

O M A N
عُمان
D A I L Y

Observer



12
SALAH MAKES HISTORY
WITH THIRD PFA PLAYER
OF THE YEAR AWARD

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SUNRISE 05:44 AM
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INBRIEF

HPV VACCINE
ADDED TO SCHOOL
IMMUNISATION

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Musandam Governorate conducted a workshop on the addition of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to the National School Immunisation Programme, on Wednesday. The Ministry of Health intends to launch the HPV vaccine as part of the National School Immunisation Programme for sixth-grade students in public and private schools. This move is in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) evidence-based recommendations, which confirm the vaccine's effectiveness in preventing certain types of cancer, most notably cervical cancer, female and male reproductive system cancers as well as other diseases directly linked to the virus.

TOURISM
HACKATHON IN
DUQM FROM AUG 27



A youth ideas competition titled 'Tourism Hackathon 2025' will kick off in Al Duqm, Governorate of Al Wusta, from August 27 to 31. Organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the private sector, the competition seeks to develop the sectors of tourism and hospitality in the Sultanate of Oman. The hackathon aims to provide a platform for youth, entrepreneurs and innovators, and develop smart solutions that keep pace with the evolving reality of the tourism sector. **DETAILS ON P2**

RUSSIA DIFFERS WITH
EU ON UKRAINE

Russia said that attempts to resolve security issues relating to Ukraine without Moscow's participation were a "road to nowhere", sounding a warning to the West as it scrambles to work out guarantees for Kyiv's future protection. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticised the role of European leaders who met US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House on Monday to discuss security guarantees for Ukraine. "We cannot agree with the fact that now it is proposed to resolve questions of security, collective security, without the Russian Federation," Lavrov said. **SEE P7**

Oman's inflation rate rises by 0.8% in July

MUSCAT: The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the Sultanate of Oman recorded an increase of 0.8 per cent in July compared to the same month in 2024, using 2018 as the base year.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that prices for the 'miscellaneous goods and services' group led the list of categories with the highest increase at 6.5 per cent. This was followed by

the 'transport' group at 4 per cent, then the 'restaurants and hotels' group at 2.5 per cent. The 'health' group also recorded an increase of 0.8 per cent, while prices for the 'clothing and footwear' group rose by 0.4 per cent and the 'education' group by 0.1 per cent.

Conversely, prices for the 'food and non-alcoholic beverages' group decreased by 1.4 per cent. The 'culture and recreation' group declined by 0.2 per cent, and the

'furnishings, household equipment and routine maintenance' group decreased by 0.1 per cent.

Meanwhile, prices for the 'housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels' group, the 'communications' group, and the 'tobacco' group remained stable without recording any significant change.

The average inflation rate for the 'miscellaneous goods and services' group in Oman during the period

from January to July 2025 was about 6.2 per cent.

As for the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages for July compared to the same month in 2024, the data showed an increase in a number of sub-groups. The 'food products not elsewhere classified' sub-group led the increases at 3.9 per cent, followed by the 'sugar, jam, honey and confectionery' sub-group at 3.3 per cent. — ONA

MACRON FEARS 'PERMANENT WAR' AMID FRESH ISRAELI OFFENSIVE

Israel approves plan to
'conquer' Gaza City

ISRAEL'S defence minister approved a plan on Wednesday for the conquest of Gaza City and authorised the call-up of around 60,000 reservists, piling pressure on Hamas as mediators push for a ceasefire. Defence Minister Israel Katz's move, confirmed by a spokesperson, came as mediators awaited an official Israeli response to their latest proposal.

While mediator Qatar had expressed optimism over the latest proposal, a senior Israeli official said the government stood firm on its call for the release of all captives in any agreement.

The framework that Hamas had approved proposes an initial 60-day truce, a staggered release of captives, the freeing of some Palestinian prisoners and provisions allowing for the entry of aid into Gaza.

On the ground in Gaza City on Wednesday, Mustafa Qazzaat, head of the emergency committee in the Gaza municipality, described the situation as "catastrophic".

He said that "large numbers" of people were fleeing their neighbourhoods, with the majority of those displaced "on the roads and streets without shelter."

Aida Abu Madi, a 48-year-old resident of Zeitoun, said she fled on Wednesday with her husband, children and three grandchildren to the home of relatives in western Gaza City.

"I didn't hear about Israel's decision, but I saw my neighbours fleeing, so I fled too," she said.

Anis Daloul, 64, said he fled Zeitoun with his family on Sunday for a neighbourhood northwest of Gaza City.



Palestinian girl Shahed Thary, whose parents and brother were killed in an overnight Israeli strike on a tent, mourns during their funeral at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, on Wednesday. — Reuters

He said that the Israeli military had "destroyed most of the buildings in Zeitoun and displaced thousands of people".

Israel's security cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, approved the plan to conquer Gaza City in early August, sparking fears it will worsen the already catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday warned of a "permanent war" amid Israel's planned military operation in Gaza City.

"The military offensive in Gaza that Israel

is preparing can only lead to disaster for both peoples and risks plunging the entire region into a cycle of permanent war," Macron wrote on X.

Macron reiterated his call for a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

He also named the release of all captives, a large-scale provision of humanitarian aid for the people in Gaza as well as the disarmament of the Hamas organisation and the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority as prerequisites for an end to the war. — Agencies

Oman ramps up emergency response as rains lash Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI AND
LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT, AUG 20

Torrential rains and strong winds swept across Dhofar Governorate on Wednesday, swelling wadis, flooding low-lying areas and forcing authorities to mobilise emergency services at the height of the khareef tourist season.

The Oman Meteorology Department warned that rainfall could reach up to 50 mm in parts of the governorate, accompanied by thunderstorms and rough seas along the Arabian Sea coast. Residents and visitors were advised to avoid crossing

The Civil Aviation Authority announced the temporary precautionary closure of Wadi Darbat due to heavy rainfall and rising water levels

wadis and to suspend sea trips until conditions stabilise.

Emergency crews have been deployed across popular tourist sites such as Wadi Darbat, Al Mughsail and Jabal Samhan. Civil Defence and Ambulance teams are stationed at key locations, while Royal Oman Police patrols are reinforcing traffic flow and guiding visitors away from hazardous areas.

Nama Dhofar Services said it has activated its full khareef operational plan to guarantee the continuity of electricity, water and wastewater networks. Emergency field teams are

on round-the-clock standby, ready to respond to any outages or disruptions. The company said the plan is designed to enhance service stability and maintain public safety despite adverse conditions.

Dhofar Municipality also confirmed heightened monitoring of flood-prone areas and directed organisers of seasonal activities to follow safety protocols. Operators at Wadi Darbat have been instructed to suspend activities temporarily as a precaution, prioritising the safety of workers and visitors.

The Civil Aviation Authority

(CAA) announced the temporary precautionary closure of Wadi Darbat due to heavy rainfall and rising water levels, in coordination with relevant authorities.

The CAA urged all residents and visitors to adhere strictly to official guidance and instructions, stressing that compliance is vital to protect lives and ensure public safety.

Officials stressed that the co-ordinated response highlights Oman's preparedness to handle severe weather while keeping Dhofar accessible and safe for tens of thousands of khareef visitors.



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SHORT TAKES



TENDER FLOATED FOR SUHAR AL BATINAH LINK

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced the tender for the design and implementation of dual carriageway road project of Suhar link in Al Batinah North Governorate. The project will stretch from Al Wahat Mall roundabout to the bridge connecting to Al Batinah Expressway, with a length of approximately 9 kilometres and an implementation period of up to 18 months. The project includes the construction of a number of roundabouts and box culverts to ensure smooth traffic flow during rainfall, in addition to installing light poles. This will enhance the road’s efficiency, raise the level of traffic safety and meet the needs of its users. — ONA

4 HELD FOR STEALING JEWELLERY WORTH RO 150,000



4 Asians arrested on charges of robbery

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Muscat Governorate and Al Batinah North police commands, in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations, arrested four Asian men on charges of robbery. The criminals broke into a jeweller’s in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, threatened and assaulted staff, and stole RO 150,000 worth of jewellery as well as a cash amount. All stolen items were recovered, and legal proceedings are underway against the suspects.

OHBDA launches joint replacement project for sickle cell patients

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 20

The Oman Hereditary Blood Disorders Association (OHBDA) successfully completed the first surgery under its groundbreaking Joint Replacement Project, aimed at improving the lives of patients suffering from complications of sickle cell disease. This transformative initiative has been made possible through the generous support of Petroleum Development Oman, underscoring the private sector’s commitment to enhancing the quality of life for Omani patients. The project targets a total of seven beneficiaries, who will undergo



The joint expertise ensures comprehensive medical care and a thorough follow-up.

surgeries in carefully planned stages. The first two operations have already been completed, with subsequent procedures scheduled to ensure each patient receives the highest standard of care. The initiative

directly addresses the pressing need to relieve chronic pain and prevent long-term joint and bone complications that often hinder sickle cell patients from leading active, independent lives.

21 General Education Diploma toppers honoured

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 20

MUSCAT Governorate, in cooperation with its Directorate-General of Education, recently held a ceremony to honour the top-performing General Education Diploma students of the 2023-2024 academic year. The 21 male and female students achieved exceptional results, scoring over 99 per cent in their exams. The event underscores the governorate’s commitment to nurturing outstanding students and supporting young talent. The ceremony, attended by parents and representatives from public and private schools as well as Islamic institutes, took place at the Dohat Al Adab Theatre under the auspices of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. In his speech, he praised the students’ dedication and reiterated the governorate’s commitment to providing institutional support throughout their academic journeys. He also commended the efforts of teachers, parents and the Ministry of Education for their role in guiding the students towards success.



The ceremony featured a visual presentation, showcasing the students’ achievements, complemented by musical performances

Representing his peers, Mohammed al Mandhari from Jaber Bin Zaid Basic Education School expressed gratitude for the recognition, emphasising that perseverance, diligence and patience are the keys to success. Al Ghalya bint Abdullah al Ismailiyah highlighted the importance of focus, positivity and time management. Parents also shared their joy and underlined the crucial role of providing a supportive environment, balancing study, rest and healthy nutrition. Meanwhile, Hamid bin Issam al Tobī, who has secured a seat at Sultan

Qaboos University’s College of Science in cybersecurity, spoke of his pride in achieving his academic goals, with his father emphasising guidance and encouragement as essential to student success. The event featured a visual presentation, ‘Journey of Glory’, showcasing the students’ achievements, complemented by musical performances that added a celebratory atmosphere. The ceremony reflected an exemplary collaboration between community institutions, the Directorate-General of Education and families in promoting academic excellence in Muscat.

Duqm hosts tourism hackathon from August 27

AL DUQM: The Youth Ideas Competition titled ‘Tourism Hackathon 2025’ will be held in Al Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate, from August 27 to 31. Organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with private-sector partners, the event aims to strengthen the tourism and hospitality sector in Oman. The hackathon will provide a platform for youth, entrepreneurs and innovators to develop smart, practical solutions that address the challenges facing the tourism sector. It also seeks to inspire and empower Omani talent to think creatively, promote sustainable growth and enhance the sector’s long-term competitiveness. Beyond being a contest, the initiative serves as an opportunity for collaboration and knowledge exchange, underscoring Oman’s

The hackathon will provide a platform for youth, entrepreneurs and innovators to develop smart, practical solutions that address the challenges facing the tourism sector



The hackathon aims to strengthen the tourism and hospitality sector in Oman

commitment to innovation and future skills development in tourism and hospitality. Participants will include entrepreneurs, innovators and students from universities and colleges. The competition will

revolve around key themes such as smart tourism destinations, enriching visitor experiences, events and activities, sustainable tourism, digital innovation and preserving and promoting heritage and culture. — ONA



OMAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY (S.A.O.G)

Chairman's Report and Unaudited Condensed Consolidated Financial Results for the Period Ended 30 Jun 2025.

Respected Shareholders,

We are pleased to present to you a summary of the results of the operations for the six months' period ending 30th June 2025.

Operating performance:

REVENUE: Group Revenue for the six months ended June 2025 has reached RO 1609.8 Mn compared to RO 1469.6 Mn for the corresponding period 2024 an increase of 9.5%.The Group revenue includes Zain Group of RO 1341.7 Mn. Group's revenue increased across all operations with portion of that coming from Oman which increased YOY by 8%, Sudan by 97%, Iraq by 16%, Bahrain by 7%, Jordan by 7% and KSA by 5%.

EXPENSES: Group's total expenses (including depreciation) increased to RO 1,372.5 Mn compared to RO 1,273.8 Mn for the corresponding period 2024, an increase of 7.7%.

NET PROFIT: The Group Net Profit after tax has increased to RO 161.1 Mn compared to RO 110.2 Mn in 2024, an increase of 46.2%. The increase is primarily due to positive EBITDA performance across all operations and higher investment income.

Net profit Attributable to Shareholders of the Company for the period stands at RO 34.9 Mn compared to RO 27.8 Mn in 2024, an increase of 25.5%.

Earnings per Share (EPS): Attributable to Shareholders of the Company for the six months ending 30th June 2025 RO 0.047 compared to RO 0.037 for the corresponding period of 2024.

Omantel Domestic operations (Domestic performance)

Revenues: reached RO 321.3 Mn in the Six months ended June 2025 compared to RO 297.7 Mn for the corresponding period 2024, an increase of 8%.

The revenue increase of RO 23.6 Mn (YoY) is primarily driven by a significant rise in telco revenue growth of RO 14.3 Mn, underpinned by robust performance across various segments. Telco revenue growth is supported by increase in Fixed revenue by RO 2.4 Mn, Device revenue by RO 6.1 Mn, and Wholesale revenue by RO 5.8 Mn. Additionally, revenue from Smart solutions, hosting and cloud related services recorded an increase of RO 6.3 Mn and RO 2.6 Mn respectively as part of the implementation of our Tech co strategy to diversify our revenues.

Net Profit: attributable to Shareholders for the six months ending June 2025 stands at RO 34.7 Mn compared to RO 38.9 Mn in the previous period. Domestic EBITDA increased by RO 2.7 Mn on account of an increase in Gross margin which in turn increased on account of top line performance and decrease in Royalty rates on Mobile services from 12% to 10%. Net profit decreased by RO 4.1 Mn on account of a higher depreciation cost to RO 5.4 Mn reflecting our increase in investment in network and digital channels to enhance customer experience. Further additional investments done as part of the implementation of Tech co strategy also contributed to the increase in Capex and depreciation costs.

SUBSCRIBER BASE: The total domestic mobile subscriber base as of 30th June 2025 was 3.8 Mn (including Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.1 Mn of the corresponding period due to the growth in postpaid mobile connections, mainly M2M sims.

Domestic Market Share: Omantel's Mobile market share as of June 2025 (excluding Mobile Resellers) is 40.3%. The fixed broadband market share as of June 2025 is 54.6%.

Subsidiary Companies:

Mobile Telecommunication Company (Zain):

Zain Group revenues for the Six months ending June 2025 reached RO 1,341.74 Mn compared to RO 1,179.2 Mn of the corresponding period of the previous year, an increase of 13.8% over the last year. EBITDA stands at RO 443.3 Mn, compared to the corresponding period EBITDA of RO 405.8 Mn recording an increase of 9.2%. Net profit Attributable to Shareholders of the Company stands at RO 150.9 Mn representing net income growth of 48.5%. Net profit increase YoY is on account of positive EBITDA performance across all operations and higher investment income.

In the first half of 2025, the region's telecommunications sector experienced strong continued momentum in its shift towards smart solutions and emerging technologies, fueled by growing demand for integrated connectivity solutions, cloud computing, and AI-driven services . Amid intensifying competition and a regional drive to diversify business models, Omantel Group continued to take bold strategic steps to reinforce its position as a leading player in this evolving landscape, both in Oman and across the region.

Building on this momentum, the Group is laying the groundwork for a flagship national technology powerhouse, soon to be unveiled with a refreshed corporate identity. The new entity will bring together Oman's ICT strengths under one umbrella, spearhead major digital initiatives, attract leading global partners, and position the Sultanate as a vibrant regional hub for innovation and next-generation technologies.

Key developments during the First Half

Strengthening Regional Connectivity Partnering with the UAE's du, Omantel has brought the Oman–UAE Gateway (OEG) online, a 275 km subsea fiber-optic system that establishes a direct high-capacity link between the two countries. The gateway interconnects three key international data hubs (datamena DX1 in Dubai, Equinix MC1 in Barka, and Equinix SN1 in Salalah) enhancing cross-border network resilience and enabling faster access to regional and global digital services. The initiative further fortifies network reliability, expands seamless access to cloud-based solutions, and reinforces Oman's standing as a key regional hub for Hyperscalers, content providers, and global telecom operators.

Joint R&D Center for Next-Generation Networks Teaming up with *FiberHome*, Omantel has set up an innovation hub dedicated to advancing cutting-edge fiber-optic and telecom technologies. Among its first achievements was a live trial of 50GPON, reaching speeds of 50 Gbps (*ten times faster than today's standard*) paving the way for transformative uses in AI, smart city infrastructure, and Industry 4.0 solutions.

In alignment with Omantel's transformation journey toward becoming a fully integrated technology group, the Human Resources team continued to play a pivotal role in empowering talent and fostering a culture of innovation. These efforts were recognized in June 2025 with the achievement of three prestigious awards presented by Inside Out in London, reflecting international appreciation for the team's excellence in organizational development and employee empowerment.

At Oman Sustainability Week (OSW), we proudly reaffirmed our commitment to sustainability alongside our ongoing drive for innovation. For the second consecutive year, our efforts were recognized with the prestigious Silver Award for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices.

Thanks and Appreciation.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to our shareholders and loyal customers for their continued support, which enabled us to achieve these excellent results. We also wholeheartedly appreciate the sincere contribution of executive management and employees to the company's performance. With your support, we are confident that Omantel will continue its good performance and will be able to reach new heights of excellence.

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position as at June 2025		
	Unaudited	Audited
	30 June 2025	31 December 2024
	RO'000	RO'000
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	341,495	299,364
Bank balances held in customers' account	23,837	19,846
Trade and other receivables	1,594,696	1,481,417
Contract assets	148,003	139,631
Inventories	80,032	115,662
Investment securities at FVTPL	100,265	70,151
Investment securities at amortised cost	200	-
	2,288,528	2,126,071
Assets classified as held for sale	133,635	119,123
	2,422,163	2,245,194
Non-current assets		
Contract assets	106,824	93,277
Investment securities at FVTPL	22,062	24,704
Investment securities at FVOCI	17,853	17,130
Investment securities at amortised cost	800	1,000
Investments in associates and joint venture	273,268	248,511
Other non-current assets	157,126	139,895
Deferred tax asset	32,391	32,005
Right of use of assets	359,963	311,581
Property and equipment	1,884,697	1,918,130
Intangible assets and goodwill	3,087,307	3,134,409
	5,942,291	5,920,642
	8,364,454	8,165,836
Total Assets		
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,695,237	1,683,946
Contract liabilities	125,725	119,262
Income tax payables	37,078	37,729
Borrowings	914,881	894,825
Lease liabilities	54,063	45,327
	2,826,984	2,781,089
Liabilities of directly associated with assets classified as held for sale	44,945	41,048
	2,871,929	2,822,137
Non-current liabilities		
Borrowings	1,831,736	1,678,969
Government grant	4,134	4,226
Lease liabilities	383,596	353,189
Other non-current liabilities	400,451	376,776
	2,619,917	2,413,160
Total liabilities	5,491,846	5,235,297
Equity		
Attributable to owners of the Company		
Share capital	75,000	75,000
Owns shares held by liquidity provider	(109)	(191)
Reserve on trading in liquidity shares	(648)	(1,815)
Legal reserve	25,000	25,000
Voluntary reserve	49,875	49,875
Capital contribution	7,288	7,288
Capital reserve	36,893	36,893
Foreign currency translation reserve	(123,860)	(119,797)
Investment fair valuation reserve	(4,831)	(4,911)
Other reserves	413	566
Retained earnings	592,170	598,037
	657,191	665,945
Non-controlling interests	2,215,417	2,264,594
Total equity	2,872,608	2,930,539
Total Liabilities and Equity	8,364,454	8,165,836

Consolidated Statement of Profit or Loss June 2025 (Unaudited)				
	Three months ended 30 June		Six months ended 30 June	
	2025	2024	2025	2024
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Revenue	806,199	741,546	1,609,787	1,469,630
Cost of operations	(277,132)	(258,801)	(564,092)	(515,703)
Operating and administrative expenses	(238,476)	(206,782)	(490,116)	(440,429)
Depreciation and amortization	(146,345)	(151,570)	(290,784)	(291,542)
Allowance for expected credit loss on financial assets	(16,422)	(15,440)	(27,567)	(26,142)
Interest income	2,847	3,009	5,018	7,111
Investment income	8,534	(154)	27,889	3,986
Share of results of associates and joint venture	23,342	2,859	25,538	3,272
Other (expense)/income	(2,750)	6,688	(17,138)	5,499
Gain on disposal of subsidiaries	24	-	24	-
Finance costs	(51,391)	(51,569)	(100,617)	(101,844)
(Loss)/Gain from currency revaluation	(883)	7,304	32	13,048
Net monetary gain	851	1,721	5,258	1,721
Profit before income taxes	108,398	78,811	183,232	128,607
Income tax expenses	(12,205)	(9,150)	(22,118)	(18,379)
Profit for the period	96,193	69,661	161,114	110,228
Attributable to:				
Owners of the Company	19,259	14,946	34,931	27,818
Non-controlling interests	76,934	54,715	126,183	82,410
	96,193	69,661	161,114	110,228
Earnings per share				
Basic and diluted – RO	0.026	0.020	0.047	0.037

Note:

1. The consolidated financial statements are available in Muscat Stock Exchange and the Company's website.
2. The consolidated financial statement will be delivered to any shareholders or other interested party who requests them, within 5 days of the written request. The request must indicate preference for Arabic or English.
3. Request may be addressed to Secretary, Board of Directors, Omantel P.O. Box 789, PC 112, Ruw' al Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 242 40 596.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The excavations also revealed complete pottery vessels

RESCUE EXCAVATION UNCOVERS ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS IN IBRI

IBRI: A rescue excavation carried out by the Department of Heritage and Tourism in the Al Dhahirah Governorate has uncovered archaeological finds in Al Sabikhi area in the Wilayat of Ibri.

Waleed bin Awad al Ghafri, an Archaeology Specialist at the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Dhahirah Governorate, indicated that the survey and excavation work has resulted in the documentation of 25 archaeological graves dating back to the third millennium BC.

The excavations also revealed the remains of skeletal structures and complete pottery vessels inside the burial chambers, some of which were imported from the Jemdet Nasr civilisation in Mesopotamia (Iraq).

In addition, beads from the Bronze Age, made of stone and shells, were discovered.

He added that a team of specialists and archaeology experts from within and outside Oman is handling the discovered artefacts in preparation for their study and preservation according to standard procedures. — ONA

AI AND SMART FARMING BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

MINISTRY SUPPORTS AGRI-INNOVATION AND STARTUPS

HARMAL PLANT OFFERS ECO-FRIENDLY PEST CONTROL

SAG 1 DEVICE MONITORS SOIL IN REAL TIME

OMAN'S agricultural sector is undergoing a significant transformation through innovation and technology, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is spearheading efforts to enhance food security and environmental sustainability by promoting smart farming, biotechnology, artificial intelligence and modern irrigation techniques.

Smart resource management systems, vertical farming, precision agriculture and digital tools are being adopted to improve productivity, reduce waste and ensure sustainable food availability.

The Ministry supports small-scale innovative projects through technical and financial assistance, while funding

ROP warns against slow driving on highways

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

THE Royal Oman Police (ROP) issued a warning to motorists that driving slowly on speed tracks without a valid reason is a serious traffic violation. Such behaviour not only disrupts traffic flow, but also increases the likelihood of accidents.

Lieutenant Colonel Saif bin Ahmed al Ramadhani, Director of the Executive Office, National Committee for Road Safety at the DG of Traffic Safety, stressed that drivers must maintain the minimum designated speed in each lane. Those who wish to drive slower should use the designated slow lanes without compromising their own safety or that of others.

“Driving slowly on main roads’ left lanes confuses other drivers, obstructs traffic and violates the executive regulations of the Traffic Law,” he said. The ROP has observed drivers travelling at 80 km/h in lanes where the speed limit is 120 km/h or failing to yield to faster vehicles approaching from behind, causing unnecessary delays and risks.

Colonel Khamis bin Ali al Battashi, Assistant Director-General of Traffic, added that what some perceive as ‘safer’ slow driving can actually cause congestion, confusion and accidents, particularly on



Advanced speed control radars are now being deployed to detect vehicles travelling below minimum speed limits

high-density roads. Common causes include inexperience, traffic anxiety, mobile phone distractions and lack of awareness of proper lane usage.

Such slow driving can create the illusion of traffic jams on single-lane roads, even when the slowdown is caused by just one vehicle. This disruption affects all road users and increases the potential for collisions.

To curb this behaviour, advanced speed control radars are now being deployed to detect vehicles

travelling below minimum speed limits. Alongside enforcement, the ROP is conducting intensive awareness campaigns via patrols, media, social media, road signage and educational visuals, highlighting the dangers of slow driving and promoting safer, smoother traffic flow.

“These combined efforts aim to ensure that highways, designed for speeds of no less than 80 km/h, are used safely and efficiently,” said Al Ramadhani.



The Ministry is spearheading efforts to enhance food security using modern irrigation techniques

SMART FARMING TRANSFORMS OMAN

initiatives and awareness programmes are provided via the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund and digital platforms. Collaboration with universities, research centres and international organisations such as FAO and AOAD further strengthens these efforts.

Emphasis is being placed on integrating technology in agriculture, including IoT-based smart farms, disease prediction and crop improvement. Legislation such as the Intellectual Property Protection Law encourages innovators to register advancements in agricultural technologies, biofertilisers and irrigation systems. Agricultural startups benefit from tax exemptions and customs duty waivers on modern technologies, while renewable energy integration and organic farming are promoted to support sustainable production.

Recent research from Sultan Qaboos University highlights the potential of the Harmal

plant (*Peganum harmala*) in combating crop diseases.

Supervised by Buthaina bint Harith al Busaidyah and Dhia bint Ibrahim al Rashdiyah, the study found that Harmal extracts inhibit harmful fungi, reducing the need for chemical pesticides. The research team developed a practical solution derived from Harmal that demonstrates high efficacy against pathogenic fungi, offering an environmentally safe option for Omani farmers.

Innovative companies are also contributing to sustainable farming solutions.

Hawra bint Rashid al Omraniyah from the University of Al Sharqiyah showcased AZDARA, a company producing organic pesticides and fertilisers in biodegradable smart soil packs. These packs nourish the soil as they decompose and include natural products derived from animal shampoo, providing safe pest control while improving animal health.

Omar bin Fathil al Daree from UTAS Ibri introduced the Smart Agriculture Cultivator (SAG 1), a sensor-equipped device that analyses soil conditions in real time, measuring moisture, pH, temperature and nutrient levels. The system alerts users to issues such as salinity or nutrient deficiencies and removes impurities like stones, weeds and plastics automatically, improving both efficiency and soil health.

The Ministry stressed that investing in agricultural innovation is a strategic necessity to secure a food-safe future amidst global challenges like climate change, resource scarcity and population growth. By encouraging private-sector partnerships, promoting research and supporting startup initiatives, Oman is building a resilient and sustainable agricultural framework.

Through projects like smart irrigation, organic farming and biotechnology research, Oman aims to transform its food system, promote environmental stewardship and strengthen the green economy. The combination of innovation, legislation and private-sector collaboration positions the Sultanate of Oman as a regional leader in sustainable agriculture and food security. — ONA

SHORTTAKES



Emotional Intelligence, AI in focus at GCC HR conference

SALALAH: The 14th GCC Conference for the Development of Human Resources Productivity opened on Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The 2-day conference focuses on four main themes, namely the relationship between emotional intelligence and artificial intelligence in enhancing productivity, the impact of emotional intelligence on occupational health and safety, the role of technology in improving performance, in addition to emotional intelligence as a tool for successful leadership.

The first day’s programme included sessions that discussed the role of emotional intelligence in the present and future; and ways to build a work culture based on emotional intelligence. On its second day, the conference will continue with specialised sessions on the relationship between emotional intelligence and artificial intelligence, effective leadership, measuring productivity and ways to develop it, in addition to interactive meetings and dialogues with leaders in the field of human resources development. — ONA

Oman hosts GCC social insurance committee meet

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUG 20

OMAN, represented by the Social Protection Fund (SPF), hosted the 62nd meeting of the Technical Committee for Civil Pension and Social Insurance Authorities in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from August 18 to 20.

The three-day meeting brought together representatives from across the region to review progress and chart future directions for cooperation in pension and social security systems.

The discussions highlighted the GCC’s strategic goal of extending social insurance coverage to citizens working outside their home countries within the bloc. The unified system ensures that Gulf nationals enjoy equal protection and benefits, regardless of where they are employed in the region.

The meeting also addressed the development of the unified system for coverage, monitoring statistical indicators, enhancing mechanisms for contribution collection, advancing training and capacity



The SPF organised an interactive session for GCC citizens working in Oman

The discussions highlighted GCC’s strategic goal of extending social insurance coverage to citizens

building; and reviewing progress in electronic linkage initiatives that enable smoother data exchange among GCC pension and insurance systems.

On the sidelines, the Social Protection Fund organised an interactive session for GCC citizens working in Oman, allowing them to engage directly with representatives from regional pension institutions. “Having direct answers from officials helps clarify our rights under the unified system. It gives us confidence that our contributions

are secure, no matter where we work in the GCC”, said Saud al Kindi, a private-sector employee in Oman.

Participants agreed that the committee’s work lays important groundwork ahead of the upcoming meeting of GCC pension and social insurance heads. Statistical updates shared during the sessions reflected the growing number of citizens benefitting from the unified system, underscoring its relevance in today’s interconnected labour market.

Experts noted that sustained cooperation is vital as Gulf economies diversify and labour mobility increases. By harmonising systems and sharing expertise, GCC nations can better safeguard their citizens against uncertainties while ensuring equitable benefits across borders.

Observers also underlined that Oman’s hosting of the 62nd meeting reflects its growing role in shaping social protection policies in the region. The Muscat gathering, they said, was not only a routine technical exercise but also a step towards building a comprehensive Gulf-wide safety net rooted in solidarity, fairness and shared prosperity.

CMYF TO HOLD DONATION CAMP ON FRIDAY

MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, is conducting a blood donation camp on Friday from 9 am on the occasion of the birthday of popular film star Chiranjeevi.

The camp will be held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka called upon all

humanitarians to participate in this noble cause of saving other’s life. The CMYF has been conducting blood donation camps continuously for the last two decades and have been awarded with the best blood donors award by the Ministry of Health on multiple times. Ramdas Chandaka says that this year’s blood camp is special as it celebrates the 70th birthday of Chiranjeevi.

Mango projects in Al Batinah South bolster food security

BARKA: Mango cultivation and production projects in the wilayats of Barka and Al Musannah in Al Batinah South Governorate are vital initiatives that bolster food security, increase local production, provide promising investment opportunities and reduce reliance on imports.

These projects also have the potential for future export to foreign markets, which enhances the competitiveness of Omani products in regional and global markets.

Over 80 projects within the food security portfolio are being implemented in the governorate. Their products vary and they span vast areas across the governorate’s wilayats.

The projects are under the continuous supervision and follow-up of the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah South Governorate. This is to overcome difficulties and address challenges that may arise during the implementation stages and ensure work proceeds according to the planned schedules.

These projects aim to plant over 35,000 mango seedlings of various varieties on an area of 373 acres in the wilayats of Barka and Al Musannah. The planting will



The projects aim to plant over 35,000 mango seedlings on an area of 373 acres.

be carried out in separate batches to ensure the highest success rates. The expected production capacity upon project completion and the start of commercial production will reach 3,382 tonnes annually.

Eng Amer bin Humood al Shebli, Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah South Governorate, stated: “The mango projects in Barka and Al Musannah come within the framework of the Ministry’s efforts to diversify agricultural production and enhance the national food security system. This is achieved by utilising natural resources, adopting modern farming methods that ensure sustainable and high-quality

production; and making the best use of available resources”.

He also said that in the next phase, the Ministry is working to expand the introduction of new mango varieties known for their high quality and excellent productivity. It will also focus on research and development programmes to improve production and enhance the efficiency of farmers and workers in this field through continuous training.

The Ministry is also placing great importance on opening diverse marketing channels, whether in local markets or through agricultural exhibitions and events, to ensure the long-term continuity and viability of these projects. — ONA



TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2025/023	Design and Communication Services Agency Contract for Nama Electricity Supply Company	28/08/2025	10/09/2025	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2025/024	Videos and media production Services Agency Contract for Nama Electricity Supply Company	28/08/2025	10/09/2025	Specialist	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	• Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. • The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. • The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). • To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om/ , under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Enquiries	• Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om , using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. • Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	• Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om/ , under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Guarantee	• The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted. The value of bond shall be Omani Rial Five Hundred only (OMR 500/=) and shall be valid for a period of at least Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. • The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. • Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.				
Terms and Conditions	• The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. • If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. • NESC is not bound to accept the lowest Tenderer. • The bidder must submit a valid Omanization certificate confirming a minimum of level of Omanization of 30%, issued by the Ministry of Labour (MOL), as evidence of compliance. Bidder, who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process. • NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. • Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	• Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



India's PM Narendra Modi shakes hands with Chinese FM Wang Yi, in New Delhi. — Reuters

CHINA, INDIA
PLEDGE TO RESUME
DIRECT FLIGHTS

BEIJING: China and India announced they would restart direct flights in a string of diplomatic breakthroughs, state media reported on Wednesday, as Beijing's foreign minister wrapped up a visit before heading to Pakistan. Following Wang Yi's trip to India, Beijing and New Delhi also agreed to advance talks on their disputed border, resume tourism visa issuance and boost trade between the neighbouring countries.

In talks on the border issue with Indian national security adviser Ajit Doval, the two sides agreed to "explore the possibility of advancing boundary demarcation negotiations" and vowed to reopen three border trade markets, according to a Xinhua report on Wednesday. Modi will travel to China later in August — his first visit since 2018. Wang is now due in Pakistan, India's arch-rival and one of China's closest partners in the region. "Both India and Pakistan are China's important neighbours. We are willing to enhance friendly cooperation with both countries, and hope that differences between these two countries can be handled properly", foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular press conference. — AFP

JAPAN HOSTS
AFRICAN LEADERS
FOR DEVELOPMENT



Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba delivers a speech during the welcome reception, in Yokohama. — AFP

YOKOHAMA: Japan hosted African leaders on Wednesday for a three-day development conference. Attendees at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) included Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, William Ruto of Kenya and UN head Antonio Guterres. "The debt and liquidity crisis on the African continent is worsening the challenging socio-economic environment and constraining the fiscal space for governments to cast a safety net over its citizens," Ramaphosa's office said in a statement.

TICAD was expected to touch on possible future free-trade deals between Japan and African nations, loan guarantees and investment incentives for Japanese firms, local media reported. Africa presents opportunities with its young population and natural resources, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters on Tuesday. "We will be discussing how we may leverage these human and material resources as a source of vitality and connect them to Japan's growth and the prosperity of the world," he said. "Rather than focusing on our own needs, we want to carefully identify the needs of our partners and earn their trust, thereby fulfilling our role as a nation," Ishiba said. — AFP

VIOLENCE SPIKE

Gunmen attack military positions in Mali



Groups of gunmen have attacked two military installations in Mali, according to the army and other sources, with residents saying that both areas came under serious assault. The latest attacks come as the country's junta, which came to power following back-to-back military coups in 2020 and 2021, battles an acute spike in violence. The militants claimed to have taken control of a military camp in the central town of Farabougou. — AFP

‘CANNOT COMPLETELY’
BREAK WITH
UN NUCLEAR
WATCHDOG,
SAYS IRAN

TEHRAN: Iran "cannot completely cut cooperation" with the UN nuclear watchdog but the return of its inspectors is up to the country's security chiefs, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday. The remarks come nearly two months after Iran suspended cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency following its 12-day war with Israel in June.

Iran has cited the IAEA's failure to condemn Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear facilities as the

reason for its decision, which saw the watchdog's inspectors leave the country following the passing of new legislation by parliament.

"We cannot completely cut cooperation with the agency," Araghchi said, noting that new fuel rods need to be installed at Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant in the coming weeks which will require the presence of IAEA inspectors. "Under the law passed by parliament, the return of inspectors will be possible through a decision of the Supreme

National Security Council," he said, referring to Iran's top security body.

Iran has since said cooperation with the agency will take "a new form", and earlier this month, the agency's deputy head visited Tehran for talks. Deputy foreign minister Kazem Gharibabadi said Iran and the agency had agreed to "continue consultations". Britain, France and Germany have threatened to trigger a snapback of UN sanctions lifted under the 2015 accord if Iran fails to agree a deal. — AFP

Palestinians condemn
Israel’s WB settlement

THE Palestinian Authority on Wednesday slammed Israel's approval of a key settlement project in the occupied West Bank, saying it undermined the chances of a two-state solution. The approval of the project in the area known as E1 "fragments... geographic and demographic unity, entrenching the division of the occupied West Bank into isolated areas and cantons that are disconnected from one another, turning them into something akin to real prisons," the PA's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Israel approved a major settlement project on Wednesday in an area of the occupied West Bank that the international community has warned threatens the viability of a future Palestinian state. Israel has long had ambitions to build on the roughly 12 square kilometres known as E1 that lie just east of Jerusalem, but the plan had been stalled for years amid international opposition.

Critics say the settlement would undermine hopes for a contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Last week, Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich backed plans to build some 3,400 homes on the ultra-sensitive parcel of land that lies between Jerusalem and the Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that constructing Israeli homes there would "put an end to" hopes for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "I am pleased to announce that just a short while ago, the civil administration approved the



Palestinians throw stones at an Israeli military vehicle during a raid on Al Amari refugee camp, Ramallah. — AFP

Critics say the settlement would undermine hopes for a contiguous Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that constructing Israeli homes there would "put an end to" hopes for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

planning for the construction of the E1 neighbourhood," the mayor of Maale Adumim, Guy Yifrach, said in a statement on Wednesday. All of Israel's settlements in the West Bank, occupied since 1967, are considered illegal under international law, regardless of whether they have Israeli planning permission.

Aviv Tatarsky, a researcher at the Israeli anti-settlement organisation Ir Amim, said: "Today's approval demonstrates how determined Israel is in pursuing what Minister Smotrich has described as a strategic programme to bury the possibility of a Palestinian state and to effectively annex the West Bank. "This is a conscious Israeli choice to implement an apartheid regime," he added, calling on the international community to take urgent and effective measures against the move.

Israeli NGO Peace Now, which

monitors settlement activity in the West Bank, said last week that infrastructure work in E1 could begin within a few months, and housing construction within about a year. Excluding East Jerusalem, the West Bank is home to around three million Palestinians, as well as about 500,000 Israeli settlers.

Meanwhile, Israel's defence minister approved a plan for the conquest of Gaza City and authorised the call-up of around 60,000 reservists, piling pressure on Hamas as mediators push for a ceasefire. Defence Minister Israel Katz's move came as mediators awaited an official Israeli response to their latest proposal. While mediator Qatar had expressed guarded optimism over the latest proposal, a senior Israeli official said the government stood firm on its call for the release of all hostages in any agreement. — AFP

AFGHANISTAN BUS CRASH TOLL RISES TO 78

GUZARA: The death toll from a collision between a bus carrying Afghan migrants returning from Iran and two other vehicles in western Afghanistan has risen to 78, provincial officials said on Wednesday. Seventy-six people died in the accident in Herat province's Guzara district on Tuesday night when the passenger bus hit a motorcycle and a truck transporting fuel, causing an explosive fire, officials and eyewitnesses said. Two of the three survivors later died of their injuries, officials said.

"Two injured individuals from

last night's incident succumbed to severe injuries, increasing the number of victims to 78," a statement by the provincial information department said, citing representatives of the military hospital that received victims. Seventeen children were among those killed, according to army spokesman Mujeebullah Ansar, though a provincial police source put the number at 19. Many of the bodies were "unidentifiable", said Mohammad Janan Moqadas, chief physician at the military hospital. — AFP



CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT

Hackers access data of 850,000 in Belgium



Telecoms provider Orange Belgium said it was hit by a cyberattack that saw hackers access the data of 850,000 customers. "The hacker gained access to one of our IT systems containing the following data: surname, first name, telephone number, SIM card number, PUK code, tariff plan," it said. "As soon as the incident was detected, our teams blocked access to the affected system and tightened our security measures." — AFP

GRANTED FREEDOM

Colombia court frees ex-president Uribe



A court in Colombia ordered the immediate release of former president Alvaro Uribe while he appeals a witness tampering conviction for which he was sentenced to 12 years of house arrest. The decision by the Superior Court in Bogota means Uribe can move around freely while his appeal is considered. "Thanks to God, thanks to so many fellow Colombians for their expressions of solidarity," Uribe wrote on X. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A resident walks among the rubble of houses destroyed by a wildfire, in Ourense. — AFP

HIGH WINDS COMPLICATE FIRE BATTLE IN SPAIN

MADRID: Winds on Wednesday hampered efforts to contain wildfires in Spain that have already scorched a record stretch of land despite lower temperatures, authorities said. Firefighters, backed by troops and water-dropping aircraft, were battling 21 blazes in the west of the country classified as “operational level two”, meaning they pose a direct threat to nearby communities, said Virginia Barcones, director-general of emergency services. “Temperatures have dropped, but strong gusts of wind continue to hinder firefighting efforts, and the lack of rain is not helping, though we hope that changes in the coming days,” she told a news conference.

Forecasters said winds were expected to ease later in the day, with higher humidity levels likely to help efforts. Rain was forecast in some fire-hit regions on Thursday. Spain endured a 16-day heatwave that ended on Monday, with temperatures soaring above 40 degrees Celsius in many regions. Officials said many of the fires were sparked by lightning during dry storms, though arson is suspected in some cases. Aircraft from Italy, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Slovenia have joined the firefighting effort. — AFP

N CAROLINA PREPARES FOR FLOODING



Hurricane Erin maintained its Category 2 strength early on Wednesday morning as North Carolina’s coasts prepared for life-threatening coastal flooding, with mandatory evacuations underway for some islands, US authorities said. Although its core is projected to remain far offshore, meteorologists are concerned by Erin’s large size, with tropical storm-force winds extending hundreds of miles from its core. “Weather conditions expected to deteriorate along the coast of North Carolina by this evening,” the National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned in its latest advisory. — AFP

EARLY FINDINGS SHOW MILITARY DRONE FELL IN POLAND, SAYS PROSECUTOR

OSINY: An object that hit and scorched a corn field in eastern Poland was a military drone, according to the preliminary findings of an investigation, a Polish prosecutor said on Wednesday. Poland has been on high alert for objects entering its airspace since a stray Ukrainian missile struck the southern Polish village of Przewodow in 2022, killing two people. “Examination of the explosion indicates that the... object is most likely a military drone,”

Lublin regional prosecutor Grzegorz Trusiewicz told reporters. He said it was probably damaged by explosives.

Police had earlier announced that an unidentified object had fallen in a field in the village of Osiny in the eastern Lublin province, just over 100 km from the Ukrainian border and around 90 km from Belarus. State news agency PAP cited a person close to the defence ministry as saying that the drone had no warhead, contained

only a small amount of explosives and was most likely a decoy.

Deputy Prime Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz, who serves as defence minister, said the incident bore similarities to cases in which Russian drones flew into Lithuania and Romania, and that there could be a link to efforts to end the war in Ukraine. “In this analysis, we should not rule out a connection between the ongoing peace talks in the United States, inspired by Trump. — Reuters

Ukraine’s security without Moscow ‘road to nowhere’

RUSSIAN

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that discussing any Western security guarantees for Ukraine without Russian involvement was a “road to nowhere”. Lavrov warned that “seriously discussing security guarantees without the Russian Federation is a utopia, a road to nowhere. “We cannot agree that it is now suggested to solve collective security issues without the Russian Federation,” he told reporters.

President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the ensuing conflict has killed tens of thousands of people and forced millions to flee their homes. US President Donald Trump, who spoke on Monday with his Russian counterpart, said Putin had agreed to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and accept some Western security guarantees for Ukraine.

Lavrov said in their phone call, Putin had only told Trump he would “think about raising the level of” talks on Ukraine. Lavrov said any summit between Putin and Zelensky “must be prepared in the most meticulous way” so the meeting does not lead to a “deterioration” of the situation around the conflict. Lavrov also accused European leaders — some of whom also visited the White House on Monday — of making “clumsy attempts” to change the US president’s position on Ukraine. “We have only seen aggressive escalation of the situation and rather clumsy attempts to change the position of the US president,” he said, referring to Monday’s meeting. “We did not hear any constructive ideas from the Europeans there,” Lavrov added.

Lavrov also said the West’s “confrontational position, a position to continue the war, does not find understanding in the current US administration, which... seeks to help eliminate the root causes of the conflict”. Post-war security is a key concern for Ukraine after more than three years of the Russian offensive. Moscow has long said it will not tolerate Kyiv joining Nato and has been hostile to the idea of Western troops



People visit a makeshift memorial to fallen Ukrainian defenders, at the Independence Square. — Reuters

being deployed to the war-torn country.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday informed his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin by phone that Türkiye would support a process involving “all parties” for peace in Ukraine, the Turkish presidency said. Erdogan told Putin that “Türkiye has sincerely strived for a just peace since the beginning of the war, and in this context, supports approaches aimed at establishing lasting peace with the participation of all parties,” his office said in a statement.

Türkiye, which enjoys friendly ties with both its Black Sea neighbours, has hosted three rounds of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia since May. Ankara has often insisted on the protection of Ukraine’s territorial integrity while shying away from Western sanctions on Russia. The pair discussed “Türkiye’s contribution to the peace process, as one of Nato’s most important countries” and agreed to remain on close coordination, according to the presidency.

They also exchanged views on feasible and sustainable security guarantees, the statement said, without further elaboration.

Nato military chiefs were set to discuss the details of eventual security guarantees

for Ukraine. But even as diplomatic efforts continued on Wednesday, Russian forces claimed fresh advances on the ground and Ukrainian officials reported more deaths from Moscow’s missiles. Few details have leaked on the virtual meeting of military chiefs from Nato’s 32 member countries, which is due to start at 2:30 pm.

But on Tuesday evening, top US officer Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held talks with European military chiefs on the “best options for a potential Ukraine peace deal,” a US defence official said.

Russia’s defence ministry said on Wednesday that its troops had captured the villages of Sukhetske and Pankivka in the embattled Donetsk region.

They are near a section of the front where the Russian army broke through Ukrainian defences last week, between the logistics hub of Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka.

Russian glide bombs hit housing in the eastern Ukrainian town of Kostiantynivka overnight, trapping as many as four people under rubble, said the town’s military administration chief Sergiy Gorbunov.

Zelensky said these latest strikes showed “the need to put pressure on Moscow”, including through sanctions. — AFP

Serbia protesters accuse police of abuse, warn of ‘spiral of violence’

BELGRADE: Serbian anti-government protesters accused police on Tuesday of beating and threatening detained activists, fuelling fears of a spiralling crackdown after a week of violent clashes. Almost daily protests have gripped Serbia since November, sparked by the collapse of a railway station roof that killed 16 people.

The tragedy became a symbol of deep-rooted corruption in the Balkan nation, with demands for a transparent investigation morphing into calls for early elections. But in the past week, the mostly peaceful demonstrations have erupted into street violence over several nights, with loyalists of President Aleksandar Vucic attacking protesters.

Nikolina Sindjelic, a student activist, said she was dragged along with another student and several other protesters into a government garage in central Belgrade by officers in a special police unit on

Thursday night. “The commander of the unit brutally beat both him and me,” the 22-year-old political science student said.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs “strongly denied” the allegations. It said Sindjelic was arrested for being part of a group that had attacked government buildings and police. “Throughout the entire procedure, no means of coercion, handcuffing, insults, or any form of mistreatment were applied,” it said.

Hundreds gathered in front of the accused commander’s police building in Belgrade on Tuesday to support Sindjelic and decry widespread reports of police brutality.

While the protests have so far led to the resignation of the prime minister and the collapse of the government, Vucic has remained defiant. He has repeatedly rejected calls for early elections and recently threatened a “strong response” to



Serbian riot police officers travel on the back of a vehicle as they face protesters, in Belgrade. — AFP

the demonstrations.

“This is an attempt at a foreign-funded colour revolution, in which no means are spared, and violence is used in a bid to seize power,” he said on Monday night. He has frequently decried the movement as a “colour revolution” — a term favoured by the Kremlin and its allies to smear protest movements as illegitimate.

The EU ambassador to Serbia, Andreas von Beckerath, said he and other diplomats had met with the government to “discuss the current political situation” in Serbia.

“The EU Ambassador underlined the need by all parties to uphold the respect for fundamental rights, including the right for peaceful assembly,” Beckerath said on Monday.

“Any suspicion of excessive use of force needs to be duly investigated, including worrying reports about threats and violence against journalists,” he said. — AFP

OPINION

A future written in decimals and elements



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

YEARS ago, when I was working in fisheries, we explored the idea of drawing cold water from the deep seas off Oman. The vision was simple on paper and ambitious in practice: water cool enough to sustain aquaculture and, at the same time, capable of lowering the temperature of data centres. Fish farms and servers bound by the same current. A fusion of economy and ecology that would use what the ocean offered to solve two challenges at once.

The vision never materialised. The sea remained where it was, vast and untouched for this purpose. The conversations left their mark. They showed me how the infrastructures of the future rarely follow the path we sketch for them. They are imagined one way, realised another.

This week brought a different kind of experiment with the elements. Oman Data Park announced a partnership with SolarWadi to power one of its data centres with solar energy. In its first phase, the project will generate 1.4 megawatts of clean electricity. On the surface, it is a modest beginning. Yet I see in it the same impulse we once had at sea: to draw from what surrounds

us, to tether our digital lives to sources of resilience rather than depletion.

Data centres are not places most of us will ever enter. They are windowless buildings, humming with servers, holding the fragments of our lives: emails, photographs, contracts and histories. Using sunlight to power even a small part of something is to change an invisible yet essential aspect. The hum remains, but its source bends towards a different future.

The week also carried a number that lingers in my mind: 11.5 per cent. That is the share of Oman's electricity now produced from renewables. The figure may appear slight, yet it changes how we read the grid. For the first time, clean energy has moved from ambition into a daily current, flowing through homes and offices in the background of ordinary life.

Sitting with that number, I feel myself divided between both hope and hesitation. Hope, because double digits mark a step change. Hesitation, because 11.5 is fragile, dependent on projects that must survive cost, scale and politics. Progress rarely arrives as a steady climb. It moves in bursts and pauses, in trials and adjustments.

Hope, because double digits mark a step change. Hesitation, because 11.5 is fragile, dependent on projects that must survive cost, scale and politics. Progress rarely arrives as a steady climb. It moves in bursts and pauses, in trials and adjustments.

When I think back to those fisheries conversations, I recall the shock of deep water and how improbable it seemed to link it with a server room. Today, the connection is with the sun overhead, a resource that feels both abundant and merciless. Oman is not cooling its servers with the sea, but it is beginning to power them with light. Different element, same pursuit: to align what sustains us with what connects us.

Elsewhere, others are attempting similar alignments. In Scandinavia, servers are cooled by fjords.

In Morocco, solar stretches across the desert to feed European grids. In the Gulf, turbines rise against coastal winds. Each country marries digital and natural infrastructure in its own way, each answer shaped by place. Oman's story will not mirror theirs, but it will echo.

The deep water is still out there, waiting. The sun, meanwhile, has been harnessed to servers in Knowledge Oasis. Neither is a revolution on its own.

Together, they remind me that progress is less about perfection than about drawing from what surrounds us. For now, the figure is 11.5. And that is enough to make me pause.

THE LIMITATIONS OF AI TOOLS FOR RESEARCH



HAJER AL BALUSHI

The writer is a student of SQU

Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms, although often celebrated as game-changing and promising, remain constrained by significant restrictions and limitations that researchers must take into account before relying on them. Many AI applications fail to deliver accurate and reliable outcomes, misleading the researcher rather than assisting them.

One of the crucial limitations of AI tools is that they cannot process visual inputs; for instance, platforms like Elicit and Consensus only work on textual data. Therefore, the risks of missing critical data and distorting conclusions without interpreting visual data are high and researchers should not rely on these outcomes; such outcomes have to be independently verified.

Furthermore, another shortcoming of AI platforms is that they often fail to understand the context, as Rajendra K Gupta observes, “AI struggles with tasks requiring emotional intelligence, empathy and profound contextual understanding”.

Thus, AI tools rarely consider historical, cultural, or even emotional conditions that might shape a study's overall meaning and impact. ChatGPT is a well-known example of an AI tool that struggles with deep contextual implications and it may sometimes sound context-aware, but most often relies on generalisation; that is, it is not smart enough to produce accurate outputs.

Another significant weakness of AI tools is that they lack citation and validation and sometimes could make up information that is not true, leading researchers to incorrect and unreliable outcomes. For example, the Gemini platform sometimes struggles to provide verifiable sources; it may invent or fabricate false references when reliable ones are unavailable. Accordingly, this not only weakens the quality of the research but also increases the risk of merging unverified citations in the academic work.

Similarly, ChatGPT usually gives made-up information, especially when it cannot answer the user's questions. The Research Rabbit also suffers from citation-related restrictions, especially in newly published works.

In the long term, this is very likely to mislead researchers. Thus, the given data by these AI platforms should not be used in research unless it has been verified in other sources.

Negotiation vs extortion

AS anyone who caught even a bit of the day's news knows, President Donald Trump, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and the leaders of Nato, the European Union, Britain and several European countries spent Monday at the White House negotiating a possible land swap and security guarantees that could end the Russian-Ukrainian war. But did they really?

Let's think about the word “negotiating”. All wars end with it, according to the popular saying, but rarely does the aggressor come to the table demanding territory that it doesn't actually control. Usually, the belligerents discuss which military gains should be formalised and which should be reversed. Vladimir Putin, however, has consistently demanded more land than his military has been able to bring under its control in the three and a half years since Russia's full-scale war began. During his summit with Trump in Alaska on Friday, Putin appears to have made a small concession: He is still demanding more land than he has occupied, but not as much as he used to demand. But less is still more.

So let's talk about “land swap”. This phrase seems to refer to Putin's offer to take a piece of Ukraine in exchange for not threatening an even bigger piece of Ukraine. This is not what we normally think of as a swap. It's what we think of as extortion. Let's also talk about the word “land”, or “territory”, which the leaders gathered at the White House on Monday used a lot. Zelensky referred to a map Trump apparently provided to facilitate discussion of “territory”. Trump promised to get him a copy.

But “territory” is not an outline on a map. It's cities and towns and villages where people still live — even near the front line, even now. Before the full-scale war, the populations of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, the two Ukrainian cities on land Putin is demanding, were 200,000 and 100,000, respectively. We don't know how many people live there now — some people surely



MASHA GESSEN

The author is a Russian and American journalist, author and translator

Putin appears to have made a small concession: He is still demanding more land than he has occupied, but not as much as he used to demand. But less is still more.

fled, some came from occupied territories, some died — but the number is almost certainly tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of people.

To propose to cede the land to Russia is to propose either subjecting those residents to Russian occupation — which in other cities has involved summary executions, detentions and torture — or displacing them forcibly. Either would be a crime — a crime in which Trump is asking Zelensky to become an accomplice.

This kind of negotiation-through-extortion is not unprecedented. In February 1945, the leaders of the Soviet Union, the United States and Britain met in Yalta — then a city in Soviet Ukraine, now a city in Russian-occupied Crimea — to negotiate the end of World War II. Among other things, Josef Stalin wanted the Kuril Islands, which stretched from Soviet Kamchatka to the coast of Japan.

Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill agreed to let the Soviets have the Kurils. The islands weren't theirs to give — the Kurils belonged to Japan — but they were theirs to take. Six months later, Soviet troops, with significant support from the US military, took control of the islands and deported the Japanese residents. The Soviet troops had gone to Alaska to train for the operation. That military operation began on August 18, 1945, exactly 80 years before Trump met with Zelensky at the White House.

Putin, who is a history buff and, more important, has for years been floating the idea of a second Yalta Conference, is certainly mindful of the date and the historical rhyme.

More than 80 years after Yalta, no peace treaty exists between Japan and Russia. World War II never officially ended for these two countries, because Japan never ceded the Kuril Islands. All wars may end in negotiations, but not all negotiations end wars.

The 20th century offers another example of extorting land. In 1938, Adolf Hitler demanded Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia where

ethnic Germans made up a significant percentage of the population. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain negotiated the surrender of the land, without involving Czechoslovakia. The higher purpose of those negotiations was security and peace for the rest of Europe. Less than a year after Czechoslovakia was forced to cede Sudetenland, however, Hitler attacked Poland and World War II began. That was the last war of aggression on the European continent until Putin attacked Ukraine.

Hitler claimed that he, too, was fighting for peace and this was why he had no choice but to annex Sudetenland: “I have made these tremendous efforts to further the peace, but I am not willing to stand any more attacks by Czechoslovakia”. In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, Putin effectively reprised a speech Hitler made before annexing Sudetenland, saying that his hand, too, was forced and “Most importantly, we want peace and harmony to reign in Ukraine”.

Which brings me to the subject of security guarantees. The last time Zelensky mentioned those in the White House, he got thrown out. This time, Trump acknowledged that any peace agreement must include security guarantees for Ukraine; during the Monday meeting, he even claimed that Putin agreed that such guarantees were necessary. But what could those be? Putin has said that Ukraine is a historical mistake, that there is no such thing as a Ukrainian nation or a Ukrainian language. How could anyone guarantee Ukraine's safety against a nuclear-armed neighbour who thinks Ukraine shouldn't exist?

The only plausible answer would be membership in Nato or its equivalent — an agreement that would obligate the Western alliance, or whatever is left of it, to defend Ukraine to the full extent of its abilities. Putin has consistently cited the very possibility of such an agreement as the “root cause” of his war against Ukraine. — NYT

Poor writing skills and reliance on chatbots



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THE field of communication is constantly evolving; however, we are observing a decline in writing skills. We are moving away from articulate styles to barely comprehensible narratives. Slack writing habits can lead to texts that are confusing and incoherent.

Many forms of written content, such as e-mails, newsletters and news articles, are increasingly being produced in a manner that resembles unstructured spoken language, often lacking objectivity. Readers may struggle to understand the intended meaning when faced with ambiguous information.

New technologies have significantly altered how we communicate, leading to diverse ways of interacting with one another. It has been quite some time since hand signals, sounds and cave paintings served as methods of communication.

Pictograms continue to be used, for instance, in road signs. Following this, there is the ideogram, and then the alphabet. Telecommunications have included Morse Code, telegraphs and phonographs. To date, letters, as alphabetic characters, are considered the most reliable communication system. Queen Atossa of Persia is credited with initiating the use of letters for communication around 500 BC. It is thought that this contributed to the adoption of the alphabet as a method of communication.

With the emergence of social platforms and alternative systems of communication,

there is a perceived decline in writing skills, mostly attributed to limited vocabulary, poor grammar and overdependence on technology.

The normalisation of poor writing can be harmful to public understanding. There is material that is often difficult to comprehend, not because of the topic, but because linguistic conventions are ignored, and probably because the writer doesn't understand the subject.

Contracts, for example, are notoriously difficult for non-experts to understand. They contain difficult-to-process elements, such as jargon, centre-embedded clauses (which result in grammatical dependencies), and passive voice structures. Contracts, known as terms and services agreements, are usually complicated and understood by no one except lawyers.

Formal language may be appropriate for certain genres or audiences; informal language can be more engaging but can sacrifice clarity. Similarly, using a humorous tone can make a piece more appealing while undermining the seriousness of a topic.

I can understand how difficult it is to write comfortably in a second or third language. According to studies, people grow up immersed in the rhythms and grammatical structures of the idiom they were born into, which can lead to poor writing that may reflect underlying cultural or political issues, for example, 'We never know who is reading this.'

New technologies have significantly altered how we communicate, leading to diverse ways of interacting with one another. It has been quite some time since hand signals, sounds and cave paintings served as methods of communication

While a straightforward style may be appropriate for a software tutorial, it does not suit the nuances of a novel or children's book. As people are more economical with their attention, there is a need for a conscious effort to improve the writing of news articles, instructions, or announcements that require action.

Consider the challenges that may arise with the help of Artificial Intelligence in writing articles when the journalist does not have the habit of reading, speaks multiple languages, or is influenced by cultural and political contexts that shape the structure and language of narratives. A chatbot may use words with unintended connotations; being bad at writing and over-reliance on chatbots can have consequences.

In the current trade-off, we can see that we are losing important abilities as feel-good stories are becoming more popular than rigorous reporting and fact-checking. The lack of detailed research and careful writing is leading to a decline in journalistic standards.

It is possible to improve the quality of information available and to promote a more informed public. Communication is a rich and diverse area that explores language, community, culture, ethics, politics, technology and media. For the benefit of society, ideas need to be communicated clearly and objectively.

The art of writing is peculiar, and reading is half of writing.

Musk quietly puts brakes on plans for new political party

CHANDNI SHAH

Billionaire Elon Musk is quietly putting the brakes on plans to start his new political party, telling allies he wants to focus on his companies, the Wall Street Journal said on Tuesday, citing people with knowledge of the plans.

Musk, without commenting further on the report, said in an X post: "Nothing @WSJ says should ever be thought of as true".

Musk, the world's richest man, unveiled the 'America Party' in July after a public dispute with President Donald Trump on the tax cut and spending bill.

He has recently been focused in part on maintaining ties with Vice-President JD Vance, the paper said, and has acknowledged to associates that forming a political party would damage his relationship with Vance. Musk and his associates have told people close to Vance that the billionaire is considering using some of his financial resources to back Vance if he decides to run for president in 2028, the paper said. The CEO of Tesla and SpaceX spent nearly \$300 million in 2024 to help Trump and other Republicans get elected, exerting enormous influence in the first few weeks of Trump's term as head of the newly created efficiency department DOGE.

Reuters could not immediately verify the Journal report. Tesla and the White House did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment outside regular business hours.

Vance, who had called for a truce following Musk's all-public feud with Trump, reaffirmed his position this month and said he had asked Musk to return to the Republican fold.

Tesla shares are down more than 18 per cent this year after it posted in July its worst quarterly sales decline in more than a decade and profit that missed Wall Street targets, though its profit margin was better than many had feared.

Musk also warned of "a few rough quarters" after the end of support for electric vehicles by the Trump administration. Elon Musk has responded to the new report that suggested he is slowing his plans to launch a new political party.

The Tesla and SpaceX CEO has been "quietly pumping the brakes" on his America Party, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday citing people with knowledge of his plans.

"Nothing (The Journal) says should ever be thought of as true," Musk wrote on his X social media platform on Wednesday, in response to a post about the reporting.

Newsweek has not verified the Journal report and has contacted Musk for more information via email to X's press office.

A new political party backed by Musk, the world's richest man and former close ally of President Trump, could take votes away from Trump's Republican Party. — Reuters

India meets clean energy target but coal still king

NON fossil fuels now account for half of India's installed energy capacity — years ahead of schedule — but the third-largest greenhouse gas polluter remains deeply reliant on coal for electricity generation.

"A landmark in India's energy transition journey," Minister of Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi proclaimed after the world's most populous nation released figures in July. "Five years early," he added, referring to India's 2030 target under the Paris Agreement, and marking a step to the country's stated goal of reaching Net-Zero emissions by 2070. But while the 50 per cent milestone is significant, climate expert Avantika Goswami says the figures, which refer only to potential energy production, tell just part of the story. "Overall, actual generation from renewable sources is still quite low," Goswami said from the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). The reason is stark: nearly three-quarters of electricity continues to come from heavily polluting coal-burning power plants. The challenge becomes even more apparent when examining India's continued dependence on coal. Far from decreasing its usage, the globe's second-largest consumer of coal pushed up production of the dirty fossil fuel by five per cent last year, mining one billion tonnes, according to the coal ministry.

"Coal remains crucial," the ministry said. The stance highlights the practical challenges of India's energy transition. Coal is needed to fulfil power demands while storage capacity lags behind the surge in renewable sources of power.

"The coal sector remains a crucial contributor to India's energy mix, powering over 74 per cent of the country's electricity and sustaining key industries like steel and cement," the coal ministry said, celebrating what it dubbed "India's coal boom".

This reliance places India in a challenging position globally. The country ranks behind only China and the United States for carbon



A worker operates a wheel loader to offload heaps of raw coal into a truck in Dhanbad, Jharkhand state. — AFP



PARVAIZ BUKHARI

The writer is South Asia Correspondent for AFP

emissions overall. But analysts point out that in a country of 1.4 billion people, per capita emissions are only one-third of the global average, according to official figures.

"Looking at India's per capita emissions, the effort it is making, India is doing pretty well," said activist Harjeet Singh, head of the Satat Sampada Climate Foundation.

India has set itself the daunting challenge of reducing emissions by 45 per cent by 2030. At the same time, electricity needs are expected to more than double by 2047, according to CSE. Supplying some of that demand "is likely to be met by the addition of renewables", Goswami said. Half of India's 484.8 GW installed capacity is from non-fossil fuel sources. The majority comes from solar, totalling 119 GW — the third-largest level globally.

India is building one of the world's largest solar and wind energy farms, spread over a desert the size of Singapore. It is followed by hydro and wind, and also nuclear power, which makes up less than two per cent of the total mix. But solar and wind create steady power only when the conditions are right, and India's storage capacity is a meagre 505 MWh — far lower than it can generate. The storage bottleneck was not lost on the renewable

energy minister. Speaking at the inauguration of a battery storage systems plant in June, Joshi said India's renewable energy potential was "growing fast" and "adding 25-30 GW every year".

He added: "But without storage, we will either waste that energy or fall back on coal when renewables dip." Building storage based on batteries requires rare earth metals, with rival and neighbour China controlling 70 per cent of the world's supplies.

"We still remain dependent on China," said Harjeet Singh, the climate activist. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in New Delhi for talks on Tuesday, with the supply of rare earth metals on the agenda.

One solution India is considering is pump-hydro energy storage projects. When wind and solar plants produce excess energy, water is pumped into high reservoirs. That stored energy can then be released to generate power when demand surges. But Goswami believes the transition to cleaner power requires a multi-pronged approach.

The transition to cleaner power must come from "emission intensity reduction" of often inefficient coal plants, combined with better integrated renewable energy in the grid that "will actually make the shift happen".

SPORTS

SANCTIONED EVENT



Officials attend the press conference. — Shamsa al Harthy

OMAN TO HOST FIRST ASIA RUGBY EMIRATES SEVENS TROPHY IN OCTOBER

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 20

Oman is preparing to host the Asia Rugby Emirates Sevens Trophy from October 24–26, marking another step that reflects the high level of trust it enjoys from continental federations.

During a press conference held by the organising committee on Wednesday, the technical and organisational details of the event were revealed.

Nabil al Busaidy, Chairman of the Oman Rugby Committee, confirmed that this is the first time Oman will host a sanctioned international rugby tournament. He noted that hosting the event is a major achievement that places Oman on the global rugby map. He said the main goal is to present Oman to the world through this event, while also giving local players the chance to showcase their talents against continental teams. Al Busaidy pointed out that the integrated sports facilities, such as the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher and the ROP Stadium, were key factors in earning the trust of the Asian Rugby Federation. The preparations over the past months have covered stadiums, accommodations and facilities.

The tournament will feature 20 Asian teams, with the possibility of increasing the number in the coming days. In the men's category, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria have confirmed participation, alongside hosts Oman. In the women's category, Uzbekistan, Iran, Syria and Lebanon will compete.

NEW CHALLENGE

On the readiness of the national team, Al Busaidy noted that preparations have been positive, with more than 50 players taking part in the first training camp. The final squad will be selected under the technical staff led by head coach Brian Hopkins, assistant coach Ali al Dakhri and team manager Mohammed al Hashami. He emphasised that facing strong Asian teams is a golden opportunity for players to gain technical experience, improve fitness and adapt to diverse styles of play, which will accelerate the team's development and aim it for larger competitions such as the Olympics and Rugby World Cup.

The Oman Rugby Committee is working to spread the culture of the game within society, particularly among school students, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, which will allow students to attend matches for free. He also mentioned a long-term plan to train local coaches and referees in cooperation with the Asian Rugby Federation, in addition to exchanging expertise with continental and international federations.

He stressed that the success of this tournament will pave the way for hosting bigger regional and global championships.

COACH HOPEFUL

For his part, coach Hopkins said that training focused on technical, physical and skill aspects, with the introduction of new methods such as judo and wrestling to strengthen tackles. He added that the difference in experience between players is being addressed by returning to the basics and building a team culture and spirit. He noted that facing well-established Asian teams will be a difficult challenge, but the Omani team possesses determination and an element of surprise that could unsettle even the strongest opponents.

He added that he trusts the players, having witnessed their high spirit during training and believes Oman could be among the contenders for the title.

Hopkins concluded by inviting Omani fans to attend and support the team in this historic first participation, assuring them that the squad will give its all to make the nation proud.

Seeb, Al Khabourah share spoils in exciting 2-2 draw

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 20

THE match between Seeb and their guests Al Khabourah ended in a 2-2 draw on Tuesday at the Seeb Stadium, concluding the first round of the Oman Elite League.

Seeb started strongly from the opening minutes, relying on the movements of their midfield trio Abdullah Fawaz, Arshad al Alawi and Zaher al Aghbari who delivered several precise passes that were not capitalised on. Left-back Ali al Busaidy's overlapping runs and crosses posed a constant threat, while Al Khabourah responded through their professional player Colin Anthony, whose powerful strike in the 18th minute was denied by goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi. Despite the exchange of attacks, the first half ended goalless.

Al Khabourah came out with more determination in the second half, pressing forward with continuous attacks. However, Seeb struck first in the 52nd minute when Nasser al Rawahi finished off a neat pass from Zaher al Aghbari with a powerful shot to the right of goalkeeper Omar al Matrooshi. The goal boosted the home side's confidence as they pushed for more.

Al Khabourah refused to back down and equalised in the 65th minute through Colin Anthony, who latched onto a through ball, went one-on-one with Ahmed al Rawahi and calmly slotted home. Just three minutes later, Seeb regained their lead when Nasser al Rawahi rose brilliantly to head in Ali al Busaidy's precise cross, completing his brace to the delight of the home fans.

Despite trailing, Al Khabourah continued their relentless search for an equaliser. The movements of Nawaf al Hosani and Youssef al Saadi threatened Seeb's defence, but poor finishing denied them success. In the 79th minute, substitute Khalifa al Mazrouei stole the show, spotting the goalkeeper off his line and executing a brilliant lob from outside the box to make it 2-2.

The final minutes were filled with drama, with both sides pushing for a winner. Seeb's substitutes unleashed



Seeb and Al Khabourah players in action.

several shots, while Al Khabourah's counterattacks nearly snatched all three points if not for Seeb's alert defending. The referee's final whistle confirmed a thrilling 2-2 draw, leaving the teams to share the spoils.

AL NAHDA TOP TABLE

With the first round of the 2025–2026 Oman Elite League completed, Al Nahda top the table on goal difference after their 3-0 win over Samayil, followed by Sohar in

second after a 4-2 victory over Al Rustaq. Bahla sit third with a 2-0 win over Saham, while Al Nasr rank fourth after beating Sur (2-0). Al Shabab are fifth thanks to a 2-0 win against Ibri and Oman Club are sixth after a narrow 2-1 win over Dhofar. Seeb and Al Khabourah share seventh and eighth place with one point each from their draw. Meanwhile, Ibri, Dhofar, Al Rustaq, Saham, Sur and Samayil remain without points, occupying the lower positions after the first week of play.

OCRf's new season to start with camel race on Sept 20

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUG 20

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRf), has announced the programme for the new camel racing season 2025-2026, which will commence on September 20 and 21 with the participation of a wide range of camel owners and trainers from across the Sultanate of Oman.

The OCRf's Board of Directors approved a series of local events, beginning with the first race in the Wilayat of Barka (Al Fulaij track), the Wilayat of Adam (Al Bashayer) and the Wilayat of Sinaw (Al Abyad) on September 20 and 21, followed by the second race on October 4 and 5 at the same venues.

A traditional festival in the Wilayat of Thamrait will then be held from October 17 to 23, featuring competitive races alongside camel beauty (Mazayen) and milk competitions (Mahalaba).

The third race will take



A traditional festival in Thamrait will be held from October 17 to 23.

place from November 1 to 3 in the wilayats of Barka and Adam, while the fourth race is scheduled for November 15 to 17.

The season will also include the first main camel beauty competition (Mazayen) in the Wilayat of Barka from December 14 to 18.

The annual community festival (OCRf Final) will be held from January 10 to 15, 2026 with details to be announced later.

In addition, the Ardah (traditional camel show) will

follow in the Wilayat of Barka from January 18 to 22. The season will conclude with the second main (Mazayen) in the Wilayat of Al Musannah (Tawi Al Shawy track) from February 8 to 12, 2026.

As part of its partnership with the private sector, OCRf also announced sponsored races supported by Shell Oman and Occidental Oman. Shell Oman will sponsor events in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on October 8 and 9; and in Al Dhahirah Governorate on October 22 to 23. Occidental

Oman will support races in Al Wusta Governorate on November 12 to 13, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on November 26 to 27; and Al Wusta Governorate again on December 20–21, with the season's final sponsored race in Al Dhahirah Governorate on January 7–8.

OCRf urged all camel owners wishing to participate to complete prior registration through the electronic system and to adhere to the federation's official regulations. Camels without approved electronic identification chips will not be allowed to compete, with all entries subject to veterinary and technical checks before the start of each race.

The federation also confirmed that the top 10 winners in each race will receive cash prizes, along with special in-kind awards such as cars, 'khanjars' (traditional daggers), swords and trophies in selected races, as part of efforts to encourage greater participation and preserve the prestige of the sport.

ENGAGINGEXPERIENCE



The Oman Golf Association took part in the SABCO Sports Park Summer Camp.

GOLF INSPIRES KIDS AT SABCO SUMMER CAMP

MUSCAT: The Oman Golf Association (OGA) announced its active participation in the SABCO Sports Park Summer Camp, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) throughout July and August. With more than 300 children attending daily, this initiative has become a cornerstone of youth sports in Oman — and a unique platform to introduce and grow the game of golf.

As part of the camp’s activities, the OGA created an engaging indoor golf experience using the Unleash Your Drive programme, designed to make the fundamentals of golf fun and accessible. For hundreds of young participants, these sessions marked their very first swing at the sport, guided by OGA development coaches and, in a special highlight, supported by members of the Oman National Junior Golf Teams.

The involvement of Oman’s junior players not only inspired the campers, but also highlighted the OGA’s mission to nurture leadership, teamwork and mentorship through sport. This hands-on approach demonstrated the clear pathway available for Omani youth to progress in golf — from grassroots entry to elite competition.

This impactful initiative was made possible with the generous support of Renaissance Services, a steadfast partner in junior golf development. Their commitment has been instrumental in providing access, resources and opportunities for young talent across the nation.

The OGA remains committed to expanding its junior programmes, building stronger ties with schools and broadening the presence of golf throughout Oman. Initiatives like the SABCO Summer Camp are not only about fun and discovery, but also represent a long-term investment in shaping the future of golf in Oman.



The OGA created an engaging indoor golf experience using the Unleash Your Drive programme.



Club Brugge’s Nicolo Tresoldi in action with Rangers’ Nasser Djiga in Ibrox, Glasgow. — Reuters

Rangers face CL exit after Club Brugge misery

RANGERS look set to miss out on the Champions League after suffering a 3-1 home loss to Club Brugge in the first leg of their play-off tie on Tuesday. The Scottish side made a disastrous start as a defensive mix-up allowed Romeo Vermant to run through and loft the ball over goalkeeper Jack Butland from 30 yards.

Defender Jorne Spileers swept in a corner as Brugge doubled their lead inside seven minutes at Ibrox.

The bitter mood inside the ground

Qarabag of Azerbaijan won 3-1 against Ferencvaros in Hungary to take a big step towards the league phase. Cypriot side Pafos, who made their European debut in last season’s Uefa Conference League, were 2-1 winners at Red Star Belgrade.

soured further when centre-back Brandon Mechele blasted in a third from just outside the area. Danilo pulled a goal back at the start of the second half but Rangers have a huge task on their hands going into next week’s return leg in Belgium.

“We want to qualify for the Champions League and we’ll do everything we can next week,” Rangers boss Russell Martin said.

“That (Danilo) goal changes everything. We have the privilege of hunting and chasing. We go in as underdogs, I’ll enjoy

that and I think the players will as well.”

Qarabag of Azerbaijan won 3-1 against Ferencvaros in Hungary to take a big step towards the league phase. Cypriot side Pafos, who made their European debut in last season’s Uefa Conference League, were 2-1 winners at Red Star Belgrade.

Rangers’ arch-rivals Celtic host Kairat Almaty on Wednesday, while Benfica visit Jose Mourinho’s Fenerbahce. Basel are at home to Copenhagen as Bodo/Glimt take on Sturm Graz of Austria. — AFP

Brazilian goalkeeper Fabio claims world record for most games

RIO DE JANEIRO: Fluminense goalkeeper Fabio on Tuesday claimed the record for most competitive appearances in men’s football when the Brazilian played for a 1,391st time.

The 44-year-old on Saturday equalled the landmark held by former England stopper Peter Shilton and Fabio has now gone one better following a 2-0 win over Colombia’s America de Cali at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro.

Fluminense and Brazilian media say Fabio now stands alone in football history.

“Sometimes we don’t realise the importance of such a significant

achievement as breaking this record, which has stood for many years,” Fabio, who has spent his entire career in Brazil, said following his clean sheet in the Copa Sudamericana last 16 second leg.

The home fans chanted, “Fabio is the best goalkeeper in Brazil,” and he received a commemorative plaque to mark the achievement.

“No one plays so many matches without a level of professionalism like his,” said Fluminense coach Renato Gauchao.

“He’ll undoubtedly continue to play for a long time.

“It will be difficult for another player to surpass his record.”



Fluminense’s Fabio during training during the Fifa Club World Cup. — Reuters

Fabio won the Copa Libertadores with Fluminense in 2023 and was part of the side that reached the semifinals of the Club World Cup in the United States this summer.

He made 976 appearances for Cruzeiro between 2005 and 2022, after playing 30 times for Uniao Bandeirante and another 150 games for Vasco da Gama. His record outing against America de Cali was his 235th match for Fluminense.

Fabio began his career in 1997, the year that Shilton retired.

The Englishman considers his total number of appearances to be 1,387, but Guinness World Records puts the number at 1,390. — AFP

**Swiatek,
Ruud
romp
into US
Open
mixed
doubles
semis**

IGA Swiatek shrugged off lingering weariness to partner Casper Ruud to back-to-back victories in the revamped mixed doubles competition at the US Open on Tuesday.

Swiatek — who on Monday had battled through a two-hour tussle with Jasmine Paolini to win the Cincinnati Open — looked full of energy as she and Ruud powered into Wednesday's semifinals.

Swiatek and Ruud needed just 39 minutes to dispatch the US pairing of Madison Keys and Frances Tiafoe 4-1, 4-2 in their opening game at Arthur Ashe Stadium, and then reappeared roughly 20 minutes later to defeat Caty McNally and Lorenzo Musetti 5-3, 4-2 in their quarterfinal clash.

The victories capped a gruelling 24 hours for Polish star Swiatek, who hot-footed it to the airport after Monday's win in Cincinnati and only arrived at her hotel in New York in the early hours of Tuesday.

"Honestly, the last two days have felt like one day, but I'm super happy to be here," Swiatek said, adding that her tight turnaround had helped her unwind after her exertions in Cincinnati.

“Honestly, I think actually it’s kind of nice for the recovery,” Swiatek said. “To have another task and not to let yourself be lazy but also focused on the next exciting thing.”

Ruud and Swiatek had just enough time to fit in a quick practice before taking to the court in their first match as a doubles pairing.

"I was happy to team up with Iga," Ruud said afterwards. "She's on the winning train these days so I'm just jumping on the train and let's see if we can win some more before the mixed doubles is over."

"I think everyone should show some appreciation to Iga today. She only got to her hotel 12 hours ago at 2.30am, and she's here playing."



Norway's Casper Ruud (R) and Poland's Iga Swiatek react after a point against Madison Keys and Frances Tiafoe of the USA during their mixed doubles match at the US Open tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — **AFP**



Britain's Emma Raducanu and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain confer during their first round mixed doubles match against Jessica Pegula of the US and Jack Draper of Britain at the US Open in New York City. — AFP

ALCARAZ, DJOKOVIC OUT

Swiatek and Ruud will meet top seeds Jessica Pegula of the United States and Britain's Jack Draper in Wednesday's semifinals.

Pegula and Draper clicked smoothly to eliminate the glamour pairing of Carlos Alcaraz and Emma Raducanu 4-2, 4-2 in the first round before easing past Russia's Daniil Medvedev and Mirra Andreeva 4-1, 4-1 in the quarterfinals.

Medvedev and Andreeva had earlier romped past Novak Djokovic and Olga Danilovic in straight sets in the first round, winning 4-2, 5-3.

In other results on Tuesday, US tennis icon Venus Williams and partner Reilly Opelka exited against Karolina Muchova and Andrey Rublev, losing 4-2, 5-4.

Italy's reigning champions Andrea Vavassori and Sara Errani ousted second seeds Elena Rybakina and Taylor Fritz 4-2, 4-2.

Earlier on Tuesday, world number one Jannik Sinner's withdrawal from the mixed doubles was confirmed as expected. Sinner, who retired due to illness in the first set of his Cincinnati Open final with Alcaraz on Monday, was due to partner Katerina Siniakova in the doubles. Sinner and Siniakova were replaced in the draw by the American duo of Danielle Collins and Christian Harrison.

This year's US Open mixed doubles competition is being held over Tuesday and Wednesday in the week before the main singles draws get under way.

The tournament is using a modified scoring system, with short sets to four games, no-advantage scoring, tie-breakers at four-all and a 10-point match tie-break in lieu of a third set.

The final will be a best-of-three set match to six games, featuring no-advantage scoring, with tie-breakers at six-all and a 10-point match tie-breaker instead of a third set, with the winning pairing pocketing \$1 million. — **AFP**

Salah makes history with third PFA player of the year award



(From L to R) Liverpool's Hungarian defender Milos Kerkez, Arsenal's Brazilian defender Gabriel Magalhaes, Arsenal's French defender William Saliba, Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk, Arsenal's English midfielder Declan Rice, Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah, Liverpool's Argentinian midfielder Alexis Mac Allister, Liverpool's Dutch midfielder Ryan Gravenberch, Nottingham Forest's Belgian goalkeeper Matz Sels and Nottingham Forest's New Zealand striker Chris Wood pose with their Mens's PFA Premier League team of the Year awards backstage during the 2024-2025 Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) awards, at the Opera House in Manchester, northern England, on Tuesday. —AFP

MANCHESTER: Mohamed Salah became the first player to win the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) men's player of the year for a third time on Tuesday after guiding Liverpool to Premier League glory.

The Egyptian scored 29 goals and provided 18 assists to propel the Reds to a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title with four games to spare last season.

Salah also scooped the award in the 2017/18 and 2021/22 seasons.

The 33-year-old picked up the Football Writers' Association and Premier League player of the year awards in recent months.

Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers won

the young player the year following a breakthrough campaign that saw the attacking midfielder make his senior international debut for England.

Salah is joined in the 2024/25 PFA Premier League team of the year by Liverpool team-mates Virgil van Dijk, Ryan Gravenberch and Alexis Mac Allister.

Milos Kerkez, who moved to Anfield from Bournemouth in June, is also selected, as are the Arsenal

Matz Sels and Chris Wood are recognised for their fine campaigns at Nottingham Forest,

while wantaway Newcastle striker Alexander Isak is included after finishing second to Salah in the Golden Boot race.

Arsenal's Mariona Caldentey won the women's player of the year accolade after her role in helping the Gunners win the Champions League.

The Spanish midfielder scored 19 goals in all competitions, including eight in the Champions League, in her first season in England.

Olivia Smith recently joined Caldentey at Arsenal in a world-record £1 million (\$1.4 million) deal and won the women's young player of the year prize following her superb season at Liverpool. — **AFP**



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Al Wadi Indian White Egg 30's

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Almond Raw 20-22
Per kg

3.590



كاجو سادة بالكلية
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W320 Per Kg

3.650



كاشي توماتو 300غم
Hayat Tomato Ketchup 6x325gm

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ارز موزي 35 كيلو
Al Mozzi 1121
35kg Basmati
Rice 35kg

17.900



كعيب اوميا الميك 30 + 40
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Salalah to host global experts at FDI capacity-building forum

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 20

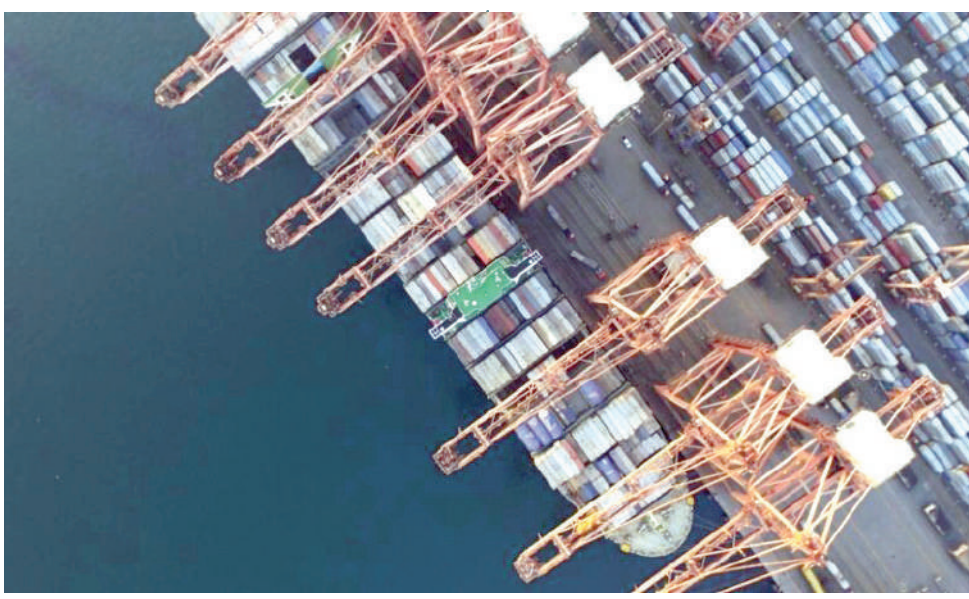
OMAN will host next month a high-level executive forum aimed at strengthening capacities to attract and promote foreign direct investment (FDI) in Salalah.

The 3-day event, set to take place during September 16-18, 2025, has been organised by the Smart Investment Gateway (SIG) in partnership with NXT Zones International, and will take place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Salalah.

It will bring together international experts in economics and investment.

The forum is designed for professionals from both the public and private sectors, including representatives of investment promotion agencies, policymakers, consultants and executives engaged in national development initiatives.

It will provide intensive training on attracting FDI clients, aligning investment projects with Oman Vision 2040, enhancing post-investment services, integrating



The 3-day forum will provide intensive training on attracting FDI clients, aligning investment projects with Oman Vision 2040.

artificial intelligence into investment promotion strategies and designing sustainable economic zones.

The three-day schedule will open with an overview of global and regional investment trends, combined with an analysis of successful projects.

The second day will address strategic promotion and

facilitation methods, explore legal frameworks and examine the use of artificial intelligence in investment promotion while also emphasising interaction with local partners.

The final day will be devoted to designing future-oriented economic zones and linking them with sustainable development goals and the requirements of the

The forum is designed for professionals from both the public and private sectors, including representatives of investment promotion agencies, policymakers, consultants and executives engaged in national development initiatives.

Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The programme will feature contributions from renowned international experts.

Dr Douglas van den Berghe,
Chief Executive Officer of
NXTZones – NwHrzN and Vice-
Chairman of FEMOZA, brings
more than 25 years of experience
in advising governments and
international institutions such as
the United Nations and the World
Bank.

Dr Yousef bin Hamad al Balushi, one of the architects of Oman Vision 2040 and a former regional economic advisor to the International Monetary Fund, will offer his insights on connecting investment strategies with private sector efficiency. He is also known

for founding the Oman Investment Portal and serving on leading Gulf investment committees.

Dr Adarsh Verma, Chief Economist with extensive experience in Europe and the Middle East, will share expertise gained through projects in over 30 countries and his work in integrating sustainable strategies into business models for special economic zones.

The programme will be conducted in both Arabic and English with simultaneous translation to ensure effective participation.

It draws upon methodologies and practices established in collaboration with the United Nations, the World Bank, UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Programme, offering participants direct access to the latest international tools for attracting and facilitating investment.

Organisers emphasised that the initiative underscores Oman's determination to strengthen its position as a competitive destination for foreign investment, in line with the national diversification agenda and the long-term goals of Vision 2040.

14 km coastal road for Duqm Tourism Zone

BUSINESS REPORTER
AL DUQM, AUG 20

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has awarded a contract for the construction of a dual carriage coastal road in the tourism zone of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The road will extend 14 kilometres, connecting the tourism area with the fishing port and the fisheries and food industries complex.

The project consists of two lanes in each direction and includes four main roundabouts, surface water drainage systems with modern infrastructure, as well as signage, concrete and steel barriers, and service facilities. This comes as part of an integrated plan to develop the transport system within the master plan of the zone.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, stated that the coastal road project represents a qualitative addition to the infrastructure of the



The new road will connect the tourism area with the fishing port and the fisheries and food industries complex.

tourism zone in Duqm, adhering to the highest engineering standards in quality and traffic safety. He added that the project enhances the area's attractiveness for tourism investments and related economic activities.

The road will pass through scenic landscapes varying between seashores, natural hills and future development projects, offering visitors a unique experience and boosting the vitality of the tourism sector.

The tourism zone spans around 30 square

kilometres, of which 15 square kilometres directly overlook an 18-kilometre waterfront, while the remaining area lies on nearby highlands, offering distinctive diversity for tourism activities.

Work is underway to develop the detailed master plan, ensuring the distribution of tourism activities, defining architectural façade requirements, and establishing artificial development projects that enhance the zone's beauty and capacity to attract domestic and international tourism.

The project has strategic significance, directly linking the tourism zone with the fishing port and Duqm Airport. The road provides direct access between hotels, resorts and leisure facilities, supporting current and future tourism investments, reinforcing Duqm's position as a promising tourism destination, contributing to the national economy, and supporting Oman's economic diversification plans.



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1	79/2025	Enhancement of Dispatcher Training and Simulator Room	21/08/2025	03/09/2025	30/09/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	52/500
2	80/2025	Providing Corporate Affairs (Media) Technical Support Services for 4 Years	21/08/2025	03/09/2025	30/09/2025	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have a Valid Commercial Registration.	105/-

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Terms and conditions	- The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not complying with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198-91491551-92217856 tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx
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ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The first launch phase will see the EU-Series introduced across Oman from late September to early October 2025

PANASONIC, OMASCO MARK 50 YEARS WITH NEW EU-SERIES AC LAUNCH

MUSCAT: Panasonic Marketing Middle East and Africa FZE (PMMAF) and Oman Marketing and Services Company LLC (OMASCO) have marked 50 years of partnership with the launch of Panasonic’s new EU-Series air conditioners in Oman. The debut took place at an exclusive event at Sheraton Oman Hotel, Muscat, on August 19, 2025.

Engineered to meet the unique demands of Oman’s climate, the EU-Series sets a new benchmark for energy-efficient, eco-friendly cooling solutions. Built on Panasonic’s renowned quality standards, the new lineup combines advanced air purification, powerful cooling and exceptional durability.

“For five decades, OMASCO and Panasonic have shared a commitment to bringing world-class technology to Omani customers”, said Hiroyuki Shibutani, CEO of PMMAF. “With the EU-Series, we are once again raising the bar, delivering solutions perfectly suited to Oman’s households and businesses”.

At the core of the EU-Series is Panasonic’s nanoe™ X technology, which inhibits bacteria, viruses, allergens and odors for healthier indoor environments. The series also integrates Adaptive Inverter Technology for stable temperatures with lower energy use, Jet Stream Technology for powerful and even airflow; and Coverti7, allowing users to adjust cooling capacity across seven levels for maximum flexibility.

The AC range is designed to endure extreme heat up to 55°C, featuring Shield Blue and ecoTOUGH™ coatings to protect components against corrosion and wear. In line with Panasonic’s sustainability commitment, it also uses R32 refrigerant, which carries a lower environmental impact.

“EU-Series air conditioners are another testament to Panasonic’s dedication to health, hygiene and innovation, rooted in our Japanese values and reflected in every product we create”, Shibutani added.

Navin Batta, Assistant General Manager of OMASCO, said, “For 50 years, OMASCO has proudly partnered with Panasonic to deliver innovative solutions to Oman. Today’s launch marks another milestone, reinforcing Panasonic’s reputation for reliability, performance and design.

To demonstrate our confidence, we are delighted to offer a 10-year warranty on all Panasonic AC models, giving customers long-term value and peace of mind”. The EU-Series will be available across Oman from late September to early October 2025, with a rollout to other GCC markets planned thereafter.

SOHAR PORT AND FREEZONE COMPLETES THIRD MASEER EDITION

SUHAR: Under the auspices of Abdullah bin Ali al Balushi, Majlis Ash’shura Representative for the Wilayat of Suhar, SOHAR Port and Freezone successfully concluded the third edition of Maseer, its summer initiative training over 1,000 students from grades 5 to 11 in future-ready skills through hands-on workshops. The programme, held in both wilayats of Suhar and Liwa, reinforces SOHAR Port and Freezone’s commitment to empowering youth with digital,

technical and cognitive skills for Oman’s socio-economic growth. This year, students participated in three four-day cycles covering Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Cybersecurity, 3D Design with TinkerCAD, Arduino Programming, Renewable Energy, Smart Cities Development and English Language Learning. Two new workshops, Smart Assistant and My Digital World, promoted digital literacy and sustainability awareness. Popular

sessions in Cybersecurity, 3D Design and Arduino emphasised creativity, critical thinking and collaboration. Rashad al Wahaibi, Communications Advisor at SOHAR Port and Freezone, said: “The success of Maseer’s third edition reflects our dedication to equipping the next generation with the knowledge and skills to contribute to Oman’s growth. The programme inspires innovation, hands-on learning and self-confidence among students”.

BMW summer offers unveiled in Oman

AL JENAIBI

International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has launched its summer campaign Escape the Heat, offering customers an unmatched blend of luxury, value and lifestyle benefits. Running until the end of September 2025, the campaign gives new BMW owners a host of exclusive perks designed to make driving this summer more rewarding. Each purchase of select BMW models includes five years or 100,000 km of complimentary service, a five-year or 200,000 km warranty, free first-year registration and premium AutoSpa vehicle care to keep cars in pristine condition.



From now through the end of September 2025, new BMW owners will enjoy a suite of complimentary benefits designed to make summer driving smoother, cooler and more rewarding than ever.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, offering a chance to escape the summer heat and enjoy the cooler mountain air in true BMW style. The campaign also introduces attractive pricing across

some of BMW’s most popular models. The BMW X1 starts from RO 17,999 plus VAT, the BMW X4 from RO 23,999, the BMW X5 from RO 34,999 and the BMW X7 from RO 38,999 plus

VAT. “Escape the Heat is more than a seasonal promotion — it’s a complete ownership journey that goes beyond the showroom”, said Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles. “From long-term peace of mind with service and warranty to lifestyle extras such as a mountain retreat, every element reflects BMW’s commitment to comfort, innovation and customer satisfaction in Oman.” With its focus on premium ownership and lifestyle integration, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles continues to strengthen BMW’s reputation in the Sultanate of Oman as a brand that combines performance with prestige. The offers are available for a limited time only. For more information or to book your BMW, visit the Al Jenaibi showroom in Al Qurum or call 80050008.

Yiti City sells Oman’s most expensive penthouse

MUSCAT: The Arc at The Sustainable City — Yiti has made history with the sale of Oman’s most expensive penthouse, priced at over RO 2 million. Early demand has pushed total phase one sales beyond RO 10 million, all secured weeks before the project’s official launch. The record-breaking penthouse features a private entrance lobby, expansive open-plan living areas, a statement show kitchen, bespoke interiors with designer fittings and premium materials throughout. An outdoor terrace with a private pool and dedicated gated parking adds a first-of-its-kind luxury experience in Oman’s residential market.



This achievement reaffirms Oman’s appeal as a destination for high-quality, purpose-led real estate.

“This is a defining moment for Oman’s real estate sector”, said Mahmoud Shehada, Chief Sales

and Marketing Officer of The Sustainable City — Yiti. “Securing the nation’s most

expensive penthouse sale alongside over RO 10 million in early phase one sales reflects strong demand for sustainable luxury living and confidence in our vision”. The Arc is part of Oman’s first net-zero emissions community, designed for live-work-thrive lifestyles. Spanning nearly one million square meters, the development features renewable infrastructure, walkable neighbourhoods, wellness and equestrian facilities, retail, education and hotels. It also targets 100% water recycling, full waste diversion from landfills and 80% self-sufficiency in food production. For more information, visit [www.thesustainablecity-yiti.com](#)

BankDhofar drives Oman’s digital banking transformation

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman by branch network, has reinforced its position as a digital pioneer, aligning its innovations with Oman Vision 2040 and setting new benchmarks in the industry. In 2024, the bank introduced Dhofar Pay, a first-of-its-kind mobile payment solution in Oman, enabling customers to use NFC-enabled Android smartphones for tokenised, contactless payments. BankDhofar also became the first in the country to integrate Samsung Pay and Apple Pay, with push provisioning to Samsung Wallet to follow. Other notable innovations include EasyMandate and EasyDebit, which streamline recurring payments



With a digital strategy that puts customer experience, security and agility at the forefront, BankDhofar exemplifies what it means to be a future-ready financial institution.

such as rent, utilities and tuition fees, offering speed, accuracy and convenience for individuals and corporates. The bank also relaunched its Intilaqa Digital Onboarding App with video-based KYC verification, integration with the Mala’a credit bureau and doorstep card delivery, allowing customers to open accounts entirely online. BankDhofar’s upgraded mobile banking app enhances security with API 33 compliance, SIM-based verification and biometric authentication. Corporate clients benefit from real-time settlements via the Ministry of Finance interface, improved FX transparency and advanced payment

solutions supported by fintech collaborations. At the foundation of its digital success is a three-phase transformation with Infosys Finacle, modernising the bank’s core systems and digital channels; and enabling innovation through over 1,100 APIs and omnichannel solutions. A cloud-first infrastructure with Omantel, supported by Oracle Cloud Infrastructure and the National Cloud, further strengthens resilience, cybersecurity and AI-driven analytics. Extending its reach, BankDhofar launched a digital banking platform for SMEs in 2025, offering secure wage payments, utility billing, international transfers and business card services.

SHORTTAKES



Oil also found support from flooding at a large US refinery. — Reuters

OIL FIRMS AS INVESTORS AWAIT NEXT STEPS IN UKRAINE PEACE PUSH

LONDON: Oil rose on Wednesday as the American Petroleum Institute reported a drop in US crude inventories and investors awaited the next steps in talks to end the Ukraine war, with sanctions on Russian crude remaining in place.

Crude fell more than 1% on Tuesday on optimism that an agreement to end the war seemed closer. However, US President Donald Trump conceded that Russian President Vladimir Putin might not want to make a deal.

Brent crude futures rose 44 cents, or 0.7%, to \$66.23 a barrel by 1000 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures for September delivery, set to expire on Wednesday, gained 65 cents, or 1%, to \$63. “It seems oil prices are thrown down one day, followed by a rebound the next day.

The API report was on the positive side, so I assume some price support is coming from that,” said Giovanni Staunovo, an analyst at UBS. US crude stocks fell by 2.42 million barrels, market sources said, citing API figures ahead of official data.

Trump said on Tuesday the US might provide air support as part of a deal to end Russia’s war in Ukraine. A day earlier, he said he was arranging a meeting between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, to be followed by a trilateral summit among the three leaders. Russia has not confirmed it will take part.

“The likelihood of a quick resolution to the conflict with Russia now seems unlikely,” said Daniel Hynes, senior commodity strategist at ANZ.

Oil also found support from flooding at a large US refinery. — Reuters

Awards for upstream blocks by early 2026

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 20

BIDS are currently under evaluation for four oil and gas blocks tendered by Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals under the 2024–2025 licensing rounds.

According to officials involved in the marketing of the blocks, awards leading to investments in the development of this upstream acreage – located both onshore and offshore – are expected by early next year at the latest.

The blocks in question include three licences – 36, 43A, and 66 – distributed along Oman’s international border with its western neighbours. The fourth licence is Block 18, a large offshore concession in the southern Sea of Oman.

OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), the majority Omani state-owned upstream subsidiary of OQ Group, has been tasked by the Ministry to support the marketing of these licences, along with a host of other blocks.

Assisting in this effort is Scotiabank, a leading Canadian multinational bank with a strong focus on international banking and capital markets.

In a recent discussion with stock market participants, Dr Anwar al Kharusi, Chief Executive Commercial at OQEP, provided an update on the company’s ongoing support for the Ministry in marketing the border concessions 36, 43A, and 66, under an initiative dubbed Project Sun.

“I want to highlight that we have been working closely with the government on the so-called



The blocks in question include three licences – 36, 43A, and 66 – distributed along Oman’s international border with its western neighbours. The fourth licence is Block 18, a large offshore concession in the southern Sea of Oman.

Project Sun, which covers Oman’s border blocks 36, 43A, and 66.

We have now obtained offers from selected potential operators and partners. At the moment, the government, together with OQEP and Scotiabank, is assessing these offers,” he said.

Dr Al Kharusi further added: “We have also received an offer on offshore Block 18, which we are analysing. Hopefully, all of these four blocks will lead to investments by late 2025 or early 2026.”

The largest of the border licences is Block 36, an expansive 18,557 km² concession straddling the Rub Al Khali desert in the far southwest of the Sultanate. Its exploration history is modest, with some

OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), the majority Omani state-owned upstream subsidiary of OQ Group, has been tasked by the Ministry to support the marketing of these licences, along with a host of other blocks.

rudimentary 2D seismic work undertaken and only one well (Hayah-1) drilled to date, which showed minor gas indications.

Further north, on the eastern flank of the Rub Al Khali basin, lies Block 66, a 4,898 km² licence suited for exploration-driven companies interested in high-potential frontier areas.

Its geology is similar to

that of producing fields in Saudi Arabia. In Al Buraimi Governorate, Block 43A spans 6,920 km² and holds possible conventional oil prospects, with its proximity to producing fields in Al Buraimi considered a key advantage.

Block 18, meanwhile, covers a sprawling 21,140 km² offshore area in the southern part of the Sea of Oman. Under a new investment framework, OQEP holds the right to cover 10% of exploration costs, potentially rising to 30% if Block 18 transitions into commercial development.

All four blocks currently under evaluation are among 11 new oil and gas licences that OQEP has been tasked with marketing in partnership with Scotiabank.

OCI invites applications for ‘Build the Future’ graduate programme

Oman Cables Industry (OCI), Oman’s leading provider of end-to-end cable solutions powered by its strategic partner Prysmian, has opened applications for the 15th edition of its internationally renowned international programme, Build the Future.

As a national champion for talent development of the industrial sector, Oman Cables invests in building a future-ready industrial workforce for Oman, equipping young professionals with the skills, exposure, and global perspective needed to accelerate their careers.

Through Build the Future, the company empowers graduates to become innovators, engineers, and leaders who will help advance the energy transition and drive the digitalisation of global communities.

The five-year programme offers an exceptional pathway for Omani



The five-year programme offers an exceptional pathway for Omani graduates to join an elite global network

graduates to join an elite global network. Build the Future is a programme where graduates are employed from day one and embark on a journey that blends professional development with international exposure.

The programme begins with a one-week induction in collaboration with SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan, Italy, followed by a year-long job rotation, a local role within Oman, and culminates in a three-year international assignment across Prysmian’s global operations.

The journey concludes with participants stepping into strategic operational roles.

Build the Future is an on-the-job training programme, where graduates are employed from day one and embark on a five-year journey that combines professional development with international

exposure. To date, 18 talented Omanis have been accepted and enrolled in Build the Future, gaining invaluable experience in countries including Italy, France, Spain, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the UAE and the USA before returning to contribute to Oman’s industrial and economic growth.

From Buenos Aires to Eindhoven and Milan to Vila Velha, the programme has a proven record of accelerating careers, with alumni advancing to senior positions worldwide.

“This programme is not about filling a role, it’s about unlocking potential,” said Erkan Aydogdu, CEO of Oman Cables Industry.

“By providing our youth with international exposure and cutting-edge skills, we are shaping leaders who will strengthen Oman’s position in the global industrial landscape.”

BUSINESS SALE

Claire’s to sell North America business



Bankrupt jewellery retailer Claire’s will sell its North America business to private equity firm Ames Watson for an undisclosed sum, as the company navigates US bankruptcy proceedings. The sale covers stores and intellectual property, while other locations face liquidation. Claire’s has struggled with high rents, tariffs, and competition. Approval from US and Canadian courts is required. — Reuters

WORKERS STRIKE

Airbus UK workers to strike over pay



Thousands of Airbus workers in the UK will strike for 10 days from September over pay demands, union Unite said, after 90% voted for industrial action. Strikes could disrupt wing production for commercial and military aircraft, though Airbus said year-end deliveries are not currently at risk. Unite cites inflation and cost of living pressures; Airbus highlights prior pay rises and bonuses. — Reuters

SECTOR SLUMP

German hospitality revenues decline in H1



Germany’s hospitality sector sank further into crisis in the first half of 2025, with restaurants and hotels reporting steep declines in business. Adjusted for price changes, sales fell 3.7% from a year earlier, according to the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis). Restaurants dropped 4.1%, while hotels and other accommodations fell 2.6%. Price rises limited nominal turnover to a 0.1% decline. — dpa

OPINION

Oman’s green energy sector gains solid new momentum



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

THE Sultanate of Oman, like other countries in the region, seeks to diversify its economic sources of income and attract foreign investment to create more new jobs in economic sectors, provide employment opportunities for citizens, and preserve natural resources and the environment. Among these sectors, the green sector is at the forefront. Its impact is numerous on safe investment policies in the field of clean energy in light of the security challenges posed by climate change. Oman currently has numerous renewable energy projects in this sector, including the Ibri-3 solar venture, in addition to other proposed projects worth billions of dollars that will be implemented through to 2030. There are also wind energy projects in Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. Several other projects are being implemented in this sector between 2025 and 2027, valued at over 1 billion dollars, in Al Duqm, Mahout, Harweel and Sadah. In addition, Oman is interested in establishing green hydrogen and ammonia projects to boost electricity generation. The value of these projects, being implemented between 2025 and 2030, amounts to

approximately RO 2 billion, belonging to Omani and foreign companies. Overall, Omani investments in solar and wind energy are approaching \$4 billion, while investments in the green hydrogen sector could attract between \$30 and \$50 billion in the coming decades, given the Sultanate’s location and the environmental factors that distinguish it in the fields of solar, wind and other natural resources. Several companies and funds are contributing to the implementation of these projects with the Omani government, including Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Singapore and others. Arab and foreign companies are also participating in the bidding process, coming from the United Arab Emirates, France, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, Germany and others. All of these clean energy projects will have a positive economic impact and environmental sustainability over the coming years. Their economic impact lies in diversifying sources of national income, thus enhancing Oman’s 2040 strategy to reduce dependence on oil and gas. Green hydrogen and its derivatives from clean energy projects could also become major export commodities in promising markets in Europe and Asia. Finally, these projects will attract more foreign investment

Oman is interested in establishing green hydrogen and ammonia projects to boost electricity generation. The value of these projects, being implemented between 2025 and 2030, amounts to approximately RO 2 billion, belonging to Omani and foreign companies

in the coming period. This is in addition to creating thousands of direct and indirect quality job opportunities in the construction and infrastructure sectors, operations and maintenance, research and development in renewable energy, local employment, and the qualification of Omani cadres in the sector to support local industries, and strengthening equipment and clean energy supply chains. These projects also contribute to environmental sustainability, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, conserving water resources, reducing air and noise pollution and preserving biodiversity. All countries in the region are considering these projects to move toward a more economically and environmentally sustainable energy sector management. They are reviewing current energy policies and implementing incentive measures, encouraging investments in clean oil and gas exploration and production technologies, adopting measures to mitigate environmental and social impacts, and promoting interconnection of electricity grids and natural gas grid projects, while encouraging private sector participation in establishing these projects, energy facilities and related industries.

COCONUT OIL BECOMES LUXURY AMID RISING DEMAND, LOWER OUTPUT

RAJENDRA JADHAV, BERNADETTE CHRISTINA & ASHLEY TANG

Prices of coconut oil are surging in Asia, led by India, where costs have nearly tripled in less than two years due to supply shortages and booming demand for its nutrient-rich water. The edible oil is increasingly out of reach for price-conscious consumers, forcing many to seek alternatives. “I will switch to the more affordable refined sunflower oil for everyday cooking and save coconut oil for dishes where its flavour is absolutely irreplaceable,” said Leelamma Cherian from Kerala. The surge, which began in the second half of 2024, was worsened by lower rainfall, extended heat, and pest damage across major producing nations. India’s prices hit 423,000 rupees (\$4,840) per tonne, while global prices reached a record \$2,990 per tonne. The International Coconut Community expects second-half global prices to stay around \$2,500–\$2,700, well above 2023 levels of about \$1,000. Coconut oil output is falling as ageing trees, insufficient replanting, and seed shortages affect production. Global production remained stagnant at 3.67 million tonnes in 2024–25, according to the US Department of Agriculture. Extreme weather, including El Niño effects, further disrupted yields, with impacts delayed due to coconuts’ long maturation period. COVID-19 lockdowns also led to neglected plantations, reducing output just as demand surged, particularly for coconut water. Premium prices have widened the gap with palm kernel oil to a record \$1,000 per tonne. Higher coconut oil costs could push up alternatives like palm, soy and sunflower oils. Global demand remains strong, including for copra, coconut cream, and milk in Britain, China, Europe, the US and the UAE. To benefit from rising prices, Indonesian farmers are shipping more whole coconuts rather than extracting oil, reducing oil exports by 15% in early 2025. Calls are growing for trade adjustments, including import relaxations in India and export suspensions in Indonesia. Planting expansion may help in the long term, but new yields take four to five years, leaving prices high for the foreseeable future. — Reuters

Business investment and productivity fall in the UK

BUSINESS investment in the UK fell by four per cent in the second quarter of the year despite moderate growth of 0.3 per cent, official data has shown, as top economists are pointing to low productivity levels across the UK economy. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said there was a dramatic fall in investment compared to the first quarter of the year, when 3.9 per cent growth was posted. The official data body also said gross fixed capital formation, which considers investment in transport or other machinery and equipment, fell by 1.1 per cent in the year’s second quarter after a two per cent increase in the first three months of the year. Economists pointed to a 0.3 per cent increase in GDP over the second quarter as positive news, given a consensus forecast pencilled in growth of just 0.1 per cent. But ONS data showed that growth in spending was largely driven by government consumption, as household consumption and business investment were much weaker than in the previous quarter. The figures point to more concerning trends across the UK economy for business chiefs and leading economists looking to improve productivity levels and the state of public finances. “Better than expected real GDP developments in the second quarter appear to be good news for the government’s embryonic growth plan but the expenditure breakdown was less encouraging,” said Raj Badiani, economics director at S&P Global Market Intelligence. “Struggling consumer spending and a sharp fall in business investment point to continued domestic growth tensions. The persistent risk of missed fiscal targets is likely to require steep tax rises in the Autumn Budget 2025.” Lacklustre growth data for the UK’s private sector highlights the top concerns of members of Shadow Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), who were asked what the biggest issue in the UK economy was before last week’s interest rate cut. Most economists pointed to low



The figures point to more concerning trends across the UK economy for business chiefs and leading economists looking to improve productivity levels and the state of public finances.



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productivity growth as a key issue that was hard to fully address, particularly given fears that more taxes were coming for industry. Productivity levels, which can be measured by GDP per hour worked, have been stagnant since the 2008 financial crisis as it dropped by 0.2 per cent over the year in the first quarter of 2025, according to an ONS flash estimate. Public sector productivity has dropped below pre-Covid level. Barclays’ UK economist Jack Meaning said Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ difficulties in operating on “such fine margins” at each Budget were a “symptom” of the country’s poor productivity. Fellow shadow MPC members Jonathan Haskel, Julian Jessop, Ruth Gregory and Ben Ramanauskas largely agreed with Meaning’s assessment. Gregory said, “The government has correctly diagnosed that low investment is restraining productivity growth and economic growth. Its policies to raise public investment, fire up homebuilding and boost business investment have

the potential to boost economic growth.” But Gregory said the Chancellor’s decision to raise taxes mostly on businesses and weaken confidence by blaming her predecessor for leaving a “black hole” in public finances was “missteps” that dampened GDP. Independent economist Vicky Pryce, the Institute of Directors’ Anna Leach and Peel Hunt’s Kallum Pickering said weak confidence levels among consumers and businesses was a drag on growth in the near term, with fears of tax hikes and tariffs making people more nervous about spending more. “The UK’s limited growth resilience means there is a real risk of entering a self-reinforcing downturn. Without a swift improvement in the economic environment for business, many firms are deferring investment and hiring, which risks deepening the cycle of low growth,” Leach said. Each responded with their own views, which did not necessarily reflect the position of respective organisations or employers.

BUSINESS

LONDON: British inflation hit its highest in 18 months in July when it increased to 3.8% from 3.6%, official data showed on Wednesday, leaving the country with the fastest rate of price increases among the world's largest rich economies.

Inflation in Britain's services sector accelerated to 5.0% from 4.7% a month earlier.

The BoE expected headline inflation to rise to 3.8% in July but had forecast a smaller 4.9% rise in services prices. Economists polled by Reuters had mostly expected increases of 3.7% and 4.8% respectively.

The BoE cut interest rates this month but only after a narrow 5-4 vote and suggested it would slow the already gradual pace of lowering borrowing costs due to inflation's persistence.

Sterling rose slightly after the data was published, with investors expecting a longer wait before the next BoE rate cut. "The economy is

UK INFLATION RISES TO HIGHEST SINCE
EARLY 2024 AT 3.8%



experiencing a bout of high inflation and weak growth that will likely remain until next spring," said Deloitte Chief Economist Ian Stewart.

The BoE thinks British inflation will hit 4% in September and stay above 2% until mid-2027.

Some of the difference reflects how energy and other utility prices are regulated in Britain.

Big increases in utility bills in April have boosted year-on-year inflation

comparisons.

Wage growth in Britain has slowed but at about 5% it is too high for the BoE to feel comfortable about inflation returning rapidly to 2%.

Wednesday's data showed the biggest contributor to July's rise in inflation came from transport costs, particularly air fares.

Electricity prices, petrol, soft drinks and hotel rooms also pushed up the annual rate of inflation between June and July.

Food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 4.9% higher than a year earlier, the biggest rise since February 2024.

The BoE forecasts food inflation will peak at 5.5% at the end of the year.

ONS data last week painted a picture of an economy with enough momentum to keep inflation high. Output grew by more than expected in the second quarter and the labour market, while still losing jobs, showed signs of stabilisation. — Reuters

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L I F E S T Y L E

HOW TRADITIONAL OMAN'S URBAN DESIGN OFFERS LESSONS FOR MODERN CITIES_{>20}

CHANGING WORLD

Career guidance for students entering higher education: A crucial aspect



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer

THE TRANSITION from secondary education to higher education and subsequently into the workforce is a pivotal period for young individuals. For students, this transition is particularly significant given the nation's strategic focus on human capital development and economic diversification as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

As many school leavers prepare to join university life, it is essential to provide effective career guidance. This guidance plays a crucial role in equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and self-awareness necessary to navigate their academic and professional journeys successfully, ensuring alignment with national development goals and personal aspirations.

One of the primary benefits of robust career guidance is its ability to bridge the gap between educational outputs and the evolving demands of the labour market. Oman, like many countries, faces the challenge of ensuring meaningful graduate employment opportunities, often due to a mismatch between the skills acquired in higher education and those required by industries.

Furthermore, career guidance fosters the development of essential soft skills that are highly valued in the modern workforce. Research indicates that Omani graduates sometimes lack critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, teamwork, and leadership skills.

Moreover, career guidance plays a vital role in supporting students' psychological well-being and fostering a sense of responsibility. The challenges of balancing work and study, coupled with social and psychological pressures, can lead to stress and isolation among students.

Guidance services can provide strategies for time management, stress reduction, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, thereby promoting self-discipline and maturity. By helping students understand the value of their contributions and the importance of professional ethics, career guidance contributes to their holistic development.

Finally, effective career guidance facilitates stronger links between educational institutions and industry. Initiatives like the Eidaad internship programme, which places engineering students in industrial internships, demonstrate the positive impact of such collaborations on enhancing employability and practical skills.

Career guidance platforms can serve as a conduit for this collaboration, providing detailed information on employment opportunities and fostering direct communication between students, educators and potential employers. This alignment ensures that academic programmes are responsive to industry needs, ultimately benefiting both students and the national economy.

Investing in comprehensive and accessible career guidance services for students is not merely an educational enhancement but a strategic imperative. It empowers individuals to make informed choices, develops critical skills, mitigates career indecision, supports personal well-being and strengthens the vital connection between education and the labour market.

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



BOLLYWOOD

Actresses Dia Mirza (R) and Vidya Balan (C) with playback singer Shreya Ghoshal attend the special screening of their Indian Hindi-language musical drama film 'Parineeta'. —AFP



FILM

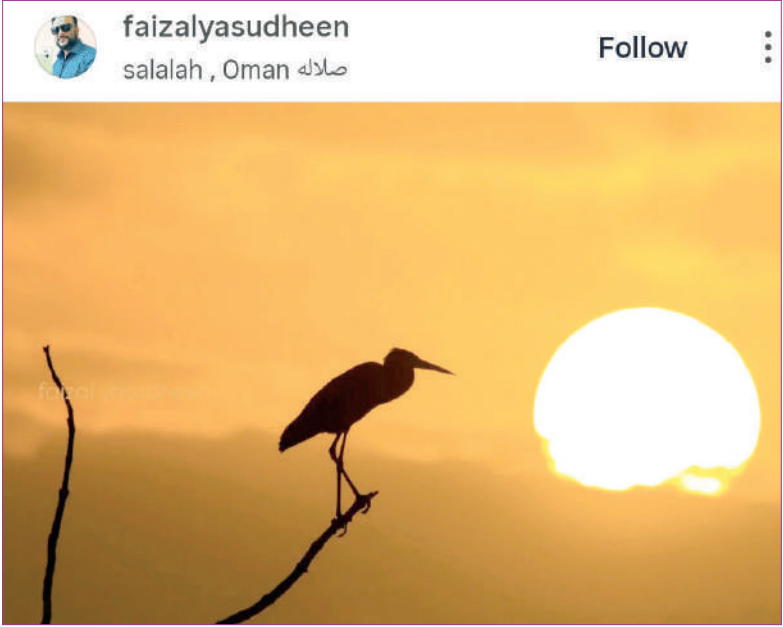
US actor Austin Butler poses during the Photocall ahead of UK gala screening of 'Caught Stealing' in central London. —AFP



MUSIC

Rock en Seine Festival takes place until August 24, 2025, in the national domain of Saint-Cloud, near Paris, with a broad variety of artists, including Chappell Roan. —AFP

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Vienna chosen to host Eurovision 2026



VIENNA was chosen on Wednesday to host the Eurovision Song Contest 2026, the world’s biggest live televised music event, Austria’s public broadcaster announced, with the final set for May 16.

Austria’s JJ won this year’s competition, held in Basel in Switzerland, with his hit “Wasted Love”, which blends techno beats with operatic vocals — making his home country the 2026 host.

Vienna, which previously hosted the glitzy TV extravaganza in 1967 and 2015, edged out its competitor Innsbruck, the capital of western Tyrol province, to stage next year’s contest, public broadcaster ORF announced.

The final of Eurovision’s 70th edition will be held on May 16, 2026, at the Wiener Stadthalle, Austria’s largest indoor arena, with semi-finals set for May 12 and 14, Eurovision said.

Since its launch in 1955, Eurovision has become the ultimate pop platform, catapulting Swedish icons ABBA to worldwide fame, as well

as boosting the likes of Celine Dion, Cliff Richard and Olivia Newton-John.

Some 166 million viewers in 37 countries watched this year’s contest, with a record 60 per cent of viewers aged 15 to 24 tuning in. The competition got even more views on Instagram and TikTok.

Under the slogan “Europe, shall we dance?”, Vienna — more commonly known for classical music and the baroque splendour of its architecture — pushed to host the contest, citing its experience with big events.

It also touted its “enormous” accommodation capacities, its “excellent” transport links, and its “cosmopolitanism”, with two million people living in the Austrian capital.

The chosen venue, the Wiener Stadthalle, also hosted Eurovision in 2015, after the previous year’s edition was won by bearded drag performer Conchita Wurst.

Located in central Vienna, it opened in 1958 and seats 16,000 people in its main hall. — AFP



300-year-old violin to star at UK music festival

ONE OF THE most valuable violins in the world, crafted three centuries ago and once owned by composer Niccolo Paganini, is to be played at a top UK classical music festival.

The violin, known as the Carrodus, is one of only around 150 made by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesu known to have survived down the centuries, and was acquired by a philanthropic group for \$20 million in June.

It was crafted in 1743 in Cremonia, northern Italy, and will be played for the first time as part of the BBC Proms by South Korean violinist Immo Yang.

The violin once owned by Italian virtuoso Paganini will be seen on August 28 at London’s Royal Albert Hall.

“I can’t believe how lucky I am to have this instrument. This is easily one of the greatest instruments ever made,” Yang, who is also making his debut at the Proms, said.

“I feel a duty to take good care of the instrument and make a beautiful sound, so that people know that it’s worth playing these instruments rather than having them in a vault in a museum.”

The Stretton Society, a network of philanthropists, patrons and sponsors that has loaned the violin to Yang, seeks to acquire rare and valuable instruments to lend to the world’s leading musicians.

Guarneri was one of the most important violin makers of all time, alongside Italian luthier Antonio Stradivari, said the society’s co-founder Stephan Jansen.

Whereas Stradivari made instruments for the Church and the nobility, Guarneri’s violins were made for musicians, and they became renowned for their deep and sonorous tones, Jansen said.



“Immo is one of the finest musicians of his generation,” Jansen said.

“When he came to my house and I showed him the fiddle, it was clear from the very first second that this is a match,” he said. “Because in the end, it’s also about chemistry, you know?”

Yang will perform Pablo de Sarasate’s “Carmen Fantasy”, which he described as “a virtuoso piece for the violin”.

The broad palette of the violin adds the “strong, at times flirty character of the Carmen character,” said Yang.

The instrument’s sound is also “quite unpredictable,” he said, and “this kind of capricious nature really gives more liveliness to the piece”.

“Thinking that Paganini used this instrument is kind of spiritual, and I think people also want to hear Paganini’s music played on his own violin,” Yang added. — AFP

FEATURES



HOW TRADITIONAL OMAN'S URBAN DESIGN OFFERS LESSONS FOR MODERN CITIES

RUQAYA AL KINDI

IN AN AGE of rapid development, Oman's historic neighbourhoods serve as silent mentors in the art of creating resilient, community-oriented cities.

In the bustling city of Nizwa, amid the rising skyline and expanding roads, lie quiet lessons that hold the potential to reshape modern urban planning.

The neighbourhood of Al Aqar, with its shaded alleys and open courtyards, stands as a living testament to centuries of wisdom in creating harmonious, sustainable communities.

Today, as cities around the world expand at an unprecedented pace, Oman's traditional urban design principles serve as an important reminder: human-centred spaces rooted in architecture's cultural past can forge resilient and vibrant communities for the future.

The neighbourhood's features are simple yet profound. Houses are built close together, creating shaded pathways to shield residents from the relentless desert sun. Narrow lanes funnel cooling breezes while fostering a sense of intimacy and neighbourliness. Central open spaces near mosques become bustling hubs for daily gathering, celebrating the town's social fabric and cultural identity. Inside, homes often feature open-air courtyards bounded by rooms, combining privacy with ventilation and social interaction.

suggest, lies in integrating these age-old principles into contemporary design. By adopting the concept of accessible shaded streets, central social spaces, and environmentally responsive architecture, modern urban planners can develop cities that serve people's physical, social, and psychological needs.

Oman is making strides along this path. The Sultanate's initiatives demonstrate how heritage-informed design can underpin growth. Projects like Sultan Haitham City exemplify the integration of



walkable streets, parks, and community hubs that are rooted in an understanding of local climates and cultures. The city is planned as a model of healthy lifestyles, fostering social interaction through integrated green spaces, pedestrian-friendly streets, and mixed-use developments.

Such design philosophies not only improve urban resilience but also foster a sense of pride and belonging among residents. Al Mahri advocates for the revival of vernacular architecture as a blueprint for sustainable urban development, emphasising that "building cities that reflect our cultural roots and environmental realities is not a step backwards but a path forward."

While the world may be rushing headlong into high-rise dreams and sprawling road networks, Oman's ancient neighbourhoods remind us that the future of city living does not solely depend on new technology or massive infrastructure. It hinges on respect for tradition, environment, and social connectivity.

As the global discourse on urbanisation evolves, Oman's heritage offers a vital lesson: cities built for people, enriched by their history and ecology, are more than just places to live — they are spaces to thrive and belong.