, just to see what all the fuss was about. But then I laughed to myself, imagining my pet at home treating the doll like a doormat. The trend, bizarre as it seems, seems to be here to stay.

What strikes me most is how something so seemingly trivial can grow into a full-blown cultural phenomenon. The owners of these dolls are making good money, especially as customisation options become more elaborate and in demand. For many, Labubu has become a symbol of personal expression or even a status symbol — a small, quirky item that you can dress up and show off on social media.

While some dismiss the trend as silly and superficial, others view it as a harmless form of creativity and fun — a way to add some colour and light-heartedness to daily routines. After all, in uncertain times, isn't it refreshing to find small things that make us smile or spark conversation? As long as it's enjoyed responsibly and doesn't harm anyone, trends like Labubu can be a good reminder that sometimes, happiness comes in the smallest packages.

So, whether you love it, hate it, or are just plain curious — one thing's for sure: the Labubu trend is here, and it's not going anywhere anytime soon. Maybe, next time you're out and about, you'll spot one hanging from a backpack, or maybe you'll be tempted to join in. After all, in a world full of worries, a colourful doll dressed in Dior might just be the happiness boost we all need.

HOW THE LABUBU BECOMES AN UNEXPECTED CULTURAL PHENOMENON EVEN IN OMAN

BY YERU EBUEN

I STILL remember the look on my face the day I met a friend for lunch and, in the middle of ordering, she pulled out what I first called an "ugly doll". Honestly, I thought she had brought along something kids would play with – a weird, slightly creepy plushy with a strange face. I didn't quite get the fuss until she held it up, dramatically, dressed in an outfit that looked straight out of a high-end boutique. Complete with Dior-inspired attire, a tiny stylish ribbon, and a tiny bag, this wasn't just any doll. It was a Labubu, and apparently, it's become quite the thing in Oman lately.

That moment sparked a curiosity that's only grown since. Later that day, on our way to another shop in The Village Mall, I stopped at a small store where the owner grinned and told me the dolls were flying off the shelves. He said it was his first time importing them, and they come in all colours — from the sweet pink to a bubbly blue, and the classic mocha brown. Some have freckles; others have sharp little teeth that make them look a bit