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IN BRIEF

OMAN, PHILIPPINES
PUSH INVESTMENTS



The Sultanate of Oman and the Philippines are seeking to deepen trade and investment ties by positioning themselves as regional gateways linking Southeast Asia with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as both countries pursue new business opportunities in food security, renewable energy, logistics and technology. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Maria Theresa Lazaro on the sidelines of the third Oman-Philippines Strategic Majlis Forum held in Manila. The meeting dealt with ways to boost bilateral relations, cooperation and partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of the Philippines in a manner that better achieves their common interests. **DETAILS ON P15**

RO 857 MILLION
INVESTMENTS
TO BOOST FOOD
SECURITY



Al Wusta Governorate is investing RO 857 million to optimise the use of its strategic location and natural resources. The governorate is developing an integrated system of development projects that aim to augment production, enhance food industries and attract quality investments in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Eng Abdullatif bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Wusta Governorate, said that the volume of existing investment in food security projects in Al Wusta Governorate stands at more than RO 655 million, distributed across the sectors of fisheries, livestock and agriculture.

Media role crucial in building corporate trust

SALALAH: Participants at the main dialogue session of the Energy and Minerals Media Forum 2026, organised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised the importance of partnership between sector institutions, media outlets, and the community. This partnership contributes to highlighting the economic,

social, and environmental impact of the energy and minerals sectors, enhancing corporate communication, and connecting the sector's achievements and future transformations with community life and needs.

Titled "Energy and Community: Partnership and Impact," the session discussed the strategic framework for the energy and

minerals sectors, the future of exploration and production, the balance between local and international investment, the transition towards renewable energy, the security of electricity and water supplies, and the role of minerals in economic diversification. In addition, it addressed the role of media and corporate communication in

building trust and conveying sector information to the community accurately and responsibly.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, emphasised that communication with the community represents a fundamental pillar in policymaking and plan implementation. **SEE P2**

Plan to provide 300,000 jobs for Omanis in 5 years

EMPLOYMENT POLICY A STRATEGIC MILESTONE IN NATIONAL TALENT

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 26

THE MINISTRY of Labour opened the third edition of its Labour Forum in Salalah with the launch of a national policy on employment, at a point when the government is working towards 60,000 jobs for Omanis this year and 300,000 over the five-year plan period.

The forum is part of its ongoing efforts to foster national dialogue on the future of the labour market, develop policies and legislation, and foresee economic and technological transformations, thereby contributing to building a more efficient, flexible and sustainable labour market. The event will run through August 13.

The ministry said the policy also seeks to strengthen labour market governance, improve the efficiency of employment institutions and programmes, and support the market's recovery after periods of disruption.

The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan projects around 300,000 direct opportunities for Omanis between 2026 and 2030, an average of 60,000 a year, against 175,000 delivered under the previous plan. The practical test of the new policy will be whether it changes how those targets are met, or restates them.

The opening of the forum was held under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, in the presence of several officials from Oman and abroad.

Nasser bin Salim al Hadhrami, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Labour in Dhofar Governorate, in his speech emphasised that the Ministry of Labour is moving steadily towards developing the labour market through partnership and innovation.

He noted that the launch of the National



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Employment Policy represents a strategic milestone, laying the groundwork for a new phase in national talent development and converting it into a driving force for economic growth, thus enhancing the labour market's readiness for future requirements.

Fayez bin Ali al Mutaيري, Director-General of the Arab Labour Organisation, praised the qualitative development achieved by the Sultanate of Oman over the past two years in its labour system. This has been realised through completing executive frameworks for the Labour Law, updating the social protection system, and issuing legislation and regulations governing modern work patterns, alongside developing the unified system for extending insurance protection to GCC citizens working outside their home countries, and issuing the occupational

diseases regulation, thereby strengthening the social protection ecosystem and establishing a safer and more stable work environment.

In turn, Mohammad bin Hassan al Obaidli, Director-General of the Executive Bureau of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Council of Ministers of Social Affairs in the GCC States, affirmed that GCC countries have achieved tangible progress in developing labour legislation, social insurance, employment and training programmes, digital transformation, and occupational safety. He underscored the importance of enhancing Gulf coordination, exchanging expertise, developing joint indicators to anticipate labour market needs, and building regional and international partnerships that contribute to supporting the development journey.

UN envoy says Trump giving Iran talks ‘some space’

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump is giving negotiations with Iran “some space,” his UN ambassador said on Sunday, after two nights passed without strikes on the country.

UN ambassador Mike Waltz told “Fox News Sunday” that the United States remained “locked and loaded” for more attacks and that “more assets have gone into the region,” but that Trump is “giving talks some space - he’s giving it a little bit of room.”

Prior to Friday, the US military had announced strikes on Iran for 13 consecutive nights, in the largest rekindling of the war since an April ceasefire.

Earlier, Iranian army warned that the Middle East war would widen if the United States chose to press ahead with attacks on the Islamic republic, ahead of the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington.

“I believe that if the Americans once again fall for the Zionists’



Iranian-made Zolfaghar missiles are displayed at Azadi Square in Tehran on Sunday. — AFP

deception, or move in line with them, and insist on continuing the war, particularly through air strikes, geographically this will expand further,” army spokesman Mohammad Akraminia told state television. He said the war had already expanded to the Bab al Mandab Strait at the entrance of the Red Sea, referencing the recent military flare-up between Yemen’s Ansar Allah and Saudi Arabia.

“The scope of our operations now encompasses the entire region, from

US bases in Jordan to the countries along the Gulf,” he said.

Akraminia said the situation in the Middle East for the United States is “difficult and unsettled,” predicting that Washington was now looking “for a new strategy.”

“We are prepared for each of the options and scenarios that appear likely,” he added.

On Friday, Israel said Netanyahu will meet US President Donald Trump at the White House on Tuesday. **SEE ALSO P6**

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SHORTTAKES



Intermittent drizzle is also expected to persist along the coastal strip.

STORM CLOUDS FROM HAJAR MOUNTAINS REACH MUSCAT

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 26

Clouds descended over the Wadi Kabir mountains on Sunday evening as an active weather system over the Central and Eastern Hajar Mountains drifted towards coastal Oman.

Weather radar images showed intense rainfall and active thunderstorm cells developing over the Al Hajar Mountains, where towering cumulonimbus clouds were accompanied by strong downdraft winds.

As the system moved eastwards during the late afternoon, cloud cover spread towards the coast, creating striking scenes over Al Wadi Kabir and surrounding areas.

Speaking to the Observer, a forecaster at the Oman Met Office confirmed that the cloud mass had shifted from the Al Hajar Mountains towards the coastal region, resulting in the unusual atmospheric conditions witnessed over Al Wadi Kabir.

The forecaster said Muscat was unlikely to receive significant rainfall despite the advancing cloud cover.

“Even if it rains in Muscat, it would be light. The downdraft associated with the storm system is generating the fresh winds,” the forecaster explained.

While Muscat experienced mainly gusty winds and reduced visibility due to haze, interior governorates recorded much heavier weather.

“Some parts of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate received heavy rainfall, and we have also reported heavy rain over the mountain areas,” the forecaster added.

Meteorological observations also indicated cumulonimbus cloud development over parts of the Dhofar Governorate desert and Al Wusta Governorate, with chances of scattered rainfall continuing over these areas. Intermittent drizzle is also expected to persist along parts of the southern coastal strip.

The weather system reflects the ongoing convective activity affecting several parts of Oman, with mountain regions remaining the focus of the heaviest rainfall and thunderstorm development.

Energy forum highlights media partnership role

PARTICIPANTS IN the main dialogue session of the Energy and Minerals Media Forum 2026, organised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised the importance of partnership between sector institutions, media outlets, and the community. This partnership contributes to highlighting the economic, social, and environmental impact of the energy and minerals sectors, enhancing corporate communication, and connecting the sector’s achievements and future transformations with community life and needs.

Titled “Energy and Community: Partnership and Impact,” the session discussed the strategic framework for the energy and minerals sectors, the future of exploration and production, the balance between local and international investment, the transition towards renewable energy, the security of electricity and water supplies, and the role of minerals in economic diversification. In addition, it addressed the role of media and corporate communication in building trust and conveying sector information to the community accurately and responsibly.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, emphasised that communication with the community represents a fundamental pillar in policymaking and plan implementation. He noted that the Ministry continues to execute its targets aimed at maximising the added value of natural resources by expanding the offering of concession areas for the oil, gas, and minerals sectors, including offshore areas, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman and attracting quality investments.

He also explained that building trust between the sector and the community is based on transparency, sustainable



The session discussed the strategic framework for the energy and minerals sectors. — ONA

communication, and information availability, affirming that the media is a strategic partner in conveying the sector’s messages and highlighting its achievements.

For his part, Dr Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami, Director-General of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), explained that the oil and gas sector possesses promising opportunities to continue exploration and production thanks to modern technologies. He affirmed that the company works towards achieving a balance between maintaining production rates and adhering to safety and environmental protection standards, alongside investing in technologies and developing national competencies, noting that corporate communication contributes to highlighting the sector’s impact in supporting development and in-country value.

Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, Chief Executive Officer of OQ Group, pointed out that the Group’s investments contribute to maximising the economic value of natural resources, emphasising that corporate communication and strategic marketing

play an important role in highlighting the economic and social value of investments and enhancing the confidence of investors and partners.

Ahmed bin Amer al Mahrizi, Chief Executive Officer of Nama Holding Group, stated that the electricity sector is one of the essential enablers of economic and social development, emphasising that the transition towards renewable energy strengthens energy security and raises the efficiency of the electrical system, while the media represents a strategic partner in conveying sector transformation messages and promoting a culture of responsible electricity and water usage. Eng Mattar bin Salim al Badi, Chief Executive Officer of Minerals Development Oman, affirmed that the minerals sector represents one of the promising streams for economic diversification, pointing to the importance of expanding exploration activities, linking mining with manufacturing industries, and enhancing media presence to introduce the investment opportunities provided by the sector and its economic and environmental impacts. — ONA



82% OF SUR ROAD DUALISATION COMPLETED

SUR: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology affirmed that 82 per cent of a project to dualise the road from the Gas Roundabout to Bilad Sur Roundabout, in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, has been completed. The project constitutes part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts to develop infrastructure and enhance traffic safety in the governorate. The project connects the Qurayat-Sur Road with the Sultan Turki bin Said Road. Earlier, the ministry opened the first part of the project (11.4 km) to traffic, leading to improved traffic safety along this vital part of the carriageway. — ONA

Muttrah Teleferik set for grand launch after successful safety trials

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 26

The Muttrah Cable Car project, known as the ‘Muttrah Teleferik’, has completed its safety runs successfully and is getting set for the grand launch soon, adding yet another reason to visit the Sultanate of Oman, according to the promoters.

The Muttrah Teleferik is Oman’s first-ever cable car project and has completed the construction of the ropeway as well as the embarking,

stopover and disembarking points, with 18 cable cars ready to ply regularly.

“The Muttrah Teleferik project is complete, and we are currently in the commissioning, testing and training processes with trial operations to begin on August 6 till mid-September, followed by full-fledged operations,” said Khalid al Nabhani, Group Co-Founder and CEO, Sabeen Investments LLC, the master developer of the Muttrah Teleferik.

The Muttrah Teleferik project,



The Muttrah Teleferik is Oman’s first-ever cable car project.

which spans around 3 kilometres between three destinations, will host over 70 retail and dining units and create over 100 job opportunities with nearly 4 million annual visitors.

“This iconic project that reflects our strategic commitment to elevating Oman’s tourism and leisure sector is part of our ongoing efforts in the development of high-impact destinations that transform visitor experiences and unlock new economic opportunities. We always focus on creating projects

that harmonise cultural authenticity with world-class innovation,” he adds.

The 3-kilometre aerial system will deliver 360-degree panoramic views over Muttrah’s historic coastline, mountains and the harbour. The cabins are Porsche-style alongside integrated retail, dining spaces, and family recreation zones like a dancing fountain. The trail will feature multiple stops including the Port Station, Peak/Al Raya Station, and Hay Al Ward (Flower Park) Station.

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SHORTTAKES

130 teams represented the world's finest military bands.

RAFO band claims top honours at Scotland World Championships

DUMBARTON: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) Band opened its campaign at the World Music Competition with a commanding first-place finish overall in Category 4B, an achievement that underscores the band's accomplished standing on the international stage.

The ensemble also topped the drum corps category in the same competition, held in Dumbarton, Scotland, which drew more than 130 bands across various divisions.

The accolade was the result of a polished performance and unwavering discipline, reflecting a high standard of musicianship and professionalism.

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Band secured a new international milestone, earning first place as the best marching and discipline ensemble, along with a fourth-place finish in the World Level 3 (B) category at the Scottish Championships in Dumbarton. The event featured over 130 teams representing the world's finest military bands.

The achievement underscores the band's advanced capabilities in military musical performance, precision, execution and adherence to the highest standards of discipline and professionalism, following intense competition that highlighted the experience and artistry of participating ensembles.

The honour adds to the RAO Band's growing list of international accolades, confirming the competence of its personnel and the effectiveness of its continuous training and preparation programmes.

It also reinforces Oman's distinguished presence in global competitions and reflects the Sultan's Armed Forces' commitment to talent development, capability enhancement and the instilling of excellence, discipline and professionalism in all international engagements.

— ONA

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar olive oil sales top ₪ 1m

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The output of olive oil in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, stood at 90,000 litres in 2025, to the tune of RO 1,035,000, according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The ministry is currently bracing for the olive harvest season in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. It is monitoring olive presses to ensure their readiness to dedicate proper areas for receiving, storing and bottling olive oil. — ONA

ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES CELEBRATES PURPLE SATURDAY

MUSCAT: The Association for Children with Disabilities celebrated the occasion of Purple on Saturday by organising a recreational and awareness event aimed for children with disabilities and their families affiliated with the association's centres.

The event aimed to enhance the integration of persons with disabilities into society, consolidate the principles of inclusivity and equal opportunities, and raise awareness of their rights. It also sought to encourage institutions to provide more supportive and accommodating environments for them, thereby contributing to their empowerment and enhancing their active participation in various aspects of life. — ONA

Muscat ranked Asia's best city for quality of life

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JULY 26

MUSCAT HAS been ranked among the world's leading cities for quality of life, securing the top position in Asia in the Numbeo Mid-Year 2026 Quality of Life Index with a score of 180.3 points.

The global index, which evaluates key indicators including quality of life, cost of living, property investment and healthcare benchmarks, places Muscat ahead of several major GCC cities.

Manama followed with 171.9 points, while Doha (169.2), Abu Dhabi (169) and Dubai (168.7) also featured among the top-ranked cities globally.

Muscat also achieved a strong global position in environmental quality, ranking second in Asia and worldwide in the Pollution Index with a score of 35.9 points, behind only Singapore at 32.5 points.

The capital received high ratings for its air quality, drinking water quality and accessibility, waste

The latest ranking reinforces Muscat's growing reputation as a liveable city, combining safety, environmental quality, modern infrastructure and a high standard of living

Oman was rated as a safe place for walking alone both during day and nighttime.

disposal services, cleanliness, peaceful environment, night-time safety, green spaces and overall comfort for residents and visitors.

Oman also scored highly in the Safety Index, reflecting low levels of crime, strong public security and a high degree of confidence among residents.

The country was rated as a safe place for walking alone during both daytime and nighttime, with low concerns related to theft, assault and violent crime.

The index further highlighted Muscat's efficient commuting conditions, with an average travel time of 22.25 minutes to cover 23.72 kilometres for work or school journeys.

The latest ranking reinforces Muscat's growing reputation as a liveable city, combining safety, environmental quality, modern infrastructure and a high standard of living.

Natural History Museum expands outreach during closure

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 26

As part of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's strategic plans to develop Oman's museums, the Natural History Museum has been closed to establish a new, modern Natural History Museum that will highlight different themes.

As per the latest digital publication by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, more than 11,000 people visited the museum in 2025.

One of the major themes of the Natural History Museum is Oman's geological heritage from the formation of the Earth and the beginning of life, a detailed

presentation of the geological eras supported by the most important fossils and scientific discoveries.

The theme, Terrestrial Environments across North, Central, and South Oman, showcases the main components of the country's natural heritage and wildlife.

The third theme, coastal environments and wetlands (coastal lagoons) for which Oman is famous, is to highlight the role of Omanis and their positive interaction with surrounding environments.

Omani seas and their distinctive marine biodiversity are the fourth theme, and the fifth theme is dedicated to high-impact educational and interactive experiences.

The museum closure was announced early in 2026; however, the museum's activities continue with the external programmes, such as educational workshops, events, and temporary exhibitions held outside the museum building

in cooperation with various government institutions and public and private schools.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the relocation process was carried out with the highest professional standards, with a specialised transportation company moving the items safely. The museum collections are temporarily stored at a storage facility in Rusayl.

Dismantling and transporting the sperm whale skeleton was one of the most challenging operations. The iconic sperm whale skeleton sections were divided into four before and were successfully relocated without damage.

SPOTLIGHT

Ancient geology beneath Oman's mountains acts as a natural reservoir, capturing and storing precious groundwater

The Al Hajar Mountains sustain aflaj systems, springs and agriculture through a remarkable underground water network

Climate change and rising groundwater pressure threaten this fragile natural balance

Exploring the serene beauty of Wadi Shab Oasis in Oman with lush greenery and crystal clear waters amidst rocky mountains



Ain Sahlanout is a picturesque water spring located in the Sultanate of Oman



MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

LONG BEFORE water emerges through an aflaj channel or flows from a mountain spring, it begins an invisible journey deep beneath Oman's rugged landscapes. Hidden beneath the dramatic peaks of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Jabal Shams and the Al Hajar Mountains lies a remarkable natural water system that has sustained communities, agriculture and ecosystems for centuries. Although Oman is often associated with arid landscapes and limited rainfall, its mountains play a vital role as natural reservoirs — capturing, storing and gradually releasing water that supports life

“A significant portion of this water does not simply flow away. Instead, it infiltrates through fractures and porous rock layers, where it is naturally stored underground.”

AL MUATHIR AL KINDI
Geological explorer

across the Sultanate.

According to Omani geological explorer Al Muathir al Kindi, the process begins high above the valleys. “When moisture-laden clouds collide with the steep slopes of the Al Hajar Mountains, they cool and produce rainfall,” he explains. “A significant portion of this water does not simply flow away. Instead, it infiltrates through fractures and porous rock layers, where it is naturally stored underground.” These geological formations function like giant natural sponges. Rainwater seeps through cracks and channels formed over millions of years, gradually replenishing underground aquifers. The stored water then moves slowly through the rock before eventually emerging through springs, aflaj systems and wells. This underground storage is especially important in a country where rainfall is seasonal and unevenly distributed. The higher elevations of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams receive greater rainfall compared with surrounding areas due to their altitude and ability to encourage cloud formation. These mountains therefore serve not only as dramatic landscapes but also as essential natural systems that regulate and sustain water availability.

CULTURAL HERITAGE
The connection between geology and water is deeply linked to Oman's cultural heritage. For generations, Omanis have relied on aflaj — sophisticated irrigation networks that transport groundwater to farms and villages. While these systems are celebrated as examples of traditional engineering, their existence depends on the unique geological conditions created by the mountains. Al Kindi explains that fractured rock formations and elevated terrain allowed early communities

to establish settlements where groundwater could be accessed sustainably. These natural advantages supported terraced agriculture and transformed steep mountain slopes into productive landscapes. The terraces of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar remain a striking example. Nourished by springs and aflaj, they continue to support the cultivation of roses, pomegranates, apricots, peaches, figs and apples. Each flowing channel represents a partnership between nature's geological processes and centuries of human adaptation. However, this delicate underground system faces growing pressures. Climate change is among the most significant long-term challenges. Reduced rainfall can limit groundwater recharge, placing additional pressure on springs and aflaj systems that communities continue to depend on. At the same time, excessive groundwater extraction risks reducing reserves faster than nature can restore them. Human activity can also affect these fragile environments. Unsustainable excavation, disruption of natural drainage pathways and landscape changes may alter the movement of water beneath the surface. Protecting Oman's mountains, therefore, is about more than preserving their spectacular beauty. It means safeguarding a natural water infrastructure that has operated quietly for thousands of years. Every drop flowing through an aflaj, nourishing a mountain terrace or emerging from a spring carries the same message: Oman's water story begins deep within its ancient rocks. Beneath the mountains lies an unseen world where geology, climate and water work together in remarkable harmony — a reminder that some of nature's greatest achievements are those that remain hidden from view.

SHORT TAKES



Over 1,000 students from various governorates are part of the programme.

MILITARY DISCIPLINE PROGRAMME BEGINS

MUSCAT: The activities of the third edition of the Military Discipline Programme commenced on Sunday at the Military Technological College (MTC) in Muscat Governorate.

Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth with support from several military, security, and other government entities, the programme features the participation of more than 1,000 students from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman.

Running until August 19, the programme includes lectures on military discipline and order, first aid, teamwork, leadership methods, and military sciences, alongside various awareness lectures.

The programme also features a variety of sports competitions and specialised workshops on citizenship, belonging, artificial intelligence, and entrepreneurship, aiming to foster modern leadership thinking and hone the personal and social skills of participating students.

It is worth noting that the programme achieved remarkable success in its first and second editions over the past two years. It continues in 2026 with a broader vision through multiple objectives, all focused on a primary goal: building a generation of conscious Omani youth who possess discipline, a spirit of leadership, a sincere sense of belonging to the homeland, and loyalty to the Sultan. — ONA



NAILA BINT HAMAD AL MAAMARI

Omani creators are transforming cultural memory into a living visual language that preserves identity while embracing modern expression.

Oral literature in Oman has never been merely a means of storytelling. For generations, it has served as a living record of people, places and experiences, carrying wisdom, emotions and cultural identity from one generation to the next.

Today, with the evolution of visual arts, the Omani story is finding new forms of expression. Photography captures the spirit of traditional narratives, cinema transforms legends and collective memories into visual experiences, while contemporary art reinterprets heritage symbols through modern creative approaches.

This transformation highlights the ability of Omani visual language to serve as a natural extension of oral heritage — preserving authenticity while engaging with global artistic movements.

Visual artist Naila bint Hamad al Maamari believes that Omani art has moved beyond simply documenting heritage to recreating it as a dynamic cultural expression.

“Visual art in Oman has not been limited to documenting heritage visually, but has reproduced it as a living cultural material that can be reformulated within a contemporary visual discourse,” she said.

She explained that artists today draw inspiration from both tangible and intangible heritage, transforming traditional elements into symbols that carry deeper aesthetic and intellectual meanings.

Traditional architecture, including forts, castles, towers, mud houses and



This transformation highlights the ability of Omani visual language to serve as a natural extension of oral heritage — preserving authenticity while engaging with global artistic movements.

decorated wooden doors, has become more than a representation of the past. These elements now serve as visual symbols of continuity and identity.

Traditional crafts such as khanjar making, silverwork, palm-leaf weaving, textiles, pottery and Arabic calligraphy have also been reintroduced into contemporary compositions, while folk tales, songs, proverbs and social customs continue to inspire new forms of artistic interpretation.

“Heritage is no longer presented as a past that has ended; rather, it has become a dynamic element that is reinterpreted according to the vision of the contemporary artist,” Al Maamari said.

She stressed that Omani artists have successfully balanced cultural identity with openness to international artistic trends by embracing techniques such as abstraction, expressionism, conceptual art, multimedia and digital forms while maintaining strong local references.

Photographer Ziyad bin Khalfan al Maashari believes photography can preserve not only places but also

human experiences and memories.

“Since my beginnings in photography, my goal has been for Omani photography to move beyond visual documentation and become a means of preserving memory, conveying emotions and telling the story of people before places,” he said.

For Al Maashari, successful photography depends on storytelling through light, shadow, composition and timing.

“A meaningful image is not only one that captures a scene, but one that preserves the memory of society, documents its values and gives people a lasting presence,” he said.

Cinema has also emerged as an important medium for transforming oral traditions into visual narratives.

Film director Abdullah bin Mohammed al Maliki believes Omani cinema has begun important work in presenting folk stories through a visual language, although the journey remains at an early stage. “Omani cinema has started transforming folk tales from stories told through words into experiences that can be seen and felt,” he said.— ONA

Ashkharah festival blends heritage and family fun

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
ASHKHARAH, JULY 26

THE FOURTH edition of the Ashkharah Summer Festival 2026 continues to draw large numbers of visitors from across Oman, the GCC and other Arab countries, further cementing Ashkharah's position as one of the Sultanate's leading summer tourism destinations.

The festival opened with the ‘Ashkharah, Our Tourism Gathering’ community walk, which covered a six-kilometre route along Ashkharah Beach. The event brought together participants of all ages to promote healthy lifestyles, encourage community sports and showcase the wilayat's natural beauty and tourism potential. Participating teams were honoured on the festival's open-air stage by Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Chairman of the Festival Organising Committee.

The evening programme featured a traditional camel parade involving more than 100 camels, drawing enthusiastic crowds and celebrating Oman's rich cultural heritage and the enduring significance of camels as a symbol of the nation's identity.

The open-air theatre also hosted a variety of family-oriented entertainment, including children's competitions, magic and clown performances, Egyptian Saidi and



The open-air theatre hosted a variety of family-oriented entertainment and children's competitions.

The festival successfully combines Oman's authentic heritage with modern entertainment, creating an enjoyable experience for the entire family

African folklore shows, as well as the theatrical production Subway. The evening concluded with a poetry gathering featuring Omani poets Saleh al Mashaykhi, Nasser al Hashmi, Faisal al Sinani and Ali al Kasbi, followed by a musical performance by vocalist Tamim bin Khalifa al Badi, which was warmly received by the audience.

Visitors continued to flock to the festival's attractions throughout the day, particularly the heritage village Majalis Al Khair, where a traditional poetry tent hosted by poet Mohammed bin Ghabish al Sinaidi complemented exhibitions highlighting Oman's maritime heritage and the traditional craft of wooden boat building, one of Ashkharah's most distinctive cultural traditions.

The Kayan Al Reef pavilion, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism stand and the consumer market

also recorded strong visitor turnout, offering interactive activities, virtual reality experiences, handicraft displays and competitions.

Recreational areas featuring electric, inflatable and water games, cycling activities and a zipline proved especially popular among families and children, providing a comprehensive entertainment experience for visitors of all ages.

Expressing his appreciation for the festival, visitor Naser bin Rashid Al Saadi said the event had successfully combined Oman's authentic heritage with modern entertainment, creating an enjoyable experience for the entire family while reflecting the organisers' commitment to delivering a high-quality tourism event.

Another visitor, Maha bint Hamood al Maamari, described the festival as a distinctive summer destination, praising its diverse cultural, heritage and sporting programmes as well as Ashkharah's unique coastal setting, which together offer visitors a memorable tourism experience.

Festival activities continue with a Duathlon Race, alongside cultural performances, heritage displays, children's competitions, daily prize draws and a range of accompanying events. The festival will run until August 15, reinforcing its role in promoting domestic tourism, preserving Omani heritage, supporting small businesses and productive families.

OMAN’S STORIES FIND A NEW VISUAL LANGUAGE

محافظة مسقط
Muscat Governorate

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (24/2026)

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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRS-26-039	Supply of Solar Power Panel (Unit Rate)	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-111	Supply, Installation, and Commissioning of Flagpole Lighting at Al Khuwair Square	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-110	Supply, Installation, and Replacement of Tunnel Lighting in Al Hail, Wilayat Seeb	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-090	Consultancy services to Evaluate Rental Prices for Various Types of Units & Uses (Recall)	06/08/2026	16/08/2026
PRE-25-147	Road Paving Works in Hillat Al Fatah, Wilayat Seeb (Re-Tender)	06/08/2026	16/08/2026
PRE-26-109	Construction, Supply, and Installation of Elevators at Muscat Municipality Buildings in Seeb and Bausher	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRS-26-038	Supply of Oil per Unit Rate for Muscat Municipality Vehicles and Equipment	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-112	Maintenance Works Sea front in Seeb (Dama Street - Phase Two)	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRS-26-040	Supply of Waste Bins for Beaches, Walkways, and Public Areas	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-087	Energy Storage Unit Maintenance Services (Re-Tender)	03/08/2026	11/08/2026
PRS-26-041	Supply of Insect Control Pesticides (Re-Tender)	03/08/2026	11/08/2026
PRE-24-315	Design and Implementation of Portable Toilets at Quriyat	11/08/2026	26/08/2026
PRE-25-167	Consultancy Services for Outdoor Advertising and Commercial Signboards in Muscat Governorate (Re-Tender)	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-114	Supply and Installation of Solar - Powered Lighting Carts for Al Amerat and Al Seeb Cemeteries	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
PRE-26-113	Contracting an Integrated Media Partner to Manage the Media	16/08/2026	06/09/2026
--	Supply & Installation Waiting Shelter Area in Qurayyat	16/08/2026	06/09/2026

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

WAR

Yemen's Ansar Allah said they downed a Saudi drone over the northwest, a day after the group claimed it attacked oil facilities in the Gulf kingdom

Iran said it has halted retaliatory attacks against US allies after Washington stopped its strikes on the country for the past two nights

Washington paused a war nearing its fifth month and reports emerged that concerns over dwindling munitions were restraining plans for further escalation

Iran's army warned on Sunday that the Middle East war would widen if the United States chose to press ahead with attacks on the Islamic republic

Iran accused Ukraine of attacking one of its merchant vessels in the Caspian Sea, killing a sailor, and warned it would not leave the incident unanswered

Iran's oil ministry on Saturday said it was able to sell a total of \$18 billion worth of oil during the war and the ensuing ceasefire with the United States

US President Donald Trump has paused attacks on Iran to allow more room for diplomacy, the US ambassador to the United Nations said on Sunday

IRAN AND US HOLD FIRE

IRAN SAID on Sunday it has halted retaliatory attacks against US allies in the Middle East after Washington stopped its strikes on the country for the past two nights. The Iranian declaration came after Washington paused a war nearing its fifth month and reports emerged that concerns over dwindling munitions were restraining plans for further escalation. “These attacks continued until two nights ago, but over the past two nights the Americans have stopped their attacks,” said army spokesman Mohammad Akraminia. “Since... our strategy has essentially been retaliatory, we have also halted our retaliatory operations.”

Fighting over the strategic Strait of Hormuz derailed diplomatic efforts between Washington and Tehran, but the conflict then expanded beyond the vital energy corridor to include attacks on US bases, regional shipping and Gulf allies. But the recent lull has revived hopes of a return to negotiations after nearly two weeks of consecutive nightly US bombardments, although US media reported the pause could also reflect pressure on stockpiles of Patriot interceptors and other defensive weapons.

Meanwhile, US operations against Iran were “on a hold”, CNN reported, quoting an unidentified Pentagon source, even as US President Donald Trump threatened a “much higher level” of strikes on Friday. Plans to escalate the campaign have been shelved in part because of those shrinking supplies, The New York Times reported, citing two people briefed on the matter.

Trump also faces the risk of a wider Middle East war, the estrangement of vulnerable Gulf allies and further shocks to the global economy, the newspaper said. Vice-President J D Vance and top US general Dan Caine both raised concerns about escalation at a White House meeting on Friday, CNN reported. Caine told Trump the military could carry out the options available to him successfully but warned of the possible implications, according to the network. Iran's army, however, warned on Sunday that the war would widen even further if the US chose to restart its attacks, ahead of a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington on Tuesday.



A man cycles past a mural depicting late Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. — AFP

Fighting over the strategic Strait of Hormuz derailed diplomatic efforts between Washington and Tehran, but the conflict then expanded beyond the vital energy corridor to include attacks on US bases, regional shipping and Gulf allies

MUCH HIGHER LEVEL
Trump said on Friday he had not decided whether to return to an all-out operation. “We’re talking to them right now. I think they’re getting more and more serious,” he told journalists. Trump said Iran faced a choice between a deal and strikes at a “much higher level”. The war that Trump once predicted would last four or five weeks is now nearing its fifth month, and is weighing on the Republican’s approval ratings ahead of crucial US midterm elections in November.

The Pentagon had presented Trump with a plan for a 14th night of strikes, but he declined to authorise it in favour of a push for talks, Axios reported. On Sunday, locals in Iranian capital Tehran carried on with a normal morning, dealing with heavy traffic jams on their way to work.

NEW FRONT
Fighting has meanwhile spread to a new front. Ansar Allah on Sunday said they downed a Saudi drone over the northwest of Yemen, a day after the Yemeni group claimed it attacked oil facilities in the Gulf kingdom. A day earlier, Ansar Allah had said they struck Saudi Aramco sites in Jizan and Yanbu, after Riyadh bombed Ansar Allah targets

on Friday. A surface-to-air battery operated by Greek personnel in Saudi Arabia downed two ballistic missiles and a drone over Yanbu.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran could not be blamed for the escalation and offered to broker talks between the Ansar Allah and Riyadh, saying “there is no military solution”. On Sunday, Iran’s armed forces stopped six vessels attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz over the past 24 hours after warnings, according to state television. Tehran’s effective blockade of the waterway remains the central flashpoint with Washington.

Iran said on Sunday it had made progress in talks with neighbouring states on “common principles and operational mechanisms” for shipping in the Strait. In June, Iran said it would discuss imposing service fees, a move Washington opposes.

Iran said it has halted retaliatory attacks against US in after Washington stopped its strikes on the country for the past two nights. The Iranian declaration came after Washington paused a war nearing its fifth month and reports emerged that concerns over dwindling munitions were restraining plans for further escalation. — AFP

SHORT TAKE



The Syrian flag flies at the Umayyad Square in Damascus. — AFP file photo

Syria reports fresh Israeli incursion, shelling in south

DAMASCUS: Syrian state media said Israeli forces carried out an incursion into the country’s south on Sunday, a day after the visiting UN chief urged an end to Israeli violations and respect for Syria’s sovereignty. State news agency SANA said that “Israeli occupation forces carried out an incursion early on Sunday into the villages of Maariya and Al Aarda in the Yarmuk basin in the west of Daraa province”. It said the soldiers, accompanied by three military vehicles, set up a checkpoint in Al Aarda, and that forces “dropped leaflets in towns in the Yarmuk basin warning residents against closing roads or obstructing the advance of the vehicles”. Also on Sunday, SANA said Israeli forces fired artillery shells at farmland near the Quneitra province village of Taranja.

Visiting UN chief Antonio Guterres said that “violations of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are unacceptable and must cease.” “What is happening in the region around the Golan Heights is totally unacceptable,” he said, emphasising that “the Golan Heights are Syrian territory.” — AFP



ISRAELI SETTLERS TORCH 2 MOSQUES IN WEST BANK

QUSRA: Palestinian officials said Israeli settlers set fire to two mosques in the occupied West Bank on Sunday, after this week’s deadly clashes in the territory left six people dead. Abdel Azim Wadi, mayor of the town of Qusra, south of the city of Nablus, said that settlers torched a mosque under construction in the southern part of the town. “The fire destroyed the mosque’s entrance and even damaged its stonework,” Wadi said.

The Israeli military said troops were dispatched to the outskirts of Qusra after receiving a report that a mosque had been set ablaze. “The soldiers searched for suspects who had fled prior to their arrival and identified signs of arson and graffiti at the scene,” it said, adding that Israeli police would investigate and collect evidence.

In a separate incident, Israeli settlers set fire to a mosque in the village of Kour, near Tulkarem, and sprayed racist slogans on its walls, according to the Palestinian ministry of endowments and religious affairs. The ministry said that “groups of settlers burned a mosque in the village of Kour in Tulkarem governorate and wrote racist slogans on its walls”. — AFP

Lebanon army condemns Israeli attacks

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s army on Sunday condemned ongoing Israeli military activities in the country’s south that it said were preventing its full deployment under a framework deal reached with Israel last month. “Israeli occupation forces continue their attacks and violations of current understandings and of international laws through the systematic destruction and bulldozing of homes, bombardment and sweeps with automatic weapons in

several southern areas,” an army statement said. “The continuation of these attacks obstructs the army’s full deployment according to current agreements and prevents the return of residents to their villages and towns,” it added.

The deal came more than three months after Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East with rocket fire at Israel in support of Tehran, triggering major Israeli air strikes and a ground invasion that Lebanese

authorities say have killed more than 4,300 people.

Lebanon’s army also accused Israeli soldiers of “opening fire near army positions in Kfar Tibnit, Nabatieh Al Fawqa and Zawtar Al Gharbiya, which hinders the implementation of its missions”.

While violence has declined since the signing of a US-Iran memorandum last month on the regional conflict, and the Lebanon-Israel framework deal, Lebanon continues to report

intermittent Israeli strikes and artillery shelling on the south, as well as the detonations of buildings in southern villages.

This week, Lebanon’s army began deploying to Zawtar Al Gharbiya, one of the “pilot zones” under the framework agreement.

A correspondent on Sunday saw heavy damage and Lebanese soldiers in the streets as some residents inspected their homes. “When I entered my home, I felt sadness.” — AFP

SHORTTAKES

ROMANIA SLAMS RUSSIA AS THIRD DRONE SHOT DOWN



NICUSOR DAN
Romania's President

BUCHAREST: Romania on Sunday said it was summoning Russia's ambassador after the Nato member's military shot down the third drone in as many days. A Romanian F-16 fighter jet shot down a drone over the Black Sea, five minutes after it entered the country's airspace, defence minister Radu Miruta said. Romania is summoning Russia's ambassador following "repeated violations", foreign minister Oana Toiu said on X.

President Nicusor Dan said according to an investigation, a drone shot down on Friday was a "Shahed model, used by the Russian Federation in its war of aggression against Ukraine". Investigations into drones shot down on Saturday and Sunday were ongoing, he added. "It is unacceptable and intolerable for the Russian Federation to continue violating Romania's airspace, which is also the airspace of Nato and the European Union," he said on X.

The drone shot down also "appears to be of Russian origin", Martin L. O'Donnell, a senior Nato military spokesperson, said. He added the shoot downs come as Romania and other Nato countries "actively acquire ground-based interceptors" to beef up their air defence. At the end of June, Romania integrated into its defences the US-made MEROPS counter-drone system, which is AI-powered and designed to intercept small targets flying at low altitudes. — **AFP**

INDIA CLEARS SITE POST 'COCKROACH' MOVEMENT PROTESTS



Supporters of India's Cockroach Janta Party celebrate after Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned in New Delhi. — **Reuters**

NEW DELHI: New Delhi municipal workers were busy painting over anti-government graffiti on Sunday after the youth-led "cockroach" movement had left a landmark protest site, satisfied with the government acceding to their demands. The social media-driven Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) had drawn thousands of demonstrators, mainly students, to the capital's Jantar Mantar site, forming one of India's largest anti-government protests in recent years. Weeks of protests over exam irregularities and other issues affecting young Indians culminated on Saturday with the resignation of the education minister and the government accepting other key demands.

On Sunday, dozens of municipal workers were washing the pavements along the road leading to the site, where activists had camped for weeks and where just hours earlier the crowd sang protest songs, chanted slogans and painted acerbic graffiti.

The movement sparked by a call for education reforms evolved to include concerns over unemployment, opportunities for young people and what critics brand as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's increasingly authoritarian style of governance. The protests became one of the biggest challenges to Modi's administration. — **AFP**

NEW PM BURNHAM VOWS TO PUT 'BRITAIN'S INTEREST FIRST' IN TRUMP TIES

LONDON: New UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham has said he may "take a different opinion" from US President Donald Trump and will "put Britain's interest first" when dealing with the American leader. In excerpts released on Sunday of a BBC interview conducted on Friday, Burnham said his first call with Trump held just hours after he replaced Keir Starmer in Downing Street on Monday was "warm". "Obviously we will continue to build the relationship as we

go forward" Burnham told the broadcaster, in his first media interview since taking power. "It's a changing world... and you just have to obviously call things as they develop. "I can't at any point say that I won't take a different opinion from him, that I will need to voice a different idea that is right for Britain. And I will do that." Burnham, 56, a veteran figure within centre-left ruling Labour who was the mayor of Greater Manchester in northern England for

nine years from 2017, twice declined to directly answer whether he trusts Trump. The UK's new leader also insisted he would "of course" be willing to call the US president out if needed. "You have to defend your own national interest before anything else," he said. "That's what you're required to do if you're to do this job properly. I will always put Britain's interest first." Trump said that Burnham "has got a big job ahead of him, but he will be able to do it". — **AFP**

Wildfires threaten France, Spain in new blazes fronts

WILDFIRES

ADVANCED towards the outskirts of the historic city of Bordeaux, at the heart of France's Winelands, on Sunday as France and Spain battled blazes that have forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people. About 220,000 people have been evacuated in France, while more than 75,000 people in Spain have been evacuated from their homes and around 30,000 more ordered to shelter in place, according to authorities.

In France, fires have ravaged the Cap Ferret peninsula on the Atlantic coast, a popular tourist destination, and spread through areas surrounding Bordeaux, where firefighters were trying to prevent the flames from reaching the regional capital. "The fire is about 15 kilometres away from the entry points to the main city," Bordeaux Mayor Thomas Cazenave said on Sunday, while Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said on X that the situation remained "difficult".

In Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez visited fire-hit areas in Avila, one of three central provinces affected by major blazes alongside Madrid and Toledo, where more than 45,000 hectares have burned. "We have a window of opportunity this weekend to fight the wildfire and, therefore, to protect lives, protect



Firefighters use counterfires to remove vegetation ahead of a wildfire, creating a fuel-free buffer zone in Marchepierre, west of Bordeaux. — **AFP**

About 220,000 people have been evacuated in France, while more than 75,000 people in Spain have been evacuated from their homes and around 30,000 more ordered to shelter in place, according to authorities

population centres and, ultimately, to bring this very serious wildfire under control as far as possible," he said.

A separate blaze in Spain's eastern Castellon province has ravaged over 4,300 hectares, regional authorities said. "The fire is out of control - it's very difficult to extinguish from a technical standpoint, especially because of the adverse weather conditions that will continue throughout the day," the regional leader of Valencia, Juanfran Perez, told reporters near the site.

The wildfire has entered the Sierra de Espadan natural park containing large forests of pine trees and cork oaks. The fires are the latest disasters linked to prolonged drought and successive heatwaves that scientists say have been intensified by climate

change. In both Bordeaux and Avila, July high temperatures have averaged 32 degrees Celsius, almost 6 °C above the month's normal high between 1961 and 1990, according to the Reuters Climate Monitor.

Under the European Union's civil protection mechanism, Greece and Italy have each sent two Canadair firefighting aircraft to Spain, while Portugal has deployed more than 100 military personnel along with equipment.

Two more planes will arrive "as soon as possible" from Turkey, the Spanish interior ministry said on X. Sanchez said his government would on Tuesday declare a civil protection emergency for the central provinces plagued by the wildfires, unlocking additional recovery funding.

More than 150,000 hectares have burned across Spain since January, he said, six times the area destroyed during the same period last year. In the highlands of Scotland, as many as 500 firefighters have been dealing with a large blaze within Cairngorms National Park since July 15.

Pope Leo offered spiritual support. "In light of the devastating wildfires that have affected various areas of France and Spain in recent days, I wish to express my solidarity and closeness, and I invite everyone to pray for those affected and for the rescue workers engaged in relief efforts," he said. — **Reuters**

RUSSIA, UKRAINE BOTH REPORT CIVILIANS KILLED

KYIV: The Ukrainian capital Kyiv came under ballistic missile attack from Russian forces early on Sunday, while other regions suffered bombardments later during the day that killed two people. Russia, for its part, said four people were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Horlivka. Ukraine's air force said Russian forces had targeted the capital with ballistic missiles, as explosions rocked the city.

In its morning note, the air force said Russia had launched seven ballistic missiles and 136 drones at Ukraine overnight. In the eastern city of Kharkiv, one person was killed and twelve others required medical attention after a daytime drone attack. Meanwhile, a glide bomb attack killed one person and wounded six in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said one blaze had broken out on the seventh and eighth floors of a multi-storey apartment block in a central district after the overnight missile attack. Three people were wounded in the capital, and unofficial social media channels showed footage of fires burning.

In Horlivka, a city in the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine's Donetsk province, Russian-installed Mayor Ivan Prikhodko said four civilians had been killed in a Ukrainian drone strike, Russia's TASS news agency reported. Prikhodko gave no further details. — **Reuters**

TRAPPED IN RAINS

Flash flood at China tourist site kills 10



A flash flood caused by heavy rain struck a tourist site in northwest China, killing 10 people and injuring 23. "A mountain torrent triggered by short-term heavy rainfall at a scenic spot in Weiyuan County, Dingxi City, trapped some campers" at the location in Gansu Province. An earlier report identified the location of the flash flood as the Shuangshimen Scenic Area in the rugged, mountainous stretches of southern Gansu — roughly 1,200 kilometres southwest of Beijing. — **AFP**

VESSEL INCIDENT

17 missing after Vietnamese ship sinks



Rescuers were searching for 17 missing people after a Vietnamese cargo ship carrying 62 sank during stormy weather in the contested South China Sea, Vietnam's foreign ministry said. Vietnamese authorities arrived at the scene after the vessel Khoi Nguyen 18 "sank while operating in bad weather conditions in the East Sea", foreign ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang said. Authorities and fishing vessels were "actively searching for the remaining people". — **Reuters**

LATEST JOINING CANDIDATE

Ugandan Otunnu joins race for UN head



Ugandan diplomat Olara Otunnu has joined the contest to become the next secretary-general of the United Nations, the seventh contender to succeed Antonio Guterres. Otunnu, a former UN under-secretary-general who served as a special representative for children and armed conflict, was nominated by Uganda in a letter to the presidents of the UN General Assembly and Security Council. At 75, he is the oldest of the current candidates for the role. — **Reuters**

OPINION

How Gen Z is redefining the future of work and life



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

AT A TIME when we are witnessing rapid social, political and technological upheavals that leave older generations confused and judgemental, Gen Zs are showing a way forward.

Around the world, and particularly in South Asia, Gen Zs have participated in large numbers and successfully changed governments in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

More recently in India, thousands of youngsters across the country are participating in rallies to protest the leak of public examinations, and multiple other educational issues.

Zooming out, youngsters born around 1997 and after, commonly known as Gen Zs, are different from other generations for a variety of reasons. They are the first digital natives, have mainly experienced the limitations of globalisation, as well as of environmental degradation.

They have also witnessed the mental cost that millennials paid for working around the clock and at odd hours in the early years of call centres and outsourcing.

What we are witnessing today is Gen Z’s resistance to such institutionalisation of work, recreation and even identity. A quick glance at Pinterest or other social media platforms reveals the wit and frustration of this generation: “We joke about pain because it’s easier than explaining it”; “We want

success, but not at the cost of our peace”; “We’re surrounded by people but still feel alone” are some typical observations.

While this generation has been seen to be entitled, ‘lazy’ and almost ‘unemployable’, they are hitting back in ways that their older brethren had not been able to.

The most important concern for Gen Zs is the fear of a bleak future. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence and general digitalisation of multiple traditional jobs, the job scenario is concerning, to say the least. Youngsters in the job market have realised that they need to focus on themselves through entrepreneurship and self-employment, as institutional jobs are getting scarce.

Even their priorities are now changing. Disillusioned by the promises of better futures if they only worked harder and longer, Gen Zs are now focusing on mental health, multitasking, and social responsibility. These are not just trends but show a genuine way forward.

In the West, it is a fact that youngsters socialise less through physical interaction and prefer online ones. They have also eschewed habits like smoking which has seen a downward trend.

There is also an impulse to go retro. Seen through a return to turntables, DSLR cameras and even DVDs, this backward gaze to a very recent past points to ways that a disposable

Gen Z is now setting the agenda for the way that they want their world to look, and perhaps they should take the lead

lifestyle is rejected in favour of authenticity and individuality.

One of the most significant contributions of Gen Zs is the sharp, sometimes bitter satire and humour that they bring to situations, mainly through online memes.

In the recent demonstrations in Asia which were fronted by them, youngsters shared witty takedowns of how they saw the world around them.

Coupled with innovative graphics and slogans, they captured the mood of a generation and of a nation.

There are lessons in this for everybody. Gen Zs are now setting the agenda for the way that they want their world to look, and perhaps they should take the lead. After all, the lifestyle of boomers has only led to irresponsible consumerism and degradation. The backlash has come in the advocacy of a way of life that may seem unfamiliar to us: slower living, work-life balance, environmental responsibility and awareness of mental health. None of these are to be taken lightly.

The dismissive attitude towards the younger generations needs to be recalibrated to give Gen Zs, and those after, a voice and a valid platform as they re-imagine their world. As is often said, change is the only constant. At present, this change is in the hands of those who have a larger stake in the stability and development of our society.

ONE MAN’S RACE TO SAVE ENDANGERED FISH IN GHANA

WINIFRED LARTEY & SUSAN NJANJI

As dawn breaks over Ghana’s Atlantic coast, artisanal fishing boats return to shore with last night’s catch - baskets of snapper, crabs, rays and a distinct-looking fish locals call ‘esene’.

Once abundant along Ghana’s shores, esene, or guitarfish - with the flattened body of a ray and the tail of a shark - have become increasingly difficult to find.

For conservationist Issah Seidu, 36, every landing is a reminder that time is running out to save the endangered species.

After studying terrestrial wildlife, he visited coastal fishing communities in 2018 and encountered what scientists describe as one of the world’s least-known conservation crises.

“We came to these communities and saw piles of sharks, rays and guitarfish being landed without any thought about conservation,” Seidu said.

“That was the moment I realised somebody had to do something,” said the wildlife biologist, who never dreamt of a career revolving around the sea.

Guitarfish - relatives of both sharks and rays - are among the world’s most threatened marine fish, red-listed as “critically endangered” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Their meat is a delicacy widely eaten locally, while their fins command high prices in international markets.

Across West Africa, populations have collapsed. Sawfish may have already disappeared from Ghana’s waters and wedgefish, another close relative, have become increasingly scarce. Seidu fears guitarfish could be next.

The biggest challenge has been persuading fishermen to stop catching one of their most valuable species.

Seidu’s NGO AquaLife Conservancy has helped boost knowledge about conservation. And instead of simply asking fishermen to stop, it has helped develop snail farming as an alternative livelihood.

Today, rows of giant African snails crawl inside wooden pens in Adjoa, a coastal community where fishing families are testing the new source of income. “The fishermen themselves selected snail farming,” said Seidu.

Edward Afful, a fisherman of 20 years, says shrinking catches have left many crews struggling to recover the cost of fuel for their boats.

He now raises snails alongside fishing. “If we had started this years ago, everyone would have benefitted,” he said. — AFP

The curious case of the last biscuit on the plate

THE LAST biscuit lives a very confusing life. At first, everything looks perfectly normal. Biscuits disappear one after another, exactly as biscuits expect them to.

The chocolate ones barely have time to admire the view before they are gone. The cream-filled ones are not much luckier, and even the broken biscuit usually finds someone willing to rescue it.

Then only one biscuit remains, and suddenly the atmosphere changes. People who were happily helping themselves only moments earlier now behave as though touching the last biscuit might damage their reputation.

The poor thing has not changed. It still looks delicious, it is still fresh and, rather annoyingly, it still contains exactly the same calories. Its only mistake is being the last one.

Somewhere between biscuit number four and biscuit number five, the biscuit quietly stops being food. It becomes something else. The first four biscuits satisfy our appetite. The last one quietly tests our manners. That is quite a burden for one innocent biscuit to carry, but watch what happens next.

The conversation that follows is almost always the same. One person smiles and says, “Please, you have it.” Another replies, “No, no. After you.” Then someone announces, “I am full.” Really? A few minutes earlier there did not seem to be the slightest sign of fullness.

Human appetite is a remarkable thing. It disappears only under one very specific condition: when there is exactly one biscuit left. Who invented this rule? Was there a meeting long ago where sensible people agreed that eating the last biscuit would forever make someone



DR KHALFAN AL HARRASI

The writer is an academic and researcher

Every office has someone who collects credit as though there might not be enough to go around. If the project succeeds, it was their idea

look greedy? If there was, I have one question. Who ate the last biscuit at that meeting? Children, thankfully, have not learned this strange habit. Put the biscuit in front of a child and the mystery disappears in seconds.

Adults, however, somehow turn the same situation into a polite negotiation. Without anybody saying a word, we stop thinking about whether we want another biscuit and start thinking about what everyone else might think if we take it. Nobody minds looking hungry. Looking greedy feels completely different.

Once I noticed that, I started seeing the last biscuit everywhere. It simply changes its shape. Parents quietly give the bigger slice of cake to their children while insisting they were not very hungry anyway.

Friends suddenly become very flexible about where to eat because friendship matters more than winning another small argument. Teachers sometimes hold back the answer because finding it yourself is often the better lesson.

In some homes, eating the final biscuit is a compliment because it tells the host the food was enjoyed. In other homes, people politely offer it around the table several times before anyone accepts.

The customs are different, but the idea underneath is much the same. Sharing food has never really been only about food. It is also about making people feel welcome.

Years later, we may forget what was on the table, but we usually remember the people who made us feel comfortable enough to stay a little longer. The biscuits disappeared long ago, yet the kindness somehow stayed behind.

By now, the biscuit has even found its way into the workplace. Every office has someone who collects

credit as though there might not be enough to go around. If the project succeeds, it was their idea. If it fails, they somehow disappear from the story.

Thankfully, there is usually somebody else who is happy to leave the last biscuit for everyone else. Those are the people we remember. They share the credit, encourage others and somehow make the whole team stronger.

Kindness has a habit of spreading, and one generous act often leads to another.

Of course, every family, office and group of friends also has one wonderfully practical person who eventually reaches across the table, smiles, thanks everyone very much and eats the last biscuit before it goes soft. Secretly, everyone is relieved.

The little performance is over, the plate can finally be cleared away and the conversation moves on. Perhaps that person deserves more appreciation than they usually receive. After all, somebody has to rescue the poor biscuit from spending the rest of the afternoon wondering what it did wrong.

Maybe the last biscuit has never really been about biscuits. Maybe it is simply a reminder that life is often shaped by small choices rather than grand gestures. We may never remember who ate the last biscuit at last week’s meeting, but we usually remember the people who made us feel welcome and respected.

The last biscuit survives because, for a few moments at least, everyone hopes somebody else will choose kindness first. That is quite an achievement for one lonely biscuit. Then again, if the last biscuit happens to be chocolate-covered, I reserve the right to forget everything I have just written.

When adaptation becomes a trap



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and
communications
professional

THERE IS a well-known story about a frog sitting in a pot of water. The water was heated very slowly. As the temperature rises little by little, the frog keeps adjusting to each small change. Because the changes are gradual, the frog does not realise that the situation is becoming dangerous. By the time the water becomes too hot, it is too weak to escape.

The story reflects something about human behaviour. It shows how people can slowly become accustomed to harmful situations without realising the damage that is being done. The ability to adapt is one of humanity’s greatest strengths. People have survived wars, economic hardships, personal losses, and major life challenges because they learned how to adjust and move forward.

Adaptation helps us overcome difficulties and become stronger. However, adaptation is not always beneficial. There is an important difference between adapting to challenges that help us grow and adapting to situations that slowly harm us.

Many unhealthy situations do not begin as obvious problems. Toxic relationships rarely start with abuse or control. Unhealthy workplaces often seem normal at first. Emotional exhaustion, disrespect, and chronic stress usually develop gradually. Because each change appears small, we often accept it without questioning it. What once felt unacceptable slowly becomes

something we tolerate.

The danger lies in the changes that happen so slowly. Human beings are naturally alert to sudden threats. When something dangerous happens unexpectedly, we usually react quickly. We defend ourselves, seek help, or leave the situation. But when things worsen little by little, our minds adjust to the new reality. What shocked us yesterday may feel normal today and completely acceptable tomorrow.

This can be seen in many aspects of life. A person may remain in a relationship where love and support have been replaced by criticism, control, and emotional pain. An employee may stay in a workplace that slowly damages their confidence, motivation, and mental health. Societies can become used to unfair treatment when each compromise seems small. In every case, the slow increase in “temperature” makes it difficult to see the full picture.

Constant adaptation also comes with a hidden cost. Every adjustment requires emotional, mental, and physical energy. When people spend years coping with unhealthy situations, they often become exhausted. They may start doubting their own feelings and judgments. They may lower their expectations, convince themselves that things are not that bad, or lose confidence in their ability to make a change. Over time, they become trapped not because they are weak, but because they have spent so much energy trying to tolerate.

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True strength is not only the ability to survive difficult circumstances. It is also the ability to recognise when a situation is causing harm. Sometimes strength means setting limits, saying no, or having the courage to walk away.

The challenge is learning to notice the warning signs before things become too damaging. This requires self-awareness and honest reflection. We should regularly ask ourselves important questions: Is this situation helping me grow, or is it slowly hurting me? Am I adapting because the challenge is meaningful, or because I have become used to something unhealthy?

Healthy boundaries act like an early warning system. They remind us that respect, dignity, safety, and peace of mind are basic human needs. When these boundaries are repeatedly ignored or violated, constantly adapting should not be the default response. Sometimes the healthiest and wisest decision is to leave, even when doing so feels uncomfortable or uncertain.

That is why gradual change can sometimes be more dangerous than sudden change. When we spend our energy adjusting to toxic environments, unhealthy relationships, or harmful situations, we may fail to recognise the moment when we should step away. Hence, it is important not to tolerate what is wrong. Do not keep accepting situations that damage your well-being, your self-respect, or your happiness.

As Zimbabwe’s raw lithium ban pays off, ambitions grow

ENOS DENHERE

Zimbabwe’s first plant to process clean-energy metal lithium - of which it is Africa’s top producer - is up and running, a milestone in its expanding drive to stop the wholesale export of its raw mineral wealth.

Buoyed by the development, the small southern African country is determined to go much further in its drive for local processing of its resources, even eyeing its own production of rechargeable lithium batteries.

It is part of a push by the country - and others on the continent - to add value domestically to raw materials to create jobs and lift export earnings.

“We will no longer tolerate the raw exportation of our wealth,” President Emmerson Mnangagwa said this week as he opened an industrialisation conference.

“We would rather leave our valuable minerals underground than export them without processing them locally. The era of ‘horse and rider’ investment relationships is over.”

In February, Zimbabwe froze exports of raw minerals ahead of a full ban in 2027, announcing it would require “in-country value addition and beneficiation”.

The focus was on raw concentrates of the rechargeable battery ingredient lithium, with most of its hundreds of thousands of tonnes of annual production shipped out to China, the world’s largest maker of electric vehicles.

The ban sent mining firms scrambling to build plants to process lithium sulfate, a step along the value chain towards battery-grade materials.

The first, and only one so far, was set up at Goromonzi, around 30 km east of Harare, a \$400-million facility built by Chinese-owned Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe (PLZ) that became fully operational in May. It was also a first for the continent, mines minister Polite Kambamura said on a tour last week.

“The construction of the first lithium sulphate plant in Africa is behind me, and this was done in Zimbabwe,” he told journalists.

“We are very happy, as a government, to witness this milestone, especially as we continue pushing for local value addition and beneficiation,” he said.

Kambamura said PLZ had also nearly completed a plant to refine lithium carbonate, the next point along the processing sequence.

More sulphate processing plants were expected to come on line by the time the ban on lithium concentrate exports comes into force in January 2027, he said.

“The next step will be getting lithium batteries in Zimbabwe,” he said. “We will rest only after we can produce... lithium batteries and solar panels.”

Battery manufacturing requires extensive industrial supply chains that remain concentrated in Asia, with South Africa dominating the emerging sector on the continent. — AFP

President Trump faces midterm poll reckoning

ONE HUNDRED days before the US midterm elections, President Donald Trump’s Republicans are staring down polling that points to the loss of the House of Representatives and a ferocious battle to retain the Senate.

Trump will not appear on the ballot on November 3, but the stakes for his presidency could hardly be higher.

A Democratic House would give the party control of powerful committees and subpoena authority, likely subjecting Trump’s administration to two years of investigations and potentially exposing him to a third impeachment drive.

Republicans enter the final stretch with a historically narrow House majority, weak presidential approval ratings and an electorate increasingly unhappy about living costs and the grinding war with Iran.

US elections website Decision Desk HQ predicts that the Democratic Party has a 59-per cent chance of winning the House, forecasting a 224-211 majority.

The president’s party usually loses ground in midterm elections, and only a handful of seats need to change hands.

Gasoline prices have climbed above \$4 a gallon as the Iran war disrupts energy markets, inflation remains elevated and interest rates are high.

Polling cited by Democrats suggests voters now trust them more than Republicans on inflation, healthcare and even immigration, long considered a Republican strength.

“Donald Trump and Republicans have failed the American people,” House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said last Thursday, announcing an affordability campaign built around groceries, gasoline, housing and healthcare.

Republicans insist the election will offer a choice between what Speaker Mike Johnson calls “common sense” and an increasingly progressive Democratic Party.

They plan to highlight border enforcement and tax cuts while



FRANKIE
TAGGART

The writer is deputy
head of English
desk at AFP



US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at the White House Correspondents’ Association (WHCA) Dinner, which was rescheduled from April after it was interrupted when a man tried to force his way through security and fired a shotgun, at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in Washington, DC, US. — Reuters file photo

portraying Democratic candidates as aligned with the socialist left.

Trump is pressing every available advantage.

He has waged a prolonged campaign for congressional Republicans to pass the SAVE America Act, which he portrays as essential to preventing election fraud but Democrats condemn as an attempt to suppress legitimate votes.

Republicans have been considerably more successful in another effort to shape the electorate: redrawing congressional maps.

Both parties have tried to carve out new safe seats, but Republicans look likely to emerge with a net advantage of between five and 12 seats. That could offset the national political environment in a House contest expected to be decided by a similarly narrow margin.

Sarah Binder, a politics professor at George Washington University, said the redistricting arms race had been particularly consequential in this cycle, with fewer than one in 20 House races genuine toss-ups.

“Redistricting has really pared back the grounds on which Democrats can contest those seats,” she said.

Republicans also hold a substantial financial advantage, with party campaign committees and allied groups entering the final months with tens of millions of

dollars more than their Democratic counterparts.

The Senate presents a different but equally dramatic contest.

Republicans hold a 53-47 majority, meaning Democrats need a net gain of four seats. Decision Desk HQ narrowly favours Republicans to retain control through a 50-50 split, with Vice-President J D Vance casting tie-breaking votes.

For Trump, even a divided Washington - with Democrats controlling the House and Republicans holding the Senate - would transform the remainder of his term.

His legislative agenda would stall in the House, his officials would face inquiries and public hearings, and Democrats would gain a national platform from which to scrutinise the Iran war, administration ethics and the president’s attempts to reshape elections.

Political analyst Chuck Todd said in a podcast marking 100 days until the midterms that Republicans had gone from “clear favourites” in the Senate nine months ago to “very small favourites.”

The president’s popularity remains near record lows in a new Economist/YouGov survey, with 36 per cent of Americans saying they approve of his performance as president.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Young skaters take part in practical training sessions focused on balance, movement and safe skating techniques.

OVER 150 SKATERS JOIN AL SEEB ROLLER SKATING EVENT

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 26

More than 150 skaters took part in the Roller Skating Open Day held recently at Al Seeb corniche as part of the 2026 Summer Sports Programme.

The event was organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with the Oman Skating Sports Committee, attracting skaters and enthusiasts from different age groups amid a lively sporting atmosphere that reflected the growing popularity of roller skating in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event formed part of a series of community sporting activities being held across Muscat Governorate during the summer season, to encourage public participation in physical activity and promote healthy lifestyles.

The programme featured a series of exciting roller-skating demonstrations and practical training sessions focusing on essential skating skills.

The sessions were supervised by experienced coaches and sports instructors, who provided participants with guidance on safe skating techniques, balance, movement and the proper use of protective equipment.

The event was held under the Ministry’s Summer Sports Programme, which seeks to encourage members of the community to remain physically active, adopt healthier lifestyles and explore modern and youth-oriented sports.

It also aimed to make effective use of beaches and public facilities across the governorate by providing young people with safe and motivating spaces in which to practise, develop their skills and interact with fellow participants.

Participants and parents praised the organisation of the event and the strong public turnout. They also highlighted the importance of such summer initiatives in helping young people make constructive use of their leisure time, while promoting sportsmanship and strengthening social ties within the community.



Participants pose during the Roller Skating Open Day at Al Seeb Corniche.

OMAN FACE BAHRAIN TEST IN U18 BASKETBALL QUALIFIERS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

OMAN’S UNDER-18 national basketball team will face one of their toughest tests in the Gulf qualifiers when they take on title contenders Bahrain at Al Gharafa Club Hall in Doha on Monday.

Both teams enter the match with two points after winning their opening fixtures. Oman produced a remarkable late comeback to defeat Kuwait 62-59, while Bahrain began their campaign with a 66-54 victory over Saudi Arabia.

The encounter could play a major role in the race for top spot and qualification for the FIBA U18 Asia Cup, with Oman seeking to build on the confidence gained from their opening success.

Head coach Mohammed al Owaisi and assistant coach Khalid al Harthy led the team’s final training session on Sunday, focusing on correcting the technical errors that appeared against Kuwait while reinforcing the positive aspects of the second-half performance.

The coaching staff also conducted a detailed analysis of Bahrain’s victory over Saudi Arabia, with training centred on defensive organisation, tactical execution and maintaining concentration throughout the four quarters.

Oman began their campaign in difficult circumstances after trailing Kuwait 22-13 at the end of the opening quarter. Kuwait continued to hold the advantage in the second period, winning it 18-16 to lead 40-29 at half-time.

However, Oman responded strongly after the break. They reduced the deficit by taking the third quarter 16-14 before delivering an outstanding defensive performance in the final period, which they won 17-5 to complete a three-point victory.

Mishal Qafqaf led Oman with 17 points and 13 rebounds, while Muhab al Hubaishi added 15 points. Al Mulham al Obaidani scored 11 points, Adam al Hinai contributed seven and Azd al Bahlani finished with five.

Oman dominated the rebounding battle 57-40 and scored 46 points in the paint compared with Kuwait’s 22. They also held the advantage in fast-break and second-chance points, factors that proved decisive



Mishal Qafqaf led Oman with 17 points and 13 rebounds.



Oman players apply defensive pressure against Kuwait during the Gulf qualifiers in Doha.

during the closing stages.

Al Owaisi said the victory had given the players an important psychological boost

but stressed that the team must improve ahead of the Bahrain encounter.

“The players showed a very positive reaction in the second half. Our defensive commitment improved, the team played collectively and we gradually worked our way back into the game,” he said.

“Bahrain are among the strongest teams in the competition and are one of the main contenders for the title. They have greater experience and enter the match with confidence after winning the Arab championship two weeks ago and defeating Saudi Arabia in their opening game.”

The coach added that Oman would need to maintain their defensive discipline and collective approach for the entire match.

“Our ambition is to win every game, but that requires a complete performance throughout the four quarters. We trust our players and believe they are capable of producing a performance that reflects positively on Omani basketball,” he said.

Oman U20 held by Bahrain in AFC qualifiers warm-up

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

Oman’s national under-20 football team were held to a 1-1 draw by Bahrain in their second friendly match at the Royal Court Affairs Stadium on Saturday evening.

The result mirrored the first friendly between the two sides, played last Wednesday, which also ended in a 1-1 draw. The two matches formed part of both teams’ preparations for the AFC qualifiers, scheduled to take place from August 25 to September 6.

Oman made the brighter start and enjoyed a slight advantage during the opening stages.

The hosts converted their early pressure into the opening goal when Ali al Alawi found the net in the 19th minute.

Bahrain responded by creating several dangerous opportunities but were unable



Oman and Bahrain players battle for possession during their second international friendly at the Royal Court Affairs Stadium. — Picture by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

to beat the Oman defence, allowing the hosts to head into the half-time break with a 1-0 lead.

The second half saw both sides create and squander a

number of chances. Bahrain began to apply greater pressure and repeatedly threatened the Oman goal, while the hosts attempted to build their attacks through

both flanks without finding a way past the Bahraini defence.

Bahrain’s sustained pressure eventually paid off in the 64th minute when Khalid al Khalaf scored the equaliser.

Both teams pushed forward in search of a winning goal during the closing stages, but neither side managed to convert their opportunities as the match ended level at 1-1.

The encounter produced a competitive performance from both teams.

Oman’s Al Hassan al Qasimi received a yellow card in the 58th minute, while Bahrain substitute Abdulrahman Bassam was booked in the 79th minute.

Oman will continue their daily training sessions as part of their domestic preparation camp, which runs until August 1.

Bahrain, meanwhile, concluded their Muscat training camp, which was held from July 18 to 26.



India claimed the men's title with a 3-1 victory over Pakistan in the final. — Pictures by Khalfan al Ruzaiqi



China team were crowned champions in the women's category.

Oman make mark as India, China claim Youth Hockey5s titles

O M A N L I F T C H A L L E N G E C U P

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT JULY 26

INDIA AND China were crowned men's and women's champions respectively as the Men's and Women's Youth Hockey5s Asian Championship 2026 concluded at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat, while hosts Oman ended their campaign on a high by lifting the men's Challenge Cup.

The six-day championship, held from July 20 to 25, brought together leading Asian under-18 teams and served as the continental qualifier for the inaugural FIH U18 Youth Hockey5s World Cup.

India claimed the men's title with a 3-1 victory over Pakistan in the final. Romit Pal opened the scoring in the fifth minute before captain Ketan Kushwaha and Shahrukh Ali struck in quick succession after the interval. Mohammad Usman pulled one back for Pakistan, but India remained composed to complete an unbeaten campaign and secure the continental crown.

Iran took the bronze medal after defeating Bangladesh 4-2 in the third-place play-off. India, Pakistan and Iran consequently secured the three men's qualification places for the World Cup.

OPENING MINUTE
In the women's final, China overcame India 4-2 in an entertaining contest. Lu Tongtong gave China the lead in the opening minute, while Tang Kexin and Guo Jiaxin extended the advantage before the interval.

Nousheen Naz reduced the deficit for India, but Ge Chen restored China's three-goal cushion. Pushpa Manjhi scored late for India, although China held firm to lift the trophy.

Kazakhstan secured the women's bronze medal with a commanding 9-0 victory over Iran. China, India and Kazakhstan qualified for the World Cup after finishing in the top three positions.

Oman's men concluded their first official Asian campaign positively by defeating Iraq 6-0 to win the Challenge Cup. The result provided a timely reward for the hosts following a demanding campaign against more experienced opposition.

Uzbekistan lifted the women's Challenge Cup after recording a 6-1 victory over Pakistan.

Oman player Said al Fazari described the championship as an important learning experience for a young squad making its first official appearance at the Asian level. He said the players gained valuable technical, tactical and mental experience from facing some of the continent's strongest teams.

The tournament also marked a milestone for Omani coach Khalid al Raisi, who became the first Omani coach to lead an Arab national hockey team after taking charge of Iraq. Al Raisi said the appointment reflected the growing confidence in Omani coaching expertise and could encourage more local coaches to seek opportunities abroad.

China player Tang Kexin said the women's Asian Hockey5s title was the result of sustained preparation, discipline and strong teamwork throughout the tournament.

She described the final against India as one of China's toughest matches, noting that the team remained focused, followed the coaching staff's instructions and made the most of its scoring opportunities to secure the title.

Tang added that winning the Asian crown and qualifying for the FIH U18 Hockey5s World Cup marked the beginning of a new challenge rather than the end of the journey. She said the tournament provided valuable tactical and mental experience ahead of the world event.

She also thanked the Asian Hockey Federation and the Oman Hockey Association for the professional organisation, warm hospitality and high-quality facilities, saying the team would leave Oman with fond memories of the championship.

Pakistan captain Adeel was named the men's Best Player, while India captain Ketan Kushwaha received the Top Scorer award. Iran's Salman Zadeh was named Best Goalkeeper.

In the women's competition, China's Lu Tongtong received the Best Player award, Kazakhstan's Ayaulem Rakhim was recognised as Top Scorer and China goalkeeper Liu Xue claimed the Best Goalkeeper award.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Nawaf bin Barghash al Said and attended by ambassadors, Asian Hockey Federation representatives, participating delegation heads and Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association (OHA).



Oman lift Challenge Cup.



SPORTS



Jackson Koivun lines up a tee shot on hole 7 during the third round of the 3M Open golf tournament at TPC Twin Cities. — Imagin Images.

Jackson Koivun reads the green on hole

PGA Tour newcomer Jackson Koivun looked like he was all business but it came with an incredibly fun third round in the 3M Open on Saturday.

Koivun fired a 10-under-par 61 on the way to taking the lead at Blaine, Minn.

“It felt great,” Koivun said. “It’s what you work for. I definitely felt some nerves.”

Koivun, in his just third tournament as a professional, moved to 20-under 193 and holds a three-shot lead on Ben Kohles and Argentina’s Emiliano Grillo going to Sunday’s final round at TPC Twin Cities.

Koivun, who announced last month that he would forgo his senior collegiate season at Auburn to turn pro, finished on a tear with two eagles on the backside that allowed him to play the final 10 holes in 9-under. That contributed to a tournament-record 28 on the

backside, rolling in a 14-foot eagle putt on the last hole. “I got a good break on (No. 9) and kind of hit the ground running with that,” Koivun said.

Koivun was dialled in from the fairway on the final hole, with his approach shot on the mark to set up his final eagle.

“I had a pretty good number (into the green),” Koivun said.

Koivun’s bogey-free round included an eagle 3 on No. 12.

Grillo and Kohles also were without bogeys on the way to posting 65s. Grillo eagled No. 18 shortly after Koivun accomplished that.

Kohles, the first-round leader, had three birdies on both sides.

“That was my highlight of the day there on 18,” Grillo said. “I hit it well, playing from the fairway like I wanted to out here and then gave myself a lot of opportunities, couldn’t

take advantage of them.”

Koivun said he knows there’s a huge test ahead as he aims for his first professional victory. “I’m sure some of the pins will be tucked and we’ve got a lot of great players behind me, but just going to stick to my game plan and try to smile,” Koivun said.

Michael Brennan (63) and Chandler Phillips (66) are tied for fourth place at 16 under.

“Played some really solid golf and it feels good,” Brennan said. “Just hope to keep it going tomorrow.”

Michael Kim, fresh off Friday’s 59, was unable to maintain the momentum, shooting 70 and joining Denny McCarthy (64) and Billy Horschel (65) at 15 under.

“I was pleasantly surprised at how calm I was feeling heading to the first tee,” Kim said. “Overall, I’m pretty happy with it, but a little disappointed that I’m five back after today.”

Kim had only one birdie until No. 16 on Saturday.

“(Friday) was obviously fantastic, but in the big picture, I still want to win this tournament,” Kim said.

World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler had his best round of the tournament with 64 to move to 14 under, holding a share of first place when he left the final green. Competing in the tournament for the first time, he posted an 8 under score on the backside, highlighted by an eagle with a chip from the greenside rough on the par-4 16th. “I just tried to do my best to stay in it,” Scheffler said.

Davis Thompson and Ireland’s Seamus Power were early finishers with 63s, also among those at 14 under before other golfers got rolling. Brian Harman (66) is at 14 under as well. Defending champion Kurt Kitayama shot 66 to move to 10 under. — Reuters

Miami win without Messi as Casemiro debuts, Berterame hurts

MIAMI: Inter Miami, with superstar Lionel Messi still resting after his World Cup exploits, won 1-0 at Montreal on Saturday on Casemiro’s Major League Soccer debut.

Luis Suarez converted a penalty in the 81st minute to secure the victory after Miami’s Mexico international German Berterame was injured in a sickening clash of heads.

Berterame crashed to the turf and lay motionless after Efrain Morales made contact as they jumped for the ball.

Players from both teams immediately signalled for help

and, after treatment by medics and a long delay, Bertrame was taken from the pitch in an ambulance.

Miami coach Guillermo Hoyos said later that Berterame was “OK and conscious”.

“His family has been informed of everything. We didn’t know what to do it was a very desperate situation.”

Suarez converted the ensuing penalty and held up Berterame’s jersey to mark the goal.

The Uruguayan former Liverpool and Barcelona forward extended his scoring streak to six goals in his last three matches, taking his total for the season to nine.



Casemiro in action

Casemiro, who has 91 caps for Brazil and won five Champions League titles with Real Madrid, made his first appearance for Miami since arriving this week from Manchester United.

The 34-year-old controlled the tempo in midfield throughout the match, but both teams struggled with poor finishing.

Messi and his Argentina teammate Rodrigo De Paul both missed a second straight game in the wake of Argentina’s defeat to Spain in the World Cup final last weekend.

MLS officials said on Saturday that Messi would not be required to

play in next week’s All-Star game.

Miami have won both their matches since MLS resumed after the World Cup, taking their win streak to six and leaving them two points behind Eastern Conference leaders Nashville, who lost 1-0 at Orlando City.

Chicago Fire, beaten by Miami on Wednesday, lost 3-1 to New York City FC at Yankee Stadium to leave Robert Lewandowski still in search of a first victory since signing from Barcelona.

Agustin Ojeda, Nicolas Fernandez and Malachi Jones scored for New York with Joel Waterman on target for Chicago. — AFP



MUSCAT
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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Oman's merchandise trade surplus expanded year-on-year to RO 3.37 billion by the end of May 2026.

OMAN'S JAN-MAY TRADE SURPLUS WIDENS 37 PER CENT

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

Oman's merchandise trade surplus widened 37.2 per cent year-on-year to RO 3.37 billion by the end of May 2026, the largest single gain among the headline indicators published in the Ministry of Economy's July Economics Brief.

Recorded merchandise imports fell 0.8 per cent to RO 7.22 billion over the same period, while non-oil Omani exports rose 1.5 per cent to RO 2.74 billion. Seven of the nine indicators carrying a direction of travel recorded year-on-year increases.

The average oil price stood at \$80.9 a barrel at the end of June, up 9.4 per cent on the same point a year earlier. On the national accounts, gross domestic product at constant prices reached RO 9.69 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2026, an increase of 2.6 per cent.

Petroleum activities grew 4.6 per cent to RO 3.04 billion, close to twice the 2.4 per cent expansion recorded by non-petroleum activities, which reached RO 7.04 billion. Non-petroleum activities remained the larger of the two components by value. Foreign direct investment presented a divided picture. The total stock of FDI reached RO 32.20 billion at the end of the first quarter, an increase of 8.7 per cent.

Flows of foreign direct investment over the same period amounted to RO 2.57 billion, a fall of 35.7 per cent. The divergence indicates a rising cumulative stock of foreign capital alongside a sharply reduced pace of new investment during the quarter. Inflation averaged 2.80 per cent over the January to June 25/26 period.

The indicators are drawn from differing reference periods. Gross domestic product and both foreign direct investment measures run to the end of the first quarter of 2026, the foreign trade figures to the end of May and the oil price to the end of June.

Energy sector urged to deliver, not just announce

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 26

PUBLIC

confidence in Oman's energy and minerals sector cannot be built through project announcements and performance indicators alone, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said on Sunday, calling for clearer information on how national resources are managed and the economic and social value they generate.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said at the Energy and Minerals Media Forum 2026 that trust depended on transparency, sustained communication and public access to accurate information.

He said engagement with society had become part of policymaking and implementation, reflecting the ministry's view that citizens were partners in national development and in the value generated through the sustainable use of natural resources.

Al Hadhrami said the ministry was continuing to widen its offering of oil, gas and mineral concession areas, including offshore acreage, to strengthen Oman's competitiveness, attract high-quality investment, expand international partnerships and support renewable energy and hydrogen development.

The expansion had diversified investment opportunities, increased competition, improved the quality of resource data and stimulated activity in exploration, production, logistics and technical services, he said.

He described the media as a strategic partner in explaining the sector's technical and economic issues, adding that a unified media approach did not mean uniform opinions or messages, but accurate information, timely circulation and stronger coordination between the



Top officials of Oman's energy and minerals sector participating in the Salalah forum.

The ministry was continuing to widen its offering of oil, gas and mineral concession areas, including offshore acreage, to strengthen Oman's competitiveness, attract high-quality investment, expand international partnerships and support renewable energy and hydrogen development.

MOHSIN BIN HAMAD AL HADHRAMI
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals

ministry, operating companies and news organisations.

The forum, organised by the ministry in Dhofar Governorate in cooperation with companies operating in the sector, was held under the theme "Energy and Society: Partnership and Impact".

The ministry said it was timed to use the Khareef Dhofar Season to bring the sector closer to the public.

Dr Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami, Managing Director of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), said the sector still offered exploration and production opportunities after decades of operations, with modern technology improving understanding of reservoirs, opening access to more complex resources and raising recovery rates from existing fields.

PDO was working to balance production with safety and environmental requirements through investment in technology, national skills and operational efficiency, he said.

Such investment could cut emissions and reduce energy and water use while preparing young Omanis to lead the sector's technical transformation. Reporting on the sector should also cover in-country value, support for small and medium enterprises, training and the advancement of Omanis into technical and leadership positions, he said.

Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Group Chief Executive Officer of OQ, said the group assessed investments according to commercial viability, their contribution to the national economy, their ability to build local supply chains and their potential to strengthen Oman's position in regional and global markets.

He said OQ's operations, extending from exploration and production to refining, petrochemicals, manufacturing and marketing, helped increase the value generated from natural resources and supported jobs and competitive national industries.

Ahmed bin Amer al Mahrazi, CEO — Nama Group, said renewable energy would help diversify electricity generation, strengthen energy security, reduce dependence on a single source and improve the power system's long-term efficiency.

The transition would require substantial investment in transmission and distribution networks, storage and smart systems, alongside stronger public awareness of efficient electricity and water use, he said. Renewables supplied about 9 per cent of Oman's electricity as of May, when Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said projects exceeding 2.3 gigawatts were in development.

Marsa Solar IPP to showcase Oman's new Direct Sales Framework

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 26

A 1,300-hectare site near the Wilayat of Haima in Al Wusta Governorate has been earmarked for the development of the 280 MW Marsa Solar PV project, whose renewable electricity will support the electrification of the Marsa LNG bunkering plant currently under construction at SOHAR Port and Freezone in the Sultanate of Oman.

OQ Group, which is participating in the development of both the LNG bunkering plant and the associated solar photovoltaic-based Independent Power Project (IPP) through its subsidiaries, confirmed the location in an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) published over the weekend.

Sites in the Wilayat of Shinas (Al Batinah North Governorate) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate

had previously been identified as possible locations for the solar project. Enabling the supply of renewable electricity from the Marsa Solar IPP near Haima to the Marsa LNG facility at SOHAR Port and Freezone — located roughly 500 km away — is Oman's newly launched Direct Sales framework, illustrating how renewable electricity generated hundreds of kilometres from its end user can help decarbonise major industrial projects.

Established under the Authority for Public Services Regulation's (APSR) Decision No 54/2026, the framework allows renewable energy producers to sell electricity directly to eligible consumers outside Oman's long-standing single-buyer procurement model.

The Marsa Solar IPP will be developed jointly by OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) — part of the OQ Group — and TotalEnergies at a site located



The Marsa Solar IPP will be developed jointly by OQAE and TotalEnergies at a site located about 85 km southwest of Al Duqm.

about 85 km southwest of Al Duqm. The project will occupy approximately 1,300 hectares of flat, arid desert terrain selected for its exceptional solar irradiance,

low environmental sensitivity and distance from densely populated areas, making it ideally suited for utility-scale solar generation.

The solar facility will deploy bifacial monocrystalline photovoltaic modules mounted on single-axis trackers to maximise electricity generation throughout the day.

In keeping with its sustainability objectives, it will also employ dry robotic cleaning technology, eliminating the need for water in routine panel maintenance — an important consideration in Oman's arid climate.

Beyond the solar arrays, the development will include internal access roads, operational buildings and grid connection infrastructure required to export electricity into the national transmission network.

Integrated Engineering & Technology (IET) has been appointed technical consultant

for the project, while HMR Environmental Engineering Consultants is responsible for preparing the ESIA.

The Marsa Solar IPP will generate the electricity required by the 1 million-tonnes-per-annum Marsa LNG plant at SOHAR Port and Freezone, which is being developed by a consortium comprising TotalEnergies and OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP).

Rather than being connected directly to the LNG facility, the solar plant will export its electricity to the national grid, from which the Marsa LNG plant will draw its power.

By retaining the renewable energy certificates associated with the solar generation, the project aims to achieve its ambition of operating as one of the world's first LNG bunkering facilities powered entirely by renewable electricity, supporting its carbon-neutral objectives.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Throughout the event, visitors are invited to stop by the Meethaq booth.

Meethaq showcases its banking solutions at Gardens Mall in Salalah

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to make its banking solutions more accessible to customers across the Sultanate of Oman, Meethaq Islamic Banking, from Bank Muscat will be present at Gardens Mall in Dhofar Governorate with a dedicated booth from July 23 to 30 2026, daily from 10 am to 10 pm.

The initiative reflects Meethaq’s commitment to strengthening customer engagement and bringing its Sharia-compliant banking products and services closer to the community.

Throughout the event, visitors are invited to stop by the Meethaq booth, where a dedicated team will be available to showcase the wide range of Sharia-compliant banking products and solutions, provide information, respond to customer enquiries and help visitors better understand the range of products and services available.

Among the key products to be showcased during the activation is the Meethaq Savings Plan, a structured savings solution that enables customers to build their savings through regular contributions starting from as little as RO 10 per month, with flexible payment frequencies including monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual instalments via direct debit or standing orders.

The plan offers customers a competitive profit rate credited to their saving plan on a monthly basis, in addition to life Takaful coverage, making it a practical solution for customers seeking to achieve their medium- to long-term financial goals, whether for education, marriage, retirement or other life milestones.

Visitors will also learn about Meethaq’s Salary Transfer service, which allows customers to transfer their monthly salary to their Meethaq account through a simple and convenient process, enabling them to manage their everyday banking needs conveniently.

The service also gives customers access to a range of banking benefits, products and value-added features linked to salary accounts, in addition to enhancing their eligibility for Meethaq’s various financing solutions on preferential terms.

Visitors can also learn about Meethaq’s Credit Card Fee Reversal offer, which reflects Meethaq’s commitment to delivering added value to holders of its diverse range of credit cards, including the Meethaq Lulu Credit Card, Meethaq Visa Gold Credit Card, Meethaq Platinum Credit Card and Hafawa Visa Signature Credit Card.

Chery Tiggo 7 Champion now available in Oman

UNLOCKING an exceptional pathway to premium SUV ownership, the Chery Big Chill summer campaign is currently transforming the automotive market in the Sultanate of Oman by placing the intelligent Chery Tiggo 7 Champion within easy reach, which runs through July 30, 2026.

Every qualifying purchase of the Tiggo 7 Champion during this ongoing promotion comes fully loaded with free insurance (valid in Oman only), free registration and a complimentary 3-year or 30,000 km service package.

To deliver maximum comfort during the hottest months, the package also includes free 3M window tinting and a complimentary fuel card worth RO 50 (equivalent to 200 litres of petrol)—all anchored by Chery’s reassuring 6-year or 200,000 km manufacturer warranty.

Built around the philosophy of being “All the way with you,” the Tiggo 7 Champion stands out as a highly versatile partner for ambitious professionals and young, tech-savvy families who require a seamless transition between corporate schedules and weekend escapes.

The exterior commands an elegant yet energetic presence on Omani roads, highlighted by the signature All-New Diamond Front Grille that projects an instant impression of precision luxury.

Its sleek, aerodynamic profile is further elevated by a Suspended Sky Roof and a layered rear wing, complemented by integrated crescent-shaped LED Tail Lamps that create a sharp night-time signature.

The interior shifts the focus towards a high-quality living experience, treating



The Tiggo 7 Champion stands out as a highly versatile partner for ambitious professionals and young, tech-savvy families who require a seamless transition between corporate schedules and weekend escapes.

occupants to an intelligent entertainment cockpit where connectivity is effortless.

The tech-forward layout maximises cabin roominess, offering generous legroom, smart storage solutions and an ultra-large panoramic sunroof that fills the space with natural light. Premium materials and intuitive digital interfaces come together beautifully, ensuring that every drive—from daily Muscat traffic to long-distance highway cruises—is defined by total passenger comfort and stress-free control.

Delivering the mechanical excellence

to back up its bold styling, the Tiggo 7 Champion is powered by the celebrated 1.5TGDI Chery Power engine.

Pushing out a robust 154 hp, this advanced powertrain provides immediate responsiveness and smooth acceleration whether conquering steep highway inclines or navigating busy urban lanes.

The driving dynamics are defined by an agile, quiet and fuel-efficient performance, proving that modern drivers can enjoy the ideal balance of responsive power and everyday practicality without compromise.

Oman’s Azura ranks second in global coffee awards

MUSCAT: Specialty coffee house Azura has been awarded second place globally in the People’s Choice Coffee Awards by FLTR Magazine, marking a defining international moment in its continued ascent within the global specialty coffee landscape.

Coffee enthusiasts from 45 countries participated in the public voting process, with coffee houses from 12 countries represented among the global top 20. Azura was the only coffee house from Oman to earn a place on the list.

This recognition follows its earlier ranking at No 68 in The World’s 100 Best Coffee Shops 2026, positioning Azura among a select group of globally recognised coffee destinations and signalling its growing presence within contemporary



Azura was the only coffee house from Oman to earn a place on the list.

coffee culture. Together, these acknowledgements reflect a brand that is building global relevance through craft, consistency and a steadily expanding community of coffee drinkers who engage with its work across borders.

“Being recognised by coffee drinkers around the world is very meaningful to us because Azura has always been built around people,” said Mohammed Behlim, CEO and Co-Founder of Azura - The Coffee Company. “From the beginning, this journey has belonged as much to our guests and team as it does to the brand itself.”

“As we continue to grow, our focus is to refine our craft, strengthen our roasting capability, invest in our people and deepen our relationships across the coffee value chain.

We do not see recognition as a destination, but as a responsibility to keep evolving.”

Azura’s presence within the international specialty coffee community continues to expand through participation in leading global forums, including World of Coffee Bangkok, World of Coffee Europe in Brussels and an upcoming engagement in Beijing, fostering dialogue, exchange and connection across the industry.

Founded in Muscat, Azura sources coffees from distinguished coffee-producing regions around the world and roasts them in Oman. Its identity is shaped by a balance of precision-led coffee craft and a hospitality philosophy rooted in Oman, expressed through a focus on quality and experience in every cup.

Drive home a new Jetour with exceptional summer benefits

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC, the authorised distributor of Jetour vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, is giving customers an exciting opportunity to drive home a new Jetour with exceptional summer benefits available only until August 1, 2026.

As part of the limited-time offer, customers purchasing a new Jetour can enjoy a range of complimentary ownership benefits, including:

- Free insurance and registration
- Free service up to 50,000 km on select models
- Free window tinting on the Jetour G700
- A chance to win one of four Jetour X90 Plus SUVs



Customers purchasing a new Jetour can enjoy a range of complimentary ownership benefits.

Customers can also take advantage of attractive starting prices across some of Jetour’s most popular models:

- Jetour T1 2.0T 2WD COM from RO 9,990
- Jetour T2 2.0T 4WD 7DCT

from RO 11,990

- Jetour G700 2.0T COM from RO 19,990

Commenting on the campaign, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said: “The Jetour Summer Tactical Offer has been

designed to provide our customers with exceptional value while making premium, feature-rich mobility more accessible.

In addition to competitive prices and complimentary ownership benefits, customers also have the

exciting opportunity to win one of four Jetour X90 Plus SUVs.

With the campaign ending soon, we encourage customers to visit their nearest Jetour showroom and take advantage of this outstanding offer before it concludes.”

Jetour’s growing line-up in Oman combines bold design, advanced technology, spacious interiors and strong performance, making the brand an attractive choice for customers seeking capable and versatile SUVs. The offer is available at Jetour showrooms in Al Athaiba, Al Maabela, Barka, Suhar, Al Buraimi, Salalah and the Mall of Oman. For further details, customers are invited to visit their nearest Jetour showroom, or call 80080222 to learn more.

SHORTTAKES



The state-owned carrier will operate three weekly flights using Airbus A220-300 aircraft.

Muscat International Airport welcomes Air Tanzania

MUSCAT: Air Tanzania launched direct passenger services between Dar es Salaam and Muscat on Sunday, adding a new air link between East Africa and the Gulf as Oman seeks to strengthen tourism, trade and investment ties with the region.

The inaugural flight from Julius Nyerere International Airport in Dar es Salaam was welcomed at Muscat International Airport during a ceremony attended by senior officials from Oman and Tanzania, including Tanzania’s Minister of Transport, Prof Makame Mbarawa and Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport.

The state-owned carrier will operate three weekly flights using Airbus A220-300 aircraft, providing the first direct scheduled connection between Dar es Salaam and Muscat.

The launch follows the Tanzania-Oman Tourism Promotion Forum and Business Forum held in Muscat, where both sides highlighted stronger cooperation in tourism, aviation and investment.

The new route is expected to reduce travel times and improve connectivity for business and leisure travellers while supporting trade and tourism between the Sultanate of Oman and Tanzania.

“Our launch of direct flights between Dar es Salaam and Muscat marks a pivotal milestone in Air Tanzania’s journey and supports our national tourism agenda”, said Eng Peter Rudolph Olomi, Chief Executive Officer of Air Tanzania.

“This route will foster unprecedented connectivity between our peoples, business communities and visitors. We look forward to welcoming more visitors from Oman to destinations such as Serengeti, Zanzibar and Mount Kilimanjaro”, he said.

Oman Airports said the service strengthens Muscat’s role as a regional aviation hub linking the Gulf with East Africa and builds on the long-standing historical relationship between Oman and Tanzania.

Oman, Philippines push investment corridor

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 26

OMAN and the Philippines are seeking to deepen trade and investment ties by positioning themselves as regional gateways linking Southeast Asia with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as both countries pursue new business opportunities in food security, renewable energy, logistics and technology.

Senior officials from both countries used the Third Oman-Philippines Forum: Strategic Majlis in Makati City on Sunday to call for stronger private-sector partnerships, saying the two economies are well placed to serve as commercial hubs connecting ASEAN, the Gulf, East Africa and South Asia.

The initiative comes as bilateral trade has expanded sharply in recent years, with Omani Ambassador to the Philippines Eng Nasser bin Said al Manwari saying two-way trade has reached about \$250 million, supported by increased high-level political engagement and new bilateral agreements.

Oman’s Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy said the next phase of relations would depend on businesses translating diplomatic goodwill into long-term investments.

“We welcome the role of businesses, investors, entrepreneurs and innovators from both countries turning these opportunities into lasting ventures”, Al Busaidy said.

“By creating stronger connections between our private sectors, we can expand economic cooperation and open new horizons for mutual benefit”.



Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma Theresa Lazaro (left) meets with Oman’s Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy during the Third Oman–Philippines Forum: Strategic Majlis in Makati City on July 26. Photo: Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines

He said Oman and the Philippines possess complementary economies that offer opportunities across trade, logistics, tourism, energy, technology and investment.

Al Busaidy identified food security, agriculture, the blue economy and renewable energy as the sectors with the strongest immediate investment potential.

“I think the ripest, or the low-hanging fruit, is probably food security, agriculture, the blue economy and also the renewable sector of energy and energy transformation”, he said.

He added that both countries are also exploring cooperation in mining, aviation, transportation, logistics, data centres and information technology as they seek to

diversify economic relations beyond traditional sectors.

Al Busaidy said Oman could serve as a strategic gateway for Philippine companies seeking access to the GCC, East Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia, while the Philippines offers Omani investors a platform into Southeast Asia’s fast-growing ASEAN market.

The two countries are also working towards investment protection and double taxation agreements aimed at encouraging cross-border investment and reducing barriers for businesses.

Al Busaidy said Oman is also open to exploring a broader economic partnership or free trade arrangement with the Philippines.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma Theresa Lazaro urged businesses to view both countries as complementary investment platforms rather than standalone markets.

She said total trade between the two countries had expanded five-fold over the past year and called for joint ventures in deep-sea fishing technology, sustainable aquaculture, halal-certified food processing and digital services.

“To sustain this upward trajectory, our governments are strengthening our bilateral regulatory framework”, Lazaro said.

“We must build on this solid foundation by maximising our positions as regional gateways and strengthening our commercial ties”.

The forum also highlighted the importance of improving connectivity between Southeast Asia and the Gulf as governments seek to diversify supply chains following years of geopolitical disruptions.

Al Manwari said recent agreements covering health, agriculture, fisheries and trade, together with enhanced labour mobility measures, had strengthened bilateral cooperation and created a stronger foundation for investment.

He said the opening of the Oman Visa and Medical Examination Centre in Manila would streamline work visa processing for Filipino workers while supporting orderly and legal labour mobility.

Oman has also introduced visa-free entry for Filipino tourists travelling on direct flights between Manila and Muscat, a move expected to support tourism and business travel between the two countries.

Forum seeks to strengthen Oman’s accounting and auditing profession

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has re-affirmed its commitment to strengthening the credibility, quality and regulatory oversight of Oman’s accounting and auditing profession through a two-day forum held under the theme “Professional Rules to Strengthen Credibility”.

The forum, held on July 26-27, 2026, brought together representatives of accounting and auditing firms, industry practitioners and regulators to discuss key regulatory developments, professional standards and future reforms aimed at enhancing the profession’s contribution to the national economy.

Opening the event, Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Executive Vice-President of the FSA, said credibility remains the profession’s most valuable asset, noting that high-quality



The forum forms part of the FSA’s 2026 regulatory programme to improve compliance with statutory and professional requirements.

auditing plays a vital role in ensuring reliable financial reporting and strengthening confidence in the economy.

He said the Authority favours a regulatory

approach that prioritises awareness, professional ethics and corrective action before enforcement measures wherever possible, while encouraging practitioners to embrace continuous improvement and strict adherence to international standards.

The forum forms part of the FSA’s 2026 regulatory programme to improve compliance with statutory and professional requirements, enhance audit quality and encourage dialogue between regulators and industry stakeholders.

One of the major initiatives highlighted during the event was the activation of the Register of Trainee Accountants, designed to create a comprehensive database of trainee professionals, facilitate targeted training programmes and establish clear career pathways for developing Omani talent.

Participants were also briefed on updates to the electronic registration system and the objectives of the new registry.

The Authority also presented findings from recent supervisory inspections of accounting and auditing firms, highlighting recurring violations requiring industry attention.

These included issuing audit reports without conducting adequate audit procedures, failure to comply with International Standards on Auditing, allowing unlicensed individuals to practise the profession; and providing both audit and financial statement preparation services to the same clients, compromising auditor independence.

The forum also reviewed recent legislative and regulatory developments. The FSA has completed a draft of the executive regulations governing the profession and submitted it for approval.

During 2026, it also issued new circulars covering the retention of audit files within Oman and the completion of registration and licensing procedures for practitioners.

TECH INVESTMENT

South Korea seals AI deals



Samsung Electronics and SK Group announced AI-related agreements worth about \$950 billion with US technology companies, underscoring surging demand for advanced chips and computing infrastructure.

The deals include a \$500 billion partnership between SK Hynix and Nvidia, while Samsung signed a \$200 billion memorandum with Broadcom covering memory chips. — Reuters

TRADE DISPUTE

Australia to challenge tariffs



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he would raise new tariffs imposed by the United States directly with President Donald Trump after Washington imposed duties on goods from 60 trading partners, including Australia.

Canberra described the measures as unjustified and said it would continue pressing for their removal through discussions with the US. — Reuters

LEGAL CHALLENGE

US firms sue over tariffs



Two US small businesses filed a lawsuit challenging President Donald Trump’s latest tariffs on imports from 60 trading partners, arguing the measures exceed presidential authority.

The case, filed in the US Court of International Trade, contends the duties lack the country-specific legal findings required and seek to revive tariffs previously ruled unlawful by the US Supreme Court. — Reuters

Stress intelligence: The new leadership competency



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS

It may be tougher than at any point in recent memory for leaders at the top to navigate technological disruptions, fractured global supply chains, geopolitical unpredictability and economic shocks, to adapt and thrive in competitive markets. These unpredictable and unprecedented global changes are not only rupturing trade and economic growth but also straining leaders as they move from one crisis to the next.

The ability to deal with a crisis was once considered an exceptional demand on leaders, but has now become a baseline condition of their job. Recent studies suggest that stress levels among leaders remain high and, in some cases, exceed those during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One plausible reason could be that the enemy was known during the pandemic, but now the world is fragmented, volatile and uncertain and the scope, scale and direction of the crisis are unclear; hence, prioritising decisions is tougher.

Leadership well-being is still less discussed than organisational performance, but elevated stress levels can meaningfully affect decision-making, performance and risk exposure. Most of us are aware that some amount of stress can be beneficial; it can enhance and accelerate cognition.

Psychologists call it ‘eustress’, a positive energising state that enhances rather than undermines capability. However, the fine

line between optimal and excessive stress is thinner than most people realise.

When stress becomes chronic, leaders enter a state of overstress, which impacts cognitive and emotional capabilities. Once this threshold is crossed, their perception, attention span, memory, recall and decision-making are impaired. In the first stage of decision-making, when framing the decision, leaders face restricted communication and gather limited information.

In the second stage, the exploring stage, leaders’ flexibility and creativity are reduced. They push towards short-term fixes at the expense of long-term consequences. Choosing the appropriate option is the final stage of decision-making, where stress distorts risk assessment.

In high-stress situations, the cumulative effect of the compounding errors can be dangerous. Business and political decisions have shaped the trajectory of trade and economics in addressing risks for decades.

The unprecedented, systemic and turbulent environments are creating a chronic state of stress for which leaders are ill-prepared. Science shows that stress degrades the quality of human judgment. Herein lies the multiplier effect of global risks.

The new skill that is needed to navigate turbulent environments and cognitive load is stress intelligence. This is not a wellness app or conventional breathing exercises. At a

Leadership wellbeing is still less discussed than organisational performance, but elevated stress levels can meaningfully affect decision-making, performance and risk exposure.

conventional level, stress intelligence is more fundamental. It is the capacity to recognise that stress is an integral part of leadership and to maintain decision quality under pressure.

Stress intelligence begins with developing individual awareness of one’s own patterns, understanding one’s decision-making during high stress and in crisis and building strategies to maintain performance under pressure. Evidence from leadership practice suggests that stress intelligence can be learned and leaders can build their cognitive resilience. Teams can also have shared practices to ensure the quality of collective decisions.

The world is in a state of heightened uncertainty and many experts expect this volatility to persist. Stress intelligence is a vital skill for leaders, as the ability to handle high stress levels will determine the quality of decisions. Leaders should accept the hard strategic reality and build stress intelligence to make sustainable decisions that impact multiple stakeholders.

Leaders today operate under historically high cognitive load, so stress has become a primary variable shaping decision quality, yet it remains poorly understood as a leadership capability. We want a world in which leaders possess the stress intelligence required to make wise decisions that benefit organisations, societies and future generations.

WAR? WHAT WAR? ALUMINIUM’S GULF DISRUPTION PREMIUM VANISHES

ANDY HOME

The Iran war is escalating again but you wouldn’t know it from the aluminium price. Damage to two Gulf smelters and constrained logistics at others have already blown a 2-million metric tonne hole in the global supply chain.

But after surging to a four-year high of \$3,787.50 per tonne in early June, London Metal Exchange (LME) three-month aluminium is now trading around \$3,170 per tonne, which is exactly where it was before the United States unleashed its “Operation Epic Fury” — joint strikes with Israel on Iran — on February 28.

And is the market right to be so relaxed about the unprecedented supply hit to what both Washington and Brussels view as a critical metal?

The market has been encouraged by the progress made by Emirates Global Aluminium in repairing and reactivating its Al Taweelah facility after an Iranian missile strike.

The alumina refinery is expected to return to production this quarter and as of July 2 the company had restarted the first 89 of 1,262 cells in the smelter. However, the situation at Aluminium Bahrain, also hit by Iranian strikes, remains unclear, while Qatar Aluminium is continuing to operate at 60 per cent capacity.

Gulf production slumped by 20 per cent in the first half of this year, according to the International Aluminium Institute. Smelter run rates have dropped by over 2 million tonnes annualised since the start of hostilities.

Full recovery could still be many months away, even assuming a return to some sort of normality.

That’s looking increasingly unlikely as the United States resumes its bombing campaign on Iran, Tehran tightens its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz and the Iranian-aligned Ansar Allah start enforcing their own blockade of the Red Sea.

The surprising market calm over the last few days rests on a growing confidence that the loss of Gulf metal, even if protracted, can be offset by higher exports from China and Indonesia.

China’s aluminium smelters are enjoying strong profit margins thanks to the combination of low alumina and high metal prices. Capacity utilisation is sitting close to 99 per cent, according to consultancy AZ Global.

Exports of semi-manufactured aluminium products such as bars, rods and tubes rose by 10 per cent year-on-year in the first five months of 2026, according to the World Bureau of Metal Statistics (WBMS), which collects official customs data. Shipments of 595,000 tonnes in May were the highest monthly count since November 2024.

While China’s product exports are not a like-for-like replacement for lost primary and alloy production from the Gulf, they can help rebalance the market by suppressing Western demand.

— Reuters

Digital banking drives Oman’s competitive edge

OMAN is entering a defining phase in its economic transformation. As the Sultanate of Oman accelerates the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040, the focus is shifting decisively toward building a diversified, private sector-led economy powered by innovation, technology and global connectivity.

That transition is already gathering pace. In 2025, the IMF projected Oman’s non-hydrocarbon sector to continue expanding steadily, supported by strong activity across logistics, manufacturing, tourism and services, while the country maintains one of the GCC’s strongest fiscal reform trajectories. At the same time, Oman’s investment ecosystem continues to mature, underpinned by regulatory modernisation, infrastructure expansion and rising foreign direct investment.

But diversification today is not only about ports, industrial zones or large-scale infrastructure. It is equally about the digital systems that enable businesses to operate efficiently, scale regionally and compete globally. In this context, digital banking is no longer merely a financial service enhancement. It is becoming critical economic infrastructure.

The Central Bank of Oman’s digital transformation agenda reflects this reality. The implementation of Oman’s Open Banking Framework and the Digital Banking Regulatory Framework in 2025 marks a significant milestone in the evolution of the Sultanate of Oman’s financial sector, positioning Oman among the region’s most forward-looking digital economies.

For corporates, the implications are substantial.

BANKING AS A PLATFORM FOR GROWTH

Modern digital banking platforms have evolved far beyond traditional transaction processing. Today, they enable integrated treasury management, real-time liquidity visibility, API-based banking



ALSALT AL KHARUSI

The writer is Country Head of Mashreq Oman

The implementation of Oman’s Open Banking Framework and the Digital Banking Regulatory Framework in 2025 marks a significant milestone in the evolution of the Sultanate of Oman’s financial sector, positioning Oman among the region’s most forward-looking digital economies.

connectivity, predictive cash flow analytics and seamless cross-border operations. This matters because speed, visibility and agility increasingly define corporate competitiveness.

Historically, treasury operations across many businesses remained fragmented, dependent on manual reconciliation processes and limited real-time visibility across multiple banking relationships.

Today, API-enabled digital banking ecosystems allow companies to integrate banking services directly into enterprise resource planning and treasury management systems, creating a unified, real-time view of financial operations.

The efficiency gains are significant. Global financial institutions estimate that digitised treasury and finance functions can reduce operational processing costs by up to 60 per cent, while AI-enabled financial forecasting tools are increasingly improving liquidity optimisation and working capital management across emerging markets.

For Oman’s growing SME ecosystem, these capabilities are particularly transformative. Faster onboarding, digital account opening, embedded financing solutions and automated credit assessments can materially improve access to financial services while reducing administrative friction for businesses seeking to scale.

SUPPORTING OMAN’S LOGISTICS AND INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

The strategic importance of digital banking becomes even more apparent when viewed alongside Oman’s diversification priorities.

Oman’s logistics sector continues to attract substantial investment. SOHAR Port and Freezone surpassed RO 11.5 billion in cumulative investments in 2025, reinforcing its position as one of the region’s fastest-growing industrial and logistics hubs.

Meanwhile, the Port of Salalah continues to strengthen its role as a critical global transshipment gateway, supported by expanded

capacity and enhanced international connectivity.

As supply chains become more integrated and time-sensitive, the underlying financial infrastructure must evolve accordingly.

Cross-border trade increasingly depends on real-time payment capabilities, integrated trade finance solutions and frictionless multi-currency transactions. Delays in documentation, settlements or financing approvals can create costly inefficiencies across international supply chains.

Digital banking addresses these challenges by enabling automated compliance checks, intelligent transaction routing and significantly faster trade finance execution.

Industry estimates suggest that digital cross-border payment systems can reduce international transaction costs by 30 per cent to 40 per cent, materially improving the economics of regional trade and supporting faster capital flows across GCC markets.

As Oman strengthens its role as a trade and investment gateway connecting the GCC, Asia and East Africa, the ability to facilitate seamless cross-border financial flows will become increasingly critical to sustaining private sector growth.

REAL-TIME FINANCE FOR A REAL-TIME ECONOMY

The broader transformation underway is the shift from periodic banking to continuous banking.

Businesses now operate in real time. Supply chains move dynamically, customer expectations are immediate and financial decisions increasingly require instant access to data and liquidity.

Oman’s Digital Banking Regulatory Framework, which came into force in 2025, creates the conditions for this next generation of financial services by enabling digital-first banking models under a clear and progressive regulatory structure. The framework also strengthens cybersecurity requirements and accelerates innovation across the banking ecosystem.

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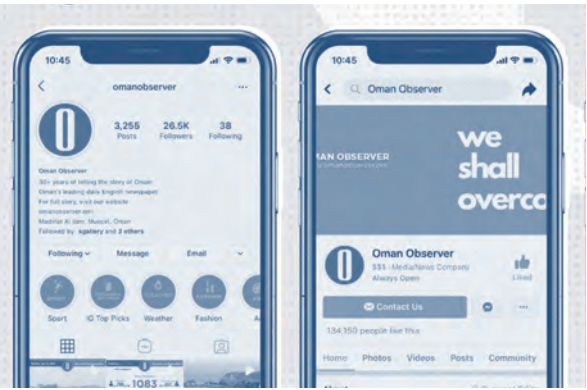
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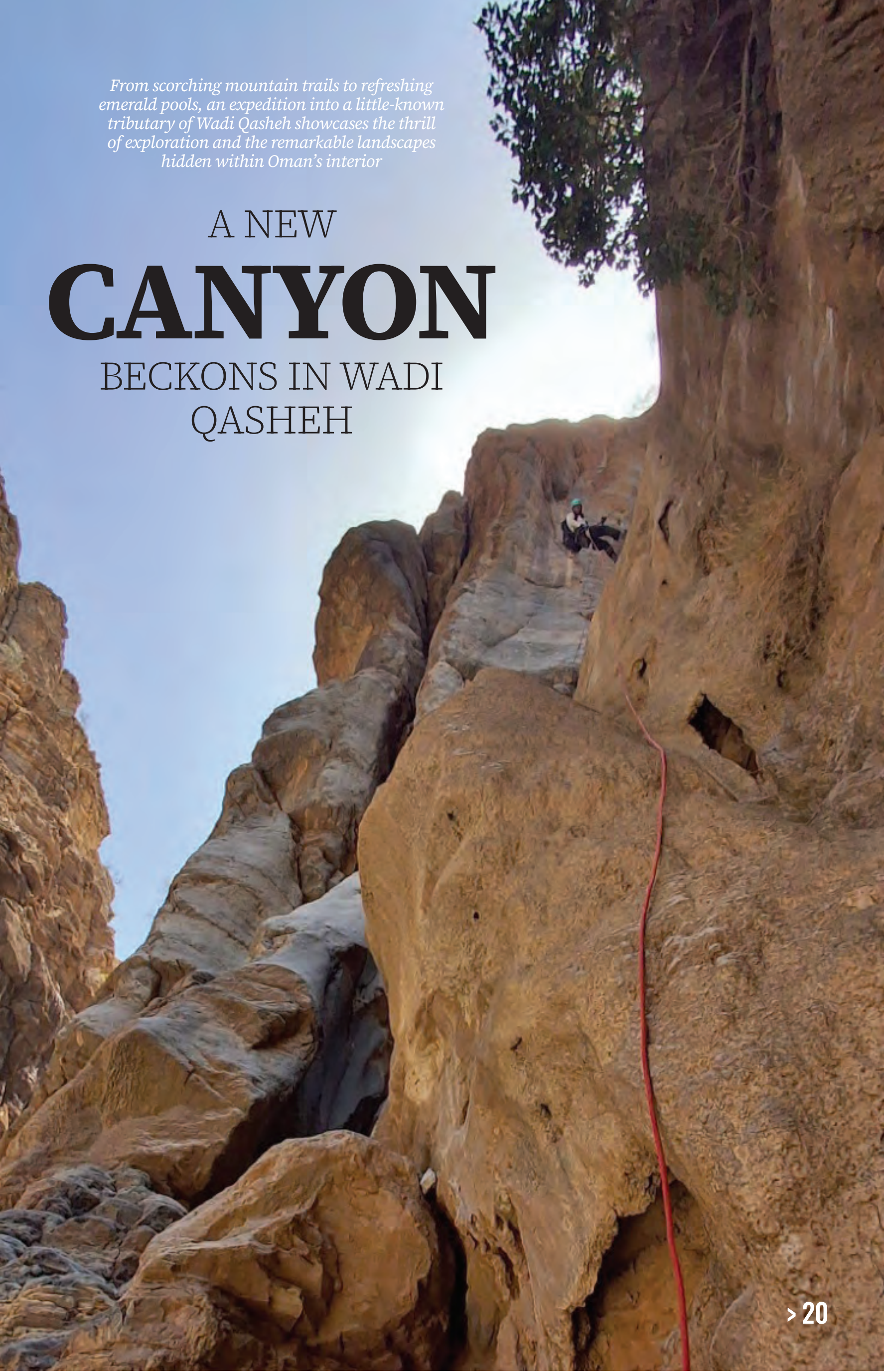


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ART/LIFE



From scorching mountain trails to refreshing emerald pools, an expedition into a little-known tributary of Wadi Qasheh showcases the thrill of exploration and the remarkable landscapes hidden within Oman’s interior

A NEW CANYON BECKONS IN WADI QASHEH

COMIC CON

MARVEL ANNOUNCES BLACK PANTHER 3



President of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige. — AFP

Superhero movie fans will officially return to Wakanda in “Black Panther III”, the newest entry in the Marvel franchise, the studio announced at Comic-Con on Saturday.

British actor David Jonsson will play the lead role in the film, due for release on December 15, 2028.

Known for his performances in the HBO series “Industry” and the 2025 film “The Long Walk”, Jonsson joins the Marvel Cinematic Universe as the son of T’Challa, the original Black Panther superhero played by Chadwick Boseman.

Boseman, who rose to global fame with 2018’s “Black Panther”, died in 2020 at the age of 43 from colon cancer.

Marvel unveiled the sequel before thousands of fans in Comic-Con’s famed Hall H, with Jonsson appearing on stage to celebrate the announcement.

“Thank you to this amazing family that I have the honour and the privilege and the blessing to join”, Jonsson told the crowd.

“I actually don’t want to say too much because I want to let this screen do the talk”, he added.

Oscar-winning filmmaker Ryan Coogler, who directed the first two “Black Panther” films, will return to helm the third instalment.

“Today is extra special”, Coogler said, joining Jonsson and Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige on stage.

Coogler said the film will follow T’Challa’s son as he comes of age and steps into his father’s superhero legacy.

The first “Black Panther” film grossed \$1.3 billion worldwide after its 2018 release and featured a cast including Michael B Jordan, Angela Bassett, Lupita Nyong’o, Forest Whitaker, Danai Gurira and Letitia Wright.

Marvel also revealed that Ryan Gosling will join the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Johnny Blaze in “Ghost Rider”, which is scheduled for release in 2028.

“Is this really happening?” Gosling said onstage alongside Feige.

Marvel Studios returned to Hall H after skipping last year’s event, less than five months before the release of the highly anticipated “Avengers: Doomsday”.

The studio brought directors Anthony and Joe Russo to the stage, along with several cast members including Robert Downey Jr, who will portray villain Victor Von Doom.

The film will continue the story after 2019’s “Endgame”, bringing together characters from the X-Men, Avengers, Black Panther and Fantastic Four franchises.

Capes and masks of the nefarious Victor Von Doom were handed out before Marvel’s presentation, transforming the audience into a green army. Some fans had waited several nights to get into the venue to hear from their favourite studio. “We’re all here for the same reason we love it, we love the feeling we get when we come to Hall H”, fan Wally from Orange County said.

“It was worth it, it was better than expected... I’m speechless”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



MUSIC

A country musician awaits his performance at International Cowboy Day celebrations in Nairobi, Kenya. — AFP



ART

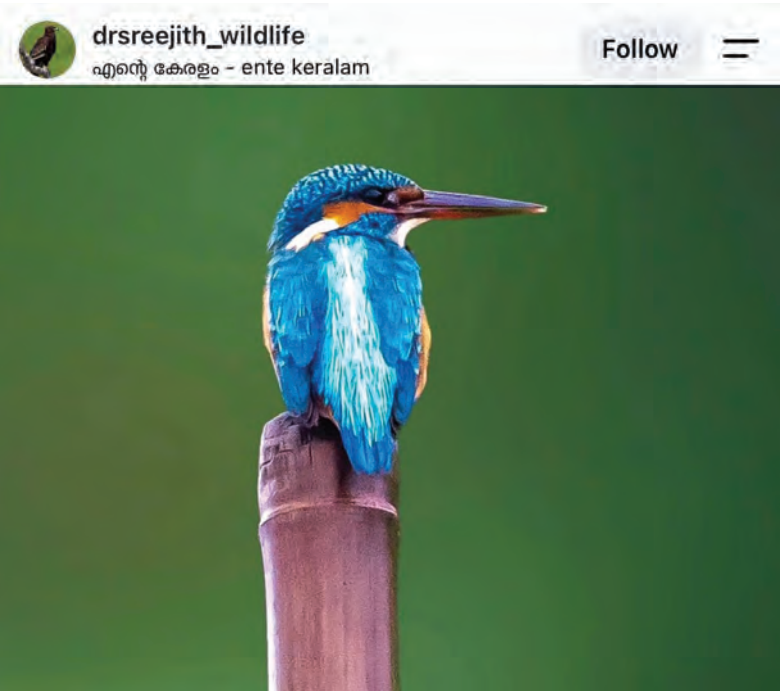
Simon-Marq glassmakers craft stained-glass windows for Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral in Reims, France. — AFP



FAN FARE

Cosplayers attend the annual Ani-Com and Games exhibition in Hong Kong. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“A flash of blue against an endless green”



“Where the sky whispers hello to the sea at Al Haffa beach, Salalah”

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CHARLI XCX RELEASES NEW ALBUM



The album explores themes of artistic immortality and identity. — AFP

British megastar Charli XCX released her first album since the smash hit “Brat” on Friday, pivoting away from hyperpop with a moody, self-referential collection titled “Music, Fashion, Film”.

The 33-year-old’s seventh studio album departs from the club-ready sound of “Brat”, which dominated the summer of 2024. More understated in tone, the record explores the insecurity surrounding global fame and commercial success, echoing themes from her tongue-in-cheek mockumentary “The Moment”, released earlier this year.

Across 11 compact tracks, Charli examines identity, creativity and artistic immortality through electronic textures, guitar riffs and her signature deadpan lyrics. The black-and-white vinyl cover brings together figures from its three titular worlds: Velvet Underground musician John Cale, designer Marc Jacobs and filmmaker Martin Scorsese.

Canadian director David Cronenberg narrates the closing track, “No One Lasts Forever”, reflecting on whether artists truly experience the immortality of their work. His cult film “Crash” inspired Charli’s fifth album. French actor Vincent Cassel, who collaborated with Cronenberg last year, appears in the video for “Camera”. Since completing her “Brat” tour, Charli has expanded into film, writing the soundtrack for Emerald Fennell’s adaptation of “Wuthering Heights” and taking on smaller acting roles.

In “The Moment”, she plays a version of herself trying to escape the “brat” persona and resist industry pressure.

Early reviews have been enthusiastic. The Guardian awarded the album five stars, calling it “gorgeously astute and disarmingly deep”, while Billboard described it as a “fascinating, addictive” addition to an increasingly formidable body of work in contemporary pop music. — AFP

From bathhouse to fish market, DJs revive Japan’s neighbourhoods



The collective hopes its videos will encourage people to rediscover neighbourhood businesses. — AFP

In a century-old Japanese public bathhouse, a DJ performs while men soak in hot baths behind him and students capture the unusual scene on camera.

The Tokyo bathhouse is one of many traditional businesses threatened by urban development and Japan’s ageing population. A group of students hopes to preserve its legacy by turning it into a temporary music venue.

Their collective, Login.jp, travels across Japan filming DJ performances in unexpected locations, including dye workshops, tofu shops, rice fields and rural trains.

The group has produced around 30 YouTube videos, describing the project as a way of “digitally archiving” small businesses by blending everyday life with electronic music.

Founders Jun Kim and Rihito Mizoguchi say their backgrounds shaped the idea. Kim is of Korean heritage, while Mizoguchi spent many years living in the United States.

“Sometimes when you’re too close to something, it becomes normalised and your appreciation for it tends to dwindle,” said 21-year-old Kim.

“We wanted to re-highlight those experiences for people who live among these businesses and traditions every day.”

Through the project, called The Shoten “small shop”, the pair also hope to reconnect younger generations with local communities through music.

Mizoguchi, 20, said growing up during the Covid-19 pandemic influenced their musical outlook. With nightclubs closed during their teenage years, they developed an appreciation for music-focused experiences rather than conventional club culture.

The collective uploaded its first video in early 2025, filmed in a fish market in Tokyo’s Akabane district, an area known for its retro shopping streets.

Finding willing participants was not easy.

“Each neighbourhood has its own



The project aims to show a side of Japan that exists beyond famous landmarks. — AFP



Login.jp, travels across Japan filming DJ performances in unexpected locations, including dye workshops, tofu shops, rice fields and rural trains. — AFP

distinct community and way of doing things,” Kim said. “You have to take time to speak with the owners and understand the culture around what they do.”

He added that the project aims to show a side of Japan that exists beyond famous landmarks such as Tokyo Tower and Mount Fuji.

At Denki-yu bathhouse in Tokyo’s Sumida district, DJ Zendo performs while bathers quietly enjoy the music.

“In a typical club, you drink and chat with friends,” the 28-year-old DJ said. “Here, taking a bath puts you in a state where you really focus on the music. It’s a completely new approach.”

Bathhouse owner Katsuhito Okubo admitted he was initially hesitant.

“A lot of people just want to hold events here,” he said. “But as we talked, I felt they were genuinely trying to understand our living space.”

The 32-year-old took over Denki-yu, which has belonged to his family for four generations, after learning it faced possible demolition.

“Many buildings disappear almost overnight,” he said. “Then neighbours ask each other, ‘What used to be here?’”

Okubo believes the bathhouse is one of the few places where people still practise kyozaï — peacefully coexisting without necessarily speaking.

“There are customers who have been coming here for decades. These elderly people teach us the art of simply being together.”

The collective hopes its videos will encourage people to rediscover neighbourhood businesses like Denki-yu. One video filmed inside a stationery shop has attracted more than two million views. — AFP

FEATURES

From scorching mountain trails to refreshing emerald pools, an expedition into a little-known tributary of Wadi Qasheh showcases the thrill of exploration and the remarkable landscapes hidden within Oman’s interior

DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

LAST week, together with my canyoning partner Hamood and my son Kevin, we decided to explore the fourth of the seven tributaries of Wadi Qasheh, a main branch of Wadi Tanuf.

Hamood came to our place in Al Mawaleh at 7:30 am to have a coffee before Kevin arrived at 8 am. The evening before, I had already prepared all the equipment we would need to open this new wadi: drill, anchors, ropes, and all the canyoning gear.

Kevin arrived at 8 sharp, and we hit the road in Hamood’s car, heading towards Al Faraa, our destination.

It was extremely hot, with temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius even in the shade. As usual, we stopped at our favourite coffee shop in Hay Al Turath for double-cheese, double-egg paratha sandwiches and some karak tea.

I was very happy to have Kevin with us because he had not joined me on adventure trips for quite a long time.

The only partner missing that day was our friend Rami, who was spending a month in France. To tease him, Hamood sent him a selfie of the three of us with our backpacks on, ready to start our hike from Al Faraa towards the new canyon.

Once we reached Al Faraa like on our previous trips, we followed the trail linking Al Faraa to the abandoned village of Al Rahba. We were completely exposed to the sun, but luckily a light breeze cooled down our overheated engines a little.

Just before the start of the canyon, we stopped in the shade next to an ancient wall, probably built long ago to mark or protect a domain. We took the opportunity to rehydrate before continuing.

Fifteen minutes later, we reached our starting point and entered the bed of the wadi. We climbed down a series of small walls and soon reached the first significant drop, where we had to fix our first metallic anchor in order to abseil.

I was the first to attach my descender to the rope and tackle the 20-metre drop, followed by Kevin, with Hamood coming down last. About fifteen minutes later, the canyon narrowed dramatically, and we realised we had reached the final vertical section leading into Wadi Qasheh.

We encountered three consecutive drops ranging between seven and ten metres each before arriving at the final massive abseil. I measured the drop with my laser range finder: 78 metres.

There, I found an excellent natural thread in the rock to secure the rope. From above, I could see a comfortable ledge halfway down the cliff where the three of us would be able to stand safely, pull the rope, install another anchor, and prepare for the final descent into the crystal-clear pool in Wadi Qasheh — the same pool where we used to stop for snacks during our previous trips.



A NEW CANYON BECKONS IN WADI QASHEH



The view during the descent was absolutely stunning.

Once I reached the ledge, roughly halfway down the cliff, I installed a metallic anchor before Hamood and Kevin joined me.

From there, we could hardly wait to reach the magnificent pool below and cool our exhausted bodies.

Once again, I descended first, followed by Kevin, then Hamood.

The moment each of us jumped into the crystal-clear water was indescribable — a heavenly feeling of joy and reward after such a demanding effort to reach this small piece of paradise.

As the French say, ‘Après l’effort, le réconfort’ — after the effort comes the reward.

After cooling down, we enjoyed drinks and snacks before beginning the 45-minute hike back to the vehicle.

When we finally reached an area with phone coverage again, we received a message from Rami calling us ‘traitors’.

We arrived home around 6 pm and during the drive back we were already planning our next adventures: exploring three more undescended tributaries of Wadi Qasheh.