

O M A N
عُضَائِد
D A I L Y

Observer

OMAN'S DRIVE FOR BABY FRIENDLY HOSPITALS

4

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SUNRISE 06:00 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 04:45 AM
DHUHR 12:00 PM
ASR 03:23 PM
MAGHRIB 05:56 PM
ISHA 07:06 PM

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INBRIEF

ONLINE SCAM RISES BY 50% IN FIRST HALF

HIS MAJESTY VISITS BELARUS ON MONDAY

Visit to promote cooperation between two countries

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations, said cyber fraud crimes in the Sultanate of Oman surged by 50 per cent during the first half of 2025 compared to the same period of last year. This is due to the rapid development of technology, electronic payment systems and the widespread use of digital platforms. Brig Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi, Director-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation at ROP, said that the recent developments in technology and electronic payment systems facilitated daily life for individuals and communities but was associated with an increase in cybercrimes with fraudsters using advanced technologies. **DETAILS ON P3**



FIRST EDITION OF ' INJAZ '

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has released the first edition of the semi-annual bulletin Injaz. It includes a number of growth indicators across the sectors of transport, logistics, communications and information technology for the first half of the year 2025. **DETAILS ON P12**

FOOD SECURITY LAB 2025 TO DRIVE INVESTMENTS



The Food Security Lab 2025, which begins on Sunday, is organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) with participation from government agencies, state-owned enterprises, private sector companies and associations. The initiative is part of the ongoing efforts to strengthen the national food security system and advance the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The lab aims to boost investment in food security sectors, establish an integrated and sustainable food system through enabling initiatives, enhance the efficiency of digital services in the field, promote institutional integration and raise planning and implementation capacity across the ministry and the sector as a whole. It also seeks to improve career pathways and performance levels by developing individual and organisational skills. **DETAILS ON P14**



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will go on a state-visit to the Republic of Belarus on Monday. A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect. It reads as follows: “In response to an invitation received by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq from President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus, His Majesty the Sultan will go on a state-visit to the Republic of Belarus on October 6-7.

The visit comes within the context of promoting relations of cooperation between Oman and Belarus and pushing them towards wider horizons in a manner that meets aspirations of the two countries. The visit will discuss areas of cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and means of boosting them to serve the joint interests. During the visit, the two leaders will exchange views on a set of current regional and international issues.



His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied during the visit by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdussalam bin Mohammed al

Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident Ambassador to the Republic of Belarus. May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys and grant him good health and wellbeing!” — ONA **SEE ALSO P2**

Oman welcomes US efforts on Gaza ceasefire

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN has welcomed the efforts led by the United States of America, under the leadership of President Donald Trump, to halt the war in the Gaza Strip and reach an agreement that ends the suffering of the Palestinian people and guarantees their legitimate rights. Oman also welcomed the response of Hamas to the proposal, which paves the way for a complete withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from Gaza, creates conditions for reconstruction, prevents the displacement of the Palestinian people and supports efforts aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace. While underlining its confidence in the efforts made by all countries to find a peaceful and lasting solution in Gaza, Oman expressed hope that these efforts would result in the urgent and effective delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians and the establishment of a peace based on the two-state solution. This, Oman affirmed, would ensure the Palestinian people can establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions and the principles of international law. Meanwhile, some 137 activists detained by Israel for taking part in a flotilla seeking



A pro-Palestinian demonstrator takes part in a national protest for Gaza, in Rome, Italy, on Saturday. — Reuters

to deliver aid to Gaza arrived in Istanbul on Saturday after being deported, according to reporters at the airport. The individuals included 36 Turkish nationals, as well as citizens from the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria,

Morocco, Italy, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Switzerland, Tunisia and Jordan, ministry sources added. The Turkish Airlines flight landed at Istanbul Airport. Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said 26 Italians were on board, with another 15 still held in Israel and set to be expelled over the next few days - along with activists from other nations. Israel has faced international condemnation after its military intercepted all of about 40 boats in a flotilla carrying aid to Gaza and detained more than 450 activists. “I have once again given instructions to the Italian Embassy in Tel Aviv to ensure that the remaining compatriots are treated with respect for their rights”, Tajani wrote on X. In another development, UN rights chief Volker Turk said that Trump's Gaza peace plan was a “vital opportunity” to stop bloodshed in the Palestinian territory “once and for all.” Turk hopes the momentum from the US president's peace plan will “pave the way for a permanent cessation of hostilities, followed by recovery and reconstruction,” his office said on X as it urged a resolution “in line with international human rights and humanitarian laws, and the much needed two-state solution”. — Agencies **SEE ALSO P6**

AASR banner advertisement. The background is a gradient of blue and purple. On the left, the AASR logo is displayed in white, with the tagline 'Experience Better' below it. In the center, the text 'Their future starts today!' is written in white, followed by 'Change to AASR, Fastest Internet In Oman'. Below this, two bullet points are listed: 'Get Ashel Educational Platform for free!' and 'Unlimited data for all plans'. On the right, there is an illustration of a young boy sitting at a desk, using a laptop. Behind him, there are faint, stylized drawings of a lightbulb, a triangle, and mathematical formulas like $x = \frac{\sqrt{b^2 - c^2}}{2}$. To the right of the boy, there is a QR code and the text 'SUBSCRIBE NOW! WhatsApp 80001000 Website: aasr.om'.

**HM'S
HISTORIC
VISIT TO
BELARUS
BOOSTS
BILATERAL
TIES**

A circular portrait of Dr. N. S. Ravi, a man with a mustache wearing a white turban and a white shirt.

THE VISIT IS EXPECTED TO STRENGTHEN TRADE TIES,
ENCOURAGE PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS, AND OPEN
CHANNELS FOR EXPERTISE EXCHANGE AND TECHNOLOGY



President Alexander Lukashenko visited the National Museum during his official visit in December 2024



Belarus looks to Oman as a gateway to export its products to various world countries, noting its promising investment opportunities

— ONA

SHORT TAKES



RO 64.9 MILLION SEWAGE PROJECTS UNDERWAY IN SEEB

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services Company is implementing sewage infrastructure projects worth RO 64.9 million in the Wilayat of Al Seeb to improve efficiency, protect the environment and support urban expansion.

Eng Moaz bin Jumaa al Ghailani, Director of Projects at Nama Water Services, said the projects include over 400 km of main and secondary networks, house connections and treatment facilities.

Key projects include: North Maabela / Sur Al Hadid (RO 10.2m): 47.5 km of networks, 30 km of house connections for 3,500 homes; completion in Q1 2028.

•North Al Hail/ North Al Mawaleh (RO 8m): 63.5 km of networks; 17% completed, Al Maabela 7 & 4 (RO 14.4m): 37.5 km of networks and 106 km of house connections; completion in 2029, Al Khoudh (RO 12.6m): 66 km of networks, 750 inspection chambers; completion in 2028, Al Manuma/Al Sharadi (RO 5.6m): Progress at 8.5 per cent and Sultan Haitham City Link (RO 7.7m): 7 km sewage line; due in 2026.

Additionally, a 20,000 m³/day treatment plant worth RO 7m is being developed for Sultan Haitham City. Plans also include new sewage networks for coastal areas with 340 inspection pits.

Additionally, a new sewage treatment plant with a capacity of 20,000 cubic metres per day is being developed at a cost of RO 7 million. The project includes design, supply, installation, and operation phases, and will serve Sultan Haitham City. Work is also underway on coastal network designs in Al Seeb, covering internal sewage systems ranging from 200 mm to 600 mm in diameter, with house connections between 100 mm and 185 mm and 340 inspection pits.

“These projects will not only improve service quality and reduce pollution risks but also enhance living standards for residents and strengthen environmental sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040,” Eng Al Ghailani said. “These projects will improve service quality, reduce pollution, and support sustainability in line with Oman Vision 2040,” Eng Al Ghailani said. — ONA

OMAN BOOSTS GCC HEALTH TIES AT MINISTERS’ MEETING

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 11th meeting of the GCC Health Ministers’ Committee, held in Kuwait, with the participation of the Ministers of Health of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, on Saturday.

The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation was headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, who emphasised that this meeting represents a new milestone in strengthening cooperation in

the health sector among the GCC countries. He highlighted the importance of the topics discussed and the resulting decisions and recommendations that will contribute to building more efficient, resilient and sustainable health systems.

The meeting discussed ways to enhance cooperation and joint integration, and advance the health system, thus contributing to improving the quality of life and enhancing health security in

the GCC countries. The meeting discussed the GCC Drug Control Strategy (2025-2026), which represents a collective response to a cross-border challenge that requires integrated efforts to protect youth and safeguard the future of nations.

The meeting also discussed the GCC Public Health Plan (2026-2030), which constitutes an integrated road map focused on prevention, promoting integration and emphasising the concept of health. — ONA

Oman achieves global social protection award in Malaysia

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
KUALA LUMPUR, OCT 4

OMAN HAS earned international acclaim for its pioneering role in social protection, with the Social Protection Fund (SPF) receiving three Certificates of Excellence from the International Social Security Association (ISSA) at the World Social Security Forum (WSSF) 2025, held in Malaysia from September 29 to October 3 under the theme ‘Shaping Social Security in a Changing World.’

The Fund was recognised for its compliance with ISSA guidelines in Contribution Collection and Compliance, Service Quality, and Human Resource Management — reflecting its institutional efficiency and commitment to global best practices.

The WSSF, convened every three years, is the largest global gathering in the field, drawing policymakers and experts from more than 150 countries.

This year’s forum examined pressing challenges, including digital innovation, the use of AI in social security, pension



Oman earned global acclaim for pioneering role with the Social Protection Fund at the World Social Security Forum held in Malaysia

sustainability and expanding inclusive coverage amid demographic and technological change.

At the opening ceremony, ISSA President Dr Mohammed Azman praised Oman’s social protection reforms, particularly its landmark move to merge multiple pension funds into a unified, comprehensive system. He described Oman’s approach as “a global model in adapting to change and ensuring long-term sustainability.”

The triple recognition highlights Oman’s success in aligning with international standards and advancing a modern, equitable, and resilient social protection

system. According to ISSA, the awards followed a rigorous evaluation process assessing governance, compliance, service delivery and innovation in digital platforms.

The SPF’s achievement builds on earlier honours, including the Good Practice Award for Asia and the Pacific Region, which further cemented Oman’s position as a regional and global leader in social protection governance.

As the forum concluded, delegates issued recommendations aimed at shaping the future of social protection worldwide — with Oman standing out as a key contributor and example of reform-driven resilience.



OMAN PARTICIPATES IN UNESCO MONDIACULT 2025 IN SPAIN

BARCELONA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the Unesco World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (Mondiacult 2025), being held in Barcelona, Spain. The conference concluded on October 1.

The Omani delegation was headed by Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, with the participation of Amina bint Salem al Balushiyah,

Oman’s Permanent Representative to Unesco. The conference focused on the cultural dimension of the post-2030 sustainable development agenda. It also addressed priority issues including culture as a human right, culture and education, the cultural economy and decent work, cultural heritage and climate change, culture for peace, digital transformation, artificial intelligence and culture, and the role of cultural data and research. — ONA

Online scam rises by 50% in first half

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations, said cyber fraud crimes in Oman surged by 50 per cent during the first half of 2025 compared to the same period of last year. This is due to the rapid development of technology, electronic payment systems, and the widespread use of digital platforms.

Brig Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi, Director-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation at ROP, said that the recent developments in technology and electronic payment systems facilitated daily life for individuals and communities but were associated with an increase in cybercrimes with fraudsters using advanced technologies, particularly methods based on artificial intelligence (AI) and deep fakes.

He added that the most common cybercriminal tactics is the fake commercial advertisements promoted through online marketplaces and online buying and selling platforms.

Victims are deceived by fake offers of products or services at prices significantly lower than the actual market prices. They are then lured



into paying sums of money as a down payment or full price following which the advertiser vanishes.

Al Quraishi explained that one of the newest fraud methods detected by ROP is the use of deep fake technologies through certain video communication programmes. These technologies are used to impersonate government employees to persuade victims to disclose their personal and banking information which can then be exploited to steal their money.

He added that the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations has also detected several recurring fraudulent methods, such as the promotion of fake advertisements on social media

platforms that mimic real platforms offering domestic worker recruitment services at attractive prices. The police have also detected several fake advertisements for renting buildings, apartments and rest houses.

He pointed out that one of the most common methods used recently is the design of websites resembling official websites. These websites are uploaded to search engines, appearing at the top of the search engine list, lending them a sense of credibility. These websites then prompt victims to disclose their personal and banking information to complete their transactions. Upon payment of the required fees and the entering of an OTP number sent to the victims’ phones via text messages, the funds available in their bank accounts are immediately withdrawn.

This criminal tactic is usually associated with another tactic: fraud via job functions. Fraudsters operating outside the Sultanate of Oman create a network of bank accounts, which they later use to conceal funds obtained through fraudulent operations. These accounts are then promoted on social media for job offers such as financial adviser or financial agent. — ONA

ELECTRONIC BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Information shall be electronically bidding vehicles and elements of the printing press through on Mazad Oman (www.mazad.om) in accordance with the following statement:

Statement	Place of Inspection	Date and Timing of Inspection	Date of Electronic Bidding
Vehicles	Madinat Al Ilam	Wednesday 08/10/2025 Thursday 09/10/2025	From Wednesday 12/10/2025 To Thursday 13/10/2025
Elements of the Printing Press	Stores of the Ministry of Information in Ruwi	Between 8:00 am & 1:00 pm	

- You may acquaint yourself with the terms and sign up through www.mazad.om
- For further details, you may reach us through info@mazad.om



B U I L D I N G H E A L T H I E R F U T U R E S

OMAN’S DRIVE FOR BABY FRIENDLY HOSPITALS



We are currently accrediting hospitals under the Ministry of Health, and the next phase will include private hospitals and primary healthcare institutions. A trained national team is in place to evaluate hospitals across Oman, ensuring they meet international benchmarks.

KHADIJA AL ZAIDI
Baby-Friendly Hospital
Programme Trainer

SIHAM
AL SAIDI

HEALTHCARE

INSTITUTIONS across Oman are accelerating efforts to achieve the prestigious ‘Baby-Friendly Hospital’ designation, an international accreditation supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Unicef.

The initiative underscores the nation’s commitment to advancing maternal and child health, with breastfeeding at the core of building healthier generations.

Hospitals and primary healthcare centres are aligning their services with the National Guidelines for Baby-Friendly Hospitals, which emphasise the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding – from encouraging early initiation to providing sustained support for mothers throughout their journey.

Over recent months, training programmes have been rolled out across multiple governorates to strengthen staff capacity, raise awareness on the benefits of breastfeeding and equip medical professionals with the skills to meet international accreditation standards.

Khadija al Zaidi, a trainer in the Baby-Friendly Hospital Programme and member of the national evaluation team, noted: “We are currently accrediting hospitals under the Ministry of Health, and the next phase will include private

hospitals and primary healthcare institutions. A trained national team is in place to evaluate hospitals across Oman, ensuring they meet international benchmarks.”

At present, Khoula Hospital in Muscat is the only officially certified

baby-friendly institution in

Oman. However,

progress is

visible, with

preliminary

evaluations

completed in several

hospitals and final

assessments conducted in

Ibri, Nizwa, Al Rustaq, Suhar and

Al Buraimi.

“The aim is to expand the network of accredited

hospitals so that every mother and child benefits from the best possible

support during this critical stage of life,” Al Zaidi added.

The initiative highlights Oman’s broader alignment with international health strategies while tailoring them to local priorities. Beyond policies and evaluations, success relies on the daily commitment of doctors and nurses who guide mothers and support families.

With momentum growing, Oman’s healthcare sector is moving steadily towards a future where every hospital is a safe and supportive space for mothers and newborns.

Hospitals and primary healthcare centres are aligning their services with the National Guidelines for Baby-Friendly Hospitals, which emphasise the

10

Steps to Successful Breastfeeding from encouraging early initiation to providing sustained support for mothers throughout their journey

GAZA CEASEFIRE

SHORTTAKES



PALESTINIANS
HAIL TRUMP
CEASEFIRE CALL

KHAN YUNIS: Smoke billowed over Gaza City on Saturday, yet for the first time in months, residents felt a ceasefire was within reach as they welcomed US President Donald Trump’s call for Israel to stop bombing. “Trump’s announcement was very surprising to me, as he has always been biased toward Israel,” said 24-year-old Jamila al Sayyid, from Gaza City’s Zeitun neighbourhood.

Despite Trump’s appeal, she said “the planes did not stop” bombing, but still felt good about her decision not to flee from the territory’s largest urban centre. “The most important thing is that the ceasefire will take effect and the Israeli prisoners will be released, as they are a pretext for Israel to continue its occupation”, she added.

For Sami Adas of Gaza City, however, it was a “day of joy, a great day”. The 50-year-old, who has been living in a tent with his family in the west of Gaza City. — **AFP**

UN RIGHTS CHIEF
HAILS CHANCE TO
STOP CARNAGE



VOLKER TURK
UN rights chief

GENEVA: UN rights chief Volker Turk on Saturday said US President Donald Trump’s Gaza peace plan was a “vital opportunity” to stop bloodshed in the Palestinian territory “once and for all”. Turk hopes the momentum

from the US president’s peace plan will “pave the way for a permanent cessation of hostilities, followed by recovery and reconstruction,” his office said on X as it urged a resolution “in line with international human rights and humanitarian laws, and the much needed two-state solution”.

He called the plan a “vital opportunity for all parties and influential states to pursue in good faith and stop — once and for all — the carnage and the suffering in Gaza, to flood the strip with humanitarian aid, and to ensure the release of the hostages and numerous detained Palestinians.”

The proposal details a gradual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the disarmament of Hamas. — **AFP**

ISRAEL STILL OPERATING IN GAZA



Palestinians walk on a coastal path northwest of Nuseirat refugee camp. — **AFP**

ISRAEL said on Saturday its troops were still operating in Gaza and warned residents not to return, despite calls from the families of Israeli hostages and US President Donald Trump for an immediate halt to the fighting. Trump issued the appeal to the key US ally after Palestinian group Hamas said it was ready to release all hostages and start talks on the details of his plan to end the nearly two-year war. “The movement announces its approval for the release of all hostages — living and remains — according to the exchange formula included in President Trump’s proposal,” Hamas said in a Friday statement. Trump later posted on Truth Social: “Based on the Statement just issued by Hamas, I believe they are ready for a lasting PEACE. Israel must immediately

Despite Trump’s appeal, Gaza’s civil defence agency said Israel carried out dozens of attacks on Gaza City overnight, with nearby hospitals reporting casualties

stop the bombing of Gaza, so that we can get the Hostages out safely and quickly!”

A senior Hamas official said on Saturday the group was “ready to begin negotiations immediately to finalise all issues”. Another Hamas official said Egypt, a mediator in the truce talks, would host a conference for Palestinian factions to decide on Gaza’s post-war future.

Trump’s proposal calls for a halt to hostilities, the release of hostages within 72 hours, a gradual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Hamas’s disarmament.

It also stipulates that Hamas and other factions “not have any role in the governance of Gaza”, with administration of the territory instead taken up by a technocratic body overseen by a post-war transitional authority headed by Trump himself. “President Trump’s demand to stop the war immediately

is essential to prevent serious and irreversible harm to the hostages,” the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement. “We call on Prime Minister Netanyahu to immediately begin efficient and swift negotiations to bring all our hostages home.”

But despite Trump’s appeal, Gaza’s civil defence agency said Israel carried out dozens of attacks on Gaza City overnight, with nearby hospitals reporting casualties.

“It was a very violent night, during which the (Israeli army) carried out dozens of air strikes and artillery shelling on Gaza City and other areas in the Strip, despite President Trump’s call to halt the bombing,” spokesman Mahmud Bassal said. Bassal said 20 homes were destroyed overnight.

The Israeli military said it was operating in Gaza City and urged residents not to return. — **AFP**

KEY REACTIONS

REACTION AFTER CALLS FOR END TO GAZA BOMBING

Here are some reactions from around the world to Hamas’ comments and Trump’s reaction:

EU COMMISSION PRESIDENT URSULA VON DER LEYEN
“Hamas’ stated readiness to release hostages and engage on the basis of the recent @POTUS proposal is encouraging. This moment must be seized. An immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all hostages are within reach.”

FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON
“The release of all hostages and a ceasefire in Gaza are within reach! Hamas’ commitment must be followed up without delay. We now have the opportunity to make decisive progress towards peace.”

GERMAN CHANCELLOR FRIEDRICH MERZ
“The fighting must cease immediately. All of this must happen very fast. After almost two years, this is the best chance for peace. Germany will continue to engage.”

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER KEIR STARMER
“Hamas’ acceptance of the US peace plan is a significant step forwards. We strongly support President Trump’s efforts, which have brought us closer to peace than ever before. There is now an opportunity to end the fighting.”

TURKISH PRESIDENT TAYYIP ERDOGAN
“Hamas has shown, as it has many times before, that it is ready for peace. Thus, a window of opportunity has opened for lasting peace in our region. It is very important in this respect that Israel immediately stop its attacks.”

SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER JOSE LUIS ALBARES
“An immediate ceasefire, the entry of food and humanitarian aid, the release of the hostages, all is welcome. It’s not a definitive step; there are still many obstacles... We want the Israeli army to definitively cease all military actions.”



Protest in solidarity with Gaza, in Barcelona. — **Reuters**

IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER SIMON HARRIS
“This moment to end the unconscionable human suffering must be grasped by all. Stop the bombing, silence the guns, end the famine and allow a surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza,” he said.

INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI
“We welcome President Trump’s leadership as peace efforts in Gaza make decisive progress. Indications of the release of hostages mark a significant step forward. India will continue to strongly support all efforts.”

JORDANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY
Jordan welcomed Hamas’ positive response to Trump’s plan, calling it an important step to end the Gaza war, a ministry statement said. Amman also praised Egypt and Qatar’s mediation.

SOUTH AFRICA DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
“We welcome the decision by Hamas to release all Israeli hostages and its stated readiness for further engagement. This decision must be met with reciprocal action by the State of Israel.”

CANADA PRIME MINISTER MARK CARNEY
“Canada welcomes commitments from Hamas to relinquish power and release all remaining hostages, living and deceased. We encourage all parties to immediately work to turn commitments into reality, and to advance peace and security in the region.”

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY ALBANESE
“Australia welcomes progress on President Trump’s plan to bring peace to Gaza,” he wrote on X. “Together with our partners, Australia will continue to support efforts to end the war and work towards a just and sustainable two-state solution.”

DUTCH PRIME MINISTER DICK SCHOOF
“Important steps toward a ceasefire in Gaza thanks to President Trump’s peace plan. Hamas’s stated willingness to release the hostages and its willingness to enter direct negotiations on the peace plan is a positive sign.” — **Reuters**

WIDESPREAD DEMANDS



Protesters watch as smoke billows from a burning barricade, in Antsiranana. — AFP

RIVAL RALLIES IN MADAGASCAR AFTER DEADLY PROTESTS

ANTANANARIVO: Backers and foes of Madagascar’s cornered government staged rival rallies in the capital Antananarivo on Saturday following days of fatal youth-led protests the president has termed a coup bid. Inspired by similar movements in Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia, the protests led by an online youth movement known as Gen Z Mada, have tapped into widespread frustration over poor governance, with demonstrators calling for President Andry Rajoelina to step down.

At least 22 people have been killed and hundreds injured, according to the United Nations, a toll the government has dismissed as based on rumours or misinformation. The anti-government protesters attempted to converge in the centre of Antananarivo but were prevented by a heavy police presence.

Officers erected roadblocks, including in the Ambondrona neighbourhood.

“It’s the shortest route to Ambohijatovo,” said 18-year-old student Ilan Randrianarison, referring to their planned meeting point. “Given the massacres, the protesters are getting angrier and angrier. We’re here for our comrades,” he said, wearing a straw hat that has become a symbol of defiance.

In the capital’s main Independence Avenue, armoured vehicles and military police stood guard. Some officers killed time on their phones, played cards or napped in the shadow of city hall. Supporters of the embattled government meanwhile met at the Coliseum — a Roman-inspired amphitheatre inaugurated by Rajoelina after he was first installed in power by the military in 2009 following a popular uprising.

That rally attracted fewer people than the anti-government protests. In the northern city of Antsiranana, hundreds of students also marched, waving placards and carrying a mock coffin covered with orange fabric emblazoned with the image of Rajoelina, journalists saw. — AFP

FLIGHTS RESUME AT MUNICH AIRPORT AFTER SECOND DRONE SCARE

FRANKFURT: Flights resumed “progressively” on Saturday at Munich airport, but delays were expected after a drone scare caused a second shutdown in as many days, affecting over 6,500 passengers, the operator said. Airports in Denmark, Norway and Poland have recently suspended flights due to unidentified drones, while Romania and Estonia have pointed the finger at Russia, which has brushed off the allegations.

Munich airport said that on Friday “from 9:30 pm air traffic

was restricted and then cancelled due to drone sightings”, meaning 23 incoming flights were diverted and 12 bound for Munich were cancelled. A police spokesman said that there were “two simultaneous confirmed drone sightings by police patrols just before 11 pm around the north and south runways”. “The drones immediately moved away, before they could be identified,” he added. “As on the previous night, the airport, in collaboration with the airlines, promptly provided supplies for passengers in the

terminals. Camp beds were set up, along with blankets, drinks, and snacks,” the airport said.

German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said the first night’s incident was a “wake-up call” on the threat from drones. “The race between the threat from drones and the defence against drones is becoming more and more difficult,” he told Bild, adding that “more financing and research” on the issue was urgently needed at the national and European levels.

— AFP

Strikes hit train station in Ukraine, injuring dozens

A RUSSIAN drone strike hit a passenger train at a station in Ukraine’s northern Sumy region, injuring dozens of people, officials said on Saturday. “A brutal Russian drone strike on the railway station in Shostka, Sumy region,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on Telegram, posting a video of a wrecked, burning passenger carriage and others with their windows blown out. He said dozens of passengers and rail workers were wounded.

Regional governor Oleh Hryhorov said the attack hit a train heading from Shostka to the capital, Kyiv. Medics and rescuers were working on the scene, he said. The head of the local district administration, Oksana Tarasiuk, told Ukraine’s public broadcaster that about 30 people were injured by the strike. No fatalities were reported in the immediate aftermath.

“The Russians could not have been unaware that they were targeting civilians. This is terrorism, which the world has no right to ignore,” Zelenskiy wrote. Moscow has stepped up its air strikes on Ukraine’s railway infrastructure, hitting it almost everyday over the last two months.

Separately, the head of the UN’s nuclear watchdog urged Ukraine and Russia to show the “political will” required to keep the area around the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant safe to allow the external power line to be reconnected to the facility. The plant, Europe’s largest with six reactors, was seized by Russian forces in the early weeks of Moscow’s attack of Ukraine. The facility has been cut off from external power since September 23 — the 10th time the line has come down.

The plant produces no electricity, but fuel in its reactors is being cooled by emergency diesel generators. Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said the external line had to be restored. “Both sides say they stand ready to conduct the necessary repairs on their respective sides of the frontline. But for this to happen, the security situation on the ground must improve so that the technicians can carry out their vital work without endangering their lives,” Grossi said in a statement. “I’m calling on both sides to do what is necessary to prevent a further



A woman holds some clothes at a distribution point in Kramatorsk, eastern Ukraine. — AFP

deterioration. It is a question of political will, not whether it is technically possible, which it is.” Each side accuses the other of compromising nuclear safety.

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Ukraine that it was playing a dangerous game by launching strikes near the plant. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha accused Moscow of deliberately cutting the link in order to connect the station to its own grid. In his statement, Grossi also said that an external power cutoff this week at the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear power plant — site of the world’s worst civil nuclear accident in 1986 — had lasted 16 hours. He said the containment vessel erected in 2016 to prevent contamination had experienced a partial blackout and had no reserve power for three hours when a power line to the nearby town of Slavutych came down. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia

deliberately staged the attack that cut power to the station.

On Friday, a massive Russian air assault struck several of Ukraine’s main gas production facilities in some cases causing critical damage as Ukraine prepares for a new heating season. Russia fired 35 missiles and 60 drones at sites of the state gas and oil company Naftogaz in the Kharkiv and Poltava regions overnight, said CEO Sergii Koretskyi, adding the attack was the biggest of the war on gas production. “As a result of this attack, a significant portion of our facilities has been damaged. Some of the destruction is critical,” he said on Facebook, adding that there was “no military rationale” for this strike. The Russian Defence Ministry confirmed its forces had carried out massive overnight strikes on Ukraine’s gas and energy infrastructure, saying it had also attacked military-industrial facilities. — Reuters

Conservative Takaichi set to be Japan’s first woman Prime Minister

TOKYO: Conservative Sanae Takaichi hailed a “new era” on Saturday after becoming head of Japan’s ruling party, putting her on course to become the country’s first woman prime minister. The 64-year-old, whose hero is Margaret Thatcher, said that a “mountain of work” lay ahead to restore the fortunes of her ailing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP has governed Japan almost uninterrupted for decades but it has been haemorrhaging support as backing grows for smaller parties, including the anti-immigration Sanseito.

Takaichi, a heavy metal drummer as a student, will almost certainly be approved by parliament later this month as Japan’s fifth prime minister in as many years. She is set to face a host of complex issues including an ageing population, geopolitical upheaval, a faltering economy and growing unease about

immigration. “Together with so many of you, we have carved a new era for the LDP,” Takaichi said at LDP headquarters after winning a run off vote against the telegenic and more socially progressive Shinjiro Koizumi. “We must all pull together across all generations and work as one to rebuild (the LDP)... Everyone will have to work like a horse,” she said to applause.

Koizumi, 44, would have been Japan’s youngest prime minister in the modern era and represented a generational change for the LDP. One of Takaichi’s first official duties as premier will be receiving US President Donald Trump, who is reportedly set to make a stopover in Japan in late October. Takaichi said on Saturday that she had no plans to overturn Tokyo’s recent trade deal — over which questions remain — with Washington. Takaichi has been a strident critic of China’s military



Sanae Takaichi poses in the party leader’s office after the LDP leadership election in Tokyo. — AFP

build-up, and as a regular visitor to the Yasukuni war shrine her appointment may irk Beijing as well as Seoul. Beijing’s foreign ministry reacted to her win by saying “it is hoped that Japan will abide by... its political commitments on major issues such as history and Taiwan, (and) pursue a positive and rational policy toward China.”

Primarily for LDP members, however, Takaichi’s task will be to restore the fortunes of the party, which has governed almost non-stop since 1955.

Outgoing premier Shigeru Ishiba took the reins last year but his LDP-led coalition lost its majority in both houses of parliament, in part because of voter anger at inflation and an LDP slush fund scandal.

One party on the up is Sanseito, which echoes other populist movements in calling immigration a “silent invasion” and blames

newcomers for a host of ills. Japan should “reconsider policies that allow in people with completely different cultures and backgrounds”, Takaichi said during the LDP campaign. People born abroad make up just three per cent of the population, and with an ageing population is in dire need of foreign workers. “As the Japanese population is declining we need to accept foreigners, but I hope (politicians) will think about how to accept them,” said Tomoyuki Mishina, 39, a real estate company employee.

On the economy, Takaichi has in the past backed aggressive monetary easing and big fiscal spending, echoing her mentor, former premier Shinzo Abe. Coming from the traditionalist wing of the LDP, celebrations that finally a woman is leading Japan may soon turn to disappointment. — AFP

OPINION

Are you for or against delaying retirement age?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

RECENTLY I met a school friend I had not seen in years. After the usual greetings, the first question he asked was: “Have you retired from your job?” I usually find this question slightly irritating, but when he told me he had already retired and mentioned a few other classmates who had done the same, I understood. Most of our batch have completed thirty years at work. The question of retirement, once distant, has become personal. Across the world, governments are re-examining the age at which people should step away from work. Rising life expectancy, growing healthcare costs and pressure on pension systems have pushed some countries to extend retirement ages. The issue is no longer about personal choice alone, it is about economics, demographics and the nature of work itself. Supporters of extending working life argue that people today live longer and healthier lives than previous generations. Many in their sixties and even seventies are physically fit, mentally sharp and capable of contributing.

Remaining at work offers structure, purpose and social connection. Economically, the case is even stronger. Countries like Germany and France have raised retirement ages to 67 and 64, respectively, mainly to protect public pension systems. Japan is also actively encouraging companies to retain older workers. While in Singapore, flexible re-employment schemes allow seniors to continue in less demanding roles while still earning an income. For individuals, working longer, particularly in non-manual jobs, is associated with better physical health and reduced risk of depression. Financially, delaying retirement helps people build more savings and rely less on their pension. On the other hand, delaying retirement age can be damaging to the health of workers in physically demanding jobs such as construction, farming, or nursing. If older workers stay longer in their posts, younger workers may face slower career progression. In some Arab countries, this is a serious concern. In some societies, retirement is seen as a time to devote oneself to family, faith, or

‘Rising life expectancy, growing healthcare costs and pressure on pension systems have pushed countries to review retirement ages’

community service. Sweden and Norway adopted a more reasonable approach by offering partial retirement, where older employees reduce their hours gradually while still contributing their skills. This way, retirement becomes a transition, respecting both financial needs and human dignity. In the Arab world, where family bonds remain strong but social change is shifting traditions, the conversation is equally relevant. Some older adults want to remain active in their professions while others prefer to step back and spend more time with grandchildren or in community work. What is needed is choice, not compulsion. In my opinion, retirement is less about a number and more about readiness financially, physically and emotionally. Delayed retirement has clear advantages, but it also carries risks. The challenge for societies, including ours, is to design systems that respect both the vitality of older workers and the opportunities owed to the young. In the end, retirement should not be about simply leaving work, but about entering the next stage of life with dignity and purpose.

NEPAL FESTIVITIES
HOLLOW FOR
GRIEVING FAMILIES

SAHANA BAJRACHARYA

Amid the lights, kite-flying and gatherings to celebrate Nepal’s 15-day festival of Dashain this year, the homes of families such as the Chaulagains are shrouded in grief for their son, killed in the country’s worst civil unrest in recent memory. “Dashain is supposed to be filled with happiness, but this year I only feel sadness,” said 53-year-old Ganesh Prasad Chaulagain, who lost his son, Shreeyam, 18, in the political turmoil that convulsed the Himalayan nation last month. He was speaking in the echoing silence of the family’s home in Kathmandu, the capital, as music and the scent of festival feasts filled the surrounding streets. The high school student was shot in the head on September 8 near parliament after he joined in a peaceful anti-graft protest that spiralled into a two-day episode of violence. Nepal is slowly emerging from violence triggered by its so-called Gen-Z protests by young people enraged at a lack of jobs and perceived political indifference that killed 74 and ushered in a new interim government. Reuters has reported that at least 33 of the demonstrators killed in the anti-graft protests were hit by “live bullets” fired from “high-velocity firearms”. Like many in mountainous Nepal, the Chaulagains lived on a slender monthly household income, in their case, less than \$200. But they ensured Shreeyam received an education, setting their sights on his finding a job overseas, perhaps in a country such as Germany, to ease their financial burden in the coming years. The median age in Nepal is about 25 years, but a lack of jobs has forced nearly a third of its young people to leave home in search of a livelihood that ensures economic security. Matters have not been made easier by Nepal’s unstable politics, with 14 changes of government in less than two decades. After the protests, 73-year-old former chief justice Sushila Karki was appointed as interim prime minister to prepare for elections set for March 5, but experts say the task is challenging. Now the Chaulagains, and the relatives of others killed in the protests, are demanding regular economic support from the government, rather than just a one-time compensation payment. “Ritually, we can’t celebrate this year, but even in the coming years, Dashain will never be the same for us,” said the father of the dead Shreeyam. — Reuters

The flight from wonder

WHEN I ran my schools in Cambridge, I resisted conformity. There was no dress code, no obsession with hair length or colour. My role was to guide students through their examinations and, where possible, help them reach the universities of their choice. I recall a mother who phoned to thank me for her daughter’s academic progress. At her previous school, the focus had been on uniforms, corridor discipline, hair length and shoe styles — trivialities that vanish into irrelevance at university. Her daughter thrived under our approach. Yet, after praising us, the mother asked if I could persuade her daughter to dress more conservatively and stop dyeing her hair a different colour every week. I explained, politely, that we had no such rules. Her daughter went on to excel and secure a place at a good university. On another occasion, a father asked me during an admissions interview: “But what about character building?” I asked him, in return, what sort of character he had in mind. He had no answer. Too often, “character building” is simply a euphemism for making children conform. My responsibility as principal was not to mould characters but to nurture individuality and critical thinking. Watching my wife’s young relatives recently, I was struck by how much energy small children possess. They cannot keep still. They dart about, fascinated by everything, their minds endlessly curious. Meanwhile, we adults sat quietly, seemingly drained of energy, often oblivious to our surroundings. As Albert Einstein once observed, “growing up is a flight from wonder.” Somewhere along the way, our curiosity fades. We stop asking questions. We conform. Children have not yet been forced through what I call the “sausage machine” of education. They have not been



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

As educators, we should do less indoctrinating and more liberating. Our task is not to produce compliant workers or ambitious power-seekers, but to help young people become individuals, people who live happily, pursue careers they enjoy and contribute meaningfully to society



When schools allow freedom of thought, of dress and of expression, students discover responsibility for themselves.

indoctrinated by newspapers, television or adult authority. They remain free of the curse we euphemistically call “education.” This philosophy was not mine alone. AS Neill’s famous Summerhill School went even further. Students were not obliged to attend lessons at all. Teachers made their classes so engaging that students wanted to be there. Far from chaos, Summerhill produced strong academic results. When asked what he would consider a failure in his students’ careers, Neill famously replied: “I would regard it as a tremendous failure on my part if any of my students became Prime Minister.” I share his sentiment. In Britain’s so-called representative democracy, the pursuit of political office is too often a pursuit of power for its own sake. Our politicians lie as a matter of course. Indeed, the system depends on it. Voters know this, yet still vote. Perhaps democracy itself would collapse if our UK politicians ever told the truth.

And so I return to those children, brimming with energy and wonder. Their curiosity is natural, unfiltered and unafraid. As educators, we should do less indoctrinating and more liberating. Our task is not to produce compliant workers or ambitious power-seekers, but to help young people become individuals, people who live happily, pursue careers they enjoy and contribute meaningfully to society. Children hemmed in by endless rules and rigid conformity often rebel, or worse, they lose their curiosity altogether. But when schools allow freedom of thought, of dress and of expression, students discover responsibility for themselves. They do not need to be policed into learning. They choose to learn because the field is wide enough for them to explore. Growing up may often be a flight from wonder. But perhaps education, if done differently, could help us hold on to it.

From FaceMash to facebook.com, ‘fake news’ to fraud



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

MEDIA giant, Facebook, has an ever-increasing financial profile, let alone its significant, almost dominant, social media presence, having a turnover during the 2024 financial year of more than \$164 billion, an increase on the previous financial year of almost \$135 billion of more than 20 per cent. It just grows!

Can you believe that Facebook, originating in 2004, has just turned 21 years old, from its genesis at Harvard University, where five students, Zuckerberg, Saverin, McCollum, Moskovitz and Hughes pooled their meagre savings to launch an application for Harvard students, on the platform then named ‘FaceMash’, to rate each other’s looks, stay connected and share experiences. Within a year, most other American universities were connected and inter-connected, and PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel provided the investment to go global, while Sean Parker, its first CEO and President, provided the business acumen.

Today, Facebook has made Zuckerberg one of the most recognisable names in the world and has made him obscenely wealthy, circa \$144 billion. Eduardo Savarin, now a venture capitalist, is worth \$22 billion. The coding expert behind the operation, Dustin Moskowitz, has \$15 billion. The man responsible for the prototype construction, Andrew McCollum, is by no means poor, but probably feels short-changed with private wealth of only \$20 million, while the last of the five, author and publisher Chris Hughes, has emerged with \$500 million. Its primary

investor, Thiel, has been successful elsewhere and is valued at \$23 billion, while Parker has a Forbes valuation of \$3 billion.

Meta Platforms, its parent company entity since 2021, is developing its current success through the advertising power of its stable of Applications, including its flagship, Facebook itself, Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, giving it an incredibly powerful ‘voice’ across social media, networking and commerce, with its Marketplace App, alone, a significant developer in the second-hand, or used product market, and critically, as a further marketing and selling platform for the giant Temu brand, from China, to the lively consumer demand for cheaply produced goods, to the bigger-spending Western consumer. You and I are among more than 3 billion active Facebook users worldwide, who make it the third most-visited site in the world, behind only Google and YouTube. It’s just so easy to do, via personal computers, laptops, tablets and phones we can register in minutes, and within hours create an ever-widening circle of like-minded, social groups, friends and family, limited only by your personal privacy requirements, which can be chosen by users.

Psychiatrists point to concerns over the level of narcissistic activity across the platform, with fears that users are over-exposing themselves and becoming vulnerable to more aggressive users. As a result, there is also a growing awareness of the level of neuroticism, with anxieties and self-doubt emerging as the consequences of failed online interactions. So, from an

Today, Facebook has made Zuckerberg one of the most recognisable names in the world, and has made him obscenely wealthy, circa \$144 billion

individual perspective, concerns regarding the intrusiveness of Facebook and its sociological consequences are probably real, not imagined, and worthy of that investigation.

It is worth pointing out that to date, Google Scholar has identified nearly 30,000 research papers with concerns over possible adverse consequences, and let’s face it, very little today is.

Privacy issues, such as the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, political influence, such as the 2016 US election, the ‘fake news’ thing, copyright issues, and hate speech, have all reared their ugly heads within the Facebook platform. However, my concern is more around ‘scam’ traders and fraudsters who use the platforms to ‘sell’ goods then don’t provide them, often using payment details for other, distinctly malevolent, transactions. Usually, the banks will refund these fraudulent transactions, but that’s not the point. Facebook must do more, earlier, to stop this predatory presence, and there must be consequences for continued and repeat offenders. Otherwise, Zuckerberg et al will just continue to fill their pockets, at our inconvenience, which is totally neither acceptable nor respectful of those of us who are not millionaires.

Facebook.com is already iconic, a game-changer, a mover and shaker of such significant degree that it has changed the way we see the world, and how the world sees us. It owes it to its billions of followers the protection and security it can undoubtedly provide... if it has the will to do so.

SANAE TAKAICHI, JAPAN’S FIRST WOMAN PM-TO-BE

Sanae Takaichi, the newly elected and staunchly conservative head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, is expected to become Japan’s first woman prime minister, but that doesn’t mean she’s a feminist choice, analysts say.

Instead, the 64-year-old, who won the party’s leadership election on Saturday, has positioned herself as a hardline leader focused on national defence and economic security.

She saw off competition from generational-change candidate Shinjiro Koizumi, the 44-year-old surfing son of a former premier, and the experienced-if-uncharismatic Yoshimasa Hayashi. Once confirmed by parliament - seen as highly likely — Takaichi will become the country’s first woman head of government and Japan’s fifth leader in as many years.

Voters have been deserting the long-dominant LDP in droves because of inflation and a recent slush fund scandal, while the anti-immigration Sanseito party has been gaining ground.

In an effort to claw them back, Takaichi has taken a tough stance on immigration and foreign tourists - both of which emerged as key issues in the LDP leadership race.

A former economic security minister, she has in the past been a vocal critic of China and its military build-up in the Asia-Pacific.

She’s also been a regular visitor to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours convicted war criminals along with 2.5 million war dead, and is seen by Asian nations as a symbol of Japan’s militarist past.

However, during the most recent LDP race, she notably softened her rhetoric - a sharp contrast to the vote last year when she pledged to visit Yasukuni as prime minister, and ultimately lost to outgoing premier Shigeru Ishiba.

Once a drummer in a college heavy metal band, Takaichi looks to the late British prime minister Margaret Thatcher as her political hero. But although her election “would be a step forward for women’s participation in politics”, according to Sadafumi Kawato, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo, she’s shown little inclination to fight against patriarchal norms.

Takaichi’s views on gender place her on the right of an already conservative LDP and she opposes revising a 19th-century law requiring married couples to share the same surname, a rule that overwhelmingly results in women taking their husband’s name. The issue “probably won’t be resolved during her term”, Kawato said. Japan ranked 118 out of 148 in the World Economic Forum’s 2025 Gender Gap Report chiefly because of the under-representation of women in government, while Iceland, Finland and Norway occupied the top three places. — AFP

Health taxes are a win-win for the world

HEALTH SYSTEMS around the world are overstretched and underfunded.

In 2023, low-income countries spent just \$10 per person annually on health – less than 15 per cent of what is required to ensure access to essential services. Compounding the problem, global health investment is forecast to fall by 40 per cent this year, from around \$25 billion in 2023 to \$15 billion, largely owing to recent aid cuts in the United States and Europe. The effects of these cuts are already being felt in the developing world: the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development alone has resulted in an estimated 500,000 deaths.

For many Global South countries, the sudden withdrawal of resources has accelerated the shift away from dependency on foreign aid towards self-sufficiency. Developing-country leaders have increasingly focused on building health capacity in every area, from vaccine production to healthcare delivery. Chief among them are Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama, who recently organised the Africa Health Sovereignty Summit; Rwandan President Paul Kagame, the African Union’s Champion on Domestic Health Financing; and former African presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Pressure must be brought to bear on the governments that have slashed aid to reconsider their position. These governments must provide a timeline for when they will help finance capacity-building efforts in countries with historically aid-dependent healthcare systems.

At the same time, the world is facing a rising non-communicable disease epidemic, fuelled by the consumption of harmful products. Tobacco and sugary beverages kill more than ten million people each year. Urgent action is needed to reduce the deaths and disease caused by these products, especially



Global health investment is forecast to fall by 40 per cent this year.



GORDON BROWN

The writer is a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is World Health Organization Ambassador for Global Health Financing

in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Addressing these twin crises requires identifying new funding sources for healthcare systems and reducing the consumption of harmful products. As the United Nations General Assembly gathers in New York this week, world leaders must embrace this policy. It aligns not only with the World Health Organization’s goals, but also with the recommendations for domestic resource mobilisation in the 2023 report by the G20 independent expert group co-chaired by Lawrence H Summers and N K Singh.

According to a 2024 report from the Task Force on Fiscal Policy for Health, of which I am a member, taxes that increase prices for tobacco and sugary beverages by 50 per cent could raise \$3.7 trillion globally over five years. This includes \$2.1 trillion in LMICs, which could use the revenue to increase healthcare spending by 40 per cent.

Moreover, if all countries raised taxes accordingly, more than 100 million people would quit smoking and sugary beverages would fall dramatically. This would save 50

million lives over the next 50 years, while millions more people would enjoy better health, easing the pressure on overstretched health systems.

Several countries have highlighted the benefits of health taxes. Tobacco excise tax hikes in the Philippines increased revenue from \$1 billion in 2012 to \$2.9 billion in 2022, which helped finance universal health coverage. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, Pakistan raised its excise tax on tobacco, resulting in a nearly 50 per cent year-on-year increase in revenue from the levy.

Mexico’s 2014 sugary-beverage tax was so effective at improving health outcomes that every dollar spent on its implementation was estimated to save \$4 in healthcare costs. But despite these successes, health taxes remain far too low in most countries, and harmful products like tobacco have become increasingly affordable as their prices fail to keep pace with inflation. Powerful corporate interests are the biggest barrier to implementing these levies, often working behind the scenes to delay or dilute policy.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The event features both men's and women's teams, jointly organised by the West Asian Football Federation and the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, in cooperation with the Jordanian E-Sports Federation.

E-SPORTS TEAM COMPETES IN WEST ASIA CHAMPIONSHIP

SPORTS REPORTER

The Oman national e-sports team will take part in the sixth edition of the West Asian Football Electronic Championship, hosted in Aqaba, Jordan, on October 10 and 11 at Al Thawra Square. The event features both men's and women's teams, jointly organised by the West Asian Football Federation and the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, in cooperation with the Jordanian E-Sports Federation.

TOURNAMENT DRAW

The draw placed the women's national teams into a single group consisting of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain and Jordan. For the men's competition, the draw resulted in two groups, group A: Oman, Jordan, Bahrain, UAE, and Iraq. group B: Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Lebanon and Kuwait.

COMPETITION FORMAT

The women's championship will be played in a two-round league system (home and away). The top two teams will advance to the final, which will be decided in a best-of-three format. Teams finishing third and fourth will also meet under the same system to determine rankings. The men's championship will follow a group stage played in a round-robin format, with the top team of Group A facing the runner-up of Group B, and the top team of Group B meeting the runner-up of Group A in the semi-finals. The winners will progress to the final, which will also be decided in a best-of-three series.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOURNAMENT

The West Asian Football Federation will later announce the official match schedule and details of digital streaming platforms for live broadcasting. This edition marks the first time the championship is held in Aqaba, reflecting growing investment interest in the rapidly expanding global e-sports sector. The tournament is part of the West Asian Federation's wider efforts to expand the reach of e-sports across the region in response to the rising enthusiasm from both male and female participants. It is worth noting that the Jordanian E-Sports Federation hosted the fifth edition last year, and the championship has become one of the region's most prominent competitive events, with broad participation from member countries.

AL ANSI REPRESENTS OMAN IN ASIAN CHESS TOURNEY



AMEEN AL ANSI
Chess player

SPORTS REPORTER

Omani player Ameen bin Hassan al Ansi is representing the Sultanate of Oman in the Asian Senior Chess Championship, hosted by the city of Erbil, Iraq, from October 5 to 14, with the participation of top players from 15 countries. The Oman Chess Committee oversees the national participation, aspiring to achieve positive results that reflect the game's growing presence locally. The championship, designated for the age category 50 years and above, is played under the Swiss system over 9 rounds, with a time control of 90 minutes plus 30 seconds per move. Ameen al Ansi is considered one of Oman's most prominent chess players, having won several top places in local club and official competitions.

Third edition of women's chess tournament kicks off

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

THE THIRD EDITION of the Omani Women's Sports Games 2025 kicked off with the inauguration of the Chess Championship, hosted at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex and organised by the Women's Sports Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) in cooperation with the Oman Chess Committee. Fifteen players representing six clubs from various governorates took part, competing under the Swiss system of rapid chess with a time control of 10 minutes plus two seconds per move across seven rounds filled with excitement and challenge. At the conclusion of the competition, Anah al Isai from Salalah Club won first place in the open category, followed by Yumna al Nadabi from Masirah Club in second, while Mariyah al Balushi from Ahli Sidab Club came third. In the under-16 category, Fatima al Ghafri from Qurayat Club secured first place, with Nour al Ghafri from Masirah Club taking second, and Mariam al Balushi finishing third.

A NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT Badriya al Wahaibi, Head of Community Programmes at the Women's Sports Department, stressed that the chess tournament is part of the Games, one of the most prominent national initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of Omani women in sports. She explained that the Games serve as a platform combining athletic competition with community development, contributing to women's health, cultural and sports awareness, and reinforcing values of participation and belonging within the sports community. She added that the Games seek to



The third edition features nine clubs: Salalah, Saham, Qurayat, Ahli Sidab, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Al Amerat, Masirah, Ibri and Samayil.

empower women through sports by discovering and nurturing talent, expanding women's participation in clubs, and strengthening their role in developing women's sports in cooperation with federations and committees. The event includes both individual and team competitions, with preliminary qualifiers for team games hosted in different governorates before concluding in Muscat with a women's day celebrating the achievements of players and clubs. COMPETING FOR THE WOMEN'S SPORTS CUP Al Wahaibi further explained that the participating clubs compete for the 2025 Women's Sports Cup by entering as many events as possible and achieving top results. Points are calculated based on participation levels and victories, adding to the spirit of competition and affirming

women's place in the national sports arena. WIDE PARTICIPATION The third edition features nine clubs: Salalah, Saham, Qurayat, Ahli Sidab, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Al Amerat, Masirah, Ibri, and Samayil. The competitions include team sports such as basketball, handball, hockey 5s, and volleyball, alongside individual sports like chess, badminton, athletics, table tennis, and e-sports. This edition is distinguished by the introduction of new sports for the first time, including hockey 5s and e-sports, reflecting the organisers' commitment to broadening participation and diversifying competitions. All technical regulations have been approved in coordination with the relevant Association and committees, ensuring fair and high-level organisation of all competitions.

Al Shueibi hits 100 international matches as Oman marks historic hockey milestones

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) recently feted the national team player, Khalid al Shueibi, who managed to surpass the milestone of 100 international matches with the national hockey team. The recognition took place during the draw ceremony of the prestigious 55th edition of His Majesty the Sultan's Cup for Hockey, marking a proud moment in the player's career and in the history of Omani hockey. Al Shueibi, who represents Ahli Sidab Club, been a key figure in Oman's hockey scene since making his senior team debut in 2012, after joining national training camps as early as 2009. His first official participation came in the 2012 Asian qualifying tournament in Thailand, where Oman secured a remarkable second-place finish. Over more than a decade of service, the 33-year old stalwart has contributed significantly both defensively and offensively, scoring 20 goals in international matches, a figure he described as "large and meaningful for the sport of hockey in Oman." Reflecting on his journey, Al Shueibi said to Oman Observer:"



The recognition took place during the draw ceremony of the prestigious 55th edition of His Majesty the Sultan's Cup for Hockey, marking a proud moment in the player's career and in the history of Omani hockey.



Al Shueibi, who represents Ahli Sidab Club, has been a key figure in Oman's hockey scene since making his senior team debut in 2012.

Registering 100 international matches is not an easy achievement. I am very proud of this moment. It took years of patience, sacrifice, and hard work to reach this milestone.

My message to young players is simple: stay dedicated and be patient. Success never happens overnight and it requires discipline and perseverance." He added

"Special thanks goes to Oman Hockey Association, Ahli Sidab club, and my employer for their unwavering support throughout my career. Their encouragement has been vital in helping me reach this level, and I hope this cooperation continues so that more Omani players can shine on the international stage," he said. Despite his milestone, Al Shueibi confirmed he has no immediate plans to retire. "I am still focused on playing with both the national team and Ahli Sidab. I want to achieve more before I think about retirement," he concluded. Alongside Al Shueibi's recognition, the OHA also celebrated other pioneering achievements within Omani hockey including: Eng Thani al Wahaibi who received his certification as an international lecturer in hockey while Mazin al Shukaili was awarded the international refereeing badge. Nawar al Jabri became the first Omani female umpire to officiate at the Asian level while Muhja al Numani was honoured as the first Omani female judge at the Asian continental level. Amina al Jahafi was recognised as the first Omani female referee to attend the AHF referee promotion course.

SHORTTAKES



At the conclusion of the second round, Al Bashayer and Al Seeb sit atop the Group 2 standings with 6 points each from two matches, both maintaining clean records without losing a set.

AL BASHAYER, SEEB DOMINATE ROUND 2 OF VOLLEYBALL FIRST DIVISION

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 4

The Nizwa Sports Complex hosted on Friday evening, October 3, 2025, the second-round fixtures of Group 2 in the First Division Volleyball League (2025–2026 season). The round featured two thrilling matches, in which Al Bashayer and Al Seeb confirmed their strong presence by securing full points for the second time in a row.

In the first match, Al Bashayer entered with intensity from the very first set, winning it 25–19 after capitalising on Taqah's errors in reception and passing. In the second set, Al Bashayer raised its level significantly, imposing absolute control and finishing with a wide margin of 25–13, thanks to powerful spikes and an effective blocking wall. The third set followed a similar script, with Al Bashayer maintaining superiority on all fronts to close it again at 25–13, sealing a clear victory that underlined their readiness to compete for the group lead.

Al SEEB EDGE SALALAH 3–0

The second match brought together Al Seeb and Salalah, beginning with a tightly contested first set that ended 25–21 in Al Seeb's favor, with the players' experience proving decisive in the closing points. In the second set, Al Seeb dominated early, aided by strong serves and varied attacks, cruising to a 25–12 win. Salalah attempted a comeback in the third set, but Al Seeb's defensive organisation stood firm, allowing the yellow team to take the set 25–14 and the match in straight sets.

At the conclusion of the second round, Al Bashayer and Al Seeb sit atop the Group 2 standings with 6 points each from two matches, both maintaining clean records without losing a set. Meanwhile, Taqah and Salalah occupy third and fourth place, respectively, still without points after suffering defeats in both of their opening matches.

This round confirmed the superiority of Al Bashayer and Al Seeb, who are moving steadily toward the final stages, while Taqah and Salalah face a tough challenge in the coming rounds to salvage their seasons.

‘Mutaeb’, ‘Al Rawi’ set top timings in 2nd camel race

WALEED AL JAHWARI
BARKA, OCT 4

MORE than 1,500 participants competed across three major venues as the 2025–26 camel racing season continued on Saturday with vibrant contests held simultaneously at Al Felaij track in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Bashayer in the Wilayat of Adam, and Al Abyad in the Wilayat of Sinaw.

The event Supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF), the second event of the season drew large crowds and showcased the exceptional quality of Omani-bred camels.

The opening day was included 14 morning heats for the Hagayeg category, two years old, over 3 km at each track, followed by nine races for the Lagaya category, three years old, over 4 km. Al Felaij was also hosted three special races for human riders over a 2 km distance.

Sunday's schedule will highlight the four rounds for the Elythaa category, four years old, over 5 km at each venue, in additions to three rounds for the Thanaya category, five year old, over 5 km, followed by three rounds for the Al Hawl categories, six years and above, bringing the total to 30 races on the second day.

All main rounds from each category crowned in the podium and a cash prize awarded to all top ten.

Read as round, camel's name, owner, time

THE FIRST DAY RESULT IN AL FELAIJ TRACK

Hagayeg – 3 km

1, Smo, Said bin Hamood al Jadili, 4:52:63

2, Al Omlah, Mohammed bin Hamdan al Habsi, 4:53:00

3, Shehab, Hamad bin Hamood al Wahibi, 4:53:77

4, Al Wasmiyah, Amer bin Salim al Amri, 4:58:74

5, Matfiyah, Mohammed bin Hamdan al Habsi, 4:54:97

6, Al Wasel, Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi, 4:56:40

7, Al Danglawiyah, Said bin Amer al Mughairi, 4:56:02

8, Al Dhabi, Khamis bin Hamid al Mashaykhi, 4:58:07

9, Walam, Abdullah bin Said al Saadi, 4:53:41

10, Arkan, Salman bin Said al Owaisi, 4:58:17

11, Mutaeb, Said bin Nasser al Hashmi, 4:51:57

12, Amwaj, Hamad bin Said al Saadi, 4:58:02

13, Al Nader, Masoud bin Nasser al Yahmadi, 4:52:60

14, Mansa, Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahibi, 4:56:39

Lagaya – 3 km

15, Madkhorah, Zayed bin Salim al Hashmi, 6:28:38

16, Mowari, Ghasi bin Salim al Mashaykhi, 6:31:93

17, Samhawi, Salim bin Fraish al Owaisi, 6:26:69

18, Al Dawwudiyah, Ali bin Rashid al Amri, 6:30:84

19, Entihar, Ghasi bin Salim al Mashaykhi, 6:26:53

20, Al Ghazal, Mohammed bin Mubarak al Hashami, 6:29:72

21, Al Haylah, Mishaal bin Said al Wahibi, 6:31:58



All main rounds from each category crowned in the podium and a cash prize awarded to all top ten.



The event Supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF).

22, Al Thaybah, Khalifa bin Ghadir al Wahibi, 6:31:42

23, Al Rawi, Jassim bin Mohammed al Humaidi, 6:24:02

HUMAN RIDER – 2 km

24, Al Rawdah, Amer bin Salim al Zarai, 3:19:91

25, Mayasah, Hamad bin Khadim al Amri, 3:21:88

26, Al Aber, Mazin bin Khalifah al Hashmi, 3:19:77

THE FIRST DAY RESULT IN AL ABYAD TRACK

Hagayeg – 3 km

1, Al Tamas, Suleiman bin Ali al Wahibi, 4:28

2, Shadeedah, Abdullah bin Sultan al Manthri, 4:39

3, Mrouj, Nasser bin Al Eid al Wahibi, 4:35

4, Mudhar, Mohammed bin Hamood al Balushi, 4:32

5, Mahloolah, Salim bin Sultan al Wahibi, 4:37

6, Shahin, Mansour bin Ali al Jahafi, 4:37

7, Al Tamas, Salim bin Al Eid al Wahibi, 4:35

8, Mukhifah, Hamad bin Abdullah al Jahafi, 4:40

9, Nehab, Abdullah bin Said al Wahibi, 4:37

10, Kiyan, Saeed bin Salim al Wahibi, 4:41

11, Shahin, Saleh bin Ali al Wahibi, 4:31

12, Joud, Ahmed bin Nasser al Naqili, 4:31

13, Al Nadib, Hamad bin Ghadir al Jadili, 4:34

14, Al Qabidhah, Hamad bin Ali al Wahibi, 4:36

Lagaya – 3 km

15, Al Eibah, Maktoum bin Saad al Mahri, 6:05

16, Manouh, Saleh bin Hamad al Jahafi, 6:10

17, Mishal, Saeed bin Humaid al Jahafi, 6:02

18, Al Tairah, Batti bin Nasser al Maliki, 6:06

19, Al Tifl, Badr bin Rami al Jahafi, 6:03

20, Shahin, Salem bin Said al Wahibi, 5:58

21, Al Reem, Mohammed bin Hamood al Balushi, 6:13

22, Al Shahiniyah, Saeed bin Mohammed al Harithi, 6:10

23, Ali, Nasser bin Ali al Naqili, 6:06

THE FIRST DAY RESULT IN AL BASHAYER TRACK

Hagayeg – 3 km

1, Sarabah, Rashid bin Hamad al Owaisi, 4:41

2, Hams, Mohammed bin Khalifah al Mahri, 4:35

3, Rahi, Abdullah bin Al Abdan al Maliki, 4:38

4, Hafilah, Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Darai, 4:35

5, Al Shahiniyah, Mohammed bin Salim al Amri, 4:41

6, Burkan, Hamad bin Muslim al Janibi, 4:38

7, Kahhal, Salim bin Ali al Darai, 4:42

8, Al Rawdah, Abdullah bin Ali al Jahafi, 4:38

9, Shahin, Ghanim bin Hamood al Darai, 4:40

10, Manouh, Mohammed bin Said al Darai, —

11, Sharot, Mohammed bin Saif al Harsoosi, 4:43

12, Al Shabiyah, Mohammed bin Talib al Jahafi, 4:43

13, Shahin, Hamad bin Muslim al Janibi, 4:43

14, Eitibar, Ali bin Said al Darai, 4:42

Lagaya – 3 km

15, Mashnaj, Mohammed bin Saif al Harsoosi, 6:11

16, Dawlah, Mohammed bin Khalifah al Mahri, 6:12

17, Maazem, Salim bin Ali al Madhoushi, 6:15

18, Al Asimah, Hamad bin Dughmal al Ghailani, 6:17

19, Shawahin, Said Bati al Janibi, 6:16

20, Jallad, Sultan bin Hamad al Janibi, 6:21

21, Shawahin, Said bin Ahmed al Janibi, 6:22

22, Qamriyah, Mihna bin Hamad al Janibi, —

23, Shahin, Saud bin Ali al Jabri, 6:20

Oman gear up for T20 World Cup qualifier with big hopes

MUSCAT: With belief built on their recent spirited Asia Cup performance against world champions India and the roar of home support behind them, Oman's cricketers are all geared up to chase back-to-back T20 World Cup qualifications.

As Oman step into the ICC T20 World Cup East Asia-Pacific (EAP) Qualifier on home soil, head coach Duleep Mendis and deputy Sulakshan Kulkarni are united by one conviction — the boys are ready.

The tournament at the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) ground in Al Amerat from October 8-17 will bring together nine top Associate nations from Asia and the EAP region, all competing for three crucial spots at the global tournament to be held in India and Sri Lanka in 2026.

For the hosts, this qualifying campaign carries both familiarity and renewed determination. Having made their T20 World Cup debut in 2016 and returned to the global stage in 2021 and 2024, Oman now aim to seal qualification for the second



The tournament at the (OCA) ground in Al Amerat from October 8-17 will bring together nine top Associate nations from Asia and the EAP region.

consecutive edition — a feat that would underscore their growing stature in the shorter format.

At the upcoming qualifier, Oman are grouped along with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Samoa.

Mendis, who has overseen much of Oman's modern cricketing evolution, believes the recent experience of playing in the Asia Cup against heavyweights India and Pakistan has fortified his players for this challenge.

“We’ve played the T20 World

Cup qualifiers several times and have been successful on three occasions to qualify. We need to do it again,” Mendis said. “This is our opportunity — and playing at home gives us that extra edge.”

The upcoming qualifier offers a rare luxury for Oman — familiar wickets, predictable weather, and vocal home support.

Oman's players have spent years honing their craft at the Al Amerat ground, and both coaches are convinced that comfort could make the decisive difference.

Yet, as Mendis cautions, familiarity alone does not guarantee success. “Conditions may favour us, but performance is what matters. Every team will come hard. We need to stay disciplined, play smart cricket, and focus on one match at a time,” he emphasised.

“Our fielding needs to improve with the bowling and batting showing improvement during our recent T20I wins against Kuwait on our return from Asia Cup,” added Mendis.

For deputy head coach Kulkarni, the optimism stems not just from training sessions but from the team's spirited showing against world-class opposition in the recent Asia Cup in the UAE.

Oman's fight against India in that campaign, he says, changed the perception of Omani cricket itself.

“Modern cricket is about agility and anticipation,” Kulkarni said. “We’ve worked on cutting down errors, reading match situations better, and keeping composure under pressure. This team has the temperament and talent — now it’s about execution.”

Mendis credits much of that to the environment cultivated by Oman Cricket, where facilities, support systems, and player welfare have steadily improved. “The infrastructure today allows our players to train and compete with international standards. That’s been crucial to our growth,” he said.

The team's core strength lies in its blend of experience and emerging talent.

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Natural gas activities surged by 40.7 per cent, contributing RO 804 million compared with RO 571 million in the same quarter of last year

GDP GROWS 0.6 PER CENT AT CURRENT PRICES IN Q2 2025

MUSCAT: Oman’s gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices expanded by 0.6 per cent in the second quarter of 2025, reaching RO 10.171 billion compared with RO 10.109 billion in the same period of 2024, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The growth was largely driven by non-oil activities, which rose by 4 per cent to RO 7.058 billion, up from RO 6.788 billion a year earlier.

By sector, agriculture and fisheries posted a robust 9.8 per cent increase, contributing RO 310.3 million. Services activities expanded by 7 per cent, accounting for RO 4.851 billion. In contrast, industrial activities contracted by 3.7 per cent, with their contribution easing to RO 1.897 billion.

Meanwhile, the oil sector’s value added declined 4.4 per cent to RO 3.517 billion, down from RO 3.681 billion in the second quarter of 2024. This was primarily due to a 12.7 per cent fall in crude oil activity, which dropped to RO 2.714 billion from RO 3.110 billion. Natural gas activities, however, surged by 40.7 per cent, contributing RO 804 million compared with RO 571 million in the same quarter of last year. — ONA

Agreements boost Oman’s air transport hub status

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 4

THE Sultanate of Oman formally concluded its active participation in the 42nd Session of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Assembly, held in Montreal, Canada, over a two-week period with the attendance of 193 Member States and 18 specialised international civil aviation organisations, according to (CAA).

The opening ceremony witnessed the nomination of Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), to preside over the work of the 42nd Assembly. In recognition of its remarkable progress in safety oversight, Oman was also awarded the ICAO Council President’s Certificate, having ranked 5th globally with a compliance rate of 95.95% in the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP-CMA).

During the Assembly, Oman signed three agreements, two memoranda of understanding with various states and an additional MoU with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) — a strategic step to enhance air connectivity for national carriers, strengthen economic and trade partnerships; and reinforce Oman’s position as a dynamic regional hub in global air transport.

In its address to the Assembly, Oman underlined the strategic importance of civil aviation in



Oman presented 18 working papers and information papers, showcasing national achievements and best practices across civil aviation domains

Oman presented 18 working papers and information papers, showcasing national achievements and best practices across civil aviation domains

driving national economic growth and enhancing regional and international air connectivity. The Sultanate of Oman highlighted its advanced results in international safety and security audits; and announced its intention to run for election to the ICAO Council in 2026, reaffirming its active role in shaping global aviation policies to promote safety, security and sustainability.

Throughout this session, Oman presented 18 working papers and information papers, showcasing national achievements and best practices across civil aviation domains.

These included papers on cyber security governance, integration of unmanned aircraft systems into aviation security frameworks, development and deployment

of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), as well as initiatives in environmental sustainability, aviation safety enhancement and regional and international cooperation.

Oman’s national pavilion at the accompanying exhibition featuring the Civil Aviation Authority, the Royal Oman Police — General Directorate of Airport Security, Oman Airports, Oman Air and SalamAir drew strong interest from international delegations. The pavilion highlighted Oman’s civil aviation milestones, its initiatives in security, safety and environmental sustainability; and its expanding portfolio of strategic partnerships contributing to the advancement of international civil aviation policies.

‘Oman’s Hydrogen projects move from planning to execution’

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 4

Oman is pressing ahead with the implementation of its substantive green hydrogen strategy which, while predominantly export-oriented, now incorporates a significant component to support domestic demand as well, according to Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Addressing the European Hydrogen Week — one of the continent’s foremost clean energy-focused platforms — Al Aufi also challenged the political leadership and policymakers in Europe — a critical export market for Omani green molecules — to address lingering policy, regulatory and standards-related shortcomings, which continue to overshadow the advancement of planned green hydrogen projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Many of these concerns were articulated in an interview given to the latest edition of The European Hydrogen Quarterly, launched in

conjunction with the European Hydrogen Week.

In his remarks to the newsletter, Al Aufi began by affirming Oman’s continuing commitment to deliver on its green hydrogen strategy, targeting an output of 1 million tonnes per annum by 2030. He credited the progress achieved thus far to the formulation of a “structured and transparent system” for hydrogen project allocation, anchored in clear policy and regulatory design.

“Our public auction framework has not only attracted significant international interest across all three rounds, with participation from developers across the value chain, but has also enabled real progress on the ground”, he said. “In Al Duqm, we are already seeing projects move into execution; several have entered FEED; and environmental and resource baselines have largely been completed. This reflects a transition from planning to delivery, underpinned by an institutional framework that developers understand and can



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals — European Hydrogen Week

engage with”, Al Aufi further stated.

In parallel with this effort, Oman — represented by the national hydrogen orchestrator, Hydrom — is also making headway in the planned rollout of common infrastructure encompassing

power, water, hydrogen handling and storage. Supporting this initiative are a number of National Champions leading the front-end design and coordination of shared assets, he said.

Furthermore, with the goal of incentivising international investment in this nascent industry, Oman recently announced new initiatives to this end. “We’ve also introduced targeted fiscal measures to strengthen early-stage project bankability, including reduced land lease fees, royalty relief in the early years of production and corporate tax exemptions of up to ten years”, the Minister noted.

But he acknowledged challenges that Oman, along with other emerging hydrogen markets, is facing — notably, the “timely development of international certification and traceability standards”.

“Without clarity on frameworks such as RFNBO (EU-mandated Renewable Fuel of Non-Biological Origin) compliance and MRV (Measurement, Reporting and

Verification) systems in key export markets like Europe and North Asia, it becomes difficult to convert offtake discussions into bankable contracts. Addressing this is essential to building confidence across the value chain”, Al Aufi explained.

Equally problematic is the goal of achieving visibility between supply and demand, particularly with regard to price discovery. “Developers and financiers require certainty that demand will be stable and competitively priced. To support this, Hydrom is advancing double-sided allocation mechanisms, preparing a domestic hydrogen auction to accelerate local industrial switching, and working with demand aggregators to structure international offtake frameworks that give developers confidence to proceed”.

Rounding off the list is the challenge inherent in the execution of large-scale hydrogen projects, which depend on alignment across permitting, infrastructure readiness and logistics, Al Aufi stressed.

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Gold has reached an unprecedented milestone by crossing \$3,800 per ounce, marking an all-time record in the global markets.

This development is particularly significant because it validates the confidence that investors, institutions and households alike have consistently placed in gold as a hedge against uncertainty.

The 36 per cent hike in the last 9 months demonstrates gold’s resilience and its ability to deliver consistent returns even in an environment where traditional assets are under pressure.

For Indian consumers, this is especially heartening news, as gold continues to occupy a dual role — an adornment that carries immense cultural significance and a safe, long-term investment that secures financial stability across generations.

While consumer demand remains steady, what is noteworthy in this cycle is that institutional investors, sovereign wealth funds and central banks have emerged as the largest buyers of gold. Their significant participation underscores gold’s unique position as an asset that transcends borders, currencies and economic cycles.

Looking ahead, I am confident that the momentum will continue, driven by a combination of macroeconomic factors including the imposition of tariffs, weakening of the US dollar and the persistent need for safe-haven assets in volatile markets.

Given these dynamics, I foresee gold advancing towards the \$5,000 per ounce mark in the coming years. This outlook reinforces what our customers have always believed — that gold is not merely ornamental, but a strategic and enduring investment.

- KEY POINTS:
1. Gold has delivered record returns to consumers, rising by an impressive 85 per cent in the last 21 months. This makes it one of the strongest performing assets globally.
 2. In 2024 alone, gold prices have increased by 37 per cent. This demonstrates its ability to grow even when other investments face challenges.
 3. Over the past 9 months, gold has risen by 36 per cent. This steady climb shows its resilience and reliability as an asset.
 4. For the first time in history, gold has crossed \$3,800 per ounce today (22K per gramme AED:424.25, INR:10,670). This milestone marks an all-time global record.
 5. Institutions (Central banks), Investors and households continue to trust gold as a safe-haven asset. It remains a proven hedge against uncertainty and volatility.
 6. For Indian consumers, gold is both cultural pride and financial security. It serves as adornment while protecting wealth for generations.
 7. Large purchases by central banks, sovereign wealth funds and institutions have driven demand. Their participation reinforces gold’s universal appeal.
 8. Global factors point to continued momentum for gold in the future. Experts see the potential for it to reach \$5,000 per ounce by next year.

OMAN OASIS UNVEILS HERITAGE-INSPIRED GLASS BOTTLES

MUSCAT: Oman Oasis, part of The Zubair Corporation and the Sultanate of Oman’s leading bottled water brand, has launched its new premium glass bottle range, combining quality, sustainability and Omani heritage. The initiative supports Oman Vision 2040 by reducing single-use plastics and promoting eco-friendly alternatives.

The first release is a 330ml Balanced Drinking Water bottle, already available in leading stores nationwide. The rollout will soon expand to include 750ml Balanced, as well as 330ml and 750ml Sparkling Water. With this phased



introduction, Oman Oasis aims to set a new standard for premium locally bottled water, offering consumers an elegant alternative to imported brands.

Designed with modern minimalism and rooted in Omani authenticity, each bottle features a sleek silhouette, embossed branding, a comfortable side grip and labels highlighting Oman’s natural landmarks.

Moosa al Hasni, Chief Operating Officer at Oman Oasis, said: “For more than three decades, the people of Oman have placed their trust in Oman Oasis and we are proud

to be part of their everyday lives. The launch of our new glass bottle range reflects our commitment to sustainability and Omani heritage, while providing a premium and environmentally responsible choice”.

The introduction of glass bottles positions Oman Oasis as a sustainable option for fine dining, luxury hospitality, corporate settings, weddings and family gatherings. Looking ahead, the company plans to introduce flavoured water variants, broadening Oman’s premium water experience.

MoAFWR launches Food
Security Lab 2025 today

THE Food Security Lab 2025 begins today (Sunday), organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) with broad participation from government agencies, state-owned enterprises, private sector companies and relevant associations. The initiative is part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the national food security system and advance the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The lab aims to boost investment in food security sectors, establish an integrated and sustainable food system through enabling initiatives, enhance the efficiency of digital services in the field, promote institutional integration and raise planning and implementation capacity across the ministry and the sector as a whole. It also seeks to improve career pathways and performance levels by developing individual and organisational skills.

This year’s edition will review the sector’s strategic programme, evaluate existing investment projects and address challenges hindering their execution. New investment projects and innovative enabling initiatives will also be announced, alongside measures to strengthen supporting enablers to ensure the sustainability and efficiency of Oman’s food security framework.

The programme will include specialised workshops featuring experts, investors and representatives of concerned entities, designed to produce practical, actionable outcomes to be implemented in the near term.

Dr Masoud bin Suleiman al Azri, Director-General of Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing, official spokesperson and overall supervisor of the Food Security Lab 2025 at the Ministry, said that the 2024



The lab aims to boost investment in the food security sector and achieve an integrated and sustainable food system



DR MASOUD
BIN SULEIMAN
AL AZRI

edition resulted in the launch of 41 investment projects across multiple sectors, with a total value exceeding RO 45 million. Of these, 14 contracts were signed in the fisheries sector worth more than RO 36.8 million and 177 agricultural contracts worth over RO 32.3 million.

He said that last year’s lab produced 24 enabling initiatives for food security projects and logistics services, as well as the launch of two platforms — Tharawat and

Zad — to support and empower investment projects. An additional 66 investment opportunities were also offered through the ministry’s digital platforms.

Dr Al Azri stressed that the Food Security Lab serves as an annual milestone for the ministry, providing a venue to launch strategic initiatives and plans that support the national economy and enhance the efficiency of Oman’s food security sector. — ONA

Oman Shell launches fifth batch of Nawafidh Youth Programme

MUSCAT: Oman Shell has launched the fifth edition of its Nawafidh Programme at the Outward-Bound Oman (OBO) training centre in Al Khoudh, welcoming a new group of Omani graduates into one of the company’s flagship youth development initiatives. The opening event featured remarks from programme partners, orientation activities and an introduction to the year-long journey ahead.

Al Ahnaf al Zubaidi, Social Investment and Community Relationship Manager at Oman Shell, said: “We view talent development as essential to building a sustainable and inclusive future. Nawafidh equips promising Omani youth with the mindset and skills to lead in a changing world and supports

national goals of innovation, competitiveness and human capital growth. As we launch the fifth batch, we remain committed to enabling the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040 through purposeful partnerships and youth empowerment”.

The Nawafidh Programme is designed to prepare young professionals for the realities of a dynamic energy market. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040 priorities on knowledge-based economies and future-readiness, the programme combines technical instruction, personal development, leadership engagement and practical exposure to the sector.

Delivered in partnership with the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) and Outward-Bound Oman (OBO), the programme



provides dual certification. Participants receive an accredited technical certificate from GUtech, endorsed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and a life skills certificate from

OBO following immersive outdoor training.

The structure includes more than 40 virtual lectures, 20 in-person sessions and four intensive soft skills modules. Participants also

gain applied knowledge through guided visits to energy sites across Oman, along with mentorship, networking forums and Nawafidh Talks that connect them to alumni, experts and decision makers.

A highlight of the programme is the Collaborative Consulting Challenge, where participants work in interdisciplinary teams under the guidance of senior professionals and energy leaders.

This challenge fosters problem-solving, peer learning and exposure to leadership thinking.

The 2025/2026 edition reinforces Oman Shell’s commitment to empowering Omani youth and supporting the Sultanate of Oman’s long-term vision for inclusive growth and innovation.

BIDSOPEN



BATISTA BROTHERS’ J&F IN TALKS FOR EDF BRAZIL PLANT

SAO PAULO: J&F Investimentos SA, the holding company of Brazil’s billionaire Batista brothers, is in early talks to acquire French utility EDF’s Rio de Janeiro thermal plant, sources familiar with the matter said. The deal could be worth up to 2 billion reais (\$374 million), though J&F has not made a binding offer and other bidders are reportedly interested.

The negotiations are part of a broader surge in Brazil’s power sector M&A activity this year. Other major moves include Canada’s Brookfield potentially selling the Mantiqueira high-voltage line and France’s Engie exploring a minority stake sale in its transmission assets.

Energy and natural resources have driven 53% of Brazil’s M&A activity in 2025, totalling \$22.3 billion through September

EDF, which is reviewing its Brazilian assets, is focusing on domestic nuclear projects while divesting non-core overseas holdings. The Rio thermal plant, operating without long-term contracts, aligns with J&F’s strategy of acquiring under-performing assets for turnaround, the sources said. J&F’s energy subsidiary, Ambar Energia, already manages several similar plants.

Energy and natural resources have driven 53% of Brazil’s M&A activity in

2025, totalling \$22.3 billion through September. Investors are seeking resilient sectors with steady cash flows, according to financial advisory firm Seneca Evercore.

Brookfield’s Mantiqueira sale, managed by Itau BBA and Bradesco BBI, could reach around 5 billion reais, attracting interest from China’s State Grid, Colombia’s Grupo Energia Bogota and a Taesa-Cemig consortium. Meanwhile, Engie has engaged Morgan Stanley to explore partnerships for its Brazilian transmission assets.

J&F and Bank of America, coordinating the EDF asset sale, declined to comment. EDF also said it is evaluating options for its Norte Fluminense plant.

— Reuters

OPEC+ weighs oil hike amid Saudi-Russia debate

EIGHT

OPEC+ countries are likely to raise oil output again on Sunday, with Saudi Arabia pushing for a larger increase to regain market share, while Russia prefers a more modest rise, four sources familiar with OPEC+ talks said.

Saudi Arabia and Russia, the two largest OPEC+ producers, have occasionally disagreed in recent years over output increases but usually reach a compromise.

Moscow would prefer a rise of 137,000 barrels per day (bpd) from November, the same increase implemented in October, to avoid pressuring oil prices and due to challenges in boosting output under sanctions, according to two sources.

Saudi Arabia, however, is reportedly considering increases of 274,000 bpd, 411,000 bpd, or even 548,000 bpd, as it has the capacity to ramp up production quickly and aims to expand market share.

OPEC has stated it does not plan to raise output by 500,000 bpd. The organisation did not respond to requests for further comment and authorities in Saudi Arabia and Russia also did not immediately respond.

OPEC+ has shifted from its previous output-cut strategy, implemented in April, to boost



A worker controls the freight level of a tanker wagon at the Rosneft oil terminal in Arkhangelsk

market share and respond to pressure from US President Donald Trump seeking lower oil prices. At their peak, OPEC+ output reductions totalled 5.85 million bpd, comprising voluntary cuts of 2.2 million bpd, 1.65 million bpd by eight members and 2.0 million bpd across the entire group. The eight producers plan to

fully unwind the 2.2 million bpd cut by the end of September. In October, they began easing the second layer of 1.65 million bpd with an increase of 137,000 bpd.

The eight OPEC+ countries are scheduled to hold an online meeting on Sunday, according to two sources. Goldman Sachs on Tuesday projected a potential quota rise of 140,000 bpd.

Oil prices on Friday were on track for a weekly loss of more than 7% amidst expectations of a further supply hike, with Brent crude trading above \$64 a barrel — up from a 2025 low near \$58 in April.

The 2 million bpd cut across the entire OPEC+ group remains in effect until the end of 2026.

— Reuters

CHEVRON PUTS \$2 BILLION COLORADO PIPELINE ASSETS ON SALE

NEW YORK: Chevron is marketing a collection of pipeline assets in the Denver-Julesburg shale basin, likely to fetch over \$2 billion, sources familiar with the matter said. The infrastructure, mostly inherited from Chevron’s 2020 acquisition of Noble Energy and its midstream operations, generates roughly \$200 million in annual EBITDA.

Investment bankers at Bank of America are soliciting interest from potential buyers. A sale is not guaranteed and Chevron could retain some or all of the assets. The company did not respond to requests for comment and Bank of America



A Chevron logo outside the Chevron building in Houston

declined comment. The divestment aligns with Chevron’s broader strategy to boost financial performance and focus on higher-margin opportunities amidst an uncertain oil price environment. The company is also reducing its global workforce by up to 20% while managing costs and competing in a volatile market. Recent US midstream deals highlight robust activity, with MPLX purchasing Northwind Midstream for \$2.4 billion and Plains All American acquiring a stake in the EPIC Crude pipeline for \$1.6 billion. — Reuters

Wall St eyes shutdown as stocks near records

NEW YORK: The US government shutdown tops investors’ agenda next week as markets enter the seasonally strong fourth quarter, with equities near record highs and gearing up for an earnings-season test later this month.

A deep partisan rift in Washington has led to the shutdown, which risks delaying crucial economic data and could potentially cloud the Federal Reserve’s policy-easing outlook. Few on Wall Street expect the impasse to derail a rally that has lifted the S&P 500 by 14% to repeated record highs, but with little in the way of major data or earnings, Capitol Hill drama is set to dominate investor focus.

“The shutdown and the potential reopening... that’s going to get almost all investor attention”, said Mark Hackett, chief market strategist at Nationwide.

Investors’ main concern is that the shutdown could suspend the flow of timely economic data. A prolonged pause might create uncertainty about the Fed’s monetary policy path, as the central bank relies on government data to guide decisions, while also potentially dragging on economic growth.

Despite some softness in labour data, the US economy has withstood trade and tariff pressures; and corporate earnings have supported



Traders work on the floor of the NYSE in New York

stocks’ rise. Analysts expect S&P 500 earnings in Q3 to increase 8.8% from a year ago, up from an earlier forecast of 8.0% in July, according to LSEG data.

“In my opinion, lack of data actually puts more burden of proof on bears than it does on bulls”, Hackett said. Investors will get a preview of the upcoming earnings season with Levi Strauss and Delta Air Lines reporting on Thursday.

Eddie Ghabour, CEO of KEY Advisors Wealth Management, who expects the shutdown could stretch two to four weeks, echoed the sentiment.

“If we get extra stimulus in the economy in the form of two more rate cuts and then the government is back in business, you’re going to see a huge re-acceleration of growth in the economy and equity markets”,

he said. Investors will also get insight into Fed thinking when the minutes of the September rate-cut meeting are released on Wednesday.

The just-started fourth quarter is historically the S&P 500’s strongest, with an average gain of 2.9% and a high proportion of positive returns, according to LSEG data dating back to 1928.

“Despite headline risks and potential short-term volatility, the weight of the evidence continues to support a constructive stance”, said Keith Lerner, co-chief investment officer at Truist Advisory Services.

— Reuters

FOR FUNDS, PARTNERS

Altman seeks funds on Asia-Mideast Tour



BENGALURU: CEO Sam Altman has embarked on a global fundraising initiative spanning East Asia and the Middle East, seeking financing and manufacturing partners to meet the company’s demand for its computing capacity, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing familiar sources. Altman has held discussions since late September in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. — Reuters

GROWTH REVISED

Germany ups growth forecast to 0.2%



BERLIN: Germany’s economy ministry revised its growth forecast for this year up to 0.2% from an earlier forecast of zero, a source familiar with the forecasts. The ministry forecasts 1.3% growth for next year and 1.4% growth for 2027. Europe’s largest economy has registered little growth at all since the onset of the Covid-19 followed by Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine and the launch of Trump’s tariffs. — Reuters

EXXON CASE

Supreme Court to hear Exxon Cuba case



WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court will hear ExxonMobil’s bid for compensation from Cuban state-owned firms for oil and gas assets. The case is based on the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which allows Americans to sue entities profiting from confiscated Cuban property. A similar case involving Havana Docks seeks to revive \$440 million in judgments against Norwegian Cruise Line. — Reuters

OPINION



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

CSR’s key role in driving In-Country Value growth

CORPORATE

Social Responsibility (CSR) has steadily integrated itself into the framework of planned economic development in the country, within the span of philanthropy up till today. The influence of CSR on the In-Country Value (ICV) programme is a fine example of this development. ICV is designed to strengthen the local economy, develop human capital and develop a more diverse industrial base. CSR is now a major source of support for ICV initiatives which sustainably aligns business interests with a country’s developmental priorities. This helps to ensure business growth and prosperity along with socio-economic sustainability.

DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL

Probably the most important way in which CSR aids ICV is through education and the development of the workforce. Corporate CSR activities for ICV initiatives incorporate, in more and more cases, the setting up and funding of training centres, rehabilitation and vocational partnerships to replace a cycle of short-term and philanthropic donations. This provides a means to ensure that local youth are equipped with the skills needed to fill the positions created. This investment reduces the recruitment of foreign nationals, develops a self-sustaining workforce for the country and develops industries of the future.

For example, oil and gas companies operating under ICV frameworks have

established technical academies. Meanwhile, banks and telecom companies have collaborated with universities for digital skills development. These initiatives improve prospects for employment, while also signalling the intent of companies to create shared value and demonstrate goodwill that goes beyond the figures on the bottom line.

EMPOWERING SMES

Another pillar of ICV is the development of local suppliers and small businesses. Once again CSR programmes can be crucial. Supplier development programmes structured by multinational corporations for domestic entrepreneurs involve mentoring, preferential procurement and financial literacy training. They empower SMEs to achieve and maintain global quality standards while also competing in local markets.

The incorporation of SME empowerment within the CSR activities of companies has the potential to significantly accelerate the objectives of ICV with regard the country retaining economic value within its borders. Over time, such efforts will also help to diversify supply chains, create jobs, spur innovation and promote regional self-sufficiency.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CSR also contributes to ICV by fostering sustainability and undertaking community projects for welfare that have positive economic resilience impacts. Long-term,

government and business costs are reduced and citizen quality of life is improved by investments in renewable energy, water conservation and healthcare infrastructure.

NATIONAL VISION ALIGNMENT

The alignment of CSR to ICV goals and objectives is probably its greatest contribution. National prosperity has been noted by region’s government entities as a result of collaborative efforts from the public and private sector. Well-designed CSR initiatives — even in education, SME development, or sustainability — national strategies and goals to feasible outcomes.

The positive impact of CSR on corporate image and CSR’s position as equals in national development partnership implies national and social progress is feasible if CSR and ICV frameworks are integrated.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Going forward, the expectation is that national growth and the trust of surrounding communities is achieved from ICV related CSR initiatives that are data-informed, transparent and focused on the value outcome. The integration of CSR goals in core business strategies will facilitate ICV focused growth plans. Businesses will earn trust from their communities and stakeholders.

While countries try to localise their industries and reduce dependencies afforded to external actors, CSR will be a very important catalyst for the accomplishment of these objectives.

The incorporation of SME empowerment within the CSR activities of companies has the potential to significantly accelerate the objectives of ICV with regard the country retaining economic value within its borders

OMAN STUDIES
DUTCH DATA
CENTRES



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate

The Netherlands has launched an unusual experiment in sustainable technology — floating data centres placed directly in city canals. These facilities use the naturally cool canal water for server cooling, eliminating the need for energy-hungry air conditioning systems. Water circulates through cooling panels, absorbs heat from the servers and is then returned to the canal to cool naturally, creating a closed, low-impact cycle.

The approach reflects a growing recognition that data infrastructure — the unseen backbone of the digital economy — must be made more energy-efficient. With global demand for cloud storage, artificial intelligence and 5G networks expanding, the energy footprint of data centres has become a pressing concern. According to the International Energy Agency, data centres already consume nearly 1% of total global electricity, a figure that could climb sharply in the coming decade. Traditional cooling, which relies heavily on air conditioning, remains one of the most energy-intensive aspects of operations.

In Amsterdam, where waterways are an integral part of the city’s identity, the floating data centre concept achieves two goals at once: reducing emissions while blending into the urban landscape. Modular and flexible in design, these centres can be scaled up or down depending on demand, and when powered by renewable energy, they operate with a fraction of the carbon footprint of conventional facilities.

Yet Oman also faces distinct challenges. Cooling data centres in the desert climate is energy-intensive, driving up operational costs. Unlike the Netherlands, there are no urban canals to provide natural cooling and water scarcity adds another constraint. As the Sultanate of Oman embraces artificial intelligence, smart city solutions and cloud-based services, the demand for efficient, climate-resilient infrastructure will only grow.

This is where lessons from the Dutch model become relevant. While floating data centres may not suit Oman’s geography, the underlying principle — using natural systems to offset the environmental cost of digital growth — is transferable.

Seawater cooling along coastal sites such as Al Duqm and Salalah, shaded reservoirs that combine solar power with evaporation-based cooling, or even underground aquifer-based designs could all be explored.

Sultan Haitham City is smartest growth bet

SULTAN

Haitham City signals a disciplined shift in how Oman invests for growth. Instead of scattering funds across isolated roads and housing plots, the project consolidates spending into a single, scalable urban platform designed to support households and firms alike. The master plan’s scale is deliberate: 14.8 million sq m, capacity for around 100,000 residents, roughly 20,000 homes and more than 2.9 million sq m of public space — a size that can capture efficiencies sprawl cannot.

The State moved early to build the “frame” for private and public investment. In October 2024, RO 228 million of Phase-I infrastructure contracts were signed covering roads, tunnels, utilities and early services — a clear signal on sequencing and delivery. That foundation matters: it lowers perceived risk, firms up supplier pipelines and turns drawings into usable assets.

This year the transition from plan to place has accelerated. Seven execution packages worth over RO 206 million are under way across Phase I, from internal roads and green spaces to core networks and community facilities. For residents, that means earlier access, fewer “start-up” bottlenecks and a faster path to everyday convenience — the simple yardsticks by which any city is judged.

Urban showcases help people picture their lives there. Designs for the city’s central park are slated to be unveiled at the Home & Building Exhibition from October 6-9, 2025 — signalling that public realm and shade are not “afterthoughts” but part of the value proposition. Green corridors and comfortable streets are economic infrastructure too: they shorten trips, support local business and keep family budgets in check. Housing policy is the demand-side engine. The Ministry’s “Your First Home” initiative opens apartments in the city to



Sultan Haitham City becomes a yielding urban asset — lowering household costs, lifting labour productivity and anchoring local value chains.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

newlyweds and small families on the housing request list — crucially while retaining eligibility to apply for other public housing options after five years of occupancy. That flexibility helps young families get on the ladder sooner, accelerates early occupancy (which local services rely on) and eases pressure on land-grant and self-build models. Public messaging directs applicants through official government e-services for Sultan Haitham City, keeping the process orderly and transparent.

To maximise the economic return, we must treat operations as a service, not a handover. Tie contractor and neighbourhood-operator payments to clear urban KPIs: time to fix faults, transit readiness, cleanliness and park upkeep. Publish indicative cost baskets (mortgage, service charges, utilities) so households can plan and speculation is dampened. Launch a high-frequency bus link to Muscat early — before full densities form — to avoid a traffic choke that would erode productivity and asset values. And govern vacancy with graduated fees on units left idle beyond a reasonable window, paired with a

trusted rental platform to attract long-term capital.

The indirect gains are material. Every Rial Omani and minute saved on commuting and car ownership is re-spent locally on education, health and leisure — service sectors that expand non-oil GDP and create youth-friendly jobs. Closer access to schools, clinics, parks and shops improves spatial equity and cuts the “hidden costs” borne by lower- and middle-income families. Just as importantly, consistent delivery — from the 2024 infrastructure deals to the 2025 execution packages — builds a reputation for reliability that lenders and investors price in.

Done right, Sultan Haitham City becomes a yielding urban asset — lowering household costs, lifting labour productivity and anchoring local value chains. The model is exportable to other governorates, but the test starts now: keep execution disciplined, bring transport early, manage vacancy and speculation, and run neighbourhoods against service standards. That is how a city turns capital expenditure into the compounding non-oil growth Oman needs.

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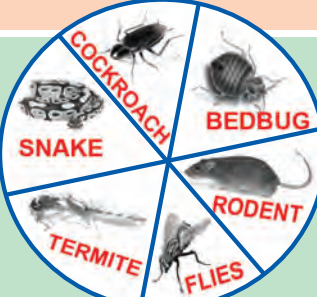
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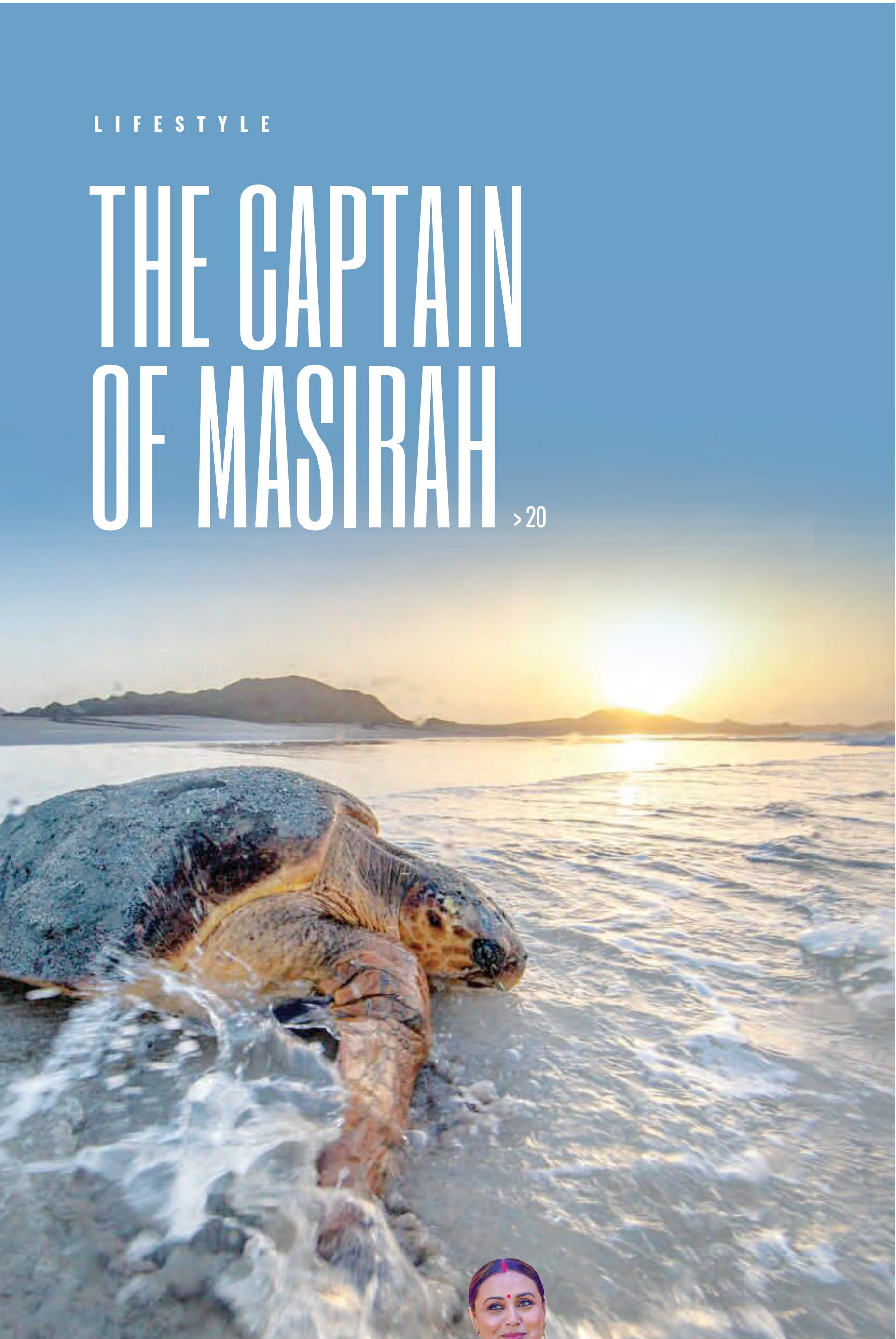
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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

THE CAPTAIN OF MASIRAH > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Bad Bunny will headline Super Bowl halftime show



LATIN SUPERSTAR Bad Bunny, who has won three Grammys while bringing Spanish-language music to the top of the charts, will headline the Super Bowl halftime show in February, the NFL announced on Sunday.

The Super Bowl is consistently the most-watched television programme of the year, with more than 130 million people viewing last season's halftime show featuring rapper Kendrick Lamar. The next Super Bowl will take place on February 8 at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, near San Francisco.

"What I'm feeling goes beyond myself", Bad Bunny said in a statement. "It's for those who came before me and ran countless yards so I could come in and score a touchdown... this is for my people, my culture and our history. Ve y d le a tu abuela, que seremos el HALFTIME SHOW DEL SUPER BOWL".

Bad Bunny, whose real name is Benito Antonio Mart nez Ocasio, was born in Puerto Rico and rose to fame through hits such as "MIA", "I Like It", "Me Porto Bonito" and "D kiti". He has been nominated for 10 Grammys, winning in the best m sica urbana album category for "Un Verano Sin Ti" and "El  ltimo Tour del Mundo", and in the best Latin pop or urban album category for "YHLQMDLG". He has also won 12 Latin Grammys.

On Saturday, Bad Bunny will host the season opener of "Saturday Night Live".

This will be the seventh Super Bowl halftime show produced by Roc Nation, the entertainment and sports company founded by billionaire rapper Jay-Z. Its agreement with the NFL came amidst tensions over the league's handling of protests by quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who had begun kneeling during the national anthem to protest police violence against people of colour.

The NFL in 2019 partnered with Roc Nation, asking the company to produce the Super Bowl halftime shows. Since then, the halftime performances have predominantly featured hip-hop and R&B artists: Lamar, Usher, Rihanna and, in 2022, a medley including Snoop Dogg, Dr Dre and Eminem. The partnership's first Super Bowl halftime show, in 2020, featured Latin music in performances by Jennifer Lopez and Shakira. — NYT

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



ENTERTAINMENT

US actress Fran Drescher gestures as she attends her Hollywood Walk of Fame ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD

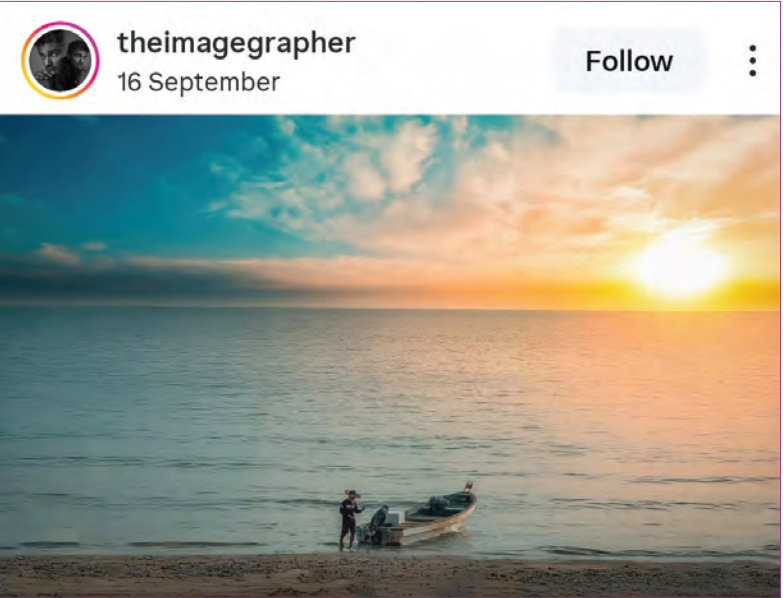
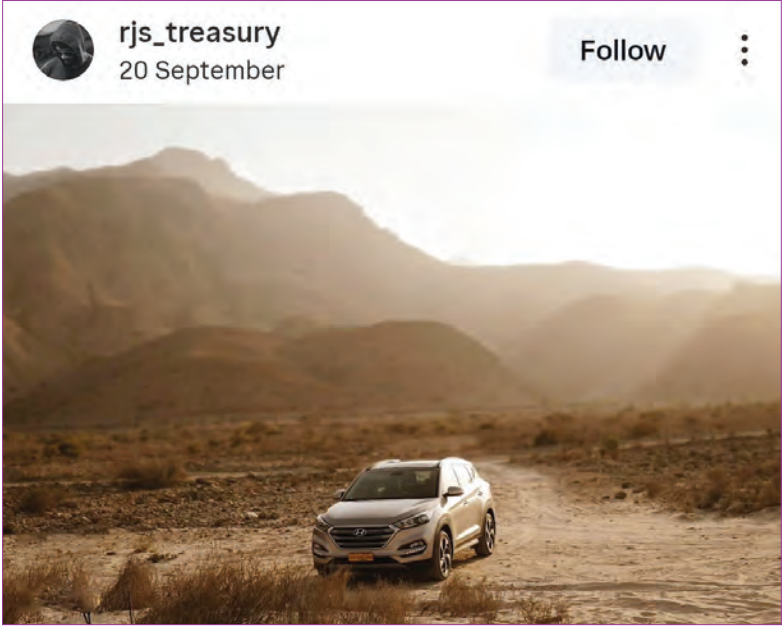
Bollywood actress Rani Mukherji takes part in celebrations on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Durga Puja in Mumbai. — AFP



CULTURE

Members of Mexico's Ministry of National Defence (SEDENA) perform during a cultural event held to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the founding of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the ancient Aztec capital. — AFP

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Jonathan Anderson to bring new twist to Dior women with Paris debut



AFTER A well-received menswear collection for Dior in June, star Northern Irish designer Jonathan Anderson is set to unveil his first women’s ready-to-wear collection on Wednesday during Paris Fashion Week.

The show, held in the Tuileries Garden in central Paris at 2:30 pm (12:30 GMT), is one of the most highly anticipated highlights of the Spring-Summer 2026 Fashion Week, alongside Matthieu Blazy’s debut at Chanel. At 41, Anderson is already one of the industry’s leading lights, beloved by celebrities and credited with turning the LVMH-owned Spanish label Loewe into a highly profitable and trend-setting house.

“The essential challenge today, with a single head leading the artistic direction of the house, is how to connect these fields”, Serge Carreira,

affiliate professor at Sciences Po Paris and luxury industry expert, said.

“What will be interesting is to see how Anderson manages to find both different expressions but also unity”, he added.

For his first menswear collection, Jonathan Anderson drew on gothic 19th-century inspiration, with capes, tailcoats and tweeds, waistcoats and Victorian high collars and cravats. “Some of my heroes, the greatest designers in history, have done Dior and I don’t want to be chopping it all down”, he told reporters at the time.

Rather he wanted to “decode and recode Dior without discarding all the great designers” who had worked for the label.

“My idea is that we need to decipher and re-program Dior... Dior is a house capable of reinventing itself”, he added.

— AFP



Oman’s cultural delegation connects with Uzbekistan’s heritage



ARWA AL HASHIMI

UPON descending into Tashkent, visitors are immediately greeted by a scene that captivates the senses and beckons the inquisitive mind to explore. The city pulses with a fascinating blend of history and modernity — majestic ancient mosques and bustling markets intertwine with sleek contemporary buildings and lively street life.

The aroma of spices hangs in the air, mingling with the sounds of animated chatter, melodic calls to prayer and the rhythmic hum of urban activity. The architectural tapestry reflects centuries of Islamic, Soviet and contemporary influences, creating a setting that is both a living museum of the past and a vibrant hub of the present.

Visitors stepping into Uzbekistan feel a warm embrace rooted in rich traditions, yet alive with a dynamic energy that signals progress and openness.

Amidst this lively backdrop, a cultural exchange unfolds — a testament to the growing role of Omani associations in fostering global bridges of civilisation. Currently, a delegation from the Cultural Reading House is engaged in a meaningful journey that began on September 26, at the gracious invitation of the Omani Embassy in Tashkent.

This isn’t merely a sightseeing tour but a deliberate, intellectual sojourn aimed at weaving deeper cultural ties between Oman and Uzbekistan.

The members of this delegation describe their experience as being “filled with warm hospitality and attention”, a reflection of



Uzbekistan’s enduring respect for its history and its culture’s role as a connecting thread among peoples. Their visit has centred on engaging with the depth of Uzbek history and its appreciation for culture as a pathway to mutual understanding. The group’s main mission led them to the Islamic Academy, where they engaged in profound discussions centred around two pivotal books — ‘A Reformer on the Throne’ and ‘The Uzbek Reformer’ — highlighting the shared human essence of reform experiences across borders.

During these dialogues, comparisons emerged between Uzbek thinker Mahmoud Khoja Behbudi and Oman’s revered the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, each standing as symbols of reform that reshaped their societies. The discourse emphasised the universal spirit of reform — whether in education, religion, or societal development — and reinforced the idea that despite differing environments, the core values of progress and human betterment unite nations.

Interactions at the Islamic Academy proved positive and constructive, illustrating the convergence of ideas on education and knowledge as the foundations of reform. Both Oman and Uzbekistan emphasise a delicate balance — preserving authenticity whilst embracing modernity — a common thread that runs through their developmental narratives. This realisation has further inspired hopes of future collaborations, enriching bilateral cultural and educational exchanges.

Complementing the intellectual pursuits was a vibrant art exhibition showcasing works by



Omani artists Fakhratag al Balushi, Maryam al Wahaibi, Mayasa al Raisi and Rahma al Wahaibi. The artworks imbued the visit with a visual language of humanitarian values, transforming aesthetic expression into a universal dialogue. Visitors responded with remarkable engagement, demonstrating how art remains a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy, transcending language and borders.

A notable moment early in the trip was the meeting with Sayyidah Wafa bint Jabr al Busaidiyah, Oman’s Ambassador to Uzbekistan. The conversation highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen cultural and educational links, with a shared commitment to supporting Omani youth initiatives and projecting a positive, respectful image of Oman abroad.

Looking ahead, the Cultural Reading House regards this visit as a “strategic milestone” — a key moment that will deepen its international reach and cultural identity. It aims to forge partnerships with Uzbek and other global cultural centres, hosting seminars on travel literature and Uzbek cultural themes, thereby enriching its programming. The journey marks a turning point, propelling the House towards greater influence and establishing a vibrant bridge, helping both nations navigate the future of cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

This expedition not only underscores the enduring power of dialogue and art but also exemplifies how shared values can build lasting bridges — transforming mutual appreciation into enduring friendship in a world eager for connection.

FEATURES



THE CAPTAIN OF MASIRAH

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

YOU 'LL SPOT him before sunrise on Masirah's shore—black trousers, black shirt, a weathered hoodie and beanie, spear in hand, a bucket swinging from his left. Locals call the 63-year-old fisherman “Nokatha”, Arabic for “the captain”, a nickname earned over time at sea.

These days he works the island's shallows for squid and, when the season turns, he dives for lobster and scallops. “When it's windy we don't go out”, he says. “When it's not windy, we go”.

We sit in the car as he talks, two friends sharing a single phone to show us a pinned map — technology limited but enough. The sea has been his classroom and career: captain on the Masirah ferries, before that, a trainer of officers in the army and always a fisherman when the weather allowed. In February, when the current runs right, he targets kingfish. “The water is clear because there's no wind”, he explains. “At night, if we put the net against the current, we catch everything”.

His stories braid personal grit with Gulf maritime history. He remembers ferry runs that stretched from Masirah to Dubai for servicing. “It takes two and a half days from here to Dubai”, he says of the route; recalling tracing Sur to Musandam and down the coast. He tells of another captain who strayed near Iranian waters and was seized: three months held with naval ships passing at a wary distance.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Masirah Island is rewriting its story — a narrative woven with threads of history, hope and transformation. Once an isolated jewel in Oman's crown, it was primarily known for its rugged beauty, ancient trade routes and strategic military outposts. Today, the island is on the cusp of a dynamic change, blending its storied past with a future brimming with promise.

Under the country's ambitious Oman Vision 2040, Masirah is becoming a beacon of progress. New infrastructure projects are transforming its remote landscape into a hub of eco-tourism and sustainable development. The echoes of RAF planes and traditional

British long ago, collecting weekly rations that covered everything “from a scratch of paper to food”. He even recalls talk of the era when planes landed on the sea before there were runways, a British camp on the coast and structures that broke the swell for seaplanes to touch down.

Fishing now is disciplined by season and rule. He shrugs off the idea of unwanted catch. “The net won't bring something we don't want — we want everything — because the eyes of the net are big”, he says, noting that officials check mesh sizes for nets and cages. He's watched new restrictions rise, including the beginnings of a ban on certain fishing cages. “They check”, he adds. “They look at the holes”.



shipping routes are giving way to modern ventures — eco-resorts, drone footage of stunning sunsets and eco-conscious initiatives that prioritise its endangered wildlife.

Culturally, Masirah is embracing its roots more than ever — not just preserving, but celebrating. Artisans are reviving age-old crafts, while festivals and markets showcase the island's vibrant traditions. This cultural renaissance is capturing the imagination of visitors and locals alike, sparking a renewed pride that honours heritage while embracing innovation.

Environmental initiatives are also reshaping Masirah's identity. Efforts to protect native species like different sea turtles and fragile coral reefs are gaining momentum, positioning the island as a model of ecological harmony. These changes are not only safeguarding its natural beauty but transforming Masirah into a sought-after eco-destination.

Tourism is evolving from distant dreams to tangible realities. Over forty projects are underway, fostering community-led tourism that invites travellers into the rhythm of island life — fishing, festivals and breathtaking landscapes. Social media buzz captures the island's newfound vibrancy, sharing stories that inspire global curiosity and respect.

A LIVING WITNESS TO CHANGE AND PROGRESS

The older seafaring generation looms large in his memory. He speaks of men who worked with the

Years of diving have left their mark. His favourite months — “two, three, four”, February through April — were once spent snorkelling two or three kilometres out along the reef. Now, he admits, the pressure of the sea has made his ears too fragile to continue.

When asked what matters most, his answer drifts from work to belonging. Before we can press for details, he gestures towards the road. “First I want to show you my village”, he says. “My grandparents' village”. And so the story folds back to land: when the wind quiets, you'll find him there, walking the shoreline, the captain of Masirah still keeping watch over sea and sand.