

O M A N
عمان
D A I L Y

Observer

VOL. 45, NO. 277
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210


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BOOSTS SUHAR'S
BUNKERING HUB

HM, UAE PRESIDENT DISCUSS RELATIONS

H I S M A J E S T Y P A Y S F R A T E R N A L V I S I T T O U A E

HM PAYS
A PRIVATE
FRATERNAL VISIT
TO UAE

LEADERS
DISCUSS COURSE
OF HISTORIC
RELATIONS

DISCUSS SHARED
TIES BETWEEN
TWO COUNTRIES



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the UAE, at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

EXCHANGE VIEWS
ON MATTERS
OF MUTUAL
INTEREST

REGIONAL
AND WORLD
DEVELOPMENTS
DISCUSSED

TALKS FOCUS
ON ACHIEVING
SECURITY AND
STABILITY

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK on Monday paid a private fraternal visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), during which he held a meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the UAE, at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the course of historic bilateral relations and the shared ties between the two fraternal countries, as well as ways to enhance and develop them across various fields to serve mutual interests and fulfil the aspirations of the peoples of both countries.

The two leaders also exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest and discussed regional and international developments, along with ways to achieve security and

stability. Alongside His Majesty the Sultan, the meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, Sayyid

Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of

Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Sayyid Dr Sultan bin Yarub al Busaidi, Adviser at the Private Office, and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Emirati side by Shaikh Suroor bin Mohammed al Nahyan, Shaikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs, Shaikh Zayed bin Mohammed bin Zayed al Nayan, Shaikh Mohammed bin Maktoum al Maktoum, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the Sultanate of Oman, and several officials. The UAE President led the welcoming and farewell party for His Majesty the Sultan at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi, accompanied by a number of senior officials. — ONA (SEE ALSO P2)

IN BRIEF

HM'S CONDOLENCES
TO CHINA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on the passing of Zhu Rongji, former Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and heartfelt sentiments to President Xi Jinping and the Chinese people.

TALKS ON GAZA PLAN

Donald Trump's envoy and son-in-law Jared Kushner left Jerusalem on Monday without a breakthrough after two days of talks with Israeli and Hamas leaders over a stalled US plan to end the war in Gaza, with both sides standing firm on key demands. Kushner met Hamas' political leader in Egypt in an attempt to revive the plan.

Efforts on to contain oil spill from ‘Caroline Bezengi’



The ministry has intensified its efforts to mitigate the potential environmental impacts resulting from the vessel's grounding.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology continues its salvage and oil spill containment operations involving the tanker “Caroline Bezengi”, which is stranded on a rocky outcrop near Al Qibliyah Island in the Al Hallaniyat Islands archipelago in Dhofar Governorate.

These efforts are being carried out amid extremely challenging weather conditions, with wind speeds at times reaching around 40 knots and sea waves rising to approximately four metres, making it extremely difficult and complex to approach the vessel by sea or air.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Rawahi, Director-General of Maritime Affairs at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that the ministry has, from the outset, intensified its efforts to mitigate the potential

environmental impacts resulting from the vessel's grounding. In coordination with the British company Ambrey, the ministry appointed specialised companies in oil spill response and pollution control, including the international company Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) and the national company OMAN PESCO, to participate in pollution response operations and the clean-up of affected areas.

COORDINATION

He added that the ministry coordinated with Ambrey to import and prepare pollution-control materials and equipment, including rubber booms, response equipment and materials, and chemical dispersants, in addition to providing a specialised vessel to transport and operate this equipment and these materials at the incident site. **TURN TO P3**

HIS MAJESTY PAYS FRATERNAL VISIT TO UAE



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday paid a private fraternal visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), during which he held a meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the UAE, at Al Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed the course of historic bilateral relations and the shared ties between the two fraternal countries, as well as ways to enhance and develop them across various fields to serve mutual interests and fulfil the aspirations of the peoples of both countries. — **ONA**



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FROMPAGE 1

EFFORTS ON TO
CONTAIN OIL SPILL
FROM ‘CAROLINE
BEZENGI’

The ministry continues to coordinate with Ambrey and the specialised companies appointed by it, in cooperation with the Environment Authority and the relevant national authorities, to ensure the readiness of the necessary resources and equipment and their deployment whenever weather and sea conditions permit, in accordance with the approved environmental and technical assessments and requirements.

He said that the difficult weather conditions during the Khareef season, accompanied by strong winds and high sea waves, have created exceptional technical and operational challenges that have made it extremely difficult to approach the vessel safely and have limited the implementation of the required marine operations. In addition, the waters surrounding the vessel’s grounding site are shallow and rocky, with limited precise marine and hydrographic data available to determine water depths and safe approach routes.

CHALLENGES

He stressed that this has posed an additional challenge for support vessels, whose operation near the grounded vessel requires a high degree of precision to ensure safety. Accordingly, bringing salvage vessels and marine equipment close to the incident site under the current conditions entails operational and navigational risks.

He added that the challenges are not limited to the conditions surrounding the vessel, but also extend to the technical condition of the vessel itself, as it is grounded on a rocky area and listing at approximately 17 degrees, resulting in a large part of one side being submerged and making movement and work on board more difficult.

He noted that the presence of oil and seawater on the vessel’s deck, combined with strong waves and winds, has made some work areas slippery and unsafe, while there is no reliable operational power source on board to operate the equipment required for salvage operations. Under these conditions, cargo transfer operations or heavy work cannot begin before minimum safety requirements are met and work areas on board the vessel are secured. He stated that the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in coordination with the relevant national authorities, engaged the international company Ambrey, given its extensive experience and expertise in handling marine salvage operations involving incidents of this nature. A large number of experts described the task of dealing with the difficult and complex situation of the oil tanker stranded at Al Qibliyah Island as one of the most difficult and complex cases.

Technical teams from the ministry and the relevant national authorities, together with international experts, are developing realistic, phased plans suited to the exceptional condition of the vessel and the surrounding marine conditions.

TOP PRIORITY

The Director-General of Maritime Affairs at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology added that the current priority is to secure a suitable and safe working environment for the technical teams by cleaning and preparing work areas, conducting safety inspections and gas and oxygen measurements, identifying suitable locations for installing equipment, and preparing and transporting generators, technical equipment and the necessary salvage equipment to enable the teams to carry out subsequent operations.

He pointed out that, as some of this equipment cannot be transported by sea under the current conditions, aerial support is being used to transport experts and equipment to the vessel’s deck, allowing technical and preparatory work to continue until sea conditions improve and vessels can approach safely.

He noted that, in parallel with securing the working environment, the technical teams are assessing and implementing possible solutions to limit the leakage and maintain the stability of the vessel and its cargo. — ONA

MEDIA, PUBLIC
AWARENESS
SECTOR
ADDRESSES
GROUNDED
VESSEL
INCIDENT

MUSCAT: The Media and Public Awareness Sector of the National Committee for Emergency Management held on Monday a meeting chaired by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Head of the Sector, to follow up on the media and public awareness aspects pertaining to the grounding incident of the vessel Caroline Bezengi off the coast of Al Hallaniyat Islands.

The meeting, held at the Ministry of Information, reviewed the latest developments of the incident, the



The meeting examined the role of media outlets in conveying accurate and reliable information to the public. — ONA

frameworks and mechanisms for media engagement and the ongoing efforts to monitor its evolution. It

also examined the role of media outlets in conveying accurate and reliable information to the public, as well as addressing rumours and misinformation.

Furthermore, the meeting discussed a number of topics related to media, awareness and guidance work, alongside ways to enhance coordination among relevant authorities. This aims to contribute to raising community awareness and ensuring that information and updates are handled strictly through official sources and channels in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Advocating love for animals
among communities

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

THE NEWLY formed Oman Animal Welfare Association (OAWA) will be organising community awareness programmes with the aim of spreading the importance of helping animals lead a better life when they are abandoned, deserted or injured, bringing hope to Oman’s most vulnerable creatures.

The Oman Animal Welfare Association (OAWA) is the first officially registered animal welfare organisation in the Sultanate of Oman and was formally registered under Ministerial Decision No 171/2025, issued on 22 May 2025. It is a non-profit civil society organisation aiming to improve animal welfare practices, enhance awareness, and protect animal rights in Oman.

The leadership emphasises that formal registration is only the beginning of a larger national movement. Sayyidah Salsabeel bint Badr al Busaidi, OAWA’s Chairperson stated, “The official recognition of OAWA marks a significant milestone in our journey, turning acts of kindness into a united national effort.

Through collaboration and empathy, we are cultivating a deeper compassionate Oman, where both people and animals can coexist harmoniously,” she said.

To celebrate this milestone and share its mission directly with the



Awareness programmes seek to help animals lead a better life.

Beyond urban street cats and dogs, OAWA places the vital emphasis on preserving Oman’s indigenous animal heritage, advocating for the welfare of native breeds and wildlife.

community, the public is invited to the Sabco Centre on August 25 where a plethora of fun-filled community events will take place offering a perfect venue to discover what the organisation stands for, support its work, and to enjoy a memorable day together.

The event will offer a unique opportunity to meet the team, learn about ongoing welfare initiatives, and discover how to make a meaningful difference through volunteering, fostering, or adopting. Designed for visitors of all ages, the market will feature lively and engaging kids activities, including interactive arts and crafts, and fun-filled games allowing adults the time to browse the fundraising market, purchase OAWA items, and get introduced to the organisation’s core responsibilities.

The Association is further leveraging strategic partnerships, education, and technology to establish a sustainable animal welfare culture, as highlighted

by its Marketing Manager, Asma al Shaikh. Key initiatives include implementing TNVR programmes, developing a structured hotline, and piloting automated, data-driven feeding stations to improve animal health and urban sanitation.

“By humanely managing stray populations and deploying clean technology like our stations, we protect native wildlife, eliminate urban waste, and elevate the Sultanate’s international standing on the global Environmental Performance Index,” Asma said.

Beyond urban street cats and dogs, OAWA places the vital emphasis on preserving Oman’s indigenous animal heritage, advocating for the welfare of native breeds and wildlife. The leadership emphasises that animal welfare is not just the job of a single organisation, but a shared community responsibility.

Simple actions, such as leaving out clean water bowls or reporting instances of animal cruelty, can save lives.

Sajeewa Jayasuriya, a marketing specialist who has volunteered in various capacities to care for animals in need for over a decade, states, “Together, we can rescue, heal, re-home, and give every stray animal the loving homes they deserve.”

“By launching the Oman Animal Welfare Association, the country is taking a significant step toward creating a kinder future for non-human animals,” an animal-lover wrote on social media.

Workshop explores opportunities under CEPA

SALALAH: An awareness workshop on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India, held in the Wilayat of Salalah, examined the opportunities available to the Omani private sector under the agreement, along with the requirements for market access to India, mechanisms for utilising tariff reductions and exemptions, and rules of origin.

The workshop, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), addressed the agreement’s components and advantages, related customs procedures, export financing and insurance opportunities, and the challenges Omani enterprises may face when entering the Indian market, alongside strategies to overcome them.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce



The workshop addressed the agreement’s components, advantages, and related customs procedures. — ONA

and Industry (OCCI), affirmed that the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement represents a new economic dimension in the trajectory of Omani-Indian relations, opening broader horizons for cooperation, growth, and investment.

This, he noted, will strengthen trade ties between the two nations and elevate them to deeper and more sustainable levels.

Shri Prashant Pise, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman, emphasised in a statement the importance of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in advancing Omani-Indian relations. He noted that the agreement reflects the shared commitment to elevate economic, trade, and investment cooperation to broader levels, thereby reinforcing mutual interests and opening new avenues for collaboration between the two countries.

The workshop featured a presentation titled “An Overview of Export Potential for Omani Products Under the Agreement,” which addressed key pathways for the Omani private sector to benefit from the agreement. — ONA



KIOSKS PUT BUSINESS OWNERSHIP UNDER SCRUTINY

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 16

AT Nashib, where temporary kiosks serve madhbi, the traditional meat grilled on hot stones, during Khareef, the name on a permit answers only one question. The more important question is who buys the stock, directs the workers, bears the losses and ultimately receives the profits.

An Omani job-seeker who has held a Riyada card since 2022 is operating a madhbi kiosk for the first time during the 2026 season. He participated last year through a pastry outlet after quotas for other activities had been filled.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he estimated that 15 madhbi kiosks were operating at Nashib this year. In his assessment, only three were directly managed by their Omani permit holders. The remainder, he said, appeared to be managed by expatriate workers under arrangements he believed went beyond normal employment.

The figures are based on his on-site assessment and are not an official count.

The distinction is important. The

Two Omani entrepreneurs say a gap between permit ownership and day-to-day control can divert Khareef opportunities away from the entrepreneurs they are meant to support



Inspectors conducted 17,778 visits across Dhofar during the first half of the year

presence of an expatriate employee is not, by itself, evidence of hidden trade. A small business may lawfully employ expatriate workers. The concern arises when a permit holder relinquishes effective control over management, decision-making, financial risk and returns, or receives a fixed payment while another person uses the licence to

conduct the business.

The investor said inspections should look beyond who is present during a single visit. Purchase invoices, meat-supply records, wage transfers, sales records and banking transactions could help establish whether the licence holder is genuinely operating the outlet or merely lending their name to it.

The concern is not new. In November 2025, Dhofar Municipality said it had removed kiosks at several locations because they were unlicensed, had expired permits or failed to comply with municipal requirements. It said the removed kiosks were being managed by expatriate workers in violation of permit conditions and that permits would be reissued to citizens who supervised their businesses themselves.

A second Omani investor, whose experience began a decade ago and was not specific to current Khareef kiosks, described the financial incentive behind such arrangements.

After leaving school and finding neither a place to continue his studies nor suitable employment, he entered business in 2016. He said he obtained activity licences for businesses he did not personally operate and rented some licences and signboards for fixed monthly payments.

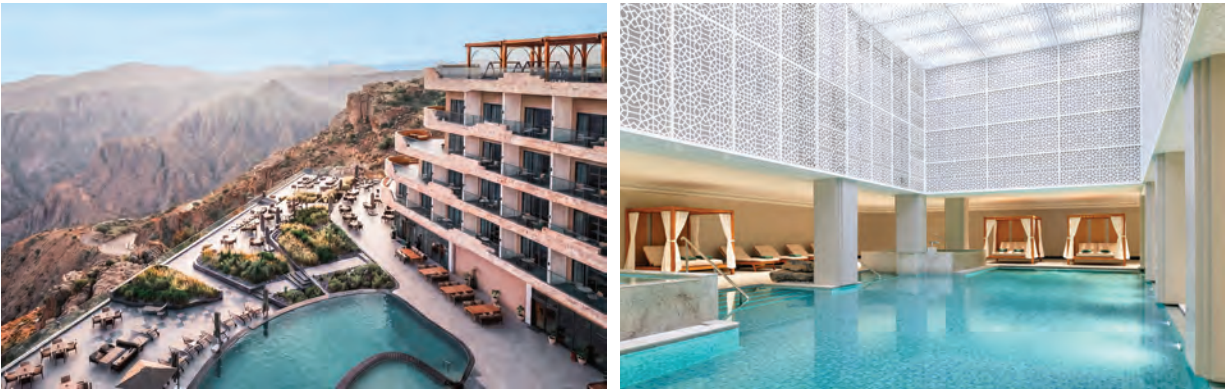
“At one point, 10 activity licences could bring in RO 600 to RO 700 a month without any real operating effort,” he said. “The money was attractive to a young man with no steady income. In about two years, I was able to start a family and buy a car, but I was not building a real business.”

His father, a trader who managed his own business, persuaded him to leave the arrangement and change course. The investor described the Covid-19 pandemic as a turning point, followed by closer scrutiny of business accounts, lease contracts, wage transfers and other compliance requirements.

His account does not establish how widespread such practices are among current Khareef outlets. It does, however, illustrate how a licence can become a source of passive income rather than a pathway into genuine entrepreneurship.

Oman has been strengthening enforcement against hidden trade. Ministerial Decision 412/2023 provides the legal framework for addressing practices in which a person enables another individual to undertake an activity they are not legally permitted to conduct by using someone else’s commercial registration, licence or approval.

Discover a Cooler Side of Oman at Jabal Akhdar



HOTEL Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa invites travellers to discover why Oman’s famed “Green Mountain” Jabal Akhdar stands out as one of the region’s most famous summer retreats. Perched high in the majestic Al Hajar Mountain range, this extraordinary destination offers 15-degree cooler climates with breathtaking canyon vistas. With immersive cultural experiences not found elsewhere in the GCC, it creates the perfect setting to reconnect with nature, Arabian heritage, and relaxation.

Jabal Akhdar offers something for everybody including a vibrant Omani street food scene, spectacular sunrises and sunsets, Museums, traditional Souqs (Nizwa) and numerous hiking trails that wind through ancient villages, terraced farms, and hidden wadis, revealing stories of resilience shaped over generations. The landscape itself is a striking contrast of rugged cliffs softened by pockets of lush greenery and flourishing orchards, offering visitors a deeper connection to Oman’s natural beauty. The region is now welcoming

the much-anticipated Rummana (pomegranate) season, with the mountain already painted in vivid shades of red as orchards burst into harvest.

At Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa, guests can choose from a variety of accommodations, including canyon view rooms, terrace suites, and pool chalets, with complimentary access to Jala Spa & Wellness one of the largest spas in Oman where every experience is designed to restore balance and renewal. Offering traditional hammam rituals, revitalising facials, soothing Vichy showers, hydrotherapy vitality pools, and holistic treatments guests can melt away tension and re-energise both mind and body against a breathtaking mountain backdrop.

Combined with Vue Rooftop & Lounge - the Middle East’s highest rooftop lounge offering an elevated dining experience set against breathtaking canyon views. Dining at the resort is equally memorable, with culinary experiences inspired by both local and international flavours. Fresh, locally

sourced ingredients, aromatic spices, and chilled dining settings come together to create unforgettable moments, all framed by sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding mountains.

Whether it’s a romantic getaway, a family retreat, or an adventure-led experience, Jabal Akhdar offers something for every traveller. Travellers can enjoy peaceful seclusion, families can reconnect through nature, and adventure seekers can explore the region’s rugged trails and outdoor experiences.

Located approximately 174 km from Muscat International Airport, Jabal Akhdar is around a two-hour drive from Muscat. Access to the mountain requires a 4WD vehicle from the police checkpoint, though transfers can be arranged to ensure a seamless journey.

This summer, retreat from the heat and discover a destination where nature, culture, and well-being come together. Jabal Akhdar awaits.

For reservations: [reservations.indigojabalakhdar@ihg.com](#)



The forthcoming edition of the festival will feature 32 films from 16 countries. — ONA

DHOFAR INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FROM SEPT 6

SALALAH: The Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, will host the second edition of Dhofar International Film Festival from September 6 to 9.

Organised by Oman Film Society (OFS), the festival reflects an ongoing strategic partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Dhofar Municipality.

The forthcoming edition of the festival will

feature 32 films from 16 countries: Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Iran, South Korea, England, Spain, Russia and Portugal.

Dhofar International Film Festival seeks to enhance the presence of the Sultanate of Oman in the Arab and international arena, support the film industry and promote national talents.

The second edition of the festival will see the felicitation of artistic and media persons from Oman and the Arab world, including Haya Abdul Salam from the State of Kuwait and Bushra Ahmed Razza from Egypt, in addition to Omani artistic and media persons Hilal bin Abdullah al Araimi, Abdullah al Sabbah, Salah bin Suleiman Beit Obaid and Salim al Amri. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The project will be built on an area exceeding 25,000 square metres. — ONA

CONTRACT SIGNED TO ESTABLISH CHEMICAL MIXING PROJECT

NIZWA: Nizwa Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates ‘Madayn’, signed on Monday a long-term investment usufruct contract to establish a project specialised in chemical mixing and oilfield equipment maintenance, with an investment exceeding RO 4 million.

The project will be built on an area exceeding 25,000 square metres and is expected to contribute to enhancing industrial activities associated with the oil and gas sectors, localising specialised services and projects in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, alongside supporting in-country value and economic and industrial activity in the governorate.

The project comes within the framework of Madayn’s efforts to attract qualitative investments to industrial cities in the Sultanate of Oman and provide an integrated industrial environment supporting economic diversification and the growth of the industrial sector.

The contract was signed by Abdullah bin Said al Balushi, Director-General of Nizwa Industrial City, and Mohammed bin Hamad al Junaibi on behalf of Rabou Haima Trading and Contracting Company (the executing company for the project). — ONA

LEGAL FORUM ON ARCHIVES MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS



The event seeks to raise public awareness about legal frameworks governing records and archives management. — ONA

SALALAH: The Governorate of Dhofar is hosting a forum on legislation governing document and archive management systems from August 17 to 19. The forum is being organised by the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA).

The forum’s opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, in the presence of Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority, in addition to officials and specialists in the field of records and archives management and representatives of government units.

The event seeks to raise public awareness about legal frameworks governing records and archives management, consolidate the efficiency of the records management system, support institutional governance and preserve records as a vital component of the national memory.

The forum also serves as a platform for exchanging expertise and showcasing national experiences in implementing records and archives management systems. It highlights the best institutional practices that have contributed to the development of this sector, enhanced knowledge sharing and promoted integration among government entities.

The programme of the forum includes working papers by experts and specialists, a review of government experiences and discussions on key challenges and practical solutions, in addition to ways of contributing to the development of a comprehensive document management system based on best practices and institutional performance efficiency.— ONA

UTAS IBRI BRANCH BAGS INTERNATIONAL AWARDS IN TUNISIA

TUNIS: The branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in the Wilayat of Ibri, Governorate of Al Dhahirah, made a global accomplishment in the field of ‘University Theatre’, during its participation in the activities of the 20th edition of the International University Theatre Festival, held in the city of Monastir in the Republic of Tunisia from August 8 to 17, 2026. The festival brought together about 350 students and innovators from 15 Arab and foreign countries. It was attended by Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Sinani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the



Republic of Tunisia. The UTAS student theatre group bagged a number of awards, including first place in the Best Scenography Award contest and second place in the Best Actor Award

contest (through the contributions of student Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Ghafri), in addition to an ‘Encouragement Award’ for the Best Play Script (awarded to writer Maram bint Ali al Muqbali). The UTAS also received an award from the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

The Omani ambassador commended the participation of Omani students, noting that such a festival offered an opportunity for their students to exchange experiences and ideas with their counterparts from different countries. — ONA

Study explores shopping via mobile devices

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

A striking image, a carefully crafted offer or a quick review from another user can turn a brief moment of browsing on a mobile phone into an immediate purchase. Mobile shopping is therefore no longer simply a matter of convenience; it has evolved into an integrated experience shaped by subtle details, the value consumers perceive and the sense of urgency created by digital platforms.



Mobile shopping is no longer a matter of convenience; it has evolved into an integrated experience.

A peer-reviewed study has found that consumer behaviour in mobile shopping is directly influenced by a combination of marketing, visual and psychological factors, which collectively shape whether consumers proceed with a purchase or pause before making a decision.

The study was conducted by a research team that included Dr Ali Tarhini from the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University. The research highlights the university’s contribution to scholarship examining digital transformation and changing patterns of consumer behaviour.

The study sought to examine

The study sought to examine how marketing stimuli influence perceived value and impulse buying on mobile shopping platforms, as well as how these factors translate into consumers’ actual purchasing responses.

how marketing stimuli influence perceived value and impulse buying on mobile shopping platforms, as well as how these factors translate into consumers’ actual purchasing responses. The researchers analysed data from 891 mobile shopping users, employing structural equation modelling based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model and Consumption Values Theory.

The findings showed that rewards, recognition, reviews and ratings had the strongest influence on consumers’ perceived value.

Meanwhile, personalised offers and visually engaging experiences emerged as the most influential factors in stimulating impulse purchases.

The study also found that the constant accessibility of mobile shopping can, in some circumstances, reduce impulsive behaviour. The ease of comparing products and accessing information through mobile devices may give consumers more opportunities to evaluate their options before making a purchase.

In addition, the researchers identified a positive relationship between perceived value and impulse buying, while differences were observed between generations in their responses to reviews and ratings. These findings point to variations in how different age groups interact with the digital shopping environment.

The study concludes that the success of mobile shopping platforms depends not only on the attractiveness of their offers, but also on their ability to create experiences that deliver genuine value to consumers while supporting more informed and balanced purchasing decisions.

Students get glance of warship at PSQ

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Over 200 students from Indian schools in Muscat got their first glance of a warship as they visited the ingeniously built INS Imphal which is berthed at Port Sultan Qaboos as part of the events celebrating India’s 80th Independence Day.

Students were selected on a first-come, first-served basis, with 200 students representing different schools under the Board of Directors of the Indian Schools system in Oman.

They were given a brief introduction to life at sea, highlighting the longstanding maritime ties shared by Oman and India since time immemorial.

The diplomatic mission stated that alongside gaining a direct perspective on life at sea, the students learnt about the nation’s naval power and the force’s role in maintaining safety across the region.

“As part of ongoing celebrations of the 80th anniversary of India’s Independence Day in Oman, more than 200 students from Indian schools in Muscat visited INS Imphal, the indigenously built Indian naval warship, at



Sultan Qaboos Port in Muscat,” the Embassy posted on social media platform X on Sunday.

“These students also had the opportunity to understand India’s naval capabilities and Oman-India naval exercises and the Indian Navy’s steadfast commitment to a secure, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean Region, besides the first-hand glimpse of life at sea,” the

embassy added.

Earlier on Sunday, the Indian Navy stated that domestic naval vessels were docked at several foreign ports, including Muscat, Ponta Delgada, and Djibouti, to mark Independence Day.

“As India marks 80 Years of Freedom, the Tricolour flew proudly onboard INS Imphal during her port call at Muscat, reaffirming the enduring bonds

of India-Oman friendship and maritime cooperation,” the Indian Embassy in Muscat stated.

India’s Ambassador to Oman, Prashant Pise, boarded the warship to extend greetings to the personnel.

Members of the warship’s crew also joined the official flag-hoisting ceremony conducted at the embassy premises.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Red Cross workers walk in formation as they disinfect Rwampara General Hospital in Ituri province, DR Congo. — Reuters

EBOLA OUTBREAK
NOW DR CONGO’S
DEADLIEST EVER

KINSHASA: A fast-spreading Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo is now the country’s deadliest ever after killing more than 2,300 people in three months, government figures showed on Monday. The United Nations says the Ebola outbreak “is the fastest growing on record” and is killing a victim every 30 minutes in the DRC. No specific vaccine or treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain behind the current surge of Ebola, which spreads through contact with bodily fluids and causes a haemorrhagic fever.

Declared on May 15, the DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak is thought to have already been spreading for several weeks by that point. It has hit regions in the north and east where the presence of the state is weak, health infrastructure is largely lacking and myriad armed groups have roamed for decades.

In its latest toll on Monday, the Congolese authorities said that 2,325 people had died in the current outbreak, from 4,945 confirmed cases. The WHO last week said it hoped to reverse the spread of the disease in the DRC within three months. Access to affected communities is also hampered by armed groups, aid groups say. — AFP

KUSHNER DISCUSSES
GAZA PLAN WITH
ISRAEL’S NETANYAHU



A salvage worker breaks the rubble of a building that was destroyed during Israeli strikes in Gaza. — AFP

TEL AVIV: Donald Trump’s envoy and son-in-law Jared Kushner met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on Monday, a day after holding a rare meeting with Hamas’ leader in Cairo in a bid to push forward the US president’s Gaza plan. Trump had said the agreement would be carried out in phases, with Israeli forces withdrawing from Gaza as disarmament proceeded and an ‘International Stabilization Force’ worked with a new Palestinian police force to secure the territory.

Kushner was joined in the meeting with Netanyahu by Nickolay Mladenov, Trump’s Board of Peace envoy for Gaza, the two sources said. However, there has so far been little progress, with Israel continuing to carry out strikes on Gaza despite agreeing to a ceasefire as part of Trump’s plan.

A source said that Hamas leader Khalil Al-Hayya had been present at some of the meetings in Cairo on Sunday that mediators held with Kushner and Mladenov. Hamas agreed to the plan but the deal’s implementation would depend on Israel first meeting its own commitments, including withdrawal and halting attacks. — Reuters

- 1
Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said that a 60-day deadline for negotiations was “irrelevant” because the US had violated the deal early on.
- 2
Ansar Allah said on Monday they had targeted a Saudi military vessel and four accompanying boats in the Red Sea, as part of their maritime blockade.
- 3
Two Iranian drones targeted the Iraqi Kurdistan prime minister’s office and the home of the autonomous region’s intelligence chief overnight, authorities said.
- 4
Iran’s foreign ministry said on Monday that it would consider three missing pilots to be prisoners in Qatar, despite Doha’s denials, until it clarified their fate.

Iran vows offensive if
diplomacy with US fails



A woman walks by a mural depicting Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on a street in Tehran, Iran. — Reuters

IRAN has decided to shift its policy from defensive to “fully offensive” due to the deadlock in efforts to agree on a permanent end to its war with the United States, a senior Iranian official said on Monday. Progress towards peace talks and a resumption of oil tanker traffic through the strategic Strait of Hormuz has ground to a halt, with no sign that the warring parties are moving towards ending the conflict that the US and Israel launched on February 28.

“Iranian entities must be prepared to escalate tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and wider region, as Iran will be ready to make decisions and take action on difficult decisions,” the Iranian official said, adding that Tehran would conduct a “timely and precise” military attack to break the US naval blockade if diplomacy failed. Monday marked the day by which Iran and the United States were expected to reach a final

Progress towards peace talks and a resumption of oil tanker traffic through the strategic Strait of Hormuz has ground to a halt. Monday marked the day by which Iran and the United States were expected to reach a final deal under a memorandum of understanding agreed in June

deal under a memorandum of understanding agreed in June and aimed at ending the war.

Signed on June 17, the MoU set out a 60-day timeframe, extendable by mutual consent, by which Washington and Tehran should reach an agreement that would cover broader issues such as the fate of Iran’s nuclear programme. The MoU, which declared the immediate and permanent cessation of military operations on all fronts, quickly unravelled, however, due to a dispute over control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran said point 5 of the MoU gives it the right to manage the waterway, while Washington rejected that interpretation. Hostilities resumed as Tehran began firing on vessels it said were trying to sail through the waterway on an unapproved route. US President Donald Trump said on July 7 that the pact was “over”. Tehran has repeatedly accused Washington of consistently violating

its commitments. “Within the short period of a few weeks set by Iran, all the agreement’s provisions must be implemented by the US. This is a precondition for further negotiations with the U.S.,” the Iranian official said, adding that mediators would share Tehran’s deadline with Washington and regional states.

Both Iran and the United States have stepped up rhetoric over the past week. Trump warned Americans in a speech at a rally on Friday to prepare for continued high fuel prices as a result of the war, while also saying that “after we finish defeating Iran ... pretty soon I’ll be declaring the Hormuz Strait a territory of the United States”. Earlier on Monday, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform: “The number one Goal is, and always will be, that Iran cannot have, in any way, shape, or form, a Nuclear Weapon”, repeating one of his stated rationales for the war. — Reuters

FRAUD RING DISMANTLE

Pakistan detains 258 in scam centre raid



Pakistan authorities said that they detained 258 foreigners, following a raid on an alleged “scam call centre” in the capital, Islamabad. “They were running a scam call centre in Gulberg Green, a housing society on the outskirts of Islamabad,” an official from the Federal Investigation Agency, a Pakistani intelligence service, said. “They came to Pakistan on tourist visas and were not allowed to do what they were doing.” The official said the respective embassies were informed. — AFP

TRAGIC SEA TRAVEL

Charity boat rescues 50 migrants off Libya



The charity rescue ship, EMERGENCY, rescued 50 migrants from an wooden boat in international waters off Libya on Monday, while seven others were found dead, the charity said. Two people are in critical condition and suffering from suffocation and needed urgent medical evacuation. The survivors said they had left the Libyan coastal town of Zuwara on August 16. The group of migrants included 45 males, five females and 29 of them were unaccompanied minors. — Reuters

CROWD ACCIDENT

Hotel blaze, stampede kill 15 in India



At least 15 people were killed on Monday in two separate incidents in eastern India. A fire at a hotel in Tarapith in West Bengal state killed eight people, while seven others were killed in a stampede at a Shiva temple in neighbouring Bihar. “Words cannot adequately express the grief I feel for the families who have lost their loved ones,” West Bengal Chief Minister Suvenud Adhikari said in a statement. The cause of the fire was not immediately known. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Cars queue to refuel amid shortages following recent series of Ukrainian air attacks on oil refineries, Moscow. — Reuters

UKRAINIAN MISSILE STRIKES KILL 6 IN RUSSIA’S BELGOROD

MOSCOW: Ukrainian missile strikes killed six people and wounded four others, including a child, in Russia’s Belgorod region, the acting governor said. With frontline fighting at a near standstill and talks frozen, the warring countries have significantly stepped up missile attacks, pushing the civilian death toll to its highest levels since the war’s first months in 2022.

“Ukrainian terrorists attacked the village of Koloskovo, Valuysky district, with missiles,” Belgorod acting governor Alexander Shuvaev said on the state-backed MAX platform. Koloskovo is about 15 kilometres (10 miles) from the Ukraine border. The attack, which Shuvaev said burned a “structure” and damaged a vehicle, came a day after Russia and Ukraine carried out missile and drone strikes deep inside each other’s territory that killed 19 people on both sides.

Ukraine has increasingly targeted warehouses belonging to Russia’s biggest online retailer Wildberries, saying the company supplies components for Russian drones. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says those strikes, along with attacks on oil refineries, are aimed at undermining Russia’s war economy. In July alone, 437 civilians were killed in Ukraine, the highest monthly toll since May 2022, according to a United Nations tally. — AFP

LULA HOLDS TIGHT ELECTION LEAD



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva holds a tight lead over Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, his main right-wing challenger, in a potential runoff ahead of October’s election, a BTG Pactual/Nexus poll showed on Monday. In a simulated second-round runoff, the leftist Lula would receive 47 per cent of voter support compared with 44 per cent for Bolsonaro, unchanged from last week’s poll. The poll has a margin of error of two percentage points. In a first-round scenario, Lula would lead with 41 per cent of the votes, followed by Bolsonaro at 36 per cent, each up one percentage point from a week earlier. — Reuters

GERMANY’S COALITION SPLIT OVER PUTTING CLIMATE IN CONSTITUTION

BERLIN: As much of Europe swelters under a heatwave, a group of German ministers wants to enshrine climate protection in the constitution, a plan that sparked pushback from within the government on Monday. The debate is heating up at a time climate scientists say global warming is intensifying drought and wildfires, dropping river levels and threatening harvests in Europe’s biggest economy.

Ministers from the centre-left

Social Democrats (SPD), junior coalition partners to Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s conservatives, are pushing the amendment as a way to better work with local and regional authorities on adapting to climate change. The SPD’s four-page proposal would enshrine a “joint mission for climate adaptation and nature conservation” in the German constitution.

The proposal also outlines a national “heat action plan”, changes to urban planning laws

and construction codes, and new labour laws to address working in sweltering temperatures.

Klaus Mack, deputy chairman of the CDU’s parliamentary group, did not reject the idea out of hand but expressed scepticism. He raised concerns about possible fiscal implications as well as over how responsibilities would be divided between ministries. “Only a concrete proposal will show whether amending the Basic Law makes sense,” Mack said. — AFP

Hours before start, Trump holds drills with S Korea

DONALD Trump said he ordered the Pentagon to scale back “inappropriate and hostile” military drills with South Korea, hours before the exercises began on Monday. The US president cited his “good relationship” with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his latest rebuke to long-standing alliances with Western partners. South Korean officials said the exercises had begun as planned and that they hoped the personal chemistry between Trump and Kim would bring them back to talks. North Korea has not responded publicly, though it has previously voiced anger at the regular joint manoeuvres, which take place in the South.

The drills began as American allies in East Asia fret over North Korean displays of weapons capabilities and its growing alignment with Russia as well as traditional backer China. “Based on my very good relationship with Kim Jong Un, of North Korea, I am not happy with the fact that the United States has, long ago, agreed to participate in Joint Military Exercises with South Korea,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. “These exercises are not only costly, with much of these costs paid for by the United States of America (as usual!), but send a signal that is totally inappropriate and hostile, to a Country that, as long as Donald J Trump has been President, has been unthreatening and respectful,” he added. He took direct aim at South Korea, writing: “I recently asked the President of South Korea if they would like to join us in the Denuclearisation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and they said, ‘No thanks!’”

As it was too late to cancel the drills, Trump said he had ordered Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth to “substantially reduce” them. The 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises are designed to prepare for a possible war with North Korea. Colonel Ryan Donald, spokesman for the US and South Korean Combined Forces Command, has said they will simulate combat against North Korean troops steeled by their deployment on Russia’s side in its invasion of Ukraine.

The manoeuvres kicked off as “previously notified and scheduled”, South Korea’s



US Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters are seen at Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek. — AFP

defence ministry said. Seoul’s presidential office told AFP it remained in “close coordination” with Washington over the exercises. The office “hopes that the friendly relationship between the leaders of the United States and North Korea will lead to meaningful dialogue”.

Pyeongyang decries the drills as dress rehearsals for an invasion. It recently test-fired a ballistic missile over the Sea of Japan, and warned on Friday it could respond to the exercises with a “new level of deterrent”.

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

Asked if China supported new dialogue between the United States and North Korea, Beijing’s foreign ministry said on Monday it had “noted the relevant reports”. “Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and promoting the

political settlement of the peninsular issue are in the common interests of all parties,” spokesman Lin Jian said.

The US-South Korean drills comprise 18,000 South Korean troops and counterparts from US forces, and will focus strongly on drone warfare, GPS disruption and the role of cyberattacks, Colonel Donald had said. Downsizing the exercise will “damage alliance coordination, slow the process of South Korea taking on greater responsibility for its own defence, and weaken deterrence against possible conflicts in Asia”, Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, said.

Lim Eul-chul, a North Korea expert at Kyungnam University, said that Pyongyang was unlikely to be moved by Trump’s announcement. “The North will only view it as meaningful if the joint exercises are cancelled in their entirety rather than scaled back,” he said. Experts say North Korea has expanded its nuclear and missile capabilities since the breakdown of Trump’s negotiations with Kim, whom he last met in person in 2019. — AFP

Rainfall aids fight against Belgium’s biggest wildfire

BRUSSELS: Rain over eastern Belgium on Monday morning aided firefighters battling to contain the country’s biggest wildfire on record, which had threatened to reach the German border. Wildfires have ripped through Europe this summer after successive severe heatwaves, fuelled by climate change, have intensified drought and left vegetation tinder-dry. Fires have now burned 576,000 hectares in Europe this year, data from the European Forest Fire Information System showed — an area twice the size of Luxembourg.

Over the weekend, an elderly couple died as fires swept through the Greek island of Salamina, where 500 people were evacuated by ferry after gale force winds pushed a wildfire towards residential areas, damaging houses. A blaze in Aragon, in northeastern Spain, destroyed 16,600 hectares, while a fire in the tourist town of Omis, Croatia, forced 1,000 people to evacuate.

In Belgium, weather agency IRM said between 5 and 9 millimetres of rain was forecast on Monday in the High Fens, a nature reserve in the east of Belgium which has been burning since Friday. The local temperature was set to fall to around 20 degrees Celsius, having breached 30°C last week in a heatwave that saw parts of Belgium hit temperatures of 37°C. “This will change everything; in addition to the water associated with rainfall, there will also be an increase in humidity levels,” fire department captain Olivier Guist told Belgian radio station RTBF. Despite the dip in temperatures, large swathes of western, southern and central Europe were still at high risk of wildfires on Monday, EFFIS data showed. Extreme fire risk has become a regular part of Europe’s summers in recent years, as hotter, drier weather caused by climate change has combined with other factors — including rural



A Belgian firefighter works in a forest affected by a wildfire in Waimes. — Reuters

abandonment, which has left land untended and allowed flammable, dry vegetation to build up in forests - to fuel fast-spreading fires. Around 90 per cent of wildfires are ignited by human activity, such as campfires or discarded cigarettes.

Europe had already suffered its worst fire season on record last year, with more than a million hectares of land burned.

Some countries, including France, have smashed through their annual records this year, with

the traditional June-September fire season far from over. Dozens of people in the village Le Porge, in southwestern France, where hundreds of homes were destroyed by a megafire last month, booed French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu as he visited the area. Residents have criticised the government’s response and accused authorities of prioritising saving wealthier areas.

Belgian officials said the blaze there was no longer spreading towards Germany and was partly contained. Evacuated residents have not yet been allowed to return home. Some 500 firefighters from across the country and neighbouring Germany and Luxembourg, alongside farmers and the army, have been battling the fire. It has burned about 3,000 hectares in the nature reserve of moorland, peat and woods — far surpassing Belgium’s last record-breaking fire in 2011, which burned close to 1,400 hectares. — Reuters

Oman’s tourism growth reflects GCC resilience



TOURISM HAS long stood as one of the most resilient pillars of economic growth in the GCC and the wider Middle East, demonstrating remarkable adaptability in the face of both global crises and regional challenges.

Over the past decade, the sector has evolved from being a complementary source of revenue into a strategic engine for diversification, job creation, and nation branding. Wise government policies, robust health and safety protocols, and increasingly liberal visa regimes ensured that the industry not only survived the Covid-19 pandemic but rebounded faster than many global counterparts.

The region's ability to provide a safe, secure, and well-managed environment for travellers reinforced its reputation as a dependable destination, even during periods of uncertainty. Massive investments in airport infrastructure, hospitality, cultural attractions, and digital services have given GCC countries a competitive edge.

At the same time, coordinated marketing campaigns that highlight heritage, luxury, adventure, and business tourism have helped reposition the Gulf as more than just a transit hub.

Although the sector faced new headwinds in recent years, its underlying strength remained evident. The recent wave of Israeli aggression in Gaza, its spillover into Lebanon, and disruptions to Red Sea shipping

traffic created pressure points, particularly for cruise tourism and short-haul itineraries.

Despite these challenges, the broader tourism and aviation ecosystem remained steady. Passenger traffic and tourism receipts across the GCC quickly returned to pre-pandemic levels, underscoring the structural strength of hubs such as Dubai, Doha, Riyadh and Muscat.

Even the temporary setback in early 2026, when the United States and Israel launched military operations against Iran, did not derail the long-term growth trajectory.

Travel disruptions were felt in the immediate aftermath, with some route cancellations and cautionary travel advisories. However, by the peak summer season, passenger flows had largely normalised.

The main lingering effect was on pricing rather than volume. Airfares rose due to a combination of supply chain delays affecting aircraft deliveries, limited competition on certain routes, and elevated fuel prices linked to geopolitical risk premiums.

Against this regional backdrop, Oman's tourism sector has emerged as a particularly bright spot, recording positive growth indicators in the first quarter of 2026. Its contribution to national GDP rose to 2.9 per cent, up from 2.6 per cent in the same period of 2025. Direct tourism GDP reached RO 293.8 million, representing a 6.5 per cent increase year-on-year. Total tourism output climbed to RO 610.4 million, marking a 9.7 per cent rise, while direct added value grew by 6.6 per cent

The region’s ability to provide a safe, secure, and well-managed environment for travellers reinforced its reputation as a dependable destination, even during periods of uncertainty

to RO 286.4 million. These figures extend a consistent upward trend. Tourism's share of GDP has risen steadily from 1.6 per cent in 2020–2021 to 2.0 per cent in 2022, 2.5 per cent in 2023, and 2.7 per cent in 2024–2025, before reaching 2.9 per cent in early 2026. This growth reflects both increased visitor spending and a deliberate policy focus on expanding tourism products beyond traditional sun-and-sea offerings. Investments in eco-tourism, adventure travel, cultural heritage sites, and MICE — meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions — are beginning to yield measurable returns.

Perhaps the clearest example of this resilience was Oman's Khareef Dhofar Season. Despite geopolitical tensions and occasional adverse travel advisories, the season attracted 472,449 visitors between June 21 and July 31, 2026. That represents an increase of 6.9 per cent compared to the previous year. Domestic tourism continued to be the backbone, with Omani nationals accounting for 360,531 visitors. International arrivals made up 7.1 per cent of the total, a share that authorities are working to grow through targeted promotions in the GCC, Europe, and Asia. Notably, air arrivals rose sharply by 9.6 per cent, reaching 117,551 visitors, highlighting improved air connectivity and the appeal of Salalah as a summer destination.

The GCC's broader tourism expansion is not coincidental. It is the result of deliberate, long-term investment and diversification strategies aligned with national visions such as Oman Vision 2040, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and the UAE's tourism strategy.

UK PREMIER TURNS TO TIKTOK, PODCASTS

ANNA MALPAS

Whether he is tossing a builder’s helmet in the air or running with Olympic medallist Mo Farah, the UK’s new prime minister Andy Burnham has embraced social media with a deft touch.

As well as putting out videos on his own accounts on X and TikTok, he has sought to broaden his audience by appearing on entertainment channels run by creators with large followings. Compared with predecessor Keir Starmer, “Burnham has a far more astute communications team around him” with a “better grasp of the media environment”, said Steven Buckley, a lecturer in digital media sociology at City St George’s, University of London.

During his first speech outside No. 10 Downing Street, Burnham addressed a crowd including teenage influencers invited because they make TikTok clips about Labour politics.

Soon after opening a separate office in his native northern England he gave an interview there to Elizabeth Day, a writer, whose podcast “How to Fail” invites celebrities to reflect on mistakes they have made.

The day he became prime minister, Burnham appeared on “Career Ladder”, a TikTok series where UK-based Ukrainian Max Klymenko -- who has 9.8 million followers -- talks to a celebrity about jobs while both stand on a step ladder.

Burnham has also chatted while on a jog with popular athlete Farah, who has millions of followers across social media platforms.

The new Labour leader has won praise for his fluent, natural style on camera, in contrast to Starmer’s somewhat stiff delivery.

In a clip on his personal TikTok, Burnham, thanks to clever editing, appears to toss up a mortarboard hat and catch a builder’s helmet, as he promotes technical education.

But it ends with a blooper shot where Burnham fumbles to catch the helmet and bursts out laughing.

TikTok does not allow political ads, so videos have to compete for views. One commentator wrote “can’t lie the new gaffer is winning me over” using slang for a boss. In another personal post, Burnham pulls a pint while unveiling measures to help publicans. — AFP

Row over TikTok raises doubts over social media

THIS week, X (formerly Twitter) buzzed in Oman after a viral TikTok clip ignited anger and a broader debate about social media regulation. The video appeared to show several people using vulgar, derogatory language.

Many viewers initially believed that the participants were Omani, but reports circulating online later claimed otherwise.

Public criticism quickly focused on those associated with the clip. Some users demanded their prosecution, while others called for TikTok itself to be banned.

The Public Prosecution later announced on X that legal measures had been taken against the individuals involved. Soon afterward, users reported that TikTok had become inaccessible in Oman, although it remained unclear whether this resulted from an official ban, a temporary restriction, or a technical problem.

The controversy nevertheless raised a legitimate question: Should an entire platform be restricted because particular users behave offensively or unlawfully? Supporters of a ban argued that TikTok rewards provocation. Its attention-driven system can encourage people to say or do almost anything for views, gifts, and money. Critics pointed to vulgar livestreams, exploitation of children, invasions of privacy, misinformation, impersonation and content that conflicts with Omani social values. From this perspective, TikTok does not merely host misconduct; its commercial design



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

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can amplify it.

Opponents of a blanket ban responded that millions of users should not be punished for individual wrongdoing. TikTok provides income for influencers, small businesses, artists, educators, and other creators. It can help entrepreneurs advertise cheaply, allow talented people to reach audiences without traditional gatekeepers, and spread useful information in accessible formats. A ban could therefore eliminate legitimate livelihoods while pushing harmful content onto Instagram, Snapchat, or another platform. The underlying behaviour would migrate rather than disappear.

Other countries demonstrate that restrictions can take different forms. India imposed a continuing nationwide ban in 2020, citing security and privacy concerns. Nepal banned TikTok in 2023 but lifted the prohibition in 2024 after the company agreed to comply with local requirements. Pakistan has temporarily blocked the platform several times over content concerns. Numerous governments have also prohibited TikTok only on official devices, a narrower measure aimed at cybersecurity rather than ordinary citizens.

International experience therefore offers no single model.

A more proportionate Omani response could combine individual accountability with clear platform rules. Authorities could prosecute credible cases involving impersonation, defamation, child exploitation, fraud, or unlawful speech while respecting due process. Platforms

could be required to respond rapidly to legal complaints, verify profitable accounts, strengthen age protections, preserve evidence, and publish transparent enforcement reports. Livestreaming, especially where gifts and children are involved, could face stricter eligibility rules, supervision, or licensing without requiring every ordinary user to obtain government permission.

Digital literacy must also form part of any lasting solution. Schools, families, and public institutions can teach young people to recognise manipulation, protect their privacy, report abuse, and understand the permanent consequences of online behaviour.

Such education would address harmful conduct before it reaches the courts, while helping users benefit from social media responsibly.

The deeper issue extends beyond TikTok. It concerns where responsibility lies among individuals, families, technology companies, and the state. Unlimited freedom can expose vulnerable people to exploitation, but excessive control can suppress expression, creativity, and economic opportunity.

Oman does not have to choose between doing nothing and banning everything. The strongest policy would target demonstrable harm, apply consistent standards across platforms, and punish offenders rather than entire communities.

Regulation should protect society without transforming one viral scandal into a permanent restriction on everyone’s digital life.

Is a dream job a broken dream?



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

Do you remember the first time someone asked you, ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ Most of us would have said teachers, police officers, air hostesses, truck drivers, etc. Soon it was not a light question, and adults did not just laugh anymore; they actually frown and determine the worthiness of your choice. The practicality matters. And here you are determined to pursue your passion. At that point, we tend to be idealists. Apparently, there is a cultural shift away from defining identity through work. Years ago, a teacher was held in high esteem so much that it was maintained even through retirement. And of course that was the case with doctors. Maybe that is when the identity began to be linked with profession. There were expectations. According to experts, ‘Identity through work is the process of defining your self-worth, purpose, and personal traits by your job or career.’ There is a distinct sense of pride some people face while carrying the title of their work, especially when they become experts. In some cases, the profession brought them little fortune but undeniable fame. Reputation mattered, and they would take extreme care to protect it from any tarnish. And their children too had to pay attention to maintain that respect. Then came the era of side hustles where one began to wear many hats. There were opportunities if you were ready to explore,

and lifestyle also meant more money for maintenance. The number of professions expanded; on the other hand, there were fewer jobs available. The question was, “Do you wait for the right job, or do you take up whatever comes your way?” Some of the youth have become bolder because they did not feel wasted by taking up small jobs. They felt it was better than waiting and wasting time. Besides, they could start earning however little it is. The more we sit idle, the rustier the skills. And they say the brain is like a muscle, where it needs to have workout sessions. And that goes with skills as well. The more we practice, the smoother the work performance. Coming back to feeling the pride of having the dream job — the experts say while this feeling is normal, the tricky part is when you associate your whole identity with this role. Actually, that is what it is — a role. It need not be just you. The situation becomes difficult when the individual, for instance, loses the job. Should the identity end there? This is known to cause severe stress, burnout, emotional pain, and at times even depression. We need to. Know our self-worth is much more than our job title. We are not our jobs or our project success rate. But of course, it could be our trait to give our best while working on each project. Should our happiness depend only on that which also needs others’ approval?

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What we are probably looking for is purpose in life. There are times we feel guilty when we are not working or when we are spending money. It should not be that, in our social circle, we are addressed in relation to our jobs. Our conversations need not just be about work. Human nature is multifaceted, yet many of our dimensions remain unexplored. Society conditions us to measure time solely by its return on investment, starving the parts of ourselves that don’t yield a return. The saddest part is when our happiness gets entangled with other people’s acceptance of us. The saddest part is when our happiness gets entangled with other people’s acceptance of us. When we realise it, we might feel heavy, but it is actually a blessing because this could be the first step to untangle ourselves. It can be exhausting when our sense of joy relies on someone else’s approval. We are letting someone else judge our self-worth. The goal should be to better ourselves each day. Yes, there are professionals who are never satisfied with their performances, and that is because they have set high standards for themselves. But that should not stop us from being happy. Once again, we have to remind ourselves that there is more to us than our work and other people’s expectations. We want approval because it makes us feel secure and accepted — it is human nature. We want a sense of belonging. But the validation can change because people’s and organisation’s criteria can change at any given time.

FOOD SAFETY CRACKDOWN SNARES MUMBAI’S FAMED RESTAURANTS

ANUJ SRIVAS

When food safety inspectors raided a Mumbai dessert parlour famed for its ice cream sandwiches last month, they found rats, houseflies and expired flavouring agents. At another beloved restaurant known for slow-cooked mutton and beef stews, they discovered meat stored in filthy containers, greasy floors and open windows that could let in insects and crows. Both eateries were ordered shut in the toughest crackdown in years on restaurants in the megacity of more than 20 million people. Residents of India’s financial capital are fiercely protective of their food culture, but many have welcomed the closure of some of the best-known establishments over a lack of hygiene. Much of the campaign has been driven by Tukaram Mundhe, the new head of Maharashtra state’s food safety regulator. “If they are abiding by the law... they have nothing to fear. And those who do not, they have no place to hide,” Mundhe said. In July alone, his office inspected nearly 900 businesses and temporarily suspended more than 100 licences. The sweep has targeted everything from top eateries and luxury hotels to canteens at elite institutions, including the nearly century-old Cricket Club of India. Mundhe, who has 2.6 million Instagram followers, said he was surprised by how many owners lacked knowledge of even basic food safety rules. “How to receive the raw material, how to store it, how to process it... whether there should be (special) flooring. Many of the things they are unaware (of).” India has a robust food safety framework on paper, but enforcement remains weak. Government data from 2022 to 2025 shows roughly one in six food samples tested by the federal regulator failed to meet key standards. While Indians are used to street food carts that use grimy rags or rancid cooking oil, they have higher expectations for established restaurants. Mundhe’s no-holds-barred approach has won support from residents who believe some operators routinely bribe officials to overlook violations. “Every department must have an officer like Mundhe,” said Mumbai resident Pramod Shinde. “Corruption and adulteration can be contained only through the strict actions of such officers.” But the campaign is also facing resistance from hotel lobby groups, who have criticised it as too heavy-handed. “The sudden suspension or termination of licences without prior notice or opportunity for corrective action is a matter of grave concern,” three industry associations said in a statement. — AFP

Race to reach trapped survivors offers hope

NELSON BOCANEGRA AND JULIA SYMMES COBB

RESCUERS in Colombia raced to free survivors still trapped under the rubble, six days after one of the strongest earthquakes to hit the Andean nation in decades left hundreds of people dead or missing. In Cali, Colombia’s third-largest city, rescue workers shifted shattered concrete after detecting sounds from a collapsed residential block early in the morning, suggesting people may still be alive - a rare sign of hope as the emergency response shifted to the grim task of accounting for the missing. “We’ll keep going as long as we have the strength,” said 67-year-old Julio Cesar Pineda, a volunteer who grabbed his gloves and hard hat to join the rescue efforts when the wall of his Pereira home fell down. Venezuelan rescuers who arrived in Pereira, deep in Colombia’s coffee-growing region, after searching for survivors from the devastating quakes that hit their country’s Caribbean coast just seven weeks ago, said they still had hope and had found people alive as many as 10 days later. Efforts in the city concentrated on a collapsed hotel that rescue workers believed might still hold survivors - including Juan Felipe Giraldo, 24, who was set to get married that weekend. His father was at the site from Monday night, waiting for news. His body was recovered from the rubble later on Friday, his family confirmed. He leaves behind a 2-year-old son. Elsewhere in Pereira, authorities were assessing the possible relocation of hundreds of families from a makeshift shelter in La Libertad park, Caracol TV reported, as several nearby buildings were deemed at risk of collapse. Caracol TV said several people were unwilling to move without their relatives knowing their whereabouts. They included



A woman sits inside a tent at an improvised camp in Pereira, Colombia, on Sunday. — AFP

Venezuelan rescuers who arrived in Pereira after searching for survivors from the devastating quakes that hit their country’s Caribbean coast just seven weeks ago said they still had hope and had found people alive as many as 10 days later

many children, as well as older people and people with disabilities. Volunteers combed the rubble for personal items such as photo albums, letters and jewellery, to keep them safe until their owners are found. Aid workers called for more daily necessities. Authorities said on Friday that 287 people had been killed and nearly 4,000 injured. Nearly 400 others were still missing. Cali and Pereira accounted for over two-thirds of those killed, and more than half the injured were in major cities. The 7.4-magnitude quake struck shortly after 7:30 am on Monday, with its epicentre in San Jose del Palmar in the province of Choco. It toppled apartment blocks and damaged homes, schools and hospitals across western Colombia, from Cali and Pereira to the Pacific port of Buenaventura. Tens of thousands of homes were damaged and many destroyed, according to government figures, underlining the scale of a disaster that has left many Colombians sleeping in shelters or outside unsafe buildings. As of Friday morning, operations

had resumed in all but one airport. The UN refugee agency warned the earthquake could trigger fresh displacement in a country already grappling with conflict, migration and other humanitarian pressures. “For internally displaced people and refugees who are already trying to rebuild their lives, this earthquake risks becoming another displacement on top of displacement,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees spokesperson Eujin Byun told reporters in Geneva. Giovanni Rizzo, the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Colombia director, said more than 9 million people in the country already depended on humanitarian aid, and roughly 10 per cent of them lived in the regions most devastated by the earthquake. “Recovery is now not merely about clearing rubble. It is about helping families rebuild,” he said, adding it was particularly urgent to reopen damaged schools. Authorities have recorded scores of aftershocks, adding to the danger for rescuers combing through unstable debris and for families reluctant to return to damaged homes. The head of Colombia’s Camacol construction association, Guillermo Herrera, said though it was too early to confirm, initial reports suggested many buildings that collapsed were old and likely built before seismic codes were modernised. He said the association was working on tackling tariffs and taxes on construction supplies so homes can be rebuilt faster. The initial reconstruction costs could be in the area of 1 per cent of gross domestic product, or around 20 trillion Colombian pesos (\$6 billion), according to estimates by BTG Pactual’s Andes chief economist Munir Jalil, cited in local media. The disaster is shaping up as the first major test for President Abelfarido De La Espriella, a political newcomer who took office just days before the quake. — Reuters

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The Local Championship, reserved for players from Dhofar Governorate.

DHOFAR BOWLING TOURNEY SET FOR AUGUST 23

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Oman Bowling Committee, in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality as part of the Khareef Dhofar Season events, will organise the Khareef Dhofar Bowling Championship 2026 from August 23 to 28 at the Dhofar Bowling Centre, bringing together leading bowlers from Oman and other GCC countries.

This year’s championship will feature two separate competitions an Open Championship and a Local Championship, with attractive cash prizes allocated for the leading finishers.

The Open Championship will begin on August 23 and conclude on August 28, with participation open to bowlers from Oman and abroad. The Local Championship, reserved for players from Dhofar Governorate, will get underway on August 24 and run until August 27. Local players will also be eligible to compete in the Open Championship, providing them with an opportunity to test their skills against some of the leading bowlers participating in the event.

Moosa bin Waleed al Maimani, Tournament Director, thanked the organisers of the Khareef Dhofar Season events and Dhofar Municipality for their continued support of the championship, noting that previous editions had generated strong participation and helped create greater interest in bowling in the governorate.

“Bowling continues to grow across the various governorates of Oman, including Dhofar, which has a large number of players practising the sport, with several of them also represented in the national teams,” Al Maimani said.

He also highlighted the championship provides an important competitive platform for bowlers from Dhofar as well as those taking part in the Open Championship. “We expect strong and challenging competition. Valuable cash prizes have been allocated for both the Local and Open Championships, while players from Dhofar are also allowed to participate in the Open event,” he said. Al Maimani explained that a specific lane oil pattern has been selected for the Open Championship in accordance with the technical requirements applied in international bowling competitions. Details of the pattern have already been communicated to players interested in participating, allowing them to prepare for the lane conditions ahead of the tournament.

He also highlighted the Oman Bowling Committee’s efforts to distribute its competitions and activities across different governorates throughout the season rather than concentrating them in one location.

The committee views the Khareef Dhofar Season as an ideal opportunity to stage one of its major activities in Dhofar, while contributing to the variety of sporting events held in the governorate during this period. Al Maimani said the encouraging turnout in previous editions has strengthened the committee’s commitment to continuing the championship and developing it further, with the prize structure designed to encourage strong participation in both the local and open competitions.

Oman U17s bounce back to beat Bahrain

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

OMAN’S NATIONAL under-17 football team concluded their two-match friendly series against Bahrain on a positive note after securing a 2-0 victory in the second encounter at the Police Stadium in Muscat on Sunday evening.

The young Red Warriors responded strongly after suffering a narrow 2-1 defeat in the opening friendly, with the second match providing another valuable test for the squad as they continue preparations for their upcoming regional and continental assignments.

The Bahrain double-header formed part of Oman’s internal training camp in Muscat, which began on August 6 and concludes on August 17. The camp has allowed the technical staff to work closely with the players and assess their progress through daily training sessions and competitive matches.

Under national head coach Ahmed bin Salim Bait Said, Oman have focused during the camp on strengthening the technical and tactical aspects of their game while also raising the players’ fitness levels. The two friendlies offered the coaching staff an opportunity to test different combinations, assess individual performances and identify areas for further improvement ahead of the next phase of preparations.

Sunday’s victory represented an encouraging response from the squad following the opening loss, allowing Oman to end the camp’s competitive programme with a win and a clean sheet. With competition for places continuing among the players, the coaching staff have been using the preparation period to gradually shape the squad ahead of the more demanding assignments later in the year.

The current camp features a 24-player squad comprising Abdullah al Zaabi, Nahidh Bait Jameel, Mohammed al Hinai, Mohammed al Kazroni, Ahmed al Mukhaini, Ziyad al Maamari, Bashar al Shamsi, Mohammed al Balushi, Hassan al Balushi, Nayer Bait Ardheen, Saif al Jabri, Jassim al Dawood, Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Jihad al Shukaili, Sultan



Oman U17 players battle for possession against Bahrain as they wrapped up their two-match friendly series with a 2-0 victory.



Oman U17 players in action against Bahrain during their 2-0 victory in the second friendly in Muscat.

al Balushi, Al Mulhim al Sulaimi, Abdulrahman al Hashmi, Abdullah Issa, Nadir al Noobi, Rakan al Jabri, Abdulrahim al Twairshi, Mohammed al Omrani, Said Bait Rajab and Mohammed al Maqbali. Oman are expected to continue their build-up with two further internal camps in Muscat next month, which are also planned to include several friendly matches.

The team’s main continental target is the AFC U17 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2027 Qualifiers in November. Oman will host one of the qualifying groups in Salalah from November 8 to 20, while the qualifying draw will take place at AFC House in Kuala Lumpur on August 27.

Oman have been placed in Pot 1 for the draw, and the upcoming preparation programme will be crucial as the young Red Warriors look to make the most of home advantage and compete for a place in the continental finals.

Oman step up preparations for Asia Cup Pre-Qualifiers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Oman’s national basketball team has stepped up preparations for the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers with an eight-day external training camp in Dubai from August 16 to 24.

The camp follows a domestic preparation phase in which the technical staff focused on improving the players’ physical and technical readiness while building greater cohesion within the squad ahead of the continental assignment.

Oman began training in Dubai on Sunday under national head coach Mohammed al Owaisi, with intensive sessions focusing on the technical and tactical aspects developed during the previous phase.

The Dubai programme also includes four friendly matches, allowing the coaching staff to assess



Oman national basketball team players at Muscat International Airport ahead of their departure to Dubai for the external training camp.

the players under match conditions, test different tactical options and address areas that require improvement before the official competition.

Al Owaisi said the external camp represents an important stage in a gradual preparation programme designed to bring the team to its best possible level ahead of the qualifiers.

The external camp runs for eight days and includes four friendly matches in preparation for the Asian qualifiers, he said.

He added the internal camp was an important stage in our preparations. We focused on improving the players’ physical condition, developing several technical aspects and gaining a

clearer understanding of the capabilities of the group. In Dubai, our preparations became more closely linked to competition through the friendly matches, which provide an opportunity to test what we have worked on.

Oman have been drawn in Group A of the Western Region alongside hosts UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Nepal. The five teams will compete in a single round-robin format, with each side playing four matches and the top three advancing to the second round of the pre-qualifiers. Group A matches will be staged in Dubai from August 26 to 31.

Group B comprises Kazakhstan, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Kyrgyzstan. In the Eastern Region, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong China and Singapore form Group C, while Thailand, Mongolia, Vietnam and Fiji make up Group D.

The Oman delegation comprises 17 members,

SHORTTAKE



Nadhira al Harthi

CHALLENGE THE HEIGHTS, HONOUR NADHIRA’S LEGACY

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Preparations are gathering pace for the “Challenge Trail” event at Jabal Shams on August 21, offering a mountain experience that combines sport, adventure and a tribute to the legacy of the late Omani mountaineer Nadhira al Harthi.

The event will feature a 25-kilometre mountain route with an accumulated elevation gain of around 1,200 metres, bringing together running and adventure enthusiasts from Oman and abroad.

The organising committee includes representatives from several running and adventure groups, including Oman Running Club, Shaba Team, Jetour Team and Rahhal Sports and Adventures Team. Participants are also expected from Saudi Arabia, along with running groups and individuals from Egypt, South Africa, the Philippines, Iran, India, Bangladesh and the United States.

Organisers expect between 100 and 200 participants, including members of the participating teams and enthusiasts of mountain sports and outdoor adventure.

According to the organising committee, the event has been designed as a tribute to Al Harthi’s legacy and the values of determination, perseverance and passion for adventure that defined her journey.

It also aims to promote a culture of challenge and community engagement while showcasing Oman’s diverse natural attractions, particularly its mountain landscapes.

In a press statement, Talal bin Salim al Mahrouqi, Chairman of Oman Running Club and a member of the organising committee, said the Challenge Trail is intended to go beyond the concept of a conventional sporting event by combining physical challenge, adventure and remembrance of Nadhira and the inspiring impact she left in the fields of sport and mountain adventure.

“Through the Challenge Trail, we were keen to present an experience with a clear message — to honour the legacy of Nadhira al Harthi and remember a journey that embodied determination, perseverance and a passion for adventure,” Al Mahrouqi said.

“We believe inspiring achievements do not end with the passing of those who accomplished them.



Dr Wahid bin Ali al Kharousi, President of the Oman Cancer Association, welcomed Mohib’s initiative.

Charity golf event to support cancer patients

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

THE Oman Cancer Association (OCA), in collaboration with young Oman national team golfer Mohib al Kathiri, will organise the Mohib La Vie Charity Golf Classic on October 3, at La Vie Golf Course at Tivoli Hotel. The event will form part of OCA’s October Breast Cancer Awareness Month activities and aims to raise funds for cancer patients and their families while promoting awareness of prevention and early detection.

The initiative was launched by 16-year-old Mohib al Kathiri, a Grade 11 student and national team golfer, who was inspired by his personal experience with cancer following the death of his grandmother.

Witnessing her battle with the disease encouraged him to use his passion for golf to support patients, particularly children, and contribute to greater awareness of cancer.

“The idea came from my desire to combine golf with cancer awareness, especially after my experience with my



grandmother, who battled the disease before it returned,” Mohib said. “I saw her struggle and how bravely she fought, and that made me feel that I should use my sport to make a positive contribution by helping cancer patients and children and providing them with the support they need.”

He added: “I hope this tournament will help raise donations for cancer patients, strengthen the work of the Oman Cancer Association

and increase awareness and education about the disease and the importance of early detection. For me, this initiative is a humanitarian message before it is a sporting event.”

The tournament is expected to attract 72 golfers from Oman and abroad, including members of the Oman national team and internationally ranked players.

The competition will be played in a four-person

Scramble format, bringing together golfers from different backgrounds in support of the charitable cause.

Following the competition, a closing ceremony will be held for senior guests, community figures and invited participants, with around 300 people expected to attend.

The programme will include the presentation of prizes and gifts, as well as a charity auction, with all proceeds directed towards charitable activities and support for cancer patients. Dr Wahid bin Ali al Kharousi, President of the Oman Cancer Association, welcomed Mohib’s initiative, describing it as an inspiring example of how young Omanis can use their talents to create a positive social impact.

He also expressed appreciation to La Vie, Tivoli Hotel and the Oman Golf Association for their support.

The event will bring together the golf, business and wider community around a common humanitarian cause, while supporting OCA’s efforts to assist cancer patients and their families and reinforce breast cancer awareness messages throughout October.

Oman U20 conclude camp ahead of Asian qualifiers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Oman’s national under-20 football team concluded their domestic training camp on Monday as head coach Hamad al Azzani and his technical staff shift their focus towards the final preparations for the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2027 Qualifiers in Doha.

The camp, which ran from August 6 to 17, included two international friendly matches against Syria and represented one of the final stages of Oman’s preparation programme before the continental assignment.

The young Red Warriors ended their friendly programme with a 2-1 defeat to Syria in the second encounter on Sunday. The result followed a 1-1 draw

between the two sides in their opening friendly three days earlier in Muscat.

Despite the second-match result, the two encounters gave the coaching staff valuable competitive minutes and another opportunity to assess the squad against international opposition at a crucial point in the preparations.

With the qualifiers now only two weeks away, the emphasis turns towards fine-tuning the squad, improving tactical organisation and ensuring the players are ready for three matches in the space of seven days.

The current camp featured 26 players selected by al Azzani as the coaching staff continued the process of narrowing down their options ahead of the trip to Qatar.



Oman U20 players in action against Syria during their second international friendly in Muscat.

Oman’s preparations have been built around a series of domestic and overseas camps over recent months, with the technical staff using friendly matches to evaluate players and develop the team’s technical and tactical approach.

The Syria double-header provided the latest international test. The opening meeting at the Royal Court Affairs Stadium finished 1-1, before Syria edged the second encounter 2-1 on Sunday.

Attention will now turn fully to Group E of the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2027 Qualifiers, where Oman will face hosts Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong, China in Doha.

The young Red Warriors will begin their campaign against Qatar on August

31 at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium before facing Saudi Arabia on September 3 at Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium. Their final group fixture against Hong Kong, China will take place on September 6.

The coming days will therefore form the final phase of Oman’s build-up, with Al Azzani and his staff expected to use the remaining period to settle on the squad and sharpen the areas identified during the latest camp.

After months of preparation and a lengthy programme of training camps and friendly matches, the focus now moves from experimentation towards delivering the required performance when the continental qualifiers get under way in Doha.

SPORTS

LENS STUN PSG TO LIFT FIRST SUPER CUP

TEN MAN Lens denied Paris Saint-Germain a second trophy in five days as Florian Thauvin's first-half goal secured a 1-0 victory in the French Champions' Trophy on Sunday.

Lens were worthy winners in their first match under new coach Dino Toppmoeller, adding to the French Cup title they won under previous boss Pierre Sage in May.

PSG, who beat Aston Villa on Wednesday in the UEFA Super Cup, struggled to find their flow at Lens' Stade Bollaert-Delelis, despite their hosts having Kyllian Antonio sent off in the first half.

"I think we deserved more," insisted PSG coach Luis Enrique.

"But I have to congratulate Lens they won, and they played very well, with their usual intensity..."

"We played a very good match, but we didn't have the luck we needed."

Paris will turn their attentions to the start of their Ligue 1 title defence at home against Rennes in a week's time.

They will be without Portugal defender Nuno Mendes for that match, after he was also dismissed late on.

Lens, runners-up in Ligue 1 behind PSG last season, qualified for this match by winning their first ever French Cup with a 3-1 final win over Nice.

Luis Enrique named a strong side, making just three changes to the team which won the Super Cup, including giving Lucas Digne his second debut after the France left-back rejoined the club from Villa.

But Bradley Barcola, widely linked with a possible move to Liverpool, was not in the squad.

DOMINATED POSSESSION

The visitors dominated possession in the opening stages but struggled to create clear-cut chances, with Lens goalkeeper Robin Risser making a comfortable save from Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

Lens grew into the contest and grabbed a 32nd-minute lead when PSG failed to clear before Thauvin slotted home at the back post from Matthieu Udol's cross-shot.

But Toppmoeller's men were dealt a big blow six minutes before half-time when Antonio was dismissed for a studs-up tackle on Maghnes Akliouche.

PSG almost made the most of their man advantage before the break but Desire Doue's effort from a tight angle bounced off the crossbar.

The European champions continued to labour after the restart, though, and Thauvin flashed a strike wide as Lens continued to threaten on the counter.

PSG substitute Mendes came close to an equaliser, drilling a dipping long-range shot narrowly over the bar.

Luis Enrique also brought on Fabian Ruiz and Ousmane Dembele off the bench, with the latter drawing another simple save from Risser.

PSG were reduced to 10 men themselves with three minutes remaining, as Mendes was shown a straight red card for elbowing Lens wing-back Michal Skoras in the face off the ball. — AFP



Lens' players celebrate with the championship trophy after winning the French Super Cup (Trophee des Champions) football match between RC Lens and Paris Saint-Germain. — AFP



PSG's French midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery (2nd R) fights for the ball with Lens' Polish defender #03 Maik Nawrocki (R) as Lens' French midfielder Michael Cuisance looks on during the French Super Cup. — AFP



Lens' players are congratulated after winning the French Super Cup (Trophee des Champions) football match between RC Lens and Paris Saint-Germain. — AFP



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SHORTTAKES



The expansion lifts A'Saffa Foods' annual broiler capacity from 48 million birds to 60 million birds, a 25 per cent increase.

FEED COSTS WEIGH ON A'SAFFA FOODS H1 PROFIT

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

A'Saffa Foods SAOG has completed and commissioned its broiler expansion project, lifting annual production capacity to 60 million birds, even as first-half profit fell on higher feed and packaging costs.

The Muscat Stock Exchange-listed poultry producer reported a consolidated net profit of RO 2.932 million for the six months ended June 30, 2026, down from RO 3.563 million a year earlier, a decline of about 18 per cent.

Consolidated revenue rose 11 per cent to RO 32.252 million from RO 29.062 million, which the company attributed to improved market demand and higher sales volumes.

The half-year result includes a gain of RO 696,094 from the disposal of the group's investment in A'Namaa Poultry, a holding that had previously been fully impaired in A'Saffa's financial statements. Stripping out that one-off item, net profit for the period would stand at about RO 2.24 million.

"Despite the increase in revenue, profitability was affected by higher feed and packaging material costs resulting from the challenging geopolitical environment during the period", the Board said in its directors' report to shareholders.

The expansion project has been "successfully completed, commissioned and brought into commercial operation", the Board said, describing the increase to 60 million birds a year as "another significant milestone in the Company's long-term growth strategy".

The Board said the investment would enhance production capacity, improve operational efficiency, strengthen food security and support long-term value creation for shareholders.

The project takes A'Saffa's annual broiler capacity from 48 million birds, a 25 per cent increase. The Board approved the plan in December 2024 at a time when the company was operating at full capacity and facing what it then described as "steadily increasing" demand for locally produced fresh and frozen poultry.

Marsa LNG boosts Suhar's bunkering hub

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

THE Marsa liquefied natural gas (LNG) project at Sohar Port continues its progress towards establishing the port as a regional hub for bunkering ships with LNG. Construction of the project was well past the 55 per cent mark by the end of June 30, 2026, with the plant nearing its target start-up date in Q1 2028.

Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Hashmi, CEO of OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) – a joint venture partner in Marsa LNG, stated that the project has achieved significant progress in construction, supporting the company's integrated growth strategy in the gas sector.

The project primarily targets the Gulf region's bunkering market, adding a new business to Sohar Port's existing industrial and logistical activities in the bunkering sector.

The importance of the Marsa LNG project for Sohar Port lies in the fact that it not only adds a liquefied natural gas (LNG) production facility but also establishes a specialised bunkering centre, enhancing the port's ability to attract vessels transiting the region and expanding the range of maritime services it offers.

The project includes a liquefaction plant with a capacity of one million tonnes per year and an LNG storage tank with a capacity of 165,000 cubic metres, in addition to dedicated bunkering facilities. The facility aims to be the first onshore LNG bunkering centre in the Middle East.

Sohar Port's strategic location further enhances this advantage, enabling the project to serve maritime traffic in the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, and to capitalise on the anticipated demand for low-emission marine fuel.

Economically, the project can expand the sources of activity associated with Sohar Port. The



Marsa LNG represents an investment in the future of Sohar Port as a hub for energy and maritime services.

Sohar Port's strategic location further enhances this advantage, enabling the project to serve maritime traffic in the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman; and to capitalise on the anticipated demand for low-emission marine fuel.

introduction of the LNG bunkering sector opens the door to growth in storage, handling, transportation, maintenance, maritime and logistics services, in addition to commercial activities related to ships.

This will enhance the port's integration with the free zone and industrial complex in Suhar, increasing the region's attractiveness to investments related to energy and maritime transport.

Marsa LNG features a design based on the electric operation of the liquefaction facility, with the development of a 300 MW solar power plant to provide the equivalent of the plant's annual electricity needs.

The design aims to reduce the facility's emissions intensity to less than three kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per barrel of oil equivalent, according to project data.

This advantage gives the project a competitive edge in the marine fuel market, given the shipping industry's focus on reducing emissions and seeking alternatives to traditional fuels.

The project has seen progress

in its marine infrastructure this year, with the completion of the channel dredging.

Work has now moved to phases that include the construction of the marine berth and shoreline protection works within the southern expansion of Sohar Port.

The project is being developed by Marsa LNG, 80 per cent owned by TotalEnergies and 20 per cent by OQEP, combining international expertise in the energy sector with OQ's local role in Oman's gas value chain.

The project also involves securing the necessary gas supply for operation, enhancing value chain integration from gas production to liquefaction and marketing as marine fuel.

Marsa LNG represents more than just an LNG production project; it is an investment in the future of Sohar Port as a hub for energy and maritime services, combining the port's location, infrastructure, Omani gas, renewable energy, and the ship fuel market, which could raise Suhar's competitiveness and enhance the Sultanate of Oman's presence in the region's LNG ship supply market.

Oman regulates investment banking activities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

In a new regulatory advancement aimed at further developing specialised capital market services, enhancing market efficiency and expanding its capacity to provide diverse financing and investment channels, the licensing of investment banking activities in the Sultanate of Oman forms part of an integrated licensing and regulatory framework that supports the further development of the financial ecosystem.

The Executive Regulation of the Securities Law, issued pursuant to Financial Services Authority (FSA) Decision No (E/11/2026), reinforces this framework and provides the necessary enabling environment, contributing to the optimal allocation of financial resources and savings and enhancing the circulation of funds within Oman's



Oman strengthens capital market framework with new investment banking regulations.

economy.

Entities licensed to conduct investment banking activities provide specialised financial services in the capital market, including assisting companies and other entities in raising capital and

providing investment services and advisory services.

This is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 towards advancing the development of the financial sector, expanding financing and investment options; and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's ability to attract capital.

During the period from 2021 to 2025, financing provided through the capital market sector exceeded RO 7 billion, which sheds light on the role of the capital market as one of the financing channels in the Sultanate of Oman and its growing contribution to providing diverse financing options for companies and economic projects.

Operating within a clear regulatory framework, entities conducting investment banking activities will serve as a link between companies seeking financing and local and international investors.

This will be achieved through

developing issuance arrangement services and product structuring, broadening the investor base, enhancing institutional investor participation; and connecting companies and projects seeking financing with local and international sources of capital.

The presence of entities specialising in investment services can also contribute to improving the efficiency of issuance processes, developing financial products and increasing the range of options available to companies and investors.

Accordingly, the Regulation defines the scope of investment banking activities to comprise five activities conducted collectively: investment management, product structuring, securities portfolio management, research and advisory services related to investment in listed securities and issue management.

It also permits entities licensed

to conduct investment banking activities to act as underwriters for issuances approved by the FSA.

The issuance of the Executive Regulation of the Securities Law coincides with the continued improvement in the Sultanate of Oman's credit standing.

In March 2026, S&P Global Ratings affirmed Oman's sovereign credit rating at BBB- with a stable outlook, placing the Sultanate of Oman within investment grade.

The continued advancement of the regulatory and institutional environment of the capital market, alongside greater diversification of financing and investment instruments, supports an enhanced investment environment in Oman and strengthens the market's ability to attract local and international capital, contributing to a more effective financial market that supports inclusive economic growth.

OIA-BACKED STARTUP TO INTRODUCE
OMAN’S FIRST COMMERCIAL BIOLEACHING
PROJECT, OPENING NEW CHAPTER IN
SUSTAINABLE MINING

BIOLEACHING OFFERS OMAN A CLEANER PATH TO CRITICAL MINERALS

HOW BIOLEACHING WORKS

Bioleaching uses naturally occurring microorganisms to extract metals from ores in an environmentally friendly way.



BENEFITS OF BIOLEACHING

Environmentally friendly

Lower energy consumption

Cost effective

Sustainable metal recovery

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

OMAN is poised to introduce bioleaching — an innovative biotechnology that harnesses naturally occurring microorganisms to extract valuable metals from minerals and mining waste — for the first time, following plans by Omani startup Ajib Environmental Rehabilitation Company to establish the Sultanate of Oman’s first commercial bioleaching project.

The initiative, outlined in the latest edition of Enjaz & Eejaz, the quarterly newsletter of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), marks a significant milestone in the country’s drive to build a knowledge-based, circular economy while advancing more sustainable approaches to mineral extraction.

Ajib, founded in 2022, specialises in recycling mining waste, rehabilitating degraded industrial sites and providing environmental consulting services. According to the newsletter, the company also plans to establish a specialised biotechnology laboratory that will underpin the commercialisation of bioleaching and support the development of advanced mineral recovery technologies using locally sourced microorganisms.

The sovereign wealth fund views the initiative as having strategic significance beyond the mining sector. OIA says the technology could help meet the technological requirements of two of its flagship portfolio companies — OQ Group, the Sultanate of Oman’s integrated energy company and Minerals Development Oman (MDO) — both of which are collaborating with Ajib to evaluate the commercial application of bioleaching technologies.

“Ajib’s participation in the Hamat Hackathon, part of the Idea Makers initiative, proved to be a turning point”, the newsletter notes. “The company earned second place in the OIA Companies Challenges track for an innovative solution to the treatment and disposal of produced water from oil production”.

That success helped propel the startup beyond laboratory research into strategic partnerships with OQ and MDO, with the focus shifting towards scaling bioleaching technologies and rigorously assessing their economic viability.

Bioleaching — sometimes referred to as biomining — represents one of the fastest-growing innovations in sustainable mineral processing. Unlike conventional mining techniques that often rely on high-temperature smelting or large quantities of chemical reagents, bioleaching employs naturally occurring bacteria and other microorganisms to unlock metals trapped within ores, mine tailings and industrial waste.

The microorganisms do not consume the metals themselves. Instead, they derive energy by interacting with naturally occurring iron and sulphur compounds in mineral deposits. In doing so, they trigger chemical reactions that dissolve the surrounding mineral matrix, allowing valuable metals to be recovered using established extraction methods.

The technology has already been deployed commercially in several countries for recovering copper, nickel, cobalt, zinc and uranium, while it also plays an important role in processing certain gold-bearing ores. Researchers worldwide are now expanding its application

to strategic minerals essential for the global energy transition, including lithium, rare earth elements, manganese and vanadium.

For Oman, the implications could be particularly significant. The Sultanate of Oman possesses a long mining heritage and abundant reserves of copper, chromite, gypsum, limestone and other industrial minerals. Decades of mining have also left behind extensive stockpiles of low-grade ores, waste rock and tailings that often still contain economically recoverable quantities of valuable minerals.

Bioleaching offers the possibility of transforming these legacy waste streams into productive assets. By recovering metals that conventional technologies often leave behind, the process not only creates additional economic value but also reduces the environmental footprint associated with abandoned mine waste.

Compared with traditional extraction methods, bioleaching generally requires less energy, fewer hazardous chemicals and produces lower greenhouse gas emissions. Although the process is typically slower than conventional mining techniques, it enables the recovery of metals from materials previously considered uneconomic to process.

Ajib’s ambitions extend well beyond conventional bioleaching. According to the newsletter, the company is developing “advanced solutions for mineral extraction using microorganisms, unlocking resources that have long gone untapped and supporting the shift towards a more sustainable and efficient economy”.

These next-generation approaches may include tailored communities of microorganisms capable of improving metal recovery from complex ores, as well as biological techniques for extracting critical minerals from mine tailings and industrial residues — technologies that are attracting growing international attention as countries seek more sustainable supplies of minerals needed for renewable energy, batteries and advanced manufacturing.

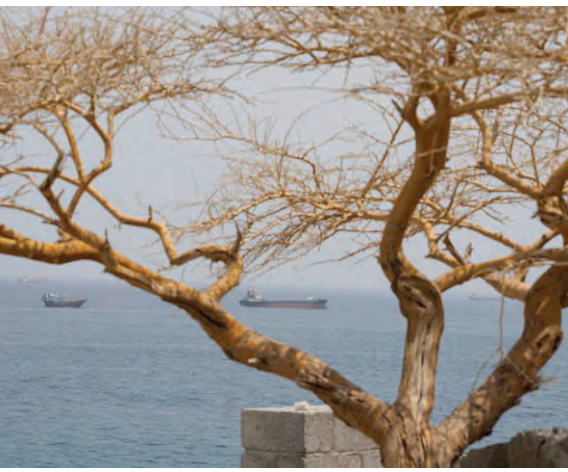
The company’s progress has been built on several years of scientific research. Working with universities, research institutions, government agencies and private-sector partners, Ajib has collected more than 200 samples from local waste streams and natural environments, successfully isolating over 60 strains of bacteria, fungi and algae.

Those investigations demonstrated that valuable minerals, salts and other economically important elements could potentially be recovered from industrial and mining waste using locally sourced microorganisms.

Looking ahead, OIA believes Ajib’s journey illustrates how home-grown innovation can support the country’s economic diversification ambitions.

“The journey began in a laboratory”, the newsletter states. “What Ajib is building, step by step, is proof that innovation can turn environmental challenges into genuine development opportunities and that an Omani company can lead the way”.

If successfully commercialised, Ajib’s bioleaching project would not only introduce an entirely new mining technology to Oman but could also establish the foundations of a domestic biotechnology capability, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as an emerging regional centre for sustainable mining innovation while helping unlock new value from resources that have long remained untapped.



Oil mixed as traders weigh Hormuz disruption risks.

OIL MIXED AS IRAN STALEMATE CAPS GAINS

Oil prices were mixed on Monday amidst a lack of progress in diplomatic efforts to resolve Middle East tensions, though the absence of major supply outages limited gains.

Brent crude futures were up 27 cents or 0.31% at \$88.79 by 08:06 GMT after hitting a session high of \$89.40. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures fell 24 cents or 0.29% to \$82.16 a barrel.

Both contracts gained more than 5% last week following attacks on tankers operated by Abu Dhabi National Oil Company in the Hormuz strait and on a Saudi Aramco refinery.

But Bjarne Schieldrop at SEB Research said that prices were unlikely to move substantively higher unless there was a halt in the current flow of crude out through the Strait of Hormuz at night and/or a closure of the Bab El Mandeb Strait.

For now, prices were trading close to \$90 as traders weigh the risk of deeper disruption and shortages against the possibility of a resolution where the Strait of Hormuz is reopened and oil prices fall sharply, Schieldrop said.

Priyanka Sachdeva, head of market insights for Phillip Nova in Singapore, also said she saw limited upside, “unless we get clear evidence of renewed aggression in the Strait of Hormuz, particularly material damage to tankers or oil infrastructure”.

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz slowed over the weekend, data showed on Monday, following attacks on tankers. Five commodity vessels transited the strait on Saturday, with none registered for Sunday, ship-tracking data from Kpler showed, versus 31 for the prior weekend.

“Gulf exports picked up slightly despite ongoing attacks, while more ships reportedly transited the Strait of Hormuz without transponders”, ANZ said in a note. — Reuters

OQBI posts RO 43.3m H1 profit as revenue surges



OQBI operates an integrated complex in the Salalah Free Zone with combined nameplate production capacity of 1.816 million tonnes per annum.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

OQ Base Industries (SFZ) SAOG (OQBI), a majority Omani state-owned company, reported a sharp improvement in financial performance for the six months ended June 30, 2026, with consolidated net profit rising to RO 43.3 million, compared with RO25.8 million in the corresponding period of 2025, an increase of around 68 per cent.

The Sultanate of Oman's only integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG products said the result was achieved despite supply chain and logistical challenges and a scheduled maintenance shutdown of its LPG plant in January.

Consolidated revenue climbed 45.4 per cent to RO 163.35 million, from RO 112.37 million a year earlier, while gross profit increased to RO 59.42 million from RO 33.27

OQBI's Chairman, in his report accompanying the unaudited results, attributed the strong performance to effective strategic execution, operational discipline and the underlying strength and adaptability of the company's business model.

million.

OQBI's Chairman, in his report accompanying the unaudited results, attributed the strong performance to effective strategic execution, operational discipline and the underlying strength and adaptability of the company's business model.

He said the Board remained focused on prudent governance, robust risk oversight and sustainable value creation amidst shifting geopolitical developments and continuing uncertainty across global markets.

The Chairman also pointed to continued investor confidence in OQBI's strategic direction and long-term growth prospects.

The company's share price closed at RO 0.248 on June 30, representing a substantial increase from its initial offering price.

The report said the share-price performance reflected sustained market support for OQBI's vision,

as well as confidence in its governance, financial stewardship, operational resilience and long-term growth strategy.

Listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange and part of OQ Group, OQBI operates an integrated complex in the Salalah Free Zone with combined nameplate production capacity of 1.816 million tonnes per annum.

Its three core business divisions are methanol, ammonia and LPG products, reported financially across the Methanol Plant segment — which includes the ammonia plant — and the LPG Plant segment.

The company operates a 1.095 million-tonne-per-year methanol plant, a 365,000-tonne-per-year ammonia facility and a 356,000-tonne-per-year LPG plant producing propane, butane, condensate and cooking gas.

Around 90 per cent of LPG output is exported, with the balance sold domestically as cooking gas.

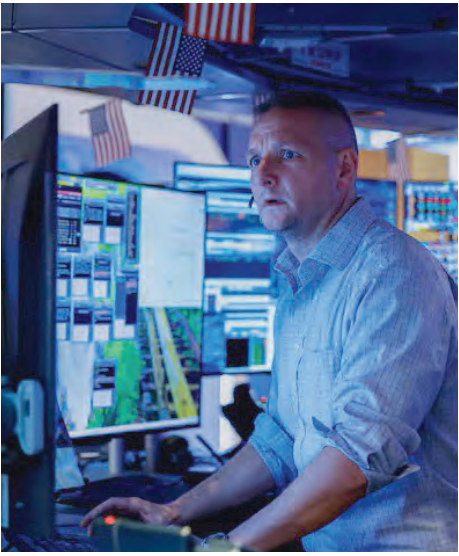
Shares steady amidst easing Fed rate bets

LONDON: Global shares edged higher and the dollar fell to its lowest level since June on Monday after a run of soft US economic data, including an unexpected drop in retail sales, saw markets reduce bets for an imminent rate hike from the Federal Reserve.

A hike next month is now priced at 30%, down sharply from about 50% a week earlier, according to the CME Group's FedWatch tool.

The STOXX benchmark of 600 big European companies inched up 0.04%, led by resources stocks as gold prices advanced, while in the US Nasdaq futures firmed 0.5% and S&P futures 0.2% .

There was subdued reaction in the Korean won after US President Donald Trump instructed the



Global shares rise as soft US data ease Fed rate fears.

Pentagon to substantially reduce joint military exercises with the country, while South Korean markets were closed for a holiday.

Oil prices were mixed after last week's gains. Iran on Saturday called on the US to accept defeat, while Trump urged Americans to accept higher gasoline prices while the conflict continues.

“While there is still no resolution to the Iran/Hormuz impasse, our base case remains that oil prices will stay in a \$70-\$100 range with Iran preventing it going lower and the US moving to try and calm things down whenever it gets above \$100”, Shane Oliver, chief economist at AMP, said in a note.

“The risk remains that there will be no sustainable peace deal, the

flow of oil out of the Middle East remains down 10%-15% on normal levels and that we will have to face higher oil prices as reserves run down”.

The bullish run in stocks has been driven by diminishing risk that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates next month.

US retail sales posted the first decline in nine months in July and consumer sentiment soured by more than expected, adding to soft inflation readings.

Earnings are lighter this week but include Home Depot, Target and Walmart, as investors scrutinise the strength of US consumers. The main data point this week is the August S&P Purchasing Managers' Indices (PMIs) to gauge whether the mid-

year acceleration in US business activity can be sustained.

In bond markets, US Treasury yields slipped after finishing mixed last week. The two-year US Treasury yield eased 2 basis points to 4.154%, having fallen 3 basis points last week to touch a seven-week low of 4.0977%.

Ten-year yields slipped to 4.688%, after rising 4 basis points last week.

The soft run of data has weighed on the dollar, with the euro hitting a two-month high of \$1.1595. The Australian and New Zealand dollars also reached 10-week peaks at \$0.7105 and \$0.5910.

In commodity markets, gold bounced 0.43% to \$4,394 an ounce , having climbed 0.8% last week.

— Reuters

ECONOMIC GROWTH

China factory growth slows



China's industrial output growth slowed while retail sales grew less than expected in July, highlighting strains on the economy from weak domestic demand, extreme weather disruptions and the waning effect of state policies aimed at boosting consumption.

The downbeat readings followed second-quarter growth that cooled to a three-and-a-half-year low.

— Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold gains on softer Fed bets



Gold drifted higher on Monday, supported by a weaker dollar and recent soft economic data that reduced expectations for a US interest rate hike next month.

Spot gold rose 0.6% to \$4,400.15 per ounce by 07:10 GMT. Prices hit a more-than-two-month high last week.

US gold futures for December delivery edged 0.4% higher to \$4,456.50.

— Reuters

RATE EXPECTATIONS

Stocks rise as dollar slips



Global shares edged higher and the dollar slipped towards two-month lows on Monday after a run of soft US economic data, including an unexpected drop in retail sales, saw markets reduce bets for an imminent rate hike from the Federal Reserve.

A hike next month is now priced at 30%, down sharply from about 50% a week earlier, according to the CME Group's FedWatch tool. — Reuters

Your life needs a board of advisers



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

YOU may be a senior executive working for a board, whether it is professional, academic or community. A professional board provides governance, oversight and strategic direction. An academic board focuses on education, institutional development and accountability, while a community board helps guide initiatives and ensure they deliver value to the people they serve.

But there is one area none of these boards can support: your personal life. For that, you need your own personal board of advisers.

I have had the privilege of serving on different formal boards, from financial and academic to community platforms. Sitting on these boards has taught me a lot about governance, accountability, decision-making and the importance of having people with different expertise around the table.

Over time, I realised that the same principle can be applied to our personal lives.

Who do you turn to when you have a difficult personal decision to make? Who challenges your thinking when you are unsure about your next career move? Who gives you honest advice when the decision is not about business, but about life?

This is why I believe everyone should have a personal board of advisers.

Unlike a formal board, this one does not need appointments, meetings, minutes or a boardroom. It is simply made up of

people you trust, respect and learn from, with different experiences that can offer perspectives you may not have yourself.

Successful people understand this too. Warren Buffett has spoken about the influence of his mentor Benjamin Graham, while Bill Gates has spoken about how much he learned from Buffett.

Oprah Winfrey has also described the importance of having trusted people around her who provide advice and perspective.

Your personal board can include a trusted friend, colleague or family member.

The members should ideally bring experience in areas you care about, such as business, finance, technology, leadership, relationships or personal development.

But before all of them, I believe there should be one person you turn to first: your chief adviser. For me, that person is my dad — an experienced, retired professional senior executive banker who is also religious and has tremendous life experience. He is not an expert in everything and he does not need to be. He is my generalist adviser. His experience comes from decades of living, working, making decisions, dealing with people, facing challenges and learning from both successes and mistakes.

Most importantly, his advice comes without expecting anything in return. That, for me, is priceless. So how do you build your own personal board? First, start with a chief adviser. Choose someone with broad

Your personal board can include a trusted friend, colleague or family member. The members should ideally bring experience in areas you care about.

life experience who understands you, knows your values and genuinely wants you to succeed. Second, identify the gaps in your experience. Find people who know what you do not know. Someone may understand finance, another business, technology, relationships or leadership.

But choose carefully. Experience alone is not enough.

Ask yourself: Does this person genuinely want me to succeed? A good adviser should sometimes challenge you, tell you uncomfortable truths and make you reconsider your decisions.

Third, listen, but decide for yourself. Advisers provide perspective; you remain responsible for your decisions. I sometimes listen to five people and still make a decision based on my gut feeling, backed by calculated risk and experience.

Finally, appreciate your advisers. Do not only call them when you need something. Check on them, thank them, support them and show them that their contribution matters.

To conclude, the value of formal boards that I have learned through my professional life is noteworthy. But I have also learned that some of the most important advice in life happens outside the boardroom.

Your success may have your name on it, but it is rarely built by you alone. Trust me. Until we catch up again next week, continue winning.

CHINA RETURNS TO OIL STOCKPILING

CLYDE RUSSELL

China managed to add a small volume of crude oil to inventories in July, as weak refinery processing outweighed a sharp drop in imports.

China’s surplus crude for July amounted to 210,000 barrels per day (bpd) and came after the world’s biggest oil importer drew on stockpiles in both May and June amid supply constraints caused by the Iran conflict.

The return to a surplus in China’s crude availability in July comes as a surprise given the huge decline in imports, with seaborne arrivals of oil down more than 3 million bpd from levels prior to the conflict. This had seen China’s refiners draw on stockpiles by about 940,000 bpd in June and 500,000 bpd in May.

China does not disclose the volumes of crude flowing into or out of its strategic and commercial stockpiles, but an estimate can be made by deducting the amount of oil processed from the total crude available from imports and domestic output. On this basis, crude oil imports of 8.41 million bpd and domestic output of 4.3 million bpd mean refiners had a total of 12.72 million bpd available.

China’s refiners processed 12.51 million bpd in July, according to official data released on Monday, down 15.8% from the same month last year and only marginally above the 12.47 million bpd from June.

Subtracting the July throughput from the total crude available leaves a surplus of about 210,000 bpd available for storage.

For the first seven months of the year China has added about 480,000 bpd to stockpiles after strong imports in the first quarter boosted the surplus of available crude. What the numbers show is that China has not really had to tap its vast oil inventories, estimated to contain at least 1.2 billion barrels, despite dramatically cutting its crude imports since the start of the Iran war.

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28 shipments of crude and refined products through the Strait of Hormuz have been constrained as Iran attacked vessels, partly as retaliation but also to gain leverage for any eventual peace settlement.

Just under 20% of the world’s crude oil passed through the narrow waterway prior to the war, and while the volumes getting through now are disputed, even the most optimistic figures from the US government still point to a current loss of about 5 million bpd from the Middle East from pre-conflict levels.

China’s imports of 8.41 million bpd in July were up from the decade-low of 7.12 million in June, but were still more than 3 million bpd below pre-war levels. To compensate for the lower imports, China has cut refinery processing rates, but they are still at levels sufficient to meet domestic demand.

China has instead cut exports of refined products, with shipments of 4.65 million metric tonnes in July being only marginally higher than the 4.36 million tonnes in June. — Reuters

How Oman can turn trust into industry

FOR 30 years, supply chains were organised around one question: who is cheapest? Since 2020 a second has displaced it: who can be counted on? Global Trade Alert logged 4,088 harmful trade measures in 2025 alone.

The International Energy Agency estimates that the top three refining countries account, on average, for about 86% of processing capacity across critical-mineral markets.

The World Economic Forum’s competitiveness scenarios conclude that ownership, technology origin and supplier nationality have themselves become sources of regulatory risk.

The upshot is that five industries have moved out of the trade column and into the security column: energy, food, minerals, medicine and computing. In each, buyers will pay a premium for supply they can verify, from a partner they expect to be dealing with in five years’ time.

Call the resulting business an assurance economy. Its product is not a lower price but certainty — verified origin, verified quality, verified continuity — and certainty is fetching margins that commodity manufacturing has not seen in a generation.

This reclassification suits Oman better than it suits its neighbours, because it inverts the constraint the sultanate has always been told is decisive. Competition on price rewards scale and Oman has none.

Competition on assurance rewards credibility, and Oman has plenty: working ties in every direction, a free-trade agreement with America in force since 2009, GCC market access, a deep-water port beyond the Strait of Hormuz, 18 submarine cables and 50 years of keeping its word.

Smallness is not the binding constraint in an assurance market. Trust is and trust is the one input Oman holds in surplus. Nowhere is that more concrete than in minerals. Oman Vision 2040 asks the mining sector to reach 10% of GDP, from roughly 1.4% in 2020. Omani geology alone cannot deliver it. Minerals Development Oman,



DR YOUSUF
HAMED AL
BALUSHI
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The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

Five industries have moved from the trade column to the security column. Oman should sell certainty, not cheapness.

backed by the Oman Investment Authority, holds multiple mining and exploration interests across the Sultanate of Oman; its flagship Mazoon Copper Project is designed to produce approximately 115,000 tonnes of copper concentrate annually.

Useful, but not transformative. The road from 1.4% to 10% runs through other countries’ ore.

Africa holds the deposits, America wants the output and neither is content with the refining capacity that exists today. Washington’s answer so far is the Lobito corridor, where the Development Finance Corporation and the Development Bank of Southern Africa closed a \$753 million financing package in June to rehabilitate more than 1,300 km of Angolan railway, with the project expected to substantially increase transport capacity.

There is no eastern equivalent — and no corridor of either kind ends at a refinery. Oman could be both. An eastern corridor, carrying East African ore a few days’ sail to Al Duqm or Salalah for separation and magnet-making before it moves on, requires three things the sultanate can assemble. Mineral and exploration rights, secured by MDO and the OIA alongside African producers.

Infrastructure finance, for which American development capital is already committed in Africa and openly looking for projects to replicate. And a refining node all sides accept. The third is the scarce ingredient and it is where neutrality stops being sentiment and becomes an asset with a price. Producers who will not send ore in one direction and buyers who will not receive it from another, can both deal with Muscat. The same logic extends across the rest. Energy security means manufacturing the transition — electrolyzers, solar components, grid equipment — not merely fueling it; Oman has ambitious plans for more than 30 GW of renewable-energy capacity and aims to lift renewables from a small base today towards 30% of electricity generation by 2030. Food security means precision fermentation,

which converts a land-and-water problem Oman cannot solve into an energy-and-biology one it can.

Health security means owning the marketing authorisation rather than renting the production line; Suhar already has a pharmaceutical cluster and Salalah has expanded its refrigerated-container capacity, strengthening its role in handling temperature-sensitive cargo.

Digital security means the layer above the data hall, where sovereign custody and certified post-quantum migration are exports requiring no factory at all.

Two developments make all this newly practical. The first is artificial intelligence, though not as usually imagined. Oman’s opportunity is less to build an AI sector than to use AI as the plumbing that makes assurance affordable. Proving provenance has always been the expensive part: inspectorates, laboratories, chains of custody, continuous audit.

That administrative bulk was available only to large states, which is why small economies were confined to low-trust, low-margin work. Machine learning collapses the cost. Digital product passports, automated inspection and dossier preparation mean a country of roughly 5 million people can run a certification regime that once required the bureaucracy of one with 50m.

The second is power. Mineral separation, fermentation, computing, sterile manufacturing and desalination are each electricity-hungry, which makes cheap renewable generation the cost line inside all five securities rather than a commodity to be shipped out as ammonia. In June Oman capped power at 12 baizas per kilowatt-hour for firms tied to food security. The principle deserves wider application.

Defence, which dominates every conversation about self-reliance, is not a sixth pillar but the customer for the other five. Every defence programme is now a procurement problem in minerals, energy, medicine, food and computing, bound by rules of origin.

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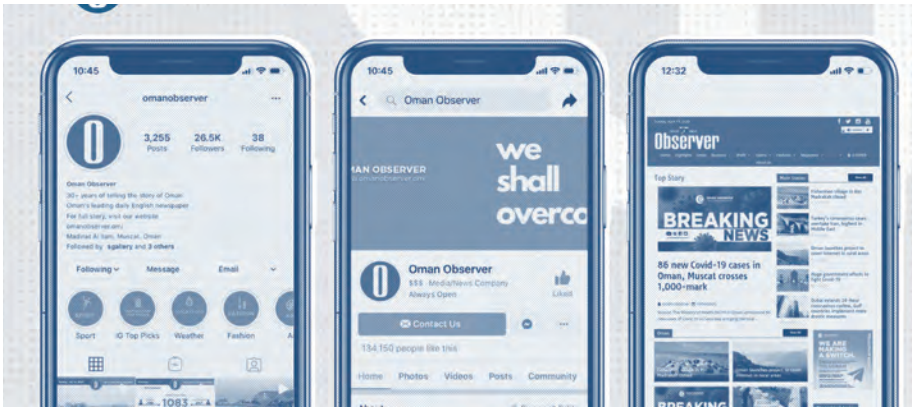
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HOLLYWOOD MOURNS HAYDEN PANETTIERE, ‘HEROES’ AND ‘NASHVILLE’ ACTRESS, DIES AT 36



American actress Hayden Panettiere, known for her roles in television shows such as “Nashville” and “Heroes”, has died at the age of 36, US media outlets including ABC News reported on Sunday, citing a statement from her father.

“It is with profound sadness that we share the tragic passing of our beloved Hayden. She was an incredible light and a force of nature who brought immeasurable love and joy to all who knew her and to the millions who watched her on-screen”, ABC quoted her father, Alan “Skip” Panettiere, as saying in a statement.

The cause of her death was not reported by ABC. Her agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment from Reuters.

A former child actor, Panettiere began her career at a young age and went on to establish herself across film and television. She gained early widespread recognition for voicing Dot, the young princess ant, in Pixar’s 1998 animated hit “A Bug’s Life”. Her work on the film’s read-along album earned her a Grammy nomination for Best Spoken Word Album for Children.

Panettiere shot to international fame in 2006 when she was cast as Claire Bennet, a high school cheerleader with regenerative superpowers, on NBC’s serialised science-fiction drama “Heroes”. The series became a major television hit and made Panettiere one of the most recognisable young stars of the period. Her character’s repeated declaration, “Save the cheerleader, save the world”, became closely associated with the show.

She also appeared in the 2000 football drama “Remember the Titans”, starring Denzel Washington, further establishing her presence on the big screen.

Panettiere later took on one of her most prominent television roles as Juliette Barnes in the musical drama “Nashville”. Her performance as the ambitious and troubled country music star earned her two Golden Globe nominations, in 2013 and 2014, for Best Supporting Actress in a Television Series, Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television.

Her film credits also included appearances in the satirical horror “Scream” franchise, adding to a career that moved between television drama, comedy, animation and film.

Panettiere’s most recent appearance was in the psychological thriller “Sleepwalker”, released in the United States in January 2026, according to IMDb. In the film, she played a grieving mother plagued by episodes of sleepwalking.

Her death comes three years after the death of her younger brother, actor Jansen Panettiere, who died in 2023 at the age of 28 from complications related to an enlarged heart and an aortic-valve condition, according to a family statement made to US media at the time.

Panettiere leaves behind a body of work spanning more than two decades, from childhood performances to roles that made her a familiar face to television and film audiences around the world. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



EVENTS

US actress Madelyn Cline attends the Netflix’s “Outer Banks” season 5 event “Pogues for Life: A Fan Farewell” at the Fort Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP



FASHION

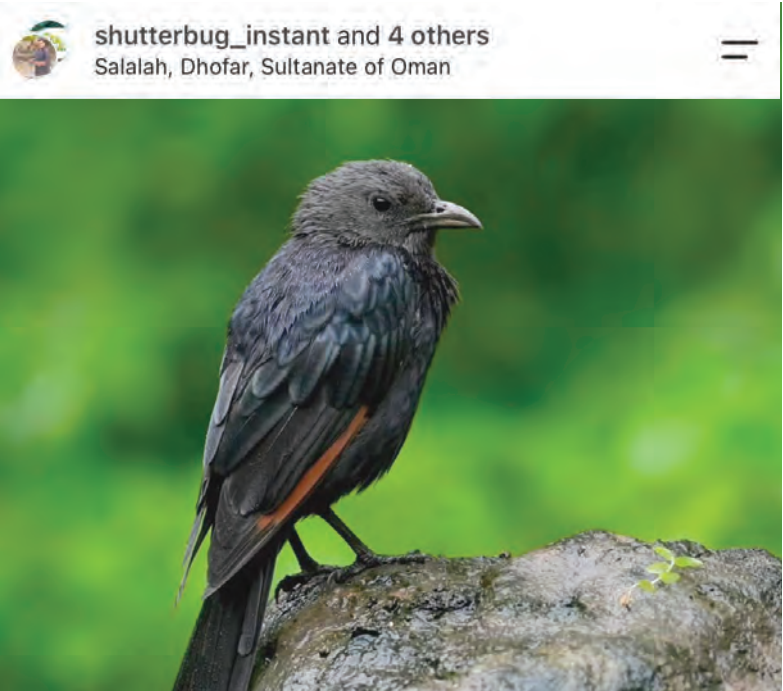
A Congolese “sapeur” performs during the DRC Fashion Week, held under the theme of promoting “sape”, a Congolese fashion and cultural movement. — AFP



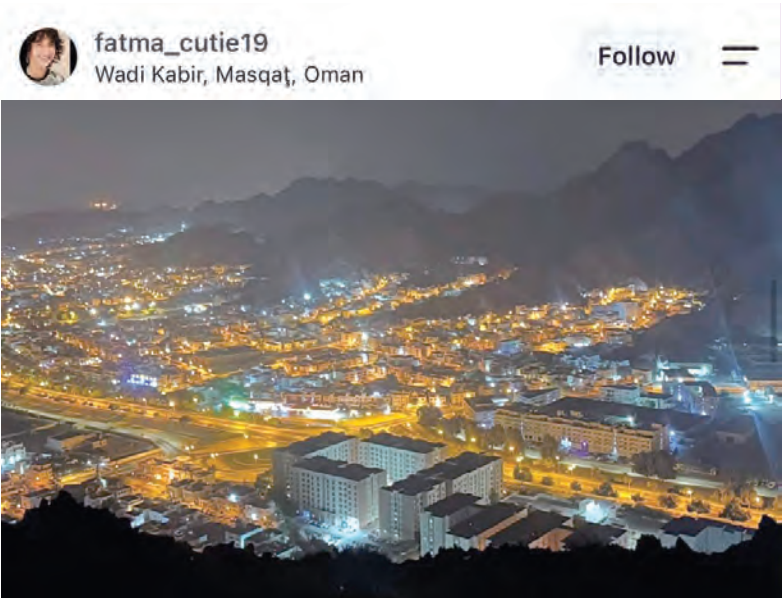
CELEBRITIES

Canadian actor Paul Anthony Kelly attends the Television Academy’s Inaugural Televerse Festival at JW Marriott LA Live in Los Angeles. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“A jet-black Tristram’s Starling in Dhofar”



“Stargazing over the city of Al Wadi Al Kabir”

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ARTISTS RECLAIM WALLS FROM GANGS IN EL SALVADOR



On walls where gang members in El Salvador once marked their territory, urban artists are now creating colourful murals as part of a traveling festival across the Central American country. Cans of paint are used by a dozen artists to depict jaguars, faces, flowers, birds and other local elements. The latest murals were created in Concepcion de Ataco, Ahuachapan, a picturesque town nestled among coffee-growing mountains about 65 km west of San Salvador. Isaac Sosa, 31, founder and organiser of the Pigmen Trip festival, said it was once “frightening” to paint murals in gang-controlled areas because of harassment and threats. The festival has been held for eight years in different locations and has produced more than 200 murals, featuring artists from El Salvador as well as Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Peru and Argentina. Gangs have lost significant power following President Nayib

Bukele’s security campaign launched in 2022, though the crackdown has faced allegations of abuses that could constitute crimes against humanity, according to NGOs. “With this change, this rebirth we are experiencing as a country... it’s a different atmosphere, more peaceful, more enjoyable and with greater freedom of expression”, Sosa said. Muralist Darwin Flores, 36, recalled that artists previously had to carefully plan every detail before entering gang-controlled areas. Today, he says, he can enter neighbourhoods that were once considered dangerous. Cristian Juarez, 29, who paints with a prosthetic leg after losing his right leg in an accident, said the situation is now “very different”. “Years later, we won back the walls from the gangs”, Sosa said, describing art as a “magical tool” for social transformation.

— AFP



TRADITIONAL CONNECTION OF IRANIAN CARPETS WITH OMAN EXPLORED

KABEER YOUSUF

AN attempt to explore the traditional connection between Iranian carpet weaving and Oman was showcased at an Iranian carpet weaving session organised by the National Museum in association with Al Besat Carpets. Titled “A Timeless Craft Takes Shape: Discover the Art of Handwoven Carpet Making”, the session was conducted by Amir Hossein Dehshid, a Persian carpet specialist and conservator; and attracted participants from different walks of life. Iranian, or Persian, carpets have shared a deep historical and commercial connection with Oman, shaped by centuries of maritime trade, the proximity of the two countries across the Sea of Oman and their shared Islamic artistic heritage. Dehshid said that while Oman had its own indigenous weaving traditions, fine Iranian rugs had long been prized in Omani homes, palaces and majlis spaces as symbols of status, elegance and exquisite craftsmanship. “For centuries, dhows and merchant fleets crossed the Gulf of Oman, linking Omani ports such as Muscat and Muttrah with Iranian coastal trading hubs. Textiles, spices and hand-knotted Persian carpets were among the goods brought by traders, establishing a lasting appreciation for Iranian craftsmanship in Omani architecture and interior design”, he said. He noted that fine Persian and Baluchi-style Iranian carpets had traditionally been favoured for formal reception rooms, or majlis, across Oman for their warmth, durability and intricate geometric and floral motifs. “There are symmetrical and asymmetrical knots that make Iranian carpets stand out”, he said, highlighting the distinctive techniques behind the craftsmanship. Specialty showrooms, including local merchants in Muttrah Souq and dedicated suppliers across Oman, have continued to offer both authentic hand-knotted and high-



grade machine-woven Iranian rugs suited to modern and traditional Omani interiors. The workshop concluded on August 17 at the National Museum,



offering participants an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the craftsmanship, techniques and historical significance behind Iranian handwoven carpets.

FEATURES

As screen time becomes an increasingly dominant part of childhood, parents are looking for ways to help children reconnect with play, nature and real-world experiences. Montessori teacher Abeer Ibrahim shares practical ways to reduce screen dependence while encouraging creativity, movement, connection and the often-overlooked value of boredom.

RUQAYA AL KINDI

In a world of rapidly evolving images, sounds and notifications, children are surrounded by entertainment that requires little effort. A single click starts a song, one short clip leads to another and video games offer new challenges at any moment. For many families, holidays bring a recurring question: how can children spend more time away from screens without turning it into a daily battle?

Mobile devices provide intense stimulation and quick pleasure, often described as “cheap dopamine”. Over time, constant exposure can make ordinary activities feel less exciting. Abeer Ibrahim, Certified Montessori Teacher, Early Childhood 0-9, believes that giving children more opportunities for real play and outdoor activities can help them regain a calmer and more stable rhythm.

“The problem is that a child who is used to the constant stimulation of his brain provided by screens may find difficulty in enjoying things that seem simple and normal for their peers”, she said, citing activities such as watching ants in the garden, playing with sand, shaping clay or listening to a story told by a parent.

Rather than eliminating screens completely, families can gradually reduce screen time while opening other doors to fun through movement, exploration, achievement and social interaction.

Challenge-based activities can provide children with a sense of satisfaction similar to the reward they seek from screens. Abeer explained that solving puzzles and participating in group games give children opportunities to try, fail and try again until they succeed. Beyond learning a skill, children experience achievement, motivation and the natural release of dopamine, one of the brain’s reward-related chemicals. Nature, movement and sensory play can also contribute to a calmer mood. Going to the park, running, riding scooters and playing with other children encourage movement and interaction. Activities involving water, sand and playdough, along with drawing and colouring, can help children focus and relax.

Quiet moments can be equally meaningful. “Reading bedtime stories with lots of hugs from parents all help the child to relax and feel content”, she said.

Physical activities such as running, jumping, playing ball and riding bicycles can promote joy and wellbeing, while role-playing, imitating characters and taking turns allow children to become active participants rather than passive observers. “The child becomes more present with their body, voice and imagination; and play transforms into a shared social experience”, Abeer noted.

Even the kitchen can become a place for engagement. Children



A MORE JOYFUL, SCREEN-FREE SUMMER FOR CHILDREN



can help prepare meals, choose ingredients, add their own touches and sit with their families to enjoy what they have made.

Abeer stressed that parents’ presence is more important than the alternatives offered to children. Consistent quality time can reduce their need to seek constant stimulation while strengthening their sense of belonging and connection.

A less device-dependent lifestyle, she added, does not mean eliminating technology, but restructuring the relationship with it. Clear boundaries around when, where and how devices are used can reduce arguments and negotiations.

Parents should also not fear boredom. Abeer believes that allowing children unstructured time encourages creativity and innovative thinking. Recalling the games of the 1990s and earlier generations, she noted that children once created entertainment using what was available, from folk games and handmade doll clothes to simple bead accessories and books.

“Boredom” can therefore become not an empty space to be filled, but an opportunity for children to discover how to create their own fun.