

OMAN

دَائِلِي

Observer

VOL. 44, NO. 298
PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:51 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:35 AM

DHUHR 12:10 PM

ASR 03:37 PM

MAGHRIB 06:23 PM

ISHA 07:35 PM

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12

SABALENKA DEFEATS ANISIMOVA TO RETAIN US OPEN CROWN

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO NORTH MACEDONIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova of the Republic of North Macedonia on the occasion of her country’s National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere wishes to the president for success in leading her friendly people towards further progress and development in all fields.

HAJ REGISTRATION FROM SEPTEMBER 23

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs announced the opening date for Haj registration for citizens and residents wishing to perform Haj rituals for the 1447 AH season, starting from September 23 to October 8, through the electronic system for registering pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman aged 18 years and above.

The ministry indicated that the date for notifying those entitled to the first entitlement will be from October 14-30, the second entitlement will be from November 2-6, and the third entitlement will be from November 9-11.

Israel tells Gazans to leave

THERE IS a “narrow window” to prevent famine from spreading further in Gaza, a top UN official said on Sunday, calling on Israel to allow unimpeded aid delivery in the territory.

According to a global hunger monitor, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are already experiencing or at risk of famine in areas including Gaza City, the enclave’s largest urban centre, where Israel has launched a new offensive against Hamas.

Israel, which stopped all aid for 11 weeks from March until mid-May, says it is doing more to let aid enter and be distributed in the enclave to prevent food shortages, though international agencies say far more is needed.

“There is a narrow window - until the end of September - to prevent famine from spreading to Deir Al Balah (in central Gaza)



A Palestinian man carries a wounded child after an Israeli air strike on a house, in Gaza City on Sunday. — Reuters

and Khan Yunis (southern Gaza). That window is now closing fast,” said United Nations aid chief Tom Fletcher.

COGAT, the Israeli defence agency that deals with humanitarian issues, said on Sunday that over the past week aid from more than 1,900 trucks,

most supplying food, was distributed in Gaza.

“We will continue facilitating humanitarian aid into Gaza for the civilian population,” COGAT said in a statement.

Israel last month launched an assault on the outskirts of Gaza City and its forces are now just

a few kilometres from the city centre, where it issued warnings over the weekend to civilians to evacuate high-rise buildings, before bombing them.

Overnight, strikes killed 14 people across the city, local health officials said, including a strike on a school in southern Gaza City sheltering displaced Palestinians.

The military on Saturday also warned Gaza City’s civilians to leave for the south, including Khan Yunis, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are already sheltering in cramped tent encampments along the coast. With hundreds of thousands of people remaining in Gaza City, pressure is growing to end the war.

“We want an end to this war. How long is this going to go on? How many lives are going to be wasted? Enough is enough,” said Gaza City resident Emad by phone. — AFP

A RARE CELESTIAL EVENT



The skies of the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a rare total lunar eclipse on Sunday night as the moon entered the partial lunar eclipse phase, followed by the full moon entering the Earth’s shadow at 9:31 pm, thus the total lunar eclipse phase which continued until 10:53 pm, while the eclipse peaked at 10:11 pm.

Oman Future Fund launches new lending portfolio for SMEs

MUSCAT: The Oman Future Fund, part of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), announced the launch of its lending portfolio for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), reinforcing the fund’s strategic role in supporting entrepreneurship and complementing national SMEs and start-up financing initiatives.

The new financing option offers quick access

to funds within two weeks of application, along with flexible repayment plans to help SMEs and start-ups meet operational and growth needs. This initiative aligns with Oman 2040’s goals to build a competitive knowledge-based economy and provide a supportive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, creating quality employment opportunities for Omani youth.

The portfolio will be operated by Beehive, the region’s first specialised SME financing platform since 2014, leveraging AI to assess applicants’ financial standing. Entrepreneurs and business owners can apply via the fund’s website, where applications are routed to the relevant managers and Beehive evaluates and executes financing in line with the fund’s objectives.

DETAILS ON P13



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Sr. Consultant - Sports & Joint Surgery
Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair, Muscat

MOH 33-47873/2025

SHORT TAKES



The centre will become one of the prominent landmarks in Musandam. — ONA

MUSANDAM CULTURE CENTRE REACHES 78 PER CENT

KHASAB: The completion rate of the Musandam Center for Culture and Innovation project in the Wilayat of Khasab has reached 78 per cent. The project is being constructed on an area of 10,500 square metres, with a built-up area of 2,733 square metres.

Abdullah bin Ahmed al Shehi, Assistant Head of the Musandam Governor’s Office, stated that the project aims to establish an integrated, multipurpose complex serving the local community in the fields of education, culture, environment, sports, tourism and entrepreneurship. He affirmed that upon completion, the centre will become one of the prominent landmarks in Musandam Governorate and a distinguished tourist destination that contributes to supporting and enhancing various activities in the governorate. — ONA

OMAN MARKS WORLD CLEAN AIR DAY



This year’s theme is ‘Racing for Air’. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joins countries around the world in celebrating the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, designated by the United Nations on September 7 of each year to raise global awareness of the issue of air pollution and the need for concerted efforts for a cleaner environment and better health.

This year’s theme is ‘Racing for Air’. Every Breath Matters emphasises that clean air is a fundamental human right and that every breath represents a motivation for urgent action to protect the health of individuals and the planet. The Sultanate of Oman is intensifying its efforts to protect clean air in line with Oman Vision 2040, which places environmental sustainability as a fundamental pillar of comprehensive development. This can be achieved by improving environmental legislation, adopting innovative solutions and encouraging the transition to clean and sustainable energy. — ONA

Omani forum in Zanzibar highlights cultural, heritage diversity

ZANZIBAR: An Omani cultural forum held at the Omani Fort in the Forodhani area in Zanzibar highlighted the deep cultural and historical ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar.

The forum, which continues until September 13, features an exhibition of products and fashions representing the Omani heritage.

The forum, organised by the Izz Foundation, under the auspices of Dr Laila Mohammed Musa, Minister of Education and Vocational Training of Zanzibar, and the Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage. The forum was attended by Said bin Salem al Sinawi, Consul General of the Sultanate of Oman in Zanzibar and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA



The forum features an exhibition of products and fashions representing Omani heritage

Substitutes for eco-friendly glass set to enter market

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

GLASS MADE from plants has shown its ability to combat summer heat and Celluvate, an Omani startup founded in 2023, offers a solution that could serve as an alternative to traditional glass. The startup specialises in producing eco-friendly glass substitutes. “Our focus is on utilising discarded plant matter (cellulose) extracted from green waste to create CelluGlass that aligns with customers’ preferences and aspirations. CelluGlass is an eco-friendly alternative to traditional glass, made from recycled plant-based cellulose. It provides a durable, lightweight, and shatter-resistant solution with thermal and acoustic insulation,” explained Khalid al Farsi, CEO of Celluvate.

Designed for use in construction, buildings and greenhouses, its primary value lies in reducing environmental impact while delivering high-quality performance. An interesting aspect of this glass is its ability to maintain a cool temperature.



The startup specialises in producing eco-friendly glass substitutes.

The startup consists of five members, and the company is collaborating with be’ah for the business accelerator “Eco Innovate Oman (EiO)” to introduce the product to the market. Their goal is to develop future strategies in the field of sustainable alternatives.

“The glass’s unique feature is its ability to isolate heat and sunlight. Currently, we are using it for sunshades, doors, and windows. We are also working on clearer versions that could be used in projects where clarity is crucial, such as side windows for vehicles,” he explained.

Numerous tests have been conducted to demonstrate the strength of the plant-based glass.

“It possesses an anti-shattering feature, and when impacted with 800 kg, it breaks in a way that is not harmful to humans. This plant-based glass is 40% lighter than regular glass,” Al Farsi noted.

The concept and prototype were developed in 2023, with pilot testing conducted in a gym in Al Khuwair.

“It has been six months now, and the results are promising. It has effectively handled the summer heat,” Al Farsi emphasised.

The project aligns with the environmental goals of Oman Vision 2040, emphasising the importance of managing renewable natural resources to ensure sustainability and meet the needs of current and future generations.

Oman participates in Embassy Festival in The Hague

THE HAGUE: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 13th Embassy Festival held in The Hague, Netherlands.

The festival saw participation from more than 60 countries and was attended by more than 70,000 visitors. It is one of the most prominent international events highlighting cultural diversity and bringing together the world’s cultures in the heart of The Hague.

Jan van Zanen, Mayor of The

Hague, visited the Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion, where he expressed his admiration for the authenticity and richness of the Omani culture. He praised the level of participation and the distinguished participation of the Sultanate of Oman in this international event.

By taking part in the 13th Embassy Festival, the Sultanate of Oman affirms its commitment to strengthening cultural



communication, building bridges of friendship with peoples around the world and consolidating its position as a bridge for cultural convergence and openness to diverse human cultures.

The Omani pavilion reflected authentic Omani hospitality. Visitors were welcomed with Omani sweets and enjoyed henna tattoos, which were widely admired.

Visitors praised the warm welcome and atmosphere,

considering it a vivid embodiment of the Omani identity and authentic generosity.

A number of visitors expressed their desire to visit the Sultanate of Oman to explore its diverse tourist attractions and investment opportunities.

This reflects the positive impact such participation has on enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s image as a leading tourist, economic and cultural destination. — ONA

SHORT TAKES

OMANI INNOVATOR
LAUNCHES AI
EDUCATION
PLATFORM ‘ALMIFY’



BARAA BINT
YOUSEF
AL AUFYIAH

MUSCAT: Omani innovator Baraa bint Yusef al Aufiyah from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has unveiled ‘Almify,’ an artificial intelligence-powered educational platform designed to improve the learning experience for students in academic institutions.

Al Aufi said the name combines ‘science’ and ‘simplify,’ reflecting the platform’s goal of analysing academic content and turning it into structured learning plans tailored to each student’s level, time, and cognitive needs. The platform also provides tools for students with hearing and visual disabilities, ensuring equal opportunities in education.

Built on advanced AI technologies, Almify supports Oman Vision 2040 goals by driving digital transformation in education. It simplifies complex academic content, helps students improve results, reduces study pressures, and enables institutions to adopt modern learning methods.

Looking ahead, Al Aufi aims to position Almify as a global leader in personalised learning and to form partnerships with universities to strengthen digital transformation in the education sector.

Al Aufi has also qualified to represent Oman at the International Falling Walls Lab Forum in Berlin this November, after securing second place in the national competition. — ONA

FALAJ AL JILA
RESTORATION
PROJECT COMPLETE



The restoration involved the collection basin and rehabilitating the 150-metre-long channel

SUR: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has completed the rehabilitation and improvement of Falaj Al Jila in the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. It is one of five aflaj listed on the Unesco World Heritage List.

The restoration of Falaj Al Jila, located in the Village of Al Jila in the Wilayat of Sur, involved restoring the collection basin and rehabilitating the 150-metre-long channel, constructing a parallel path, restoring some parts of the bridges carrying the water channel to the farms and constructing a ramp for the wall supporting the channel cutting across the wadi.

Eng Salah bin Salem al Mahajri, Head of the Dams, Aflaj, and Protective Walls Department at the Water Resources Department of the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, said that the aflaj in the Sultanate of Oman are not just a source of water, but an integrated lifestyle that has over the centuries contributed to the prosperity of agriculture and the stability of local communities. — ONA

DHOFAR
MEDIA
CHIEF
PRAISES
KHAREEF
2025
COVERAGE

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 7

Dr Mohammed al Shashai, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Information in Dhofar Governorate, has commended Oman’s media sector for its “professional and responsible” coverage of Khareef Dhofar 2025, describing the season’s communications success as the result of close institutional co-ordination and field effort.

“The colleagues who worked across traditional and digital platforms delivered reporting that showcased the natural and human

beauty of Dhofar and projected a worthy image of the Sultanate at home and abroad,” Dr Al Shashai told the Observer.

He paid tribute to Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, for his oversight and guidance, and thanked Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, for enabling field teams and ensuring operational readiness. Dr Al Shashai praised the ministry’s integrated media effort across newsrooms, OB vans, social platforms and public content, adding that independent creators, photographers, and

volunteers also contributed to the consistency and credibility of coverage. He said the outcomes went beyond seasonal reporting by enhancing Oman’s global image and Dhofar’s profile as a year-round destination. With the season drawing to a close, the Directorate will maintain coordination with partners to sustain tourism, culture and community visibility. “Khareef Dhofar 2025 is a collective achievement,” he stressed.

“Guided by the minister’s vision and the Under-Secretary’s support, we will build on this momentum in the years ahead.”

Transitions to Sarb as
herders begin migration



Sarb is more than a dry spell as it strengthens herds and steadies incomes

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH/TAQAH, SEPT 7

AS DRIZZLE FADES and low clouds lift, Dhofar shifts into its second season: Sarb. Wildflowers slowly open, and the land breathes after weeks of saturation. With just a few more dry days, herding caravans prepare to move.

In this delicate transition, herders read the ground and wind as carefully as a calendar, charting routes between the mountain, coast and Najd according to moisture, pasture and breeze.

In Taqah, herders rely less on fixed dates than on signals from the earth: the firmness of soil, the colour of grass, the spread of dawn dew. As rains ebb, many descend from summering grounds in the highlands and coast toward inland plains, where early pasture appears on the back of khareef moisture.

“We read the land like a timetable,” said Salem al Mashaihi, a herder from the Wilayat of Taqah. “When the mud loosens

and short, firm plants show, we know it is time. In Sarb, movement widens and tracks open. We spread the herd across familiar plots so we don’t exhaust the ground or the animals.”

Mohammed al Maashani, also from Taqah, described the migration as purposeful, not random: “Every herd follows a mental map - shade, water points, safe descents. We adjust the route each year to the land’s condition. Sarb is real work. You move every few days, watch the pasture, and reassign the herd as needed.”

This traditional ‘engineering’ of movement now aligns with modest modern support - mobile veterinary visits, weather guidance and supplemental feed - helping reduce risks during the shift.

Sarb also supports a small local economy: feed trade, herding tools, transport, and dynamic livestock markets. “When the pasture improves after khareef, sheep recover and costs fall. Prices move with the season,” said Said al Shahri, who raises a flock with his family. “The aim is to enter

winter with a strong, healthy herd.”

As Sarb arrives, eco-tourism and soft adventure also grow. Dry wadi tracks and golden plains draw hikers and campers. Herders, however, remind visitors to respect herd routes, avoid disturbing animals and safeguard water sources. With clear guidance and marked paths, a balance between pastoral life and mindful tourism could become an advantage for Dhofar.

Sarb is more than a dry spell - it is a rhythm of survival. When read well, it strengthens herds, lowers costs and steadies incomes. With smart support - seasonal vet points, simple climate apps and visitor routes that respect pastoral rhythms - this balance can thrive.

As Dhofar shifts from khareef’s lush greens to Sarb’s golden light, the transition remains guided by inherited wisdom. With measured steps, Taqah’s herders lead the way into a season that reframes the bond between people and land: an economy rooted in rain and a culture attuned to rhythm.

Suwaiq to host Food Security Forum on safe
investment, sustainability on Sept 15

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 7

Al Suwaiq is gearing up to host the Food Security Forum from September 15–16, organised by the Al Batinah North branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), represented by its Food Security Committee. The event will be held under the theme ‘Safe Investment for Sustainable Food.’

The forum aims to boost investment in food security sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040, strengthen economic diversification, and localise technology-driven projects in agriculture, fisheries and food



ENG SAID BIN
ALI AL ABRI

production.

Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of OCCI Al Batinah North, said Al Suwaiq’s selection underscores its position as a key hub for agriculture and fisheries. “This forum aligns with national priorities to reinforce food security systems and provides a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and exploring best practices,” he said.

The two-day programme will include sessions on investment opportunities, sector enablers, financing, and the role of private sector, civil society, and technology in advancing food security. An exhibition alongside the forum will feature specialised companies

presenting innovative solutions and fostering partnerships.

Dr Ali al Hamdi, CEO of Azr Engineering and Investment Holding and Chairman of OCCI’s Food Security Committee, said pioneering agricultural projects will be showcased, highlighting how traditional farms can evolve into innovative ventures across 16 sectors, in collaboration with government bodies, private firms and international organisations such as the FAO.

With its focus on partnerships and innovation, the Food Security Forum is set to serve as a key platform for shaping a sustainable food future for Oman.

SPOTLIGHT

Scammers exploit fear and authority to extort money or sensitive data

They use advanced methods like AI visuals, caller ID spoofing, and video overlays

Public vigilance, verification and awareness are crucial to prevent victimisation

Criminals impersonate law enforcement via video calls, messaging apps, or spoofed phone numbers, pressuring victims into believing they are under investigation. Victims are coerced into paying money or sharing sensitive information to avoid fabricated legal consequences. While the scam originated in Asia, it is now spreading worldwide, including the Gulf region

PAYAL SAMPAT DUTIA
Cybersecurity specialist

The scammer contacted me through Google Meet, dressed in what appeared to be an ROP uniform, speaking with authority. They demanded my bank details, creating fear and urgency. Even as a professional, I felt psychological pressure — showing how vulnerable the public can be

NANDHINI NADA KUMAR
Psychotherapist, PhD scholar

CYBER ALERT

‘Digital Arrest’ scams on the rise

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

‘Digital arrest’ scams, a sophisticated form of cyber fraud, are increasingly threatening individuals worldwide, including in Oman. These scams involve criminals impersonating law enforcement or government officials, falsely accusing victims of criminal activities, and threatening immediate arrest to extort money or sensitive information.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has been actively addressing various forms of cybercrime, reporting several arrests linked to digital scams.

Authorities have urged the public to stay vigilant, avoid sharing personal information or documents without verification, and report suspicious calls or messages through official

communication channels.

The ROP advisory emphasised that “protecting your information is a shared responsibility,” highlighting the growing sophistication of online fraud targeting unsuspecting individuals.

Cybersecurity specialist Payal Sampat Dutia, working in the oil and gas sector, explained that digital arrest scams exploit psychological manipulation to instil fear. “Criminals impersonate law enforcement via video calls, messaging apps, or spoofed phone numbers, pressuring victims into believing they are under investigation. Victims are coerced into paying money or sharing sensitive information to avoid fabricated legal consequences. While the scam originated in Asia, it is now spreading worldwide, including the Gulf region,” she said.



The scams are designed to scare people into giving up money or information. If you receive such a call, verify through official contacts and report it immediately. Don’t panic

TARIQ AL BARWANI
IT expert

She detailed that fraudsters use caller ID spoofing, video overlays, or AI-generated visuals to make calls appear legitimate. Victims are accused of crimes such as money laundering or identity fraud and are threatened with immediate ‘digital arrest,’ creating panic and urgency that forces many to comply.

Tariq al Barwani, an IT expert, highlighted that no legitimate authority will demand payments over a call or chat. “These scams are designed to scare people into giving up money or information. If you receive such a call, don’t panic. Verify through official contacts and report it immediately,” he said.

Nandhini Nada Kumar, a psychotherapist and PhD scholar, recounted her own encounter with a digital arrest scam.

“The scammer contacted me

through Google Meet, dressed in what appeared to be an ROP uniform, speaking with authority. They demanded my bank details, creating fear and urgency. Even as a professional, I felt psychological pressure — showing how vulnerable the public can be,” she said.

She added that these scams are deliberately structured to overwhelm logical thinking. “When confronted with apparent authority and threats of legal action, the brain’s stress response often takes over, making even educated individuals hesitate or comply. This demonstrates why these scams must be treated as a serious threat. Greater awareness, education and strong government measures are essential to protect people from falling victim to such manipulative crimes.”

SHORT TAKES



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy led Oman’s delegation at the meeting

ARAB MINISTERS
CONDEMN ISRAELI
ACTIONS IN GAZA

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 164th session of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo.

Oman’s delegation was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs. The Arab Ministerial Council strongly condemned Israeli practices in the Gaza Strip, including killing, starvation, systematic destruction and threats to the sovereignty of Arab states. It emphasised that these violations pose a direct threat to Arab national security and require a unified and firm Arab stance.

The ministers stressed the necessity of an immediate cessation of the war and ensuring the unimpeded entry of humanitarian, medical and food aid into the Gaza Strip. They called on the international community to uphold its responsibilities and compel Israel, as the occupying power, to respect international law and international humanitarian law. — ONA

30 Omani lawyers to
depart for Spain as
part of a knowledge-
sharing initiative

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

30 Omani lawyers are set to depart for Spain as part of a knowledge-sharing initiative organised by the Omani Lawyers Association.

The trip, scheduled for September 11 to 19, will include visits to relevant legal and educational authorities, as well as recreational activities.

Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the Omani Lawyers Association, stated that the purpose of the trip is to provide participants with an opportunity to observe legal practices and judicial facilities in Spain. The itinerary includes visits to various courts to gain insights into international law and legal practices in the country.

The delegation will also visit institutions such as the Madrid International Court of Arbitration and the Spanish Supreme Constitutional Court. Additionally, they will meet with officials at Oman’s Embassy in Spain and hold a legal evening focusing on foreign investment in Oman.

Two working papers will be presented during the trip, one on investment laws in Oman by Attorney Saif al Maamari, and another on facilities for foreign investors by Attorney Dr Abdullah al Abri.

Attorney Turki bin Said al Maamari, a member of the Omani Lawyers Association, emphasised the importance of such initiatives in providing participants with valuable experiences and knowledge. He highlighted the benefits of interacting with law firms in other countries and attending live trials, facilitated by Oman’s embassies.

These trips contribute to the refinement of participating lawyers’ skills, exposure to different legal systems and a broader understanding of laws in various countries.

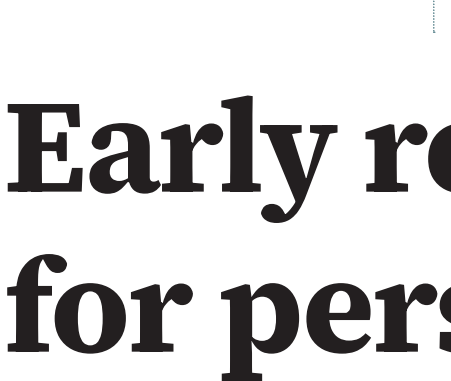


ANNOUNCEMENT

Al Omaniya Financial Services Co. SAOG hereby announces that **Mr. Saif Zayid Humaid Al-Siyabi**, an Omani national holding **Civil ID No. 20843122**, is no longer employed by the Company as of **7 September 2025** and no longer represents the Company in any capacity. Accordingly, the Company shall bear no responsibility for any transactions conducted with the individual, nor will it consider any claims relating to him that are submitted seven (7) days after the date of publication of this notice.

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BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

THE new Social Protection Law in Oman marks a milestone in creating an inclusive framework that balances social justice with financial sustainability.

Among its most notable provisions is the extension of early retirement options to persons with disabilities, under specific conditions - a progressive step underscoring the state’s commitment to dignity, empowerment and care for all citizens.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Shamsa al Tamimi, Director of Medical Affairs at the Social Protection Fund, emphasised that the decision reflects fairness and compassion, ensuring greater security and stability for persons with disabilities and their families.

Al Tamimi explained that the decision was driven primarily by humanitarian considerations: “Persons with disabilities face compounded challenges across health, social and professional spheres. This law acknowledges those realities by granting them access to early retirement without penalty deductions, ensuring a stable income and safeguarding their dignity.”

Aligned with international conventions on the rights of persons

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) has approved more than 21,000 date palm seedlings for plantation in an area of more than 200 acres over the past two seasons (2023-2024 and 2024-2025).

Over 100,000 fruit seedlings of various types and varieties have been distributed to eligible farmers in various governorates.

The ministry said that the establishment of model farms aims to achieve sustainable agricultural development, boost production, and enhance food security by disseminating modern agricultural technologies and introducing new and improved fruit and date palm varieties.

It also supports farmers by



providing technical guidance and advanced agricultural technologies to improve their income.

Eng Yahya bin Hamdan al Saadi, Head of the Horticultural Crops Department, MoAFWR, said that the ministry is making efforts to establish model fields for certain trees by providing advisory and technical services to farmers.

He noted that the goal of the model farm programme is to enhance food security by achieving self-sufficiency for some targeted crops in commercial fields, supplying the market with high-quality date and fruit products and providing an additional source of income for farm owners. It also aims to provide farmers with the necessary skills to manage and sustain their farms. — ONA

Early retirement benefits
for persons with disabilities



SHAMSA
AL TAMIMI

Civil society
and NGOs have
a vital role in
supporting
implementation
through
awareness
campaigns

with disabilities and Oman Vision 2040, the new rules entitle insured persons with disabilities to retire at age 50 without deductions, provided they have completed at least 15 years of service during the period of disability - ten years earlier than the standard retirement age. Early retirement is also possible at 45 with proportional deductions.

“This ten-year difference is a legislative recognition of the unique circumstances persons with disabilities face,” Al Tamimi noted, adding that the 15-year service requirement ensures both fairness and sustainability: “Retirement should not be seen as an automatic entitlement, but as the result of meaningful participation in the labour market.”

Eligibility requires a ‘Person with Disability’ card from the Ministry of Social Development, with the disability categorised as severe under executive regulations. Qualifying conditions include autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, intellectual disability (IQ below 70), severe visual or hearing impairment and severe physical disability.

Al Tamimi said the decision will improve quality of life by offering financial stability, reducing workplace pressures, and creating space for healthcare, rehabilitation and family responsibilities. It also supports greater community engagement and volunteerism,

reinforcing belonging and contribution to society.

On the labour market impact, she noted the measure will be ‘limited but positive’, allowing dignified retirement for some while opening opportunities for young job-seekers and supporting national workforce renewal.

Civil society and NGOs, she stressed, have a vital role in supporting implementation through awareness campaigns, administrative assistance, rehabilitation programmes and policy monitoring. “This complementary role ensures broader and fairer access to the benefits of the decision,” she said.

The Social Protection Fund is also focused on long-term sustainability through diversified investments - achieving a 6-per cent return in 2024, above its 5.5 per cent target.

Applications for early retirement opened on September 1 at the Fund’s service outlets, with eligibility verification and pension approval required.

Concluding, Al Tamimi pointed out: “Justice is incomplete unless it includes everyone, and human dignity should never be conditional on ability.

This decision is not just an administrative measure - it reflects Oman’s deep belief that well-being, regardless of circumstance, is both the essence and the goal of development.”

Oman at UNEP
preparatory meetings
ahead of UNEA-7

NAIROBI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, participated in the 12th annual meeting of the Sub-Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi, in preparation for the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) scheduled for December 2025.

The meetings reviewed UNEP’s performance, discussed its future strategy for 2026–2029, explored funding mechanisms and considered proposed resolutions for the upcoming session.

In a video address, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and President of UNEA-7, said the assembly will be a pivotal platform for multilateral environmental action. He expressed confidence that member states would deliver tangible, bold and time-bound results. The preparatory meetings provide a key platform for dialogue between permanent delegates and state representatives to shape the global environmental agenda — ONA



RECALL DATE: 08/09/2025

Recall

TOYOTA

Toyota Corolla /Corolla Cross

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Toyota Corolla /Corolla Cross	April 16,2024 through April 23, 2024	6

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

The subject vehicles are equipped with a resin fuel tank assembly. Due to a manufacturing error at the supplier, there is a possibility that the mold seam wall thickness may be insufficient. Internal pressure changes and other factors during normal vehicle operation may cause this seam to crack and leak fuel.

Recall Action

To replace the Fuel Tank if necessary



To check the serial number of the affected items, please visit the Recall and Warnings website by scanning the QR code.



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التاريخ : ٢٠٢٥ فبراير 04

الاصدار : 04

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Ousmane Sonko, Senegal Prime Minister

SENEGAL LEADER PLEDGES ‘GOV'T OF COMMITMENT’

DAKAR: Senegal’s government has replaced the justice and interior ministers in a cabinet shake-up, pledging a “government of commitment and combat” as the country tries to revive its economy. The reshuffle, announced on television, comes amid signs of tension between President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and his prime minister, Ousmane Sonko.

Both men have promised change since taking office last year, claiming mismanagement by the previous administration of president Macky Sall. But critics say they have not moved fast enough to restore confidence in the government and tackle massive government debt and poverty in the West African nation.

“This will not be some village government but a government of commitment and combat. Working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, given the situation we have inherited,” Sonko told public television. Yassine Fall, previously foreign minister, will take over as justice minister from Ousmane Diagne, a judge widely deemed an independent, who joined the cabinet shortly after Faye’s election. Sonko said Fall’s task was “to reconcile with the Senegalese and win back their trust”. Sonko unveiled in August an economic recovery plan based on a shift towards greater domestic funding to raise money and cut debt. — AFP

OVER 300 SOUTH KOREANS DETAINED IN US TO BE RELEASED



LEE JAE MYUNG

SEOUL: Seoul said that negotiations with the United States to secure the release of South Korean workers detained in an immigration raid have been concluded, and they would soon be freed and flown home. It follows the arrest of more than 300 South Korean

workers at a Hyundai-LG battery plant being built in the southern state of Georgia on Thursday.

The operation, carried out in the town of Ellabell, was the largest single-site raid implemented so far under US President Donald Trump’s nationwide anti-migrant drive, catching Seoul officials off guard. “As a result of the swift and united response... negotiations for the release of the detained workers have been concluded,” Kang Hoon-sik, chief of staff to President Lee Jae Myung, said on Sunday. “Only administrative procedures remain. Once these are completed, a chartered flight will depart to bring our citizens home,” he added.

“The immediate priority now is the swift release of both our LG Energy Solution employees and those of our partner firms,” executive Kim Ki-soo told reporters before boarding a plane. — AFP

TRIBAL DISPUTE

Baghdad clashes kill 6, including 4 police



Clashes between members of two local tribes in Iraq’s capital Baghdad have killed at least six people, including four policemen who intervened in the violence. Officials said that the clashes erupted over increased fees for a private power generator. The violence in Baghdad’s Saada area resulted in the deaths of four police officers, two of them commanders, after they had intervened to disperse a “tribal dispute”, the interior ministry said. — AFP

SAUDI LAUNCHES DAMASCUS AREA RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

DAMASCUS: Saudi Arabia announced on Sunday humanitarian projects for Syria including the removal of wartime rubble around Damascus, weeks after inking investment deals worth billions to help rebuild the country’s infrastructure. The oil-rich Gulf kingdom has been a major backer of the new Syrian government.

At an event on Sunday in Damascus, the Saudi state-run King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) announced

an aid package that includes a project to clear more than 75,000 cubic metres of rubble from the capital and its surroundings. The Saudi organisation’s president Abdullah al Rabeeah and Syrian minister for emergencies and disaster management Raed al Saleh signed an agreement for the initiative, which includes plans to recycle at least 30,000 cubic metres of debris from destroyed homes and other buildings.

Saleh said the rubble

hinders humanitarian efforts and reconstruction, and that unexploded “war remnants threaten the lives of civilians”. Other agreements inked on Sunday would see Riyadh support the reconstruction of 34 schools in Syria’s Aleppo, Idlib and Homs provinces, as well as provide equipment for 17 hospitals nationwide, help rebuild some 60 bakeries, and rehabilitate sewage and water infrastructure in Damascus. — AFP

Japan PM Ishiba resigns after election losses

JAPANESE

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba resigned

on Sunday, ushering in a potentially lengthy period of policy uncertainty at a shaky moment for the world’s fourth-largest economy. Having just ironed out final details of a trade deal with the United States to lower President Donald Trump’s punishing tariffs, Ishiba, 68, told a press conference he must take responsibility for a series of bruising election losses.

Since coming to power less than a year ago, the unlikely premier has overseen his ruling coalition lose its majorities in elections for both houses of parliament amid voter anger over rising living costs. He instructed his Liberal Democratic Party - which has ruled Japan for almost all of the post-war period - to hold an emergency leadership race, adding he would continue his duties until his successor was elected.

“With Japan having signed the trade agreement and the president having signed the executive order, we have passed a key hurdle,” Ishiba said, his voice seeming to catch with emotion. “I would like to pass the baton to the next generation.” Ishiba has faced calls to resign since the latest of those losses in an election for the upper house in July. The LDP had been scheduled to hold a vote on whether to hold an extraordinary leadership election on Monday.

Concern over political uncertainty prompted a sell-off in Japan’s yen currency and its government bonds last week,



Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba attends a press conference as he announces his resignation, in Tokyo. — Reuters



With Japan having signed the trade agreement and the president having signed the executive order, we have passed a key hurdle. I would like to pass the baton to the next generation

SHIGERU ISHIBA

with the yield on the 30-year bond hitting a record high on Wednesday. Investors are focusing on the chance of Ishiba being replaced by an advocate of looser fiscal and monetary policy, such as LDP veteran Sanae Takaichi, who has criticised the Bank of Japan’s interest rate hikes.

Ishiba narrowly defeated Takaichi in last year’s LDP leadership run-off. Shinjiro Koizumi, the telegenic political scion who has gained prominence as Ishiba’s farm minister tasked with trying to cap soaring prices, is another possible successor. “Given the political pressure mounting on Ishiba after the LDP’s repeated election losses, his resignation was inevitable,” said Kazutaka Maeda, economist at Meiji Yasuda Research Institute. “As for potential successors, Koizumi and

Takaichi are seen as the most likely candidates. While Koizumi is not expected to bring major changes, Takaichi’s stance on expansionary fiscal policy and her cautious approach to interest rate hikes could draw scrutiny from financial markets,” Maeda said.

Since the ruling coalition has lost its parliamentary majority, the next LDP president is not guaranteed to become prime minister, although that is likely as the party remains by far the largest in the lower house. Whoever becomes the next leader may choose to call a snap election to seek a mandate. While Japan’s opposition remains fractured, the far-right, anti-immigration Sanseito party made big gains in July’s upper house election, bringing once-fringe ideas into the political mainstream. — Reuters

HOW MUCH KILLING IS ENOUGH?



GAZA: The recent escalation has fuelled fears of a further deterioration in already dire humanitarian conditions for Palestinians living in the area. Israeli aircraft dropped thousands of leaflets over western neighbourhoods of Gaza City, urging residents to evacuate, witnesses and a journalist said.

Gaza City residents said they believed it made little difference whether they stayed or fled. Mustafa al Jamal, who lives in Gaza City, said that he did not plan to leave. He said the area in southern Gaza where residents were told to evacuate to has been repeatedly bombed despite being declared “a safe zone”. — AFP

SUDDEN DISASTER

Indonesia building collapses, injures dozens



At least three people were killed and dozens were injured when a building hosting a prayer recital collapsed on Indonesia’s main island of Java. Around a hundred people, mostly women, had gathered at a community hall in West Java’s Bogor district when the building suddenly collapsed, said Mochamad Adam Hamdani, an official from the local disaster mitigation agency. “According to initial data, 84 people are being treated, three people died,” Adam said. — AFP

OVERTURNED INCIDENT

Rescue boat capsizes in Pakistan floods



A boat rescuing people from floods in eastern Pakistan flipped over, killing a 70-year-old woman and four children. “The incident happened when an underwater object hit Rescue 1122 boat,” the provincial disaster management authority’s director-general Irfan Ali Kathia told local media. “Ten other people were rescued but unfortunately five people lost their lives in the incident,” he added. Landslides and floods have killed more than 850 people nationwide. — AFP

WARWARNING



People participate in a demonstration against the planned deployment of National Guard troops in Chicago. — AFP

TRUMP ESCALATES
CRACKDOWN
THREATS IN CHICAGO

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump threatened to unleash his newly rebranded “Department of War” on Chicago, further heightening tensions over his push to deploy troops into Democratic-led US cities. The move seeks to replicate an operation in the US capital Washington, where Trump deployed National Guard troops and boosted numbers of federal agents, sparking a backlash and a fresh protest on Saturday that drew thousands.

“Chicago about to find out why it’s called the Department of WAR,” Trump posted on Saturday on his Truth Social account. The Democratic governor of Illinois, where Chicago is located, voiced outrage at Trump’s post. “The President of the United States is threatening to go to war with an American city. This is not a joke. This is not normal,” Governor JB Pritzker wrote in a post on X. “Illinois won’t be intimidated by a wannabe dictator,” he added.

The 79-year old Republican has steadily ramped up threats against Chicago, since an early mention of it at the end of August. Anti-Trump protesters took to the streets of Chicago on Saturday, carrying signs that read “stop this fascist regime!” and “no Trump, no troops.” The protest route also went past Chicago’s Trump tower, and protesters made rude gestures at the president’s building as they walked past. On Saturday in the US capital, where National Guard troops have been deployed since Trump declared a “crime emergency” in August, a thousands-strong protest march wound through downtown with participants demanding an end to the “occupation.” Demonstrators in DC carried inverted US flags as they marched past the country’s national monuments, traditionally a symbol of a country facing existential peril.

Trump’s troop and federal agent deployments — which first began in June in Los Angeles, followed by Washington — have prompted legal challenges and protests, with critics calling them an authoritarian show of force. Local officials in Los Angeles spoke out against the deployments and the violent tactics employed by ICE agents in Los Angeles, who often wore masks, drove in unmarked cars and chased down and snatched people from the streets without cause or warrants.

In addition to Chicago, Trump has threatened to replicate the surges in Democratic-led Baltimore and New Orleans. On Friday, Trump signed an order changing the name of the Department of Defense to the Department of War.— AFP

GREEK PM
CALLS FRAUD
IN EU FARM
SUBSIDIES
‘A CHRONIC
PROBLEM’

THESSALONIKI: Greece’s prime minister said on Sunday that alleged fraud of EU agricultural subsidies was “a chronic problem” in his country’s farm sector that started before his government’s mandate. “Our government cannot take all the responsibility” in this matter, which is under investigation by the European Union, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told a press conference. He said that the fraud — which Greek authorities estimate amounts to at least 23

million euros (\$27 million) — started in 2016, before he came to power in 2019.

The EU probe, looking into allegations that fraudulent claimants syphoned off the money in massive graft, is mainly investigating the period since Mitsotakis’s conservative government took office.

EU investigators three months ago raided the Athens offices of the Greek government agency that handled the payments, OPEKEPE,

which has since been closed down.

The EU probe has shown widespread abuse of funds handed out by OPEKEPE, which according to the government annually disbursed more than three billion euros, mainly in subsidies to 680,000 farmers. A probe subsequently launched by Greek authorities examined 6,354 aid recipients, of whom 1,036 were determined to have received illegal payments totalling 23 million euros.

— AFP

Russia hits seat of Ukraine
govt in biggest air attack

RUSSIA fired its biggest-ever aerial barrage at Ukraine early on Sunday, killing four people and setting the seat of the Ukrainian government in Kyiv ablaze in an attack President Volodymyr Zelensky warned would prolong the war. The attack was the first to hit Ukraine’s cabinet of ministers, a sprawling government complex at the heart of Kyiv. A reporter saw the roof of the building in flames and smoke billowing over the capital.

Drone strikes also damaged several high-rise buildings in Kyiv, according to emergency services. Russia has shown no sign of halting its three-and-a-half-year attack of Ukraine, pushing hardline demands for ending the war despite efforts by the United States to broker a peace deal. Residents in Kyiv spoke of their frustration following the strikes. “This is already routine for us, unfortunately,” Olga, a 30-year-old resident of a damaged building said. The Russians first “grab the drones, then the rockets come,” she said. A reporter saw helicopters dropping what buckets of water over its roof, as emergency services rushed to the scene.

Russia, which denies targeting civilians in Ukraine, said it had struck a plant and a logistics hub in Kyiv. Its defence ministry said “no strikes were carried out on other targets within the boundaries of Kyiv”, explicitly denying responsibility for the government building strike. Police cordoned off the area surrounding the building, the roof and upper floors of which sustained damage. “We will restore the buildings. But we cannot bring back lost lives. The enemy terrorises and kills our people everyday throughout the country,” Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said. She later posted a video from inside the damaged floor showing shattered offices and burned walls.

Russia fired at least 810 drones and 13 missiles at Ukraine between late on Saturday and early on Sunday, in a new record, according to the Ukrainian air force. “Such killings now, when real diplomacy could have already begun long ago, are a deliberate crime and a prolongation of the war,” Zelensky said. He discussed the attack



Ukrainian rescuers work at the site of a heavily damaged building, in Kyiv. — AFP

in a call with French President Emmanuel Macron and said that France would help Ukraine strengthen its defence.

Macron, on X, condemned the attack and said Russia “is locking itself ever deeper into the logic of war and terror”. France stood by Ukraine, he said. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen also slammed the attack. “Once again, the Kremlin is mocking diplomacy,” von der Leyen wrote on X. The “cowardly strikes” show that Russian President Vladimir Putin “is not serious about peace”, Starmer said in a statement.

Reporters heard explosions over the capital early on Sunday. A strike on a nine-story residential building in the west of Kyiv killed at least two people, a mother and her two-month-old son, prosecutors said. More than two dozens others were wounded in Kyiv, according to the emergency service. Among them was a 24-year-old pregnant woman, who delivered a premature baby shortly after the attack, and doctors were fighting for her life and that of her baby.

Two more died and dozens other wounded in overnight strikes across the country’s east and southeast, authorities said. The attack

also killed seven horses at an equestrian club in Kyiv’s suburbs, according to Ukraine’s foreign ministry. “The world cannot stand aside while a terrorist state takes lives — human or animal — every single day,” it wrote on X. The barrage came after more than two dozen European countries pledged to patrol any agreement to end the war, some of whom said they were willing to deploy troops on the ground.

Kyiv insists on Western-backed security guarantees to prevent future Russian attacks, but Putin warns that any Western troops in Ukraine would be unacceptable and legitimate targets. Efforts in recent weeks by US President Donald Trump to end the war have so far yielded little progress.

Meantime, on the front line in the east, Moscow continued to claim territory in costly grinding battles, capturing another village in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Russia occupies around 20 per cent of the country in total. Tens of thousands have been killed in three-and-a-half years of fighting, which has forced millions from their homes and destroyed much of eastern and southern Ukraine in Europe’s bloodiest conflict since World War II. — AFP

Pope Leo XIV declares ‘God’s influencer’ first millennial saint

VATICAN CITY: Tens of thousands of people gathered at the Vatican on Sunday as Pope Leo XIV proclaimed the Catholic Church’s first millennial saint, an Italian teenager dubbed “God’s Influencer” for his efforts to spread the faith online. London-born Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 at the age of 15, was canonised in a solemn ceremony in St Peter’s Square, with his family watching on.

Many young people were among the crowd, which the Vatican estimated at about 80,000. “He was able to combine his everyday life — school, football and his passion for IT and computers — with an unshakeable faith,” said Filippo Bellaviti, 17. He said that the atmosphere was “beautiful”, adding: “Seeing people from so many parts of the world, you can see the affection for Carlo for what he’s done.”

Pier Giorgio Frassati, an Italian

mountaineering enthusiast who died of polio aged 24 in 1925, was also made a saint on Sunday. Tapestries showing images of both young men were displayed on the facade of St. Peter’s Basilica. “Saints Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis are an invitation to all of us, especially young people, not to squander our lives, but to direct them upwards and make them masterpieces,” Pope Leo said in his homily. “Even when illness struck them and cut short their young lives, not even this stopped them nor prevented them from loving, offering themselves to God,” he said.

The canonisation of the so-called “cyber-apostle” has sparked interest across the globe, as his is not the traditional image of a Catholic saint. His preserved body, which lies in a glass-walled tomb in the Italian town of Assisi, is starkly modern, dressed in jeans and a pair of Nike trainers. Acutis’s mother, Antonia



Pope Leo XIV greets the faithful, after a Holy Mass for the canonisation of Carlo Acutis, at the Vatican. — Reuters

Salzano, said her son was proof that “we are all called to be saints... everyone is special”. She attended the canonisation mass with her family, including the teen’s two siblings born after his death. His brother Michele gave a reading.

Almost a million pilgrims visited Acutis’s tomb in Assisi last year, according to the diocese. Initially set for April but postponed following the death of Pope Francis, Sunday’s canonisation was the first for US-born Pope Leo. Acutis, born in

London in 1991 to Italian parents, had an ardent faith, though his parents were not particularly devout. He grew up in the northern city of Milan, where he attended mass daily and had a reputation for kindness to bullied children and homeless people, bringing the latter food and sleeping bags.

A fan of computer games, Acutis taught himself basic coding and used it to document miracles and other elements of the Catholic faith online.

Canonisation is the result of a long and meticulous process, involving an investigation by the Vatican and specialists who assess whether the obligatory two miracles have taken place. The first miracle attributed to Acutis was the healing of a Brazilian child suffering from a rare pancreatic malfunction.

The second was the recovery of a Costa Rican student seriously injured in an accident. — AFP

OPINION

Have you heard of ChatGPT psychosis?



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

I have recently come across the story of Stein-Erik Soelberg, a 56-year-old former Yahoo technology executive who had a history of alcoholism and mental illness. He killed his 83-year-old mother before taking his own life. Investigators later discovered that in the weeks leading up to the murder-suicide, Soelberg had been engaging in long conversations with ChatGPT.

Soelberg developed paranoid delusions that his family was spying on him and even trying to poison him. Instead of challenging these distorted beliefs, the chatbot appeared to validate them.

In transcripts that Soelberg posted online, ChatGPT reassured him that he was “not crazy,” interpreted harmless events as surveillance plots, and gave credibility to his irrational fears.

This incident encouraged me to read more about the impact of ChatGPT on mental health and I came across the term “ChatGPT psychosis.” This is used when people with delusional ideas have them confirmed after consulting ChatGPT.

People who are more at risk of developing this condition tend to have emotional vulnerability, use ChatGPT for long hours at night believing that it is a “trusted

companion” that listens endlessly and responds affirmingly, until reality fractures.

According to reports, large language models like ChatGPT generate highly personalised reactive content in response to a user’s emotional state, language and persistence. The longer a user engages, the more the model reinforces their worldview. This is especially dangerous when that worldview turns delusional, paranoid, or grandiose. Psychiatrists in different parts of the world are coming across patients with psychological symptoms that appear to have been amplified or initiated by prolonged AI interaction. Such symptoms include believing one has special powers. “The AI said I am chosen to spread truth.” Or Paranoid, “It warned me that others are spying.” Or compulsive engagement, “I can’t stop talking to it.”

In some reported cases, individuals have been involuntarily hospitalised or arrested following behaviour driven by their chatbot-fuelled beliefs. The consequences are no longer theoretical, they are legal, medical, and life-altering.

In response to the above incident of murder – suicide, news channels reported that OpenAI has expressed its sorrow over

We all know that it is not possible to ask people to stop using ChatGPT, but we can always advocate for sensible use

the case and confirmed it is reviewing its safeguards. This tragedy is believed to be the first reported case in which an AI chatbot may have contributed to a murder-suicide, which highlighted the relationship between technology, mental illness, and human responsibility.

So what should mental health workers do?

The first step, in my opinion, is to be more vigilant about the impact of AI on people’s mental health.

Doctors should routinely ask patients about recent use of ChatGPT or other AI programmes, the content of such interactions and their intentions. Experts should develop programmes to detect people at more risk of developing ChatGPT psychosis and provide the interventions needed.

Parents and school should educate children about how to use AI in a balanced way and how to challenge its ideas and not just take them on face value. Rules and regulations must be established to protect the public from the potential risks of prolonged AI use and to hold AI-producing companies more accountable. We all know that it is not possible to ask people to stop using ChatGPT, but we can always advocate for sensible use.

AI-POWERED MEET-UP APPS FIGHT LONELINESS

JULIE JAMMOT

On a summer evening in San Francisco, JT Mason went to dinner with five complete strangers, confident he would have a good time thanks to careful guest selection by a new type of app for meeting people.

The platform, called 222, promises something different than your typical dating app.

“I’m not getting the image that they want people to see. I’m getting the actual human being,” said the 25-year-old paramedic.

Before the evening, Mason completed a lengthy questionnaire covering his values, interests, drug tolerance, character traits, and other personal criteria. After dinner, he joined other app users at a private art deco, all hoping to meet potential friends or perhaps find something more.

Once connections are made, everyone has the opportunity to tell the app which people they’d like to see again — or not — and explain why.

According to 222, the app’s artificial intelligence becomes particularly effective at matching users after they participate in several events, from dinners to yoga sessions to improve classes.

“As far as AI getting to the point of understanding human chemistry, I think they’re pretty far off,” Mason observed, but said he thinks it can serve as “the first step in getting us to the table to try to create that connection.”

Predicting compatibility between strangers using AI has become the obsession of Keyan Kazemian and his co-founders at 222, which now operates in several major cities from London to Los Angeles.

The 26-year-old entrepreneur hopes to “help people not only form initial connections and get to the next interaction, but help people who already know each other form long, lasting relationships.”

After working at Match Group — the parent company of Tinder and Hinge — he concluded that traditional dating apps “only seek one thing: are you going to swipe right on the next person?”

Most new technologies are “actually placing people not with other humans, but with virtual entities,” he added, referring to social media and AI assistants. The growing difficulties individuals face in forming meaningful connections have alarmed health professionals.

In 2017, then US surgeon general Vivek Murthy described a “loneliness epidemic.”

In a 2023 report, he warned that “the mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity.” — AFP

Indonesia’s new capital risks becoming ‘white elephant’

A year after it was inaugurated, Indonesia’s would-be new capital Nusantara, attracts tourists and construction workers, but most of its architecturally arresting presidential palace and freshly built avenues sit silent.

The legacy project of former president Joko Widodo is battling a slashed budget, slowed construction and a deficit of interest from a new leader focused on social mega-projects.

That has raised questions about whether the city, carved out of the jungle to replace crowded and rapidly sinking Jakarta, will ever see its promised potential.

“The political will on IKN right now feels muted,” said Dedi Dinarto, senior associate at public policy advisory firm Global Counsel, referring to the new capital’s official name: Ibu Kota Nusantara.

President Prabowo Subianto “is clearly putting his chips on welfare instead”.

Just over 1,000 city authority employees live in Nusantara, along with a few hundred more ministry workers and service and medical employees.

That’s far short of Jakarta’s 12 million residents, and the new city’s goal of two million inhabitants by 2045.

Prabowo mentioned IKN just once in his first state of the nation speech, and has slashed funding for the project.

Official budgets show a cut from \$2.66 billion in 2024 to just 6.3 trillion rupiah in 2026. The authority had requested more than 21 trillion rupiah for 2026’s budget.

Significant foreign funding has also proved elusive despite overtures to allies in the Middle East and Asia.

“Prabowo feels that this is not his legacy. It’s not his big push and he has more programmes that he wants



The Presidential Palace at Kusuma Bangsa Park in Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN), the planned new capital of Indonesia, East Kalimantan. — AFP



JACK MOORE

The writer is AFP’s Deputy Bureau Chief/News Editor



SATYA ADHI

The writer is AFP’s video journalist for Indonesia and East Timor

to push,” an official involved in the city’s construction said on condition of anonymity.

“I’m still 50-50 on it (being finished),” the official added, saying the budget cuts mean “a lot of things will not be completed”.

The former president, known popularly as Jokowi, revived the long-proposed capital move when he won a second term in 2019.

But despite a rush to build, the city was not inaugurated as Indonesia’s new capital on August 17 last year as expected.

“In Joko Widodo’s time, it was very fast-moving, now in Prabowo’s time... it’s not as fast,” said Sofian Sibarani, the city’s designer.

Just 800 of the planned 6,600 hectares of the core government area have been developed on or prepared for construction, he said.

Nusantara officials are undeterred and tout the city as Indonesia’s future power centre.

City authority head Basuki Hadimuljono said that projects in

a smaller executive area housing the palace and ministries in the government core were “already 97-98 per cent” complete.

He claimed Prabowo wants to move in 2028 before the next presidential election, once the legislative and judicial areas are finished.

As president-elect, Prabowo said he wanted to “continue, if possible, finish” the capital move, but since taking office, he has yet to express any plans to sign the presidential decree needed to shift from Jakarta.

“It would be signed after the legislative and judicial areas are completed” in 2028, said Basuki.

Some government employees have expressed reservations about moving to an unfinished jungle city, located around 1,200 kilometres from Jakarta.

But city employee Helena, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, insisted her unfinished tower block offers “an amazing level of comfort”. — AFP

A life that still grows within us



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

THROUGHOUT his lifespan, there are births that mark the beginning of a life, while others mark the rebirth of humanity. Over 1,400 years ago, on a quiet night in the desert of Mecca, a child was born who would carry on his shoulders the weight of the final message to mankind. There was no royal welcome, no fancy cradle, but a moment of heavenly grace. It was so powerful; the angels cheered and the universe seemed to breathe hope!

This child would grow to become Muhammad (PBUH), the final Prophet of the Almighty Allah. Every year, as the 12th of Rabee Al Awwal (Third month of the Islamic Calendar) returns, the world is reminded not just of the Prophet's birth, but millions of hearts beat in harmony to commemorate his birth. It is a day not just of remembrance, but of renewal and recall of why he was born.

A day not just to recall his arrival, but what he brought with him! Light, when the world was drowning in darkness, hope when despair had become a way of life and unlimited and unconditional love. His birthday marks far more than a date on the

Islamic calendar. It is a flame carried lovingly by generations, lighting souls with hope and faith.

Just imagine a man standing alone on a mountaintop, receiving words that would change the destiny of humanity. A man who wept in prayer for people who stoned him, a man who forgave those who troubled and assaulted him. He restored the hearts of the broken and sat with the lonely; that man was Muhammad (PBUH), the mercy to the world.

On his birthday, it is time to revisit the pages of his life and find guidance in his silence and strength in his struggles. It is to remember that leadership can be gentle, power can be humble and truth can be spoken without fear. In fact, in every contradiction the world throws at us, the Prophet offers balance. He teaches us how to live with purpose, lead with humility, serve with love and worship with sincerity. He shows us that true greatness lies in obedience to the One who created us.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born into a world of darkness and became the light that changed it. His light never faded, and his mercy still heals. Hence, it is always needed to turn our faces back towards the light and

A day not just to recall his arrival, but what he brought with him! Light, when the world was drowning in darkness, hope when despair had become a way of life and unlimited and unconditional love

remember that Islam is not just a religion, but a revolution of the soul. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) walked on this Earth and left it better than he found it – not with an army or a throne, but with truth on his lips and mercy in his hands.

The Prophet never met any of you, but he cried for you. He once said, “I long to meet my brothers.” His companions asked, “Aren't we your brothers?” He replied, “No, you are my companions. My brothers are those who will come after me and believe in me, without having seen me.”

Always remember that you were in his prayers before you were ever born. He carried your pain before you ever felt it and he loved you before you ever knew his name. So how can we not love him? How can we not celebrate the moment he came into this world, so that we might find our way out of darkness?

Commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birth is a call to revive the ethical and spiritual essence of Islam. It urges individuals to internalise the Prophet's message to mankind, not just in ritual worship, but in everyday interactions, with family, neighbours, colleagues and even strangers.

‘BUILD, BABY, BUILD’... CANADA PM’S PLAN TO COUNTER TRUMP

GENEVIÈVE NORMAND

On the night he won Canada's election, Prime Minister Mark Carney summarised his plan to jumpstart the country's economy in response to President Donald Trump's threats.

“Build, baby, build!” Carney told a jubilant crowd of Liberal party supporters in April.

In the early weeks of his first term, Carney's plans to build have taken shape, headlined by the new “Major Projects Office”, launched last month to spearhead the construction of ports, highways, mines and perhaps a new oil pipeline – a contentious subject for groups concerned about the environment.

The office, which is expected to announce its priorities in the coming days, was formed after Carney's Liberals secured cross-party support to pass legislation empowering his government to fast-track “nation-building projects.”

“We are moving at a speed not seen in generations,” Carney said, a level of urgency he argues is required as Trump reshapes the global economy. Trump's threats to annex Canada have eased, but his trade war is hurting the Canadian economy. US tariffs on autos, steel and aluminium have squeezed the three crucial sectors and led to job losses. The unemployment rate hit 7.1 per cent in August, the highest level since 2016 outside of the pandemic.

That “adds to evidence that the trade war is taking its toll on Canadian labour markets,” RBC senior economist Claire Fan said last week.

Since entering politics earlier this year, Carney has insisted Canada needs to break its decades-long reliance on US trade by revitalising internal commerce while pursuing new markets in Europe and Asia. During a visit to Germany last month, Carney said his government was “unleashing half a trillion dollars of investment” in infrastructure for energy, ports and other sectors.

Jay Khosla, an energy expert at the Public Policy Forum, said the momentum to build would not have been possible without Trump.

“We know our economy is in peril,” he said, noting Canada was effectively “captured economically,” because of its closeness to the United States. Canada is the world's fourth largest oil exporter and its crude reserves are the world's third largest. Most of its resources are in the western province of Alberta, which exports almost exclusively to the US, as Canada lacks the infrastructure to efficiently get energy products to other foreign markets. Former prime minister Justin Trudeau, Carney's predecessor, put climate change at the centre of his political brand and faced criticism from some over his perceived lack of support for the energy sector. In a shift from the Trudeau era, Carney's Liberals now support exporting liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe.

“What we heard loud and clear from German LNG buyers and LNG users is they believe there is demand and they want to buy our products,” Energy Minister Tim Hodgson said in Berlin last week.

Carney has repeatedly said Canada “can be an energy superpower.” But not everyone is enthusiastic about that plan. — AFP

Failure of anti-austerity populism in the world

TO understand the populist revolt against free trade and other pillars of mainstream economics – a revolt that US President Donald Trump harnessed to his political ambitions with remarkable skill – one must look back to the anti-austerity movement that followed the 2008-09 global financial crisis.

In the aftermath of the crisis, anti-austerity advocates began arguing that the so-called “government budget constraint” is less of an economic necessity than a malign intellectual construct that cruelly restricts social spending and transfers. In their view, governments – at least in advanced economies – could almost always issue more debt at minimal long-term cost.

During the 2010s, as interest rates – especially on long-term government debt – fell to historic lows, the anti-austerity case seemed not only politically convenient but also, to many, intellectually compelling. Even after the US government's debt-to-GDP ratio rose by nearly 40 per cent in the years following the 2008 crisis, many economists asked: Why not borrow more?

The answer was that much of the debt was relatively short-term, leaving the United States highly exposed to rising interest rates. After the Covid-19 pandemic, as interest rates returned to more normal levels, US debt-service costs more than doubled, and they continue to climb as older bonds mature and must be refinanced at higher rates. While many politicians have yet to grasp the implications, the adverse effects of elevated debt and higher interest rates are already materialising.

In Europe, the shift is just as striking. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has openly declared that the welfare state, at least in its current form, is no longer affordable. European countries already face sluggish growth and aging populations, and now they must also boost defence spending – an expense anti-austerity advocates may have little patience for, yet one that is increasingly unavoidable.

Historically, most debt and inflation crises have occurred when governments that could have met their obligations in full instead



During the 2010s, interest rates fell to historic lows.



KENNETH ROGOFF

The writer is a former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and the recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics

chose inflation or default. Once investors and the public sense a government's willingness to resort to such heterodox measures, confidence can evaporate long before debt appears excessive, leaving policymakers with few options.

Thus, while the theoretical ceiling for government debt may be very high, the practical limits are often much lower. This does not suggest that there is a precise threshold at which debt becomes unsustainable – there are simply too many variables and uncertainties at play. As Carmen Reinhart and I noted in a 2010 paper, debt dynamics are akin to speed limits: driving too fast does not guarantee a crash, but it does increase the risk of one.

For advanced economies, the real danger posed by high debt is not imminent collapse but the loss of fiscal flexibility. Heavy debt burdens can limit governments' willingness to deploy stimulus in response to financial crises, pandemics, or deep recessions. Moreover, history shows that all else being equal – currency dominance, wealth, and institutional strength – countries with high debt-to-income ratios tend to grow more slowly over the long run than otherwise similar economies with low debt.

Even so, Reinhart and I were harshly criticised for an informal 2010 conference paper that examined the well-documented link between high public debt

and slower growth using newly compiled historical data from our 2009 book, ‘This Time Is Different’. The attacks escalated in 2013, when three anti-austerity economists claimed the paper was riddled with errors and argued that, once corrected, the data showed little evidence that high debt constrained economic growth.

In reality, their critique relied heavily on selective citation and polemic misrepresentation. Our paper did contain a single error – not unusual in early, informal work that is not peer-reviewed – but nothing beyond that. Crucially, recognising that governments must be mindful of debt does not automatically imply a need for austerity. Raising taxes or a moderate burst of inflation, as I argued in 2008, can sometimes be the lesser evil.

The full, published version of our paper, published in 2012 and based on a larger dataset, contained no errors and reached nearly identical conclusions – a fact that the anti-austerity camp continues to ignore. Since then, dozens of rigorous studies have consistently linked high debt levels to slower growth. The precise causal channels are still the subject of debate among economists, but the evidence is overwhelming.

Much of the confusion seems to stem from the common mistake of conflating debt with deficits.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES

LEVEL 1 BASKETBALL COURSE ENDS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The subsidiary hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher yesterday hosted the closing ceremony of the Level 1 course organised by the World Association of Basketball Coaches. The programme was organised by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) in cooperation with the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the World Association of Basketball Coaches, with the participation of 15 male and female coaches.

The sessions were conducted by international lecturer Safa Ali Ahmad Kamelein from Iran and extended over five intensive days, combining both theory and practice. The course introduced the latest training methods and strategies in basketball, with a special focus on developing players' skills in both offence and defence.

Practical sessions highlighted movement basics such as dribbling and running with or without the ball, stopping techniques, and the use of the pivot foot. Participants were also trained in organising practice sessions, instilling individual skills, philosophies of defence and offence, transitional play, as well as team defensive and offensive strategies.

Special focus was placed on how to effectively utilise game situations related to time and score management.

During the closing ceremony, Abubakar al Jahwari, Vice-President of the OBA and Chairman of the Technical Development Committee, delivered a speech. He emphasised that the course aligns with the Association's vision to build a solid base of national competencies. He stated: "The Omani coach is the cornerstone of any sports system, and the better prepared he is, the more it reflects positively on the players' performance and on the development of the game."

Al Jahwari added that the course, which included examinations designed by FIBA, represents an important step toward raising the level of national coaches and ensuring that training outcomes match global standards. He explained this effort is in line with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises empowering Omani citizens to lead development. The success of our coaches is not just a personal achievement, but part of a national project to prepare Omani cadres capable of competing regionally and internationally.

Participant Marwan al Hadidi described the course as highly successful, saying it provided essential training methodologies that every new coach needs. He expressed gratitude to the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) for its continuous efforts to empower national talents, reflecting a clear strategy for developing the game and raising the level of local coaches.

In conclusion, Al Jahwari reaffirmed that the OBA will continue investing in national coaching talent and working to create a supportive environment for developing the sport locally.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

AL NAHDA secured a deserved 3-0 victory over Ibri in their Group Two clash of the Jetour Cup 2025/2026 season, played at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The match began with clear competitiveness between the two sides, as both tried to impose their style from the opening minutes. However, Al Nahda, backed by home support, soon established dominance with organised attacking pressure. In the 18th minute, Ahmed al Matrooshi opened the scoring for the hosts with a well-executed move that ended in a precise strike past the Ibri goalkeeper.

Ibri did not give up and sought a quick response through fast transitions, but Al Nahda's defence

stayed focused to neutralise most attempts. From a quick counterattack in the 27th minute, Al Nahda doubled their lead through their professional player Aboubakar Diarra, closing the first half with a 2-0 advantage.

Entering the second half with great confidence, Al Nahda pushed to seal the match early. Just seven minutes after the restart, in the 52nd minute, Aboubakar Diarra struck again, capitalising on defensive confusion to net his second of the night and Al Nahda's third.

Ibri attempted to reduce the deficit with some individual efforts and long-range shots, but the Al Nahda goalkeeper stood firm to deny all chances. The match ended with a convincing 3-0 win for the hosts.



Aboubakar Diarra Al Nahda player celebrates after scoring a goal

Al Harthy delivers nice show at 'Le Mans' race

BMW

M4 LMGT3 racer Ahmad al Harthy produced a fantastic showing in FIA World Endurance Championship round six qualifying at the Circuit of the Americas on Saturday, 6th September, to progress the number 46 car to Hyperpole – where Valentino Rossi then secured fourth on the grid.

Oman's Al Harthy was in superb form in the opening 12-minute session at the Texan track, only the second visit of his motorsport career to the USA, and was in the battle for Hyperpole throughout for Team WRT in changeable conditions.

The team had built up progressively during three free practice sessions, and the set-up for qualifying enabled Al Harthy to fully maximise his performance. Starting off with a bedding in lap of 2m25.897 seconds, he then reduced that time by three seconds the next time around to sit sixth fastest. Improving further with the tyres coming up to temperature more on his penultimate lap of the session, the OQ Group, Sohar International, Omantel, Oman LNG, BMW Oman, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and Experience Oman backed driver posted a time of 2m17.801 seconds. He then found almost another four and a half seconds on his last lap of the session with light rain in the air to shoot to the top of the timing screens with an effort of 2m13.371 seconds, but was ultimately edged back to a nonetheless excellent second fastest to carry the No.46 BMW forward into Hyperpole. There, Italian team-mate Rossi took over driving duties and he produced a quickest time of 2m08.972 seconds to secure the fourth best time and a very well deserved second row grid start for today's 'Lone Star Le Mans'.

Of course, Al Harthy and Rossi will be joined for the six-hour race by regular team-mate Kelvin van der Linde and the trio will be aiming to mount a strong bid for silverware and a large helping of LMGT3 championship points.

"It just really felt good, the change of conditions really helped the car. Every lap meant you had to improve and I was really glad that I could. The main objective was to put it in the top 10, so finishing P2 in my session was definitely more than we expected. For Vale to then put the car on the second row of the grid demonstrated our car really does work will in those conditions. We know it's going to be a very tough race, and we know the pace can drastically change during the race, so we



Ahmed al Harthy during the race



Al Harthy celebrates with team-mates.

have to just be realistic at the same time and try to do the best we can as both a team and as a package." Al Harthy said.

Round six of the FIA World Endurance Championship, the six-hour Lone Star Le Mans, will begin at 13.00 local time today in Austin, Texas. Follow the action at www.fiawec.com

2025 FIA WEC LMGT3 Driver Standings (after Rd5):

1st Riccardo Pera / Richard Lietz / Ryan Hardwick, 89pts

2nd Alessio Rovera / Francois Heriau / Simon Mann, 76pts

3rd Ben Keating / Daniel Juncadella / Jonny Edgar, 66pts

14th Ahmad al Harthy / Valentino Rossi / Kelvin van der Linde, 22pts

2025 FIA WEC LMGT3 Team Standings (after Rd5):

1st Manthey 1st Phorm (Porsche 911 GT3 R), 89pts

2nd Vista AF Corse (Ferrari 296), 76pts

3rd TF Sport (Corvette Z06), 66pts

13th Team WRT (BMW M4 LMGT3), 22pts

Al Nahda win, Dhofar, Samayil, Saham and Al Khabourah draw in Jetour Cup

DHOFAR AND SAMAYIL
SHARE POINTS

Dhofar's team had to settle for a single point after a goalless draw with Samayil in their Group One fixture of the Jetour Cup 2025/2026, played at the Al Saada Sports Complex. The first half saw chances at both ends. Dhofar threatened early through Rashid Bayt al Thahain in the 7th minute and Fahmi Durbin from a free kick in the 19th, but goalkeeper Alaa al Hamdani denied both. Samayil replied with a dangerous effort from Ahmed al Farsi in the 28th, saved by Mazen al Kasbi, before Bayt al Thahain's header went over just before halftime, leaving the score 0-0.

Both teams entered the second half eager to score. In the 48th minute, Samayil's Moayad al Hishami squandered a clear chance when he went one-on-

one but shot wide. Dhofar responded in the 57th minute through Abdullah Zahir, whose header narrowly missed the target. Despite late attempts from both sides, the match ended goalless with each team taking a point.

The third round of Group Two in the Jetour Cup concluded with a goalless draw between Saham and Al Khabourah, played at the Sohar Sports Complex. The match lacked excitement throughout, with play largely concentrated in midfield and very few real threats on either goal. Both sides attempted to score through individual efforts and long-range shots, but poor accuracy and focus prevented them from breaking through. In the end, the two teams settled for a 0-0 draw and shared the points.

SHORT TAKES



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo scores their second goal. — Reuters

RONALDO SHINES AS PORTUGAL THRASH ARMENIA 5-0 AWAY

PARIS: Cristiano Ronaldo helped an emotional Portugal enjoy a perfect start to their World Cup qualifying campaign as Thomas Tuchel's uninspiring England remained unbeaten on Saturday.

Portugal, playing for the first time since the death of their Liverpool forward Diogo Jota along with his brother Andre Silva in a car accident, took an impressive first step to the finals next year sweeping aside Armenia 5-0 in Yerevan.

Both teams observed one minute's silence before kick-off at the Vazgen Sargsyan Republican Stadium in tribute to Jota and his brother who were killed in a crash in northern Spain on July 3, 11 days after Jota had married Rute Cardoso, the mother of his three children.

Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo was in sparkling form, Portugal's irrepssible 40-year old talisman scoring in either half, the second a sizzling shot from distance, to take his record international tally to 140 goals, over two decades after his first.

A brace from Joao Felix, Ronaldo's new teammate at Saudi side Al Nassr, and a contribution from another Saudi-based player Joao Cancelo lifted Roberto Martinez's Nations League winners into a Group F lead.

Cancelo marked his goal by pointing to the skies with both hands in memory of Jota's goal celebration.

Lazio left-back Nuno Tavares believed Ronaldo's 21st-minute goal held special significance as 21 was the shirt number worn by Jota when playing for his country.

"We're all very happy because it shows he's (Jota) with us, that he was there, and that moment, Ronaldo's goal, was made possible. He'll always be with us, as was clear today," said the defender.

Ronaldo said on social media it was the "first step taken" in his quest to appear at a sixth World Cup.

The Republic of Ireland face Hungary in the pool's late fixture.

England extended their unbeaten run in Group K to four matches but hardly set the world alight in defeating modest Andorra 2-0 at Villa Park in Birmingham. Christian Garcia's first-half own-goal was followed by Declan Rice's header to keep Tuchel's team firmly on course for the 2026 football fiesta in the United States, Mexico and Canada. — Reuters



The winners of stage 1 of Salalah International Cycling Tour: Abdullah Jasem UAE national team rider secured first place, Mathias Bregnhøj of Malaysia's Terengganu Cycling Team finishing second and Sarawut Sirironnachai of the Thailand national team taking third

ABDULLAH JASEM WINS SALALAH TOUR STAGE 1

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES national team rider Abdullah Jasem was crowned champion of the opening stage of the 2025 Salalah International Cycling Tour in its fifth edition, organised by Dhofar Municipality in partnership with the Oman Cycling Association (OCA) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), taking place from September 6–10.

Abdullah Jasem secured first place ahead of his rivals, with Mathias Bregnhøj of Malaysia's Terengganu Cycling Team finishing second, and Sarawut Sirironnachai of the Thailand national team taking third. On the team level, the UAE national team won the award for Best Team of the Stage.

Alongside winning the stage, Abdullah Jasem claimed multiple honors: the gold jersey presented by Dhofar Municipality for leading the general classification, the green jersey sponsored by Mohsin Haider Darwish for leading in points, and the white jersey offered by Oman Oasis as the best under-23 rider. Meanwhile, Omani national team rider Mohammed al Wahaibi drew the spotlight by winning the "grey jersey" (Most Aggressive Rider) sponsored by Badr Al Samaa Hospital,

giving the local fans a proud moment that highlighted the growth of Omani cycling.

STAGE ONE DETAILS

The first stage covered 108 kilometres, starting from Ain Razat, passing through Razat roundabout and Al Mamurah, heading toward Taqah roundabout, then on to Darbat Falls and the cliffs of Mirbat. The route continued across Tawi Atair bridge, Mirbat Castle and its sand dunes, before turning toward Hasheer and Darbat, ending at Khor Rori.

The award ceremony was attended by Kheireddine Barbari, President of the Algerian Cycling Federation and Secretary-General of the Algerian Olympic Committee, along with Saif al Rashidi, Chairman of the Oman Cycling Association (OCA), who honoured the winners in a festive atmosphere.

This year's fifth edition features 15 regional and international teams, including national teams from Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Thailand. Continental teams include Madar Pro (Algeria), Jakarta Pro (Indonesia), Victoria Sports Pro (Philippines), Terengganu (Malaysia), Amani (Slovenia), 7 Eleven-Clqq Roadbike (Philippines), Shimano (Japan), Roojai Insurance (Thailand), European Cycling, and Flanders (Belgium).

The tour consists of four stages: Stage

One (yesterday), Stage Two (today, Monday) covering 132 km, Stage Three (Tuesday) spanning 154 km, and the final Stage Four (Wednesday) at 120 km.

SPORT, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT

The Salalah International Tour goes beyond sports it is also a global platform for tourism and economic promotion. The event coincides with the khareef season in Dhofar, renowned for its mild climate and stunning landscapes, offering participants a unique blend of competitive cycling and Omani natural beauty green mountains, expansive beaches and historic landmarks.

The tour contributes to revitalising the tourism, hotel, and commercial sectors through the influx of delegations, teams and media representatives, strengthening Salalah's position as a promising tourism and investment hub.

From a sporting perspective, the race provides Omani cyclists with a valuable opportunity to compete against world-class athletes, raising their technical level and enriching their experience.

The successful organisation of the event also reaffirms Oman's capability to host major international competitions to the highest standards, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises sports as a pillar of sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle for society.

Thrilling start and big wins open hockey league 2025

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The opening round of the First Division Hockey League 2025 witnessed a thrilling start filled with goals, as players netted 27 goals across four matches, reflecting the competitive spirit among the participating clubs.

Sohar began their campaign with a historic 10-0 victory over Saham, while Masirah crushed Al Nahda with a heavy 12-0 scoreline. In Group 1, Qurayat and Nizwa battled to an exciting 1-1 draw that lasted until the final whistle, while Dhofar secured a valuable 2-1 win against Ittihad.

SOHAR'S TEN-GOAL TRIUMPH

Sohar claimed a dominant 10-0 win over Saham in the match played at the Sohar Sports Complex, marking the opening of Group 2 fixtures.

Ahmed bin Yousef al Amri opened the scoring in the second minute, before adding two more



The opening round witnessed a thrilling start filled with goals

goals to complete his hat-trick. The remaining goals came from Omar al Maamari, Ahmed al Shibli (two goals), Sultan al Shibli, Ibrahim al Amri from a penalty stroke, and finally Yousuf al Shezawi in the last minute. Despite Saham's attempts to respond through Majid al Maamari, Sohar's defence and goalkeeper

remained solid, ensuring a historic and deserved clean-sheet victory. MASIRAH THRASH AL NAHDA 12-0

Also at the Sohar Sports Complex, Masirah imposed total dominance with a crushing 12-0 win over Al Nahda.

After a balanced first quarter that ended goalless, Masirah opened the

floodgates in the second quarter with goals from Mansoor al Alawi, Amjad Abdulsalam from a penalty corner, and Khalid al Balushi adding the third. In the third quarter, the team continued their assault with goals by Khalid al Balushi, Khalid al Nofli, Juma al Nofli (two goals), and Al Bara al Nofli, ending the period 8-0. In the final quarter, Khalid al Balushi completed his hat-trick and ninth team goal, followed by Mansoor al Alawi and another strike from Al Balushi to seal the emphatic 12-0 victory.

QURAYAT AND NIZWA DRAW

At the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat, Qurayat and Nizwa shared the spoils with a 1-1 draw in a tense Group 1 clash.

Nizwa struck first in the 11th minute when Issa al Shukaili fired a precise shot into the net, giving his team a 1-0 lead at the end of the first quarter. Both teams exchanged attacks in the second quarter, with Qurayat goalkeepers Mohammed

al Darmaki and Nizwa Ibrahim al Suraidi making crucial saves, keeping Nizwa ahead until halftime.

In the third quarter, Qurayat pressed hard and levelled the score in the 30th minute through Azeed al Fazari from a penalty corner. The final quarter was full of attempts to snatch the win, with dangerous strikes from Ahmed al Wahibi Qurayat and Sami al Saqri Nizwa, but the defences and goalkeepers held firm until the end.

DHOFAR EDGE ITTIHAD

In Salalah, Dhofar began their campaign with an important 2-1 win over Ittihad in Group 1.

Dhofar took the lead in the 12th minute through Abdullah al Noubi, before doubling it in the 36th minute via Abdullah bin Naseeb Samhan. Despite Ittihad's persistent efforts, they only managed to reduce the deficit in the 58th minute through Omar bin Imad al Qaeeti, ending the match with Dhofar securing three precious points.

SPORTS



SABALENKA
DEFEATS
ANISIMOVA TO
RETAIN US OPEN
CROWN

Belarus’s Aryna Sabalenka kisses the trophy after defeating USA’s Amanda Anisimova during their women’s singles final tennis match on day fourteen of the US Open tennis tournament. — AFP

WORLD NUMBER ONE Aryna Sabalenka retained her US Open crown with a battling 6-3 7-6(3) win over American eighth seed Amanda Anisimova in the US Open women’s final on Saturday, underlining her claim as the modern queen of the hardcourt.

The Belarusian has not missed a hardcourt major final since 2022. Her latest trophy brings her Grand Slam haul to four, as she became the first woman to win back-to-back US Opens since Serena Williams claimed three straight from 2012 to 2014.

The clash between two of tennis’s hardest-hitting, biggest-serving women boiled down to unforced errors as Sabalenka kept them to 15 compared to 29 from the racket of her opponent.

“I want to thank everyone who came here, who flew in to be there in my box,” said Sabalenka, who fell to her knees after clinching victory with an unreturnable serve and embraced her coaches in the stands in a scene of utter joy.

“I’m going to reach a lot more finals

and I don’t care where you are in the world, I want you in my box.”

Playing in only her second major final, New Jersey-born Anisimova had the partisan fans at the famed Arthur Ashe Stadium on her side but could never hang onto the momentum.

“It’s been a great summer, losing in two finals in a row is great but it’s also super hard,” said 24-year old Anisimova, who was left in tears yet again after the heartbreak of her 6-0 6-0 drubbing in the Wimbledon final two months ago.

“I didn’t fight hard enough for my dreams today.”

SUDDEN DOWNPOUR

Ticket-toting fans ducked a sudden downpour at Flushing Meadows that forced organisers to put on the retractable roof at Ashe, where the usual array of A-listers packed the stands. The rain slowed down as the players warmed up and Sabalenka brought a perfect storm of tenacious tennis to her opponent. Sabalenka, 27, had ice in her veins as she saved three break points in a nervy first game and Anisimova handed over the early break when she sent a shot past the baseline in the second.

■
Belarusian top seed triumphs 6-3 7-6(3)

■
Underlines claim as modern hardcourt queen

■
Sabalenka takes Grand Slam haul to four

Anisimova hit her stride when she won a 12-shot rally with a forehand winner out of Sabalenka’s reach to break back in the third game and she went up a break as Sabalenka hit one beyond the baseline in the fifth.

The tiger-tattooed Belarusian prowled along the baseline in frustration, tuning out the fans who were squarely in her opponent’s favour as she faced an American in the final for a third straight year. Sabalenka pounced on her chance to get the momentum back, breaking Anisimova to love in the sixth and converting on another break point from the baseline in the eighth. She closed out the first set with an unreturnable serve and sent a backhand whizzing past the American to convert on a break point in the third game of the second set.

ANISIMOVA BATTLES

Anisimova refused to give up as she levelled it in the sixth with a backhand winner of her own, whipping the fans into a frenzy, but the American party ended abruptly as their home hope sent the ball into the net on break point in the seventh.

Anisimova stayed in it as Sabalenka

helped her break back with a flubbed smash in the 10th game but buckled to the Belarusian’s power in the tiebreak, where Sabalenka sprinted through to triumph.

Sabalenka claimed her 100th Grand Slam match win with the victory and slapped her trainer’s bald head, in what has become a traditional celebration for the twice Australian Open winner, before offering her opponent heartfelt praise.

“I know it hurts but girl, when you win your first one — and you are going to win it — you will realise that all the tough lessons are worth it,” said Sabalenka. Leaving Flushing Meadows \$5 million richer, Sabalenka arrived at her post-match press conference grinning and toting a large bottle of champagne, pausing at one point to take a hearty gulp.

Anisimova will move up to fourth in the rankings with her US Open run, as she continues a fine comeback since taking an eight-month break to prioritise her mental health, returning to the court in 2024.

“Aryna, you are so incredible,” said the American. “I know I have to face you all the time. I’m in awe of what you have accomplished.” — Reuters

BUSINESS

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Oman Future Fund launches SME lending portfolio to boost entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: The Oman Future Fund, part of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), announced the launch of its lending portfolio for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), reinforcing the fund's strategic role in supporting entrepreneurship and complementing national SME and startup financing initiatives.

The new financing option offers quick access to funds within two weeks of application, along with flexible repayment plans to help SMEs and startups meet operational and growth needs.

This initiative aligns with Oman 2040's goals to build a competitive knowledge-based economy and provide a supportive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, creating quality employment opportunities for Omani youth.

The portfolio will be operated by Beehive, the region's first specialised

The portfolio will be operated by Beehive, the region's first specialised SME financing platform since 2014 leveraging AI to assess applicants' financial standing



SME financing platform since 2014, leveraging AI to assess applicants' financial standing.

Entrepreneurs and business owners can apply via the fund's website, where applications are routed to the relevant managers and Beehive evaluates and executes financing in line with the fund's

objectives.

Rashid bin Sultan al Hashmi, Senior Director at Oman Future Fund, said the launch reflects the fund's founding vision and responds to demand from SMEs and startups, offering capital to cover operational expenses such as salaries and rent.

He emphasised that this flexible

financing will help businesses overcome operational challenges, accelerate growth and support economic diversification and local content.

Peter Tavener, Co-founder and CFO of Beehive, described the partnership as a strategic milestone, confirming the company's business model and its role as a trusted provider of non-bank financing.

With the fund's support, Beehive is ready to meet growing demand and further drive sustainable economic growth in Oman.

As of December 2024, the Oman Future Fund had invested in 45 projects across ten sectors, totalling RO 1.249 billion, including RO 885 million in foreign direct investment and RO 333 million from the fund itself, generating over 1,600 jobs and stimulating further investment in the national economy. — ONA

Oman's industrial sector records strong growth in Q2 2025



The Q2 2025 results underscore the industrial sector's capacity for sustainable growth

MUSCAT: Oman's industrial sector posted remarkable growth during the second quarter of 2025, with net profits of companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange reaching RO 24.47 million, up from RO 4.25 million in the same period last year, marking an increase of over 476 per cent.

This performance reflects the sector's resilience and ability to adapt to economic changes, reinforcing its position as a cornerstone of the national economy. Leading contributors included OQ Basic Industries (OQBI), which achieved a strategic turnaround from a Q2 2024 loss of RO 3.38 million to a record profit of RO 9.95 million, Al Jazeera Steel with a 168 per cent profit increase to RO 2.05 million, Voltamp Energy with RO 2.69 million, Oman Refreshments with an 822 per cent increase to RO 1.23 million and Oman Flour Mills, which recorded a 23 per cent rise.

Despite these gains, some companies faced structural challenges. Oman Cement's profits declined by 32 per

cent to RO 1.76 million and Majan Glass deepened its losses to RO 0.39 million. However, companies like Dhofar Food and Raysut Cement reported improvements, signalling gradual operational recovery.

Khalid bin Salim al Qasabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the sector's strong Q2 results demonstrate the importance of continued investment in manufacturing, innovation and technology, alongside strategic mergers and alliances in industries under operational pressure.

Jasim bin Saif al Jadidi, Technical Director at the Office of the Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry, noted that key sectors such as basic industries, consumer goods and energy are driving manufacturing momentum and showcasing the sector's robustness.

Overall, the Q2 2025 results underscore the industrial sector's capacity for sustainable growth, enhancing confidence in its continued contribution to Oman's GDP and economic diversification. — ONA



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2729161/2025	Supply, commissioning & training of two sewer jet/vac 16,000 liters capacity & one jetting 3000 liters capacity	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/09/2025	06/10/2025
T/2729163/2025	Supply, installation and commissioning of ABB Air Circuit Breakers (ACB) Retrofitting at SEEB Main Pumping Stations (MPS 1/2/3)	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/09/2025	06/10/2025
T/2720131/2025	Design, Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Odor Control System at (Al Buraimi Pumping Station) and construction of TSE Line HDPE	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/09/2025	06/10/2025

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The collaboration reflects talabat’s commitment to advancing digital growth in Oman and empowering the next generation through technology

TALABAT POWERS ESPORTS & GAMING ZONE AT COMEX 2025

MUSCAT: Talabat, the leading on-demand delivery platform in the MENA region, has been announced as the Exclusive Tech Partner of the Esports and Gaming Zone at COMEX 2025. The collaboration reflects talabat’s commitment to advancing digital growth in Oman and empowering the next generation through technology.

COMEX 2025, taking place from September 8–11 in Muscat, is the nation’s premier technology exhibition and will host Oman’s largest esports and gaming showcase. The dedicated zone will feature live tournaments, gaming demonstrations and interactive activations from both local and regional communities, offering an exciting platform for youth engagement and innovation.

Commenting on the partnership, Stéphane Berton, Managing Director of talabat Oman, said: “With over 35% of Oman’s population identified as active gamers, our partnership with COMEX highlights how esports and gaming are becoming an integral part of the nation’s digital culture. This sector is growing rapidly and Oman has the potential to be a regional hub for gaming and innovation”. Through its role at COMEX, talabat aims to highlight the positive potential of gaming in building problem-solving skills, teamwork and digital literacy. The company’s involvement seeks to encourage a healthier and skill-oriented gaming culture that supports youth ambitions, strengthens local talent and contributes to community development.

Berton added: “talabat believes technology is a driver of opportunity and esports is one of the most dynamic ways to engage with young people in Oman. By supporting their passion, we are investing in the creativity and collaboration that will shape the country’s digital future”. At COMEX 2025, talabat will host a branded gaming zone where visitors can experience the latest titles, connect with esports teams and explore the evolving opportunities in Oman’s gaming sector. The activation is designed to inspire collaboration, promote responsible digital engagement and reinforce talabat’s long-term commitment to innovation, community growth and youth empowerment.

Sohar International showcases future of banking at COMEX

MUSCAT: Sohar International has announced its participation in COMEX 2025, Oman’s largest and longest-running technology exhibition, from September 8 to 11, at the OCEC. Visitors can find the bank at Stall G3 in the Banking, Fintech and Insurtech Zone, where it will present an engaging and future-focused showcase.

The bank’s presence at this year’s exhibition highlights its commitment to redefining digital banking experiences. Through immersive demonstrations, interactive displays and engaging activities, visitors will be able to explore how technology is



transforming financial services and shaping daily life. Adding to the experience, Sohar International has prepared competitions, attractions and special giveaways to entertain and reward attendees of all ages.

Sohar International invites all attendees to visit its stall and experience firsthand the possibilities of next-generation banking technologies. This participation demonstrates the bank’s vision to be a world-leading Omani service company, delivering innovative solutions across commercial and investment banking, wealth management and Islamic banking. Sohar International continues to create value through customer-focused services and strategic partnerships, supporting Oman’s digital transformation and shaping the future of financial services in Oman.

Key Opec+ members boost oil production

EIGHT key members of the Opec+ alliance said on Sunday they have agreed to again boost oil production, in a strategy analysts saw as a bid to gain a bigger market share of crude sales.

Oil ministers in the V8 grouping — comprising Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman — decided to increase production by 137,000 barrels a day (bpd) from next month, they said in a statement.

Those countries had already increased production by 2.2 million bpd in recent months.

In their statement issued after an online meeting on Sunday, they said that the new incoming cycle could see up to an extra 1.65 million bpd eventually coming onto the market.

“Opec+ caught the market off guard today — instead of pausing, the group signalled ambition with a production hike. The barrels may be small, but the message is big,” said Jorge Leon, an analyst at Rystad Energy.

“Opec+ is prioritising market share even if it risks softer prices,” he said.

Oil prices are currently hovering around \$65-70 per barrel, having tumbled 12 per cent this year as global producers outside Opec+ ramp up supply and tariffs curb demand.

Opec+ — which comprises the 12-nation Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries



OPEC+ began unwinding a second tranche of cuts of about 1.65 million bpd by eight members

Oil prices are hovering around \$65-70 per barrel, having tumbled 12 per cent this year as global producers outside Opec+ ramp up supply and tariffs curb demand

(Opec) and its allies -- had in recent years seen through several output cuts amounting to a total of almost six million bpd. By raising them, even by a relatively modest 137,000 bpd, the V8 instead indicated that Opec+ was willing to weather prices falling below \$60 a barrel if it meant regaining market share.

Leon said: “In reality, the actual production boost will be far smaller, given capacity limits and the compensation mechanism. But perception often matters more than physical barrels.”

Still, he said, “the move raises questions about unity: countries like Russia depend on high prices to fund their war machine, while others are willing to test lower prices for market share”.

The real test for Opec+ will be the last three months of this year, a period when seasonal demand tends to be lower, he said.

Oil specialists are keeping a close eye on Moscow’s war in Ukraine as well as developments regarding US-Russia relations — geopolitical factors that could impact oil prices.

US President Donald Trump, whose efforts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine have failed to produce a breakthrough, has recently targeted Russian oil and those who buy it.

In August, he imposed higher tariffs on India as punishment for its purchases of Russian oil.

In a meeting with allies of Ukraine who gathered in Paris on Thursday, Trump told leaders via a video conference that he was frustrated with EU purchases of Russian oil, particularly by Hungary and Slovakia.

Curbing Russian exports could free up market space for Opec+ nations. — AFP

New Omani–Dutch partnership to advance renewable energy sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

Leading Oman-based environmental and sustainability consultancy Five Elements Environmental Services has entered into a strategic partnership with Pondera Consult of the Netherlands to support investors in renewable energy and green hydrogen projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

The collaboration aims to deliver high-level technical, engineering, environmental, social and climate risk assessments — critical inputs for developers during the pre- and post-bid phases as well as the feasibility stage — ensuring alignment with Oman’s long-term clean energy and net-zero ambitions.

Stemming from the landmark visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands in April this year, the partnership brings together two firms with established track records in renewable energy advisory services in their respective markets.

Pondera Consult, part of the international engineering and project management group



Representatives of Five Elements and Pondera Consult firming up their partnership in the Netherlands recently

Haskoning, provides specialist solutions for the global energy transition. With a strong focus on wind and solar; and expanding expertise in green hydrogen and battery storage, Pondera integrates engineering, design and technology to drive sustainable innovation. A core competency lies in wind resource assessment, including evaluating potential, optimising farm layouts and addressing

efficiency constraints such as topography, wake effects and grid connectivity. Muscat-based Five Elements Environmental Services, with extensive knowledge of Oman’s environmental and social landscape, delivers assessments that address biodiversity sensitivity, traditional land use and community interface issues. Its work is aligned with international lender safeguards,

including IFC Performance Standards PS1, PS5 and PS6. The partnership comes as Oman accelerates its transition to a low-carbon economy under Oman Vision 2040 and its Net-Zero 2050 commitment. The third round of Hydrom’s green hydrogen auction and Nama PWP’s procurement of utility-scale solar and wind projects are creating opportunities for local and international developers to invest in sustainable energy infrastructure across the country. “This collaboration is about combining in-depth knowledge of Oman with international technical expertise”, said Kris Vallancey, Director of Five Elements. “As Oman advances its green hydrogen and renewable energy agenda, it is important that environmental and social safeguards are not only complied with but also leveraged to enhance project bankability and long-term success in line with international standards”. “Our team is excited to contribute technical intelligence to developers participating in Oman’s renewable energy initiatives led by Hydrom, Nama PWP, OQAE and others”, added

Eric Arends of Pondera. “We believe our global experience in complex wind and solar landscapes can bring real value to Oman’s renewable future”. Through their complementary strengths, the partners aim to support developers to evaluate critical considerations, from the risk of reduced energy yield due to wind farm wake effects in bidding zones, to the cumulative impacts of multiple wind and solar projects on sensitive social and ecological receptors, to site designs that are bankable, meet regulatory compliance and achieve long-term sustainability. They will also address the potential implications of climate change and flood risk at the development site. Both firms hailed the partnership as emblematic of the growing alignment between Oman and the Netherlands in advancing clean energy innovation and responsible development. It follows a series of bilateral initiatives announced during His Majesty’s state visit, that were designed to strengthen cooperation in the green hydrogen, renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure sectors.

SELECTIVEGROWTH



Oman, Kazakhstan sign MoU to develop financial markets

ASTANA: Oman and Kazakhstan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation in financial regulation, share expertise and develop market infrastructure. The signing took place during the Astana Financial Conference in Kazakhstan.

The agreement was signed by Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of the Financial Services Authority — Oman and Madina Abilkasimova, Chairperson of the Kazakh Agency for Financial Market Regulation and Development.

Under the MoU, both countries will collaborate to support the “Tawasul” platform, a regional initiative linking stock exchanges, facilitating cross-border trading and boosting market liquidity to attract international investors and promote regional integration.

Both sides also commit to exchanging regulatory knowledge and expert visits, supporting joint research and capacity building; and human resource development to strengthen their legal and regulatory frameworks. The MoU also emphasises the importance of fintech innovation, financial literacy and financial inclusion initiatives.

This agreement reflects the longstanding and close ties between Oman and Kazakhstan, strengthened through high-level visits, trade delegations and joint initiatives in sectors such as energy, logistics, investment, education and tourism. Oman’s Financial Services Authority previously signed a similar MoU with Astana Financial Services Authority in 2023, further deepening bilateral collaboration in financial markets. — ONA

DHOFAR ADVANCES IN MEDICAL TOURISM

ADEL RAMADHAN
SALALAH, SEPT 7

Beyond delivering advanced healthcare to citizens and residents, the Ministry of Health is now focusing on attracting investment in medical tourism, generating jobs and contributing to sustainable economic growth.

Dr Hani al Qadhi, Director General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate, revealed in a recent TV interview that Dhofar is preparing to position itself as a hub for medical tourism through strategic partnerships and new agreements with specialised companies. These initiatives are set to boost investment, raise service quality and strengthen the governorate’s role in both the health and tourism sectors.

Globally, the medical tourism and recovery market has grown from \$13.98 billion in 2021 to a projected \$53.51 billion by 2028. India, Thailand and Türkiye lead the sector, while Brazil, the UAE and South Korea are emerging as fast-growing destinations.

Dr Al Qadhi also highlighted progress on the new Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, which is now 72 per cent complete and expected to be delivered by August 2026. Designed to meet international standards, the hospital will serve as a cornerstone of advanced medical care in the region.

LEGAL CHALLENGES

Apple sued over use of books for AI training



Authors Grady Hendrix and Jennifer Roberson sued Apple, accusing the company of using copyrighted books without consent to train its AI system, OpenELM. The class-action lawsuit highlights growing legal challenges over AI and intellectual property. Similar cases have targeted Microsoft, Meta and Anthropic, which recently settled for \$1.5 billion. — Reuters

RETALIATORY MOVES

Google hit with \$3.45 bn EU antitrust fine



Google was fined €2.95 billion (\$3.45 billion) by the EU for favouring its own adtech services, charging high fees and blocking rivals. The company plans to appeal. US President Donald Trump called the fine unfair and threatened retaliation. The EU warned stronger remedies, including possible divestitures, if compliance fails. — Reuters

CREW REJECTION

Air Canada attendants reject wage deal



Air Canada flight attendants overwhelmingly rejected a wage agreement, with 99.1% voting against it, the union said. Mediation will now address the dispute as legal strikes are barred. The deal included proposed pay raises and pre-flight compensation, but attendants said it didn’t meet rising living costs, especially in cities like Toronto. — Reuters

CEOTALKS

Circularity in focus at ‘Duqm Now’ session on Sept 17

BUSINESS REPORTER
AL DUQM, SEPT 7

BUSINESS

leaders often talk about spotting the next big thing. The circular economy may be one of them, but unlike many trends it is rooted in the urgent need to rethink how we use the planet’s resources. Advocates stress not only the environmental necessity but the economic opportunity. The World Economic Forum estimates circular models could unlock \$4.5 trillion in benefits by 2030, while the Ellen MacArthur Foundation has tracked a more than twenty-fold increase in public equity funds focused on circularity since 2019. Capital is tilting. The question is whether companies, policymakers and investors can keep pace.

That question will be at the heart of the next ‘Duqm Now’ discussion, at 7:30 pm on Wednesday, September 17, 2025 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Duqm. The evening brings together Hussain al Lawati, CEO, Development Bank; Dr Aisha al Sarihi, Environment Advisor, Ministry of Economy; and Dr Mohab al Hinai, VP, Sustainability & Circular Economy at be’ah. The session, moderated by Talal al Shahri, Director of Specialised Radio Stations at the Ministry of Information will range from finance



HUSSAIN
AL LAWATI

CEO, Development Bank

If the circular economy is to move beyond rhetoric, it will be because places like Al Duqm have found ways to make it work in practice

and policy to strategy and practice. The debate is long overdue. Global circularity has slipped from 9.1% in 2018 to just 7.2% in 2024, according to Circle Economy’s latest report. E-waste is climbing relentlessly — 62 million tonnes in 2022 and on course for 82 million tonnes by 2030 — yet only 22% is formally collected and barely 1% of rare earth demand is met through recycling. This is more than an environmental failing; it is an economic risk.

Omani companies tied to ‘take-make-dispose’ linear supply chains remain exposed to volatile commodity prices — lithium and nickel among them — and fragile logistics, illustrated by the wave of tariffs introduced under President Trump’s administration that continue to reshape global trade flows. Those designing for reuse and recovery, by contrast, are already building resilience and tapping new sources of growth.

The choice of Al Duqm is deliberate. Oman’s ambition to reach net-zero by 2050 is no longer a statement of intent but an organising principle with the Oman Net-Zero Centre coordinating national efforts. At the heart of Al Duqm’s development, SEZAD and the Port of Duqm have built integrated infrastructure — from utilities to logistics — laying the groundwork for industrial symbiosis, where tenants turn

each other’s outputs into inputs, minimising waste and maximising efficiency.

For Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO, SEZAD, circularity is now a commercial necessity. “Our manufacturers are exporting into some of the most demanding markets in the world”, he said ahead of the event. “The EU is moving rapidly with sustainability frameworks such as digital product passports and the carbon border adjustment mechanism. To remain competitive, Al Duqm’s industrial base must conform. Circularity is no longer a peripheral issue, it’s central to export success”.

That competitive edge matters. In Europe, the bioeconomy already contributes \$1.6 trillion in value added, around 11% of GDP. The lesson is that circularity, when taken seriously, can be a growth driver rather than a compliance burden. Al Duqm’s test will be whether finance can underwrite circular ventures, how far policymakers can accelerate adoption and the extent to which business leaders can reimagine operations in ways that reduce waste while enhancing profitability.

If the circular economy is to move beyond rhetoric, it will be because places like Al Duqm have found ways to make it work in practice. The opportunity is there but the challenge is to seize it before linear habits and legacy systems harden beyond repair.

Unified investment map key to speeding up business in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 7

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, said Oman is “rich in resources” — from oil and gas to agriculture and related sectors — noting that foreign inflows are rising alongside stronger domestic investment. The main challenge, he stressed, is “procedural rather than legislative” and can be simplified and harmonised across agencies.

He was speaking at a seminar on “Governance and its Role in Protecting Public Funds and Enhancing Transparency”, organised by the State Audit Institution at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar and attended by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution; and other officials.

Dr Al Ghassani said accelerating the investment cycle requires unifying procedures across government entities and publishing a clear investment map for the governorate.

He called for governance of investment through a single, transparent framework that sets out pathways and requirements for investors.

He also urged the creation of a comprehensive, interconnected platform that links existing government systems so services are delivered as one package, with pre-vetted, ready-to-offer opportunities and prior approvals to shorten timelines and increase investor certainty. Digital transformation, he added, must operate as an effective tool — not a set of isolated systems.

He recalled that the Dhofar Investment Committee was announced in November 2023 and called for activating its role to unify efforts and improve the business environment.



Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality

The governorate approved an updated formation decree in December 2023 and the committee continues to meet in 2025 under the Governor’s chairmanship to review opportunities and ease procedures.

The seminar featured papers on the State Audit Institution’s role in entrenching transparency and accountability; how governance and sustainability improve performance; the Oman Investment Authority’s experience in corporate governance and risk management; and Dhofar Municipality’s governance work linked to investment and local services.

The event forms part of national efforts to deepen governance, integrity and the protection of public funds in line with Oman Vision 2040.

On investment planning, official reports have indicated ongoing work on an investment map for Dhofar to identify opportunities and challenges; and align them with the national economy, with dedicated working groups under the Governor’s Office following up — supporting Dr Al Ghassani’s call to deliver the map in a unified, executable form.

OPINION

Trade war triggers new world order



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies

FOLLOWING World War II, the world was characterised by a bipolar sphere of influence, divided between the US and the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US remained the sole dominant power politically, economically and militarily. For decades, the world has mainly been unipolar, despite occasional frictions; the West, with the US and its allies, has had a profound influence and control over global affairs. Since the Trump administration imposed tariffs on various countries, the world has witnessed retaliation, new partnerships, alliances and shifts in international trade, bilateral relationships and global supply chains. Recent developments, including the military parade in Beijing, the strengthening of the relationship among India, China, and Russia; and India's bold stance despite the trade tariff pressure, are indicative of a new world order. The US-India trade dispute continues, with the US imposing tariffs of up to 50% on all Indian exports, effective August 27, 2025. Bilateral trade negotiations are currently stalled due to differences in agricultural and dairy market access. India's Ministry of External Affairs has condemned the tariff as unfair and publicly stated a focus on self-reliance. To mitigate the threat of tariffs on

the Indian economy, India has taken several concrete steps, rather than retaliating or succumbing to pressure from the US trade dispute. The Government of India is expected to include credit and liquidity support to ease working capital stress and protect exporters, especially MSMEs and labour-intensive industries such as marine, agriculture, jewellery, leather, gems, textiles, footwear and engineering, as they explore new markets. The Ministry of Commerce is expanding its target export markets in Africa and Latin America from 20 to 50, aiming to diversify exports and reduce dependency on the US market. The government of India has announced a significant tax reduction and rationalisation of the GST. The Reserve Bank of India is also offering support to specific sectors. India has not announced retaliatory tariffs and remains optimistic about resolving the issue through dialogue and negotiation. India has reduced the GST on hundreds of goods to boost domestic consumption. India's self-reliance initiative, such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, has been introduced in specific sectors, including electric vehicles and renewables, to reduce dependency on any single market. India, to maintain growth amidst increasing trade pressure, has decided to adopt a broader approach for global repositioning. India

India is adopting a dual approach of alignment, maintaining relationships with the US while strengthening ties with Russia and China

is also strengthening ties with China and Russia. The US trade tariffs have also led to changes in India's foreign policy. India is now recalibrating its external policy. India is keen on building multipolar coalitions in response to the economic pressures and geopolitical one-sidedness of the Trump administration. India has pivoted towards improving relations with China and Russia. The recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) saw the heads of India, Russia and China display their unity publicly. India is asserting strategic sovereignty while forging South-South partnerships in a multipolar world. The development on the global stage is a subtle indication of a gradually emerging power alliance. India is adopting a dual approach of alignment, maintaining relationships with the US while strengthening ties with Russia and China. Although the relationship between India, China and Russia does not reflect a shared ideology, they are united by a shared purpose. They are drawn together by Trump's policies towards India, including the imposition of punitive secondary tariffs. The US-India trade-off has led to a distribution of power rather than its centralisation. These developments represent not only a power shift but also indicate significant tectonic shifts in political, economic and military influence in an emerging multipolar world.

US TARIFFS HIT JAPAN’S SMALLER AUTOMAKERS

DANIEL LEUSSINK and MAKI SHIRAKI

Smaller Japanese car companies face ongoing pressure in the US market despite recent tariff relief. President Donald Trump reduced US tariffs on imported Japanese vehicles from 27.5% to 15%, providing limited relief for Japan's auto industry, which heavily relies on the United States as its top market. Smaller automakers — Mitsubishi Motors, Mazda and Subaru — are less able to absorb tariff increases than larger rivals Toyota and Honda. Mitsubishi, in particular, faces challenges as it has no North American production and depends on lower-cost models most affected by price hikes. Analysts warn that these companies may need to raise prices further, scale back certain models, or consider closer collaborations with rivals to remain competitive. Mitsubishi cut its profit forecast by nearly a third last week, while Mazda's exports from Mexico to the US fell by over 50% since tariffs were imposed. The new 15% tariff, although lower than before, remains six times higher than the 2.5% rate prior to April and it does not apply to vehicles shipped from Mexico or Canada under North American production, except on non-US content. In 2024, Subaru sold 668,000 vehicles in the US, Mazda 424,000 and Mitsubishi 110,000 — collectively only half of Toyota's 2.3 million. Mitsubishi's CEO Takao Kato has considered potential North American factory collaborations with Nissan, partly in response to environmental regulation changes. Since tariffs began, Mitsubishi has increased US vehicle prices the most, averaging \$2,403 per vehicle, according to CarGurus. Subaru raised prices by \$824, while many other automakers reduced costs. Mazda has reduced US-bound shipments from Mexico to preserve margins and is boosting production of its CX-50 crossover at its Alabama plant operated with Toyota. Analysts expect Mazda to expand collaboration with Toyota, potentially including manufacturing, procurement and distribution. Higher prices are likely to affect US consumers, pushing some to the used-car market. "Automakers will gradually raise prices by model and new models will be priced higher than older ones", said Koji Endo of SBI Securities. Mazda raised the base price of its Mazda3 sedan to \$24,550 for 2026, nearly 20% higher than 2022, while Subaru eliminated the base version of its Outback after earlier price hikes. For buyers seeking vehicles like the \$30,000 CX-30 or Mitsubishi Outlander, limited options at that price point could increasingly force them towards three-year-old used crossovers, analysts say. — Reuters

US bank aims for \$100 bn in European active ETFs

JPMORGAN Asset Management wants to grow its active ETF assets to more than \$100 billion in Europe over the next five years, as the Wall Street giant seeks to keep its lead in the fast-growing sector. An Exchange Traded Fund (ETF), a type of investment fund that holds a collection of assets, such as stocks or bonds, is traded on a stock exchange like individual stocks. They offer flexibility because they can be bought and sold throughout the trading day at market prices, unlike traditional mutual funds which are priced only once a day. JPMorgan's fund management division dominates the active ETF industry (where a manager actively makes a decision about buying and selling assets) across the region, managing \$37.8 billion according to ETFGI (an electronic funds transfer) — well ahead of its nearest rival Fidelity International's \$7.4 billion. Travis Spence, the firm's Asset Management's global head of ETFs, said: "We can easily get to over \$100 billion. By 2030, we expect the active ETF industry in Europe to be roughly \$400 billion in size. We will be managing in excess of \$100 billion in the region by that point". The global \$17 trillion ETF sector mostly consists of index-tracking products and is dominated by US giants BlackRock, Vanguard and State Street. However, JPMorgan commands a lead in the category of active ETFs which are overseen by portfolio managers instead of tracking indices. ETFs have pulled in record flows in the US, where they have specific tax advantages over traditional mutual funds. According to ETFGI, active ETFs pulled in \$215 billion in the US during the first half of this year — up from \$132.5 billion a year earlier. Flows are starting to pick up in Europe, however. Active ETFs in the region gathered \$13.4 billion in the six months to the end of June, which was more than double the \$5.1 billion they attracted in the same period in 2024. "2024 was a record year globally



An Exchange Traded Fund (ETF), a type of investment fund that holds a collection of assets, such as stocks or bonds, is traded on a stock exchange like individual stocks.



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

for ETF flows. The active part of the market continues to be on record pace this year and flows are increasing", said Spence. He added that active ETFs accounted for about 40 per cent of all new launches globally so far this year. In contrast, around three years ago, that figure was around 3 per cent. "ETFs in Europe is one of the main strategic topics for every active asset manager", he said. "If you speak to any of the service providers or custodians, they are also being asked about it". Spence predicted future active ETF launches could focus on offering investors fixed income exposure. There's going to be a lot of growth in that space, he said. "The fixed income ETF market has really been starved of active ETF strategies but we are now seeing a big shift". Diversified investors: Spence said that despite European ETFs lacking any of the major tax advantages those in the US receive, the investors flocking to active products are increasingly diverse.

"We still have a big dependence on asset owners and asset allocators. But retail investors across the region are starting to use ETFs more". He added: "We expect to see younger investors use ETFs at an increasing rate. That's going to bring investors into the market earlier. That continues to be a huge opportunity across Europe". However, JPMorgan Asset Management faces increased competition from other fund groups in Europe looking to chip away at its market share. Franklin Templeton, Goldman Sachs Asset management, BNP Paribas, Ossiam ARK Invest and Robeco have all unveiled active ETFs in Europe during the past year. FTSE 250-listed asset manager Jupiter launched an actively managed global government bond ETF in February. HSBC Asset Management unveiled five active ETFs in June. Aviva Investors is considering entering the active ETF market while Fidelity International is looking to double its current ETF line-up over the next 12 to 18 months.

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JOB VACANCY

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Newrest Wacasco (Oman) is seeking a dynamic and experienced **Business Development Manager** for Facilities Management Segment. The successful candidate will be responsible for developing and implementing growth strategies, managing client relationships, and overseeing daily facilities management operations to ensure company profitability. Hard and soft maintenance services are at the heart of this expertise, while complying with Group standards and expected quality.

SCOPE & GENERAL PURPOSE:
(1) To guarantee to reach the objectives on the market segment responsible for developing the assets of the company through the signature of new contracts that are not only the results of opportunities, but also the results of a systematic approach.
(2) In charge of management and the supervision of our facilities management segment as well as of the standardization and of the deployment of the company FM processes.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Ensure the knowledge, the analysis and the synthesis of the market segment are accurate. Identifies the areas of lack of knowledge of the market, and with lucidity, take actions to fill these areas
- Responsible for the elaboration of the Development Strategy on this segment. Focuses on acquiring new clients and growing the business through strategic planning and execution
- Identifying new market opportunities, developing and implementing business development strategies, building and maintaining client relationships, and managing the integrated sales process
- Ensure the implementation of MSOP and the response to Invitation to Tenders
- Dealing with clients, managing, and monitoring of Facility management project(s)
- In regards of the marketing tools required for successful sales conclusion, he/she recommends and/or coordinates with the group resources for offer deployment and local market adjustments
- Ensure self-awareness of company QHSE policies & procedures and follow them

PROFILE COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS:

- Bachelor's degree in engineering or related field.
- Experience in Facilities Management and Business Development. Knowledge of the catering sector is a plus
- Minimum 5 years in FM within an international group
- Project management and good organizational skills
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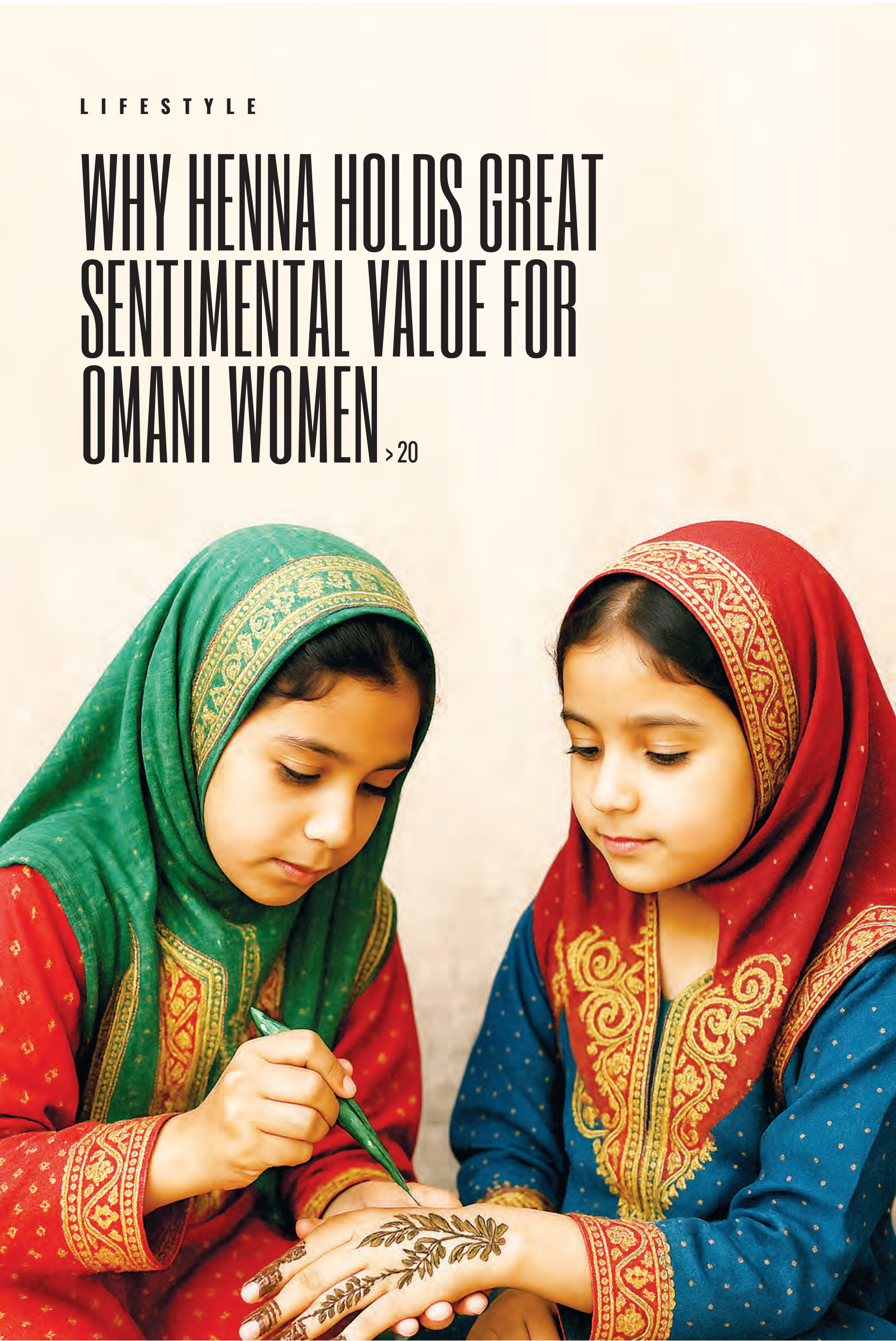
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ART/LIFE

L I F E S T Y L E

WHY HENNA HOLDS GREAT SENTIMENTAL VALUE FOR OMANI WOMEN > 20



TRAVEL

Made in China? The remarkable tale of Venice’s iconic winged lion



A WINGED lion sculpture that symbolises the Italian city of Venice was made in China and went on a remarkable journey that possibly involved explorer Marco Polo’s father and the court of Mongol emperor Kublai Khan, researchers suggested on Thursday.

Every year millions of people pass under the Lion of Venice, an ancient bronze sculpture which looks out on the Venetian Lagoon from the top of a column on the main square Piazza San Marco.

However much about this icon of the Venetian Republic remains shrouded in mystery.

It bears clear signs of having had a life before being installed near Saint Mark’s Basilica and Doge’s Palace.

Over the centuries its ears have been shortened, its wings have been changed — the sculpture even once had horns that were shorn off at some point.

“We don’t know when the sculpture arrived in Venice, where it was reworked, who did it, or when it was erected on the column where it is still visible today”, Massimo Vidale, an archaeologist at the University of Padua and co-author of a new study, said in a statement.

The only historical document that mentions the sculpture dates back to 1293, when it was already damaged and in need of repair.

The violet granite of the sculpture’s column — which could have been looted from the sacking of the ancient city Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul — likely arrived in Venice shortly before 1261, the study said.

Hoping to shed light on the winged lion’s mysterious past, a team of Italian researchers analysed lead isotopes in samples taken during a 1990 restoration.

The sculpture’s copper ore was mined in the Yangtze River basin in China, the analysis revealed.

That is dramatically farther east than previous theories about where the sculpture came from, which include a 12th-century Venetian foundry, or somewhere in Anatolia or Syria during the Hellenistic period. — AFP

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



FASHION

A model displays a creation by fashion brand “Haute Mode Hirata” at Rakuten Fashion Week TOKYO 2026 S/S in Japan. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Actor Skylar Astin attends the world premiere of ‘The Wizard of Oz’ at the Sphere in Las Vegas, Nevada. — Reuters



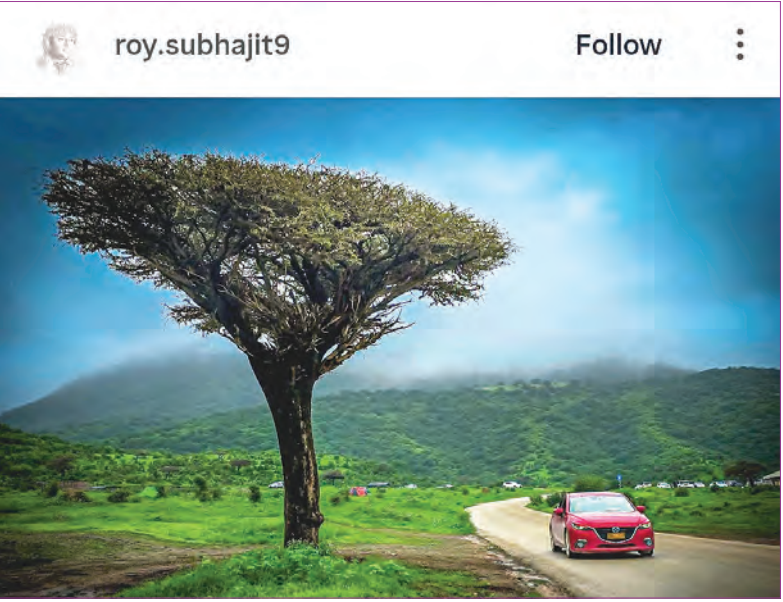
DISCOVERY

Kurdish members of the Dohuk Antiquities Department work on a grave unearthed on the banks of Mosul Dam on an archaeological site in the Khanke sub-district of Dohuk Governorate. — AFP

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Bison herds ‘reawaken’ Yellowstone’s prairies



A NEW STUDY published in Science highlights the vital ecological role of the American bison, the iconic symbol of the West that once numbered in the tens of millions. The research, conducted in Yellowstone National Park, demonstrates how bison reintroduced into their historic ranges are revitalising grassland ecosystems, with benefits cascading through the entire food web.

Historically, bison were keystone species, shaping prairie landscapes through grazing, wallowing and seed dispersal. Their herds helped lock carbon in the soil, enhancing ecosystem health. However, overhunting, driven by the expansion of railroads and aims to supply hides while starving Native Americans, decimated their population.

By the early 20th century, bison teetered on the brink of extinction, with only a few thousand surviving mainly on private lands and reserves. Only Yellowstone’s herd, numbering about 5,000, roams freely, covering nearly 1,000 miles

annually, making it a living laboratory for ecological study.

Between 2015 and 2021, researchers tracked the bison’s movements, grazing and their effects on vegetation, soil nutrients and microbial activity.

Findings reveal that bison grazing accelerates the nitrogen cycle, enriching plants — making forage 150% richer in protein. This boosts nutritional value for native species like elk, deer and pronghorn. Grazing also fosters plant diversity and stimulates microbial growth in the soil, creating a feedback loop that enhances overall ecosystem productivity.

Despite opposition from ranchers concerned about fences, disease and cattle interactions, scientists argue that bison play a crucial role in maintaining healthy grasslands.

Jerod Merkle of the University of Wyoming emphasised that bison’s ecological benefits outweigh concerns, advocating for their removal from livestock paradigms to support biodiversity and habitat integrity. — AFP



Preserving frankincense... Oman’s ‘white gold’



THE ARID Wadi Dawkah is home to one of Oman’s most prized resources: not oil or gas but frankincense trees, their fragrant sap harvested for millennia by residents who call it “white gold”.

Located in Oman’s southern Dhofar Governorate, bordering Yemen, the valley is the world’s largest such reserve, home to around 5,000 frankincense trees that dot the barren earth, their trunks bearing kernels that exude a distinctive woody scent.

“For us, frankincense is more precious than gold. It’s a treasure”, said Abdullah Jaddad, a frankincense harvester resting in the shade of a tree.

The oil extracted from the sap of the frankincense tree is used in perfume and skincare but it is also sold as solid beads of fragrance in local markets.

The high-end Omani perfume-maker Amouage, which manages the reserve, sells its luxury scents internationally for hundreds of dollars a bottle — with one limited edition perfume containing frankincense sold for nearly \$2,000.

Wadi Dawkah is one of the rare places in the world where the Boswellia tree, from which frankincense resin is extracted, grows. Since 2000, it has been a Unesco World Heritage Site as part of the Land of Frankincense listing, along with Khor Rori, Al Baleed and Shisr.

LIKE OIL With its unique earthy scent, frankincense has long been used as incense, but also in traditional medicine and even religious rituals.

Before modern technology, the frankincense trade, which began in the third millennium BC, extended from Dhofar via sea and caravan routes to Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and Ancient Egypt, all the way to Greece, Rome and even China.

“Frankincense had roughly the same value as oil today”, according to Ahmed al Murshidi, who heads the Khor Rori site.

The ancient port of Samahram, which forms part of the Khor Rori site, served as the gateway for frankincense to the world.

As Jaddad collected dried beads of sap from the trees, he said that the type of frankincense found in the valley was the Najdi — one of four main varieties.

The Najdi and Hojari varieties are used for their medicinal properties, according to Faisal Hussein Bin Askar, whose father founded the Bin Askar frankincense shop, in business since the 1950s.

“The cleaner and purer the frankincense, the more suitable it is for drinking as a treatment, while the rest is used as incense”, he said, adding that several factories in Dhofar are specialised in frankincense skincare and oils.

The highest-grade and rarest frankincense has a light green colour.

‘QUICK TO ANGER’ The resin is harvested by hand using traditional methods that involve cutting the bark to release the sap and leaving it for a few days to harden.

Harvesting the tree requires care and skilled craftsmanship.

As one guide put it to a group of tourists at The Museum of the Frankincense Land in Salalah: “the frankincense tree is quick to anger”.

“We strike the tree in specific, small spots, about five times, to preserve” the plant, said Musallam bin Saeed Jaddad, who works in the reserve.

“No one should cut open a frankincense tree... it could kill it”, he said.

In 2022, Amouage partnered with Omani authorities to develop the Dawkah reserve and provide jobs for the local community, only harvesting a fifth of the trees to preserve them.

Each tree has a unique code and is monitored by a team of specialists, with donations open to anyone wanting to help the reserve in exchange for small gifts of frankincense products every year.

A distillery is set to be built in the reserve to extract the frankincense oil, a process for now completed in France, said Mohammed Faraj Istanbuli, the reserve supervisor.

“The government is carrying out vital projects, like building roads for example, which threatens other areas where frankincense trees grow”, he said. “We bring those trees... to the reserve. We have saved about 600 trees so far”. — AFP

FEATURES



past, preparing henna was a meticulous process, often done days before Eid. Women would knead the henna mixture and apply it to their children's hands and feet before bedtime. Unlike today's intricate patterns, early henna use was very simple, with no designs or motifs. Traditionally, henna leaves were used not only to beautify but also to heal ailments, ward off the evil eye and attract good fortune. If applied on the head for an extended period, henna absorbed heat from the scalp, making it useful in treating sunstroke. Both men and women also used henna to address dandruff, bleeding and deep wounds. Today, henna's presence remains strong in Omani life. The henna night before a

She emphasised that a skilled henna artist must be talented in drawing, capable of continually creating new designs that set them apart. Fashionable patterns evolve over time; traditional motifs remain timeless, but designers adapt and improve them continuously. From geometric shapes to intricate plant motifs and delicate ornaments, creating these designs is no easy task — only those with steady hands and artistic flair truly excel.

Alia also advises young women to perform a patch test before applying henna, ensuring their skin is compatible and avoiding allergies or reactions. For those with sensitive skin, she recommends using natural henna free from chemicals, which is gentler and safer to use.



wedding, in particular, continues to be one of the most significant traditions, celebrated with joy and colour.

Henna holds great sentimental value for Omani women as a symbol of happiness and celebration. This importance has never waned and henna remains a cherished part of Gulf traditions, including those in Oman. During wedding seasons, festivals, or summer nights, young women flock to specialised salons to adorn themselves with beautiful designs and the finest henna. The number of salons dedicated to henna tattooing has increased, making it a popular art form. For many women, henna tattooing is more than just decoration — it is an essential aspect of adornment and a symbol of joy.

In Omani society, henna signifies celebration and beauty. It is an indispensable part of a bride's adornment on her wedding day and applying henna on the wedding night, engagement day, or family gatherings remains a long-standing tradition. It is customary for close family members of the bride and groom to also apply henna, reinforcing these shared moments of happiness.

Alia mentioned that plant-inspired designs remain some of the most popular among women today. These include large floral patterns surrounded by smaller flowers, leaves and delicate dots. “The beauty of henna depends on the precision of its design and the skill of the artist. These elements are often considered more important than the type of henna used”, she explains.

WHY HENNA HOLDS GREAT SENTIMENTAL VALUE FOR OMANI WOMEN

BY AFRAH AL BALUSHI

HENNA HAS a unique character, distinguished by its inscriptions and drawing techniques. For generations, henna has been an integral part of Omani women's heritage and identity, used on various special occasions.

Far from being a modern trend, henna's roots stretch deep into history, affirming its enduring quality and longevity. Its presence in Omani culture was not solely for decorative purposes. Historically, henna leaves were picked, dried, ground and mixed with crushed lemon and water when needed.

In an interview with Alia al Wahaibi, a talented henna artist, she shared: “The skill of henna tattooing is both a hobby and a talent — an income for many. I learned it by practising with my sisters. As I practised, my passion for it grew. I used to draw in sketchbooks with a pencil when I was just thirteen years old. Since then, I've been dedicated to perfecting my craft”. In the