

IN BRIEF

OMAN, US TRADE
HITS **₹555.26M**

Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, received the representatives of the Oman Trade Office in the United States of America, affiliated with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, during their visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the office’s key achievements and future plans were discussed, along with the opportunities and challenges encountered, and ways to enhance cooperation to ensure the realisation of the objectives. It is worth mentioning that the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America reached approximately RO 555.26 million by the end of July 2026.

DETAILS ON P3

84% AVAIL SOCIAL
PROTECTION
BENEFITS

Eighty-four per cent of the population of the Sultanate of Oman were covered by at least one social protection programme by 2025. Segments entitled to social protection benefits were covered at 100 per cent, whereas the percentage of children benefiting from social protection benefits reached 98 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Data published by the NCSI shows that the number of children who benefited from social protection in 2025 was 1,251,274 in addition to 9,008 children who benefited from the orphan benefit programme and 16,703 beneficiaries from the disability benefit programme within the 0-17 age group.

DETAILS ON P2

BANGKOK UNDER WATER



People travel in a pickup truck through a flooded area in Bangkok, Thailand. Heavy rains have killed eight people in Thailand since mid-September, the government said on Monday as Bangkok battled flooding for a fourth consecutive day, with at least eight more confirmed dead in neighbouring Myanmar. — Reuters

New promotion system
for Omani employees

RO 10 million allotted for promotions this year

SAUD AL ANSARI AND
BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

THE Ministry of Labour has announced the implementation of a new promotion system for Omani civil employees in government administrative units, effective from 2026, with RO 10 million allocated for promotions this year.

The announcement was made during a media briefing held by the ministry in Muscat on the new promotion system, attended by Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, along with ministry officials, specialists and representatives of government administrative units.

Abdullah bin Muhanna al Kharousi, Director-General of Administrative Review and Follow-up at the Ministry of Labour, gave a presentation outlining the new promotion tracks, their conditions, criteria and regulations, evaluation and selection mechanisms, and the role of promotion committees in government units.

The new system forms part of the efforts to develop human resources management practices and organise promotions through clear mechanisms and criteria, strengthening the link between performance and career development while taking into account the financial allocations approved for promotions.

The promotion rules apply to Omani civil employees holding permanent positions in government



ABDULLAH BIN MUHANNA AL KHAROUSI

Director-General of Administrative Review and Follow-up at the Ministry of Labour.

NEW MECHANISMS
FOR ASSESSMENT,
SELECTION

PROMOTIONS WILL
BE THROUGH THREE
PATHWAYS

NEED 3 ‘EXCELLENT’
RATINGS IN EJADA
SYSTEM

PERFORMANCE SCORE
CALCULATED AT

75
POINTS

INDIVIDUAL
COMPETENCE
SCORE AT

12.5
POINTS

SCORES ARE
DISTRIBUTED IN EQUAL
PROPORTIONS

ASSESSMENT NEEDS
APPROVAL BY
SUPERVISOR

EACH UNIT WILL
HAVE A PROMOTION
COMMITTEE

administrative units, except for categories governed by special employment systems, which remain subject to the promotion rules stipulated in their respective regulations.

THREE TRACKS

Al Kharousi said the promotion system is based on three main tracks: the fast track for exceptional performance, the flexible track based on competitive selection, and the special track for retention and recruitment. The three tracks are designed to address different employment situations according to specific conditions, criteria and regulations.

The fast track targets employees demonstrating exceptional performance. To qualify, an employee must have spent at least three years in the grade preceding the grade to which promotion is sought and must have received three ‘Excellent’ performance evaluation reports under the ‘Ejada’ system. The promotion must also remain within the maximum career progression stipulated under the job classification and grading system issued by Civil Service Council Decision No 10/2010, with no promotion impediment applying to the employee.

The flexible track is based on competition among employees who meet the promotion requirements and is implemented within the financial allocations remaining from the amount allocated for the fast track.

TURN TO P3

IRAN SAYS NO FURTHER TALKS WITH US IN NEW YORK

TEHRAN: Iran’s delegation in New York for the UN General Assembly is not planning further talks with the United States, state media reported on Monday, after US President Donald Trump said he expected more negotiations soon. Iranian and US officials last week held indirect talks mediated by Qatar on the sidelines of the

UN meeting, with Tehran saying it presented seven conditions for ending their war and reopening the Strait of Hormuz. But state news agency IRNA on Monday quoted an unnamed source close to the UN delegation as saying there were no more talks scheduled.

“Iran’s delegation in New York

has no plans for negotiations with the United States,” IRNA quoted the source as saying.

“Iran’s views and positions were conveyed clearly and explicitly to the US side... via a Qatari mediator,” IRNA said.

The Iranian delegation would return to Tehran on Tuesday, the news agency added.

Trump on Saturday publicly rejected Iran’s latest proposal for ending the war, but told US media outlet Axios on Sunday that he expected talks to resume in the coming days.

Despite Trump’s rejection, Tehran has said it is waiting for a formal US response before deciding on its next steps. — AFP

SpaceX puts Starship megarocket in orbit for first time

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk’s Starship megarocket reached orbit for the first time on Monday after blasting off from Texas, in a major milestone for SpaceX’s future plans, including trips to the Moon and Mars.

The black-and-silver behemoth, standing more than 120 metres tall, rose through a thick cloud of smoke on an ambitious 14th test flight. The upper stage separated from the Super Heavy booster and reached orbit about 26 minutes into the flight.

During the test, expected to last about 10 hours, the experimental rocket’s upper stage is set to orbit Earth several times and deploy 26 next-generation Starlink satellites.

As a precaution, the spacecraft was launched on a suborbital trajectory and - after some back-and-forth - the launch team decided to perform a second burn to reach orbit. “Starship is orbital,” announced one member of the launch team. Satellite deployment began minutes later.



The SpaceX Starship and Super Heavy v3 Booster lift off on its 14th test flight from the SpaceX launch complex in Starbase, Texas, US, on Monday. — Reuters

Previous Starship tests, all conducted on safer, less demanding suborbital trajectories, had ended in spectacular explosions, including over the Caribbean.

The latest test flight, coming three months after SpaceX’s high-profile stock market debut, aims to accelerate development of the largest and most powerful rocket ever designed. After several years of development and testing in Texas, SpaceX began flying Starship in its full configuration in 2023 and has

since made numerous modifications through the successes and failures of successive tests.

But enormous technical challenges remain before Starship, which Musk wants to make fully reusable, can conduct commercial flights, deploy data centres in orbit or reach the Moon or the Red Planet.

With this new test, SpaceX hopes to usher in an “exciting new phase” of development that will include, among other things, tests of refuelling the rocket in orbit. — AFP

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Oman and Tanzania seek stronger economic ties

MUSCAT: The first bilateral consultation meeting between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Republic of Tanzania was held in Muscat.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Tanzanian side was headed by Denis Lazaro Londo, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade.

During the meeting, existing bilateral relations between the two countries and prospects for cooperation in the fields of investment, commercial exchanges, and logistics were discussed. The two sides also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi, Head of the Africa Department at the Foreign Ministry, Maulidah Bwanakheir Hassan, Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanzania to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials from both countries. — ONA

84pc of Omanis avail social protection benefits in 2025

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Eighty-four per cent of the population of the Sultanate of Oman were covered by at least one social protection programme by 2025. Segments entitled to social protection benefits were covered at 100 per cent, whereas the percentage of children benefiting from social protection benefits reached 98 per cent, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Data published by the NCSI shows that the number of children who benefited from social protection in 2025 was 1,251,274, in addition to 9,008 children benefiting from the orphan benefit programme and 16,703 beneficiaries from the disability benefit programme within the 0-17 age group.

The total number of women who benefited from social protection benefits in 2025 reached 743,023, representing 50 per cent of all beneficiaries. Of these women, 616,446 received child benefits, 5,076 received orphan benefits, 5,686 received widow benefits, 95,576 received elderly benefits and 20,239 received disability benefits.

The total number of young Omanis aged 18 to 29 who benefited from the social protection system was 10,740, representing 2 per cent of the total youth population.

Data showed that 20 per cent of all young Omanis benefiting from social protection programmes hail from the Al Batinah North Governorate, while young people with disabilities made up more than half of all young Omanis receiving benefits.

The number of young Omanis who received disability benefits was 8,219, representing 76.5 per cent of the total of young beneficiaries.

The number of orphans who benefited from the social protection system was 1,220, representing 11.4 per cent, while the number of widows receiving benefits was 50, representing 0.5 per cent.

A total of 174,662 senior Omanis received benefits in 2025, representing 93 per cent of all senior Omanis. The total number of Omani persons with disabilities who benefited from the social protection system, while the total amount disbursed to this segment reached RO 74 million. — ONA

COMMUNITY LIBRARIES FORUM BEGINS ON OCT 5

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth will organise a forum for community libraries and cultural centres from October 5 to 8. The event will focus on fostering knowledge-based partnerships as a cornerstone for enhancing the performance of these institutions.

The forum seeks to expand areas of cooperation, facilitate the exchange of expertise and utilise available resources to improve services and activities in a manner that enhances the role of these institutions in society.

The forum is themed ‘Partners



The forum aims to encourage institutions to use digital technologies to enhance their services.

in Knowledge Empowerment and Building Community Identity’, reflecting a commitment to foster integration and partnership between the ministry and community libraries and cultural centres. It aims to enhance the role of these institutions in the cultural and intellectual landscape, provide a platform for dialogue and the exchange of expertise and explore ways to upgrade the quality of services and programmes to keep pace with developments in the sector of knowledge and culture. — ONA

Sur symposium focuses on infrastructure planning

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
SUR, SEPT 28

A symposium on optimal planning for resilient infrastructure is being held in Sur, bringing together specialists, academics, researchers and representatives of government and private-sector institutions to discuss ways of strengthening infrastructure resilience and sustainability.

Organised by the Oman Water Society (OWS) in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Sharqiyah South and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the symposium features scientific sessions and lectures by specialists in the water and infrastructure sectors.

The event is examining prospects for planning and developing infrastructure systems capable of withstanding natural hazards, adapting to future risks and ensuring the continuity of essential services. It is scheduled to conclude with technical recommendations, which will be announced through social media platforms and published in the media.

In his opening address, Zaher al Suleimani, Chairman of the Oman Water Society, said infrastructure was no longer limited to bridges, roads, ports, communication networks and water production and distribution facilities.

“Today, it has become the backbone connecting the components of the national and societal economy. As countries progress in their development journey, the extent of this progress is crucial,” he said.

He noted that economic and social security were increasingly linked to the quality of



The seminar was held under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

The seminar examines prospects for planning and developing infrastructure systems capable of withstanding natural hazards

infrastructure and its ability to remain operational under diverse conditions.

Al Suleimani said resilience was no longer an intellectual luxury but a fundamental requirement for serious planning that anticipates the natural, human and economic risks to which infrastructure projects may be exposed over the long term.

At the heart of optimal planning, he said, was the need to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach.

“Investing in resilience is not merely an additional cost; it is an investment in the continuity of services and the protection of public and private investments,” he said.

Al Suleimani said the choice of Sur as the venue for the symposium was significant given Al Sharqiyah South Governorate’s economic and developmental diversity, encompassing ports, industry, tourism and fisheries.

Its coastal location also places the governorate among areas

facing environmental and climate-related challenges that require resilient infrastructure. Holding the symposium in Sur reflected a strategic shift towards involving governorates in development-related decision-making and supporting scientific and engineering initiatives outside Muscat, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The organisers said the resilience and adaptive capacity of such systems in the face of natural hazards and climate change were important indicators of the effectiveness of urban planning and national preparedness. They also contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.

The symposium is highlighting international best practices and expertise in the planning, design and management of resilient infrastructure and examining ways to translate the concept of resilience into practical measures.

Oman steps up fight against human trafficking

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Oman, represented by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), has launched an awareness campaign highlighting the legal consequences of human trafficking and measures available to protect victims.

The campaign comes amid strengthened legislation under Oman’s new Anti-Human Trafficking Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No 78/2025 in September 2025. The law replaced the previous 2008 legislation and expanded the definition and scope of trafficking offences.

Under the new law, human trafficking carries a maximum penalty of 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to RO 100,000. In aggravated cases, including those involving children, organised criminal



اللجنة الوطنية لمكافحة الاتجار بالبشر
NATIONAL COMMITTEE TO COMBAT Human Trafficking

groups, or transnational trafficking, the sentence can range from seven to 15 years, with fines of up to RO 100,000.

A source from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) said the continued awareness efforts reflect the authorities’ vigilance and their focus on prevention, early detection and victim protection.

The campaign also highlights the broader definition of trafficking under the new law, which covers exploitation including slavery, servitude, forced labour and other forms

of exploitation. The legislation also specifically criminalises the confiscation or destruction of passports when used as a means of trafficking.

The new legislation strengthens protections for victims, including exemptions from certain residency- and labour-related fees and fines and protection from liability for acts committed as a consequence of their exploitation. It also provides for specialised shelters and support services, including legal, psychological and medical assistance.

The law further provides for penalties for those who use coercive measures against victims. Passport confiscation or destruction for trafficking purposes is specifically criminalised under the new legislation.

The NCCHT had earlier launched the ‘Aman’ awareness campaign, a three-month initiative aimed at raising public awareness of human trafficking, reporting mechanisms and victim support. The campaign used social media, workshops and exhibitions and focused successively on understanding trafficking, safe reporting and victim protection.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, Oman dealt with 39 human trafficking cases, 4,199 child abuse cases, 26 forced marriage cases and eight cases involving abuse of women in 2025 through an integrated legal and social framework.



SHORT TAKES



Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri holds talks with a representative of the Oman Trade Office in the US.

OMAN-US TRADE REACHES 555 MILLION BY JULY

MUSCAT: Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy, received the representatives of Oman Trade Office in the United States of America, affiliated with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, during their visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the Office's key achievements and future plans were discussed, along with the opportunities and challenges encountered, and ways to enhance joint cooperation to ensure the realisation of the objectives for which the Office was established.

The visit also focused on activating mutual economic and investment partnerships, foremost among them supporting Omani exports and increasing their access to the American market, in addition to attracting American investments to the Sultanate of Oman and developing areas of trade cooperation between the two countries.

It is worth noting that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the United States reached approximately RO 555.26 million by the end of July 2026. Among the most prominent exports from the Sultanate of Oman to the United States are chemicals and aluminium, while vehicles and means of transport are among the most prominent goods imported from America to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

AI can accelerate medical research, experts say

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE can play a major role in accelerating medical research, improving healthcare decision-making and supporting more precise treatment, experts said at the Second Annual Scientific Research Day organised by the University Medical City.

Held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, and patronised by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the University Medical City, the one-day event brought together researchers, academics and healthcare professionals to explore the theme 'From Evidence to Excellence'.

Experts examined the potential of AI and machine learning in predicting health complications and supporting research and clinical practice in areas including precision medicine, oncology, cardiology, organ transplantation, infectious diseases, patient safety and clinical pharmacy.

The participating researchers presented work spanning 20 fields, including population health, health economics, health policy, medical education, quality of care, public health and basic sciences, providing a broad overview of research being conducted by the University Medical City and health and academic institutions across Oman.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the event, Prof Zobair Younossi,



The Second Annual Scientific Research Day was organised by the University Medical City.

renowned researcher, Chair of the Global Council on Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH) and Professor of Medicine at Georgetown University in the United States, said AI has enormous potential to advance medical research.

"Artificial intelligence can accelerate medical research by analysing massive, complex datasets far beyond human capability to fast-track discoveries, optimise trials, and improve patient outcomes," he said. He said AI has an important role in areas including drug discovery and development, genomic and big-data analysis, clinical trial optimisation, disease progression and predictive modelling, as well as research assistance and scientific writing.

Dr Siham bint Salim al Sinani, CEO of the University Medical City, said the value of research should be measured by its impact on decision-making and clinical practice rather than simply by the number of studies completed.

"At the University Medical City, we aim for research that remains close to the patient — starting with a genuine question arising from practice and returning to it with better evidence, more precise decisions, or actionable solutions," she said. The programme attracted 600 researchers, academics and healthcare professionals from health, academic and research institutions across Oman. A total of 15 oral research presentations and 60 scientific posters were selected from 340 papers submitted for consideration in the scientific programme.

Prof Dr Murtadha bin Khamis al Khabouri, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Medical Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, said Scientific Research Day provides a platform for researchers from diverse disciplines and institutions to present and discuss their work and develop new research partnerships.

He said the next phase should focus on greater integration between research and clinical practice, as well as stronger collaboration between health and academic institutions, to align research with national health priorities and translate findings into practical applications and policies.

The event concluded with the announcement of the award winners.

NEW PROMOTION SYSTEM FOR OMANI EMPLOYEES

FROM P1

Selection is not based solely on meeting the eligibility requirements but also takes into account the employee's performance and competence, including 'Ejada' performance reports and individual competency assessments. Individual competency scores are subject to specific controls and distribution ratios aimed at limiting excessive ratings and ensuring more objective differentiation among eligible employees.

ATTRACTING TALENT

The special track covers retention and recruitment promotions and is intended to meet government units' needs to retain qualified employees and attract talent, according to the conditions, criteria and regulations established for the track.

Al Kharousi stressed that meeting the requirements of any of the three tracks forms the basis for an employee to enter the promotion process, while actual promotions remain subject to the financial allocations approved for each unit and the ranking of eligible employees under the rules governing each track. With respect to the flexible pathway, he indicated that promotion is based on the ranking of employees according to the total scores of each, out of 100 points. The employee's job performance score is calculated at a maximum of 75 points, based on three-quarters of the average of the highest three performance appraisal reports in the grade he/she occupies, and 25 points for individual competence.

He said that individual competence scores are calculated at a maximum of 12.5 points for assessing the employee's readiness to assume a higher post, and a maximum of 12.5 points for assessing the development of his/her skills and



capabilities in the field of the post.

He added that the direct supervisor assigns the individual competence assessment for employees nominated for promotion who are under his/her direct supervision in each of the two aforementioned criteria. To ensure that all employees are not awarded equal scores in this criterion, scores are distributed in proportions of the number of employees as follows: 20 to 25 points for no more than 10 per cent of the number of employees nominated for promotion under his/her supervision; 15 to 19 points for no more than 35 per cent; 10 to 14 points for no more than 50 per cent; and 1 to 9 points for 5 per cent of the number of employees nominated for promotion under his/her supervision. This assessment is then submitted to the higher supervisor for approval.

The new system also regulates the work of promotion committees in government administrative units. Each unit will establish a promotion committee by decision of its head, comprising an odd number of members, with at least three members. The committee

chairperson must hold a position no lower than director general, while a secretary will be appointed without voting rights.

The committee will receive promotion applications, verify that nominees meet the relevant conditions, criteria and regulations, and review the data and documents supporting each nomination. Where necessary, it may discuss the reasons and basis for a nomination with the senior or direct supervisor if the application does not contain sufficient supporting documents and information.

TWICE A YEAR

Al Kharousi said promotion decisions will be issued by the head of each government unit twice a year, with promotions taking effect on January 2 and July 2. If a decision includes several employees whose promotions take effect on the same date, their seniority will be determined according to their seniority in the grade from which they were promoted.

Regarding the methodology for distributing the financial allocation for promotions, the ministry said that RO 10 million has been

earmarked for distribution among the entities covered according to a mechanism based on proportionality according to the number of those eligible for promotion in each entity, such that the total number of eligible persons equals the sum of the number of eligible persons in all entities, and the financial allocation for the entity equals (the number of eligible persons in the entity ÷ the total number of eligible persons) × RO 10 million.

The Ministry of Labour affirmed that the methodology for distributing the financial allocation for promotions embodies fairness of distribution, such that each entity's share is directly linked to the number of its eligible persons; clarity of calculation through a unified equation that can be applied and verified; accommodation of differences in the sizes of entities, as entities with a larger number of eligible persons receive a larger share in proportion; and full distribution of the amount, as the entire sum of RO 10 million is distributed among the entities covered.

Mohammed bin Mubarak al Kalbani, Director-General of Development and Quality Assurance at the Ministry of Labour, said the 'Ejada' system is a key component of the promotion framework, linking an employee's actual performance to career development opportunities according to the track for which the employee meets the relevant conditions and criteria.

He said the link between performance and career development promotes a culture of performance and excellence, with promotions based not only on seniority but also on performance, competence and merit. Clear promotion requirements, he added, enable employees to understand the requirements for career advancement and encourage them to improve their performance, skills and capabilities.

SPOTLIGHT



POTATOES

DRIVE FOOD SECURITY

LOCAL PRODUCTION CAN SHORTEN SUPPLY CHAINS, REDUCE TRANSPORTATION AND HANDLING COSTS, AND PROVIDE FRESHER PRODUCE TO CONSUMERS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

ONCE a relatively minor crop in Oman, potatoes are emerging as an increasingly important part of Oman's food-security drive, backed by growing investment in local agricultural production.

Between 2021 and 2025, Oman allocated an estimated RO 36.4 million to 106 agricultural projects, targeting crops that can meet rising domestic demand, strengthen local supply chains and reduce reliance on imports.

Of this investment, 13 projects worth RO 7.34 million were directed towards potato production, highlighting the crop's growing commercial importance alongside traditionally cultivated crops such as onions and garlic.

The official project data was published in Food Security Labs, a book documenting 'outputs and projects that have contributed to increasing local production, strengthening the food stockpile, enhancing added value, supporting the national economy, and ultimately localising the "Second Billion" in food security; the general vegetable cultivation secured the largest share of new activity.'

The diverse vegetable crops secured 56 projects totalling RO 15.95 million, directed towards high-demand local items, including tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and leafy greens.

Onion production ranked second with 30 projects valued at RO 8.00 million, driven by year-round domestic consumption and the crop's long-term storage viability.

Garlic cultivation gained 9 targeted projects, which accounted for the remainder of the portfolio, focusing specifically on import substitution for a high-demand commodity.

While onions, along with garlic, are traditionally and historically rooted crops in Oman, their role and economic scale have evolved significantly over time. Potato, meanwhile, is seeing an increase in commercial production.

For centuries, Omani farmers cultivated onions alongside traditional staples like dates, garlic, wheat, limes, and pomegranates.

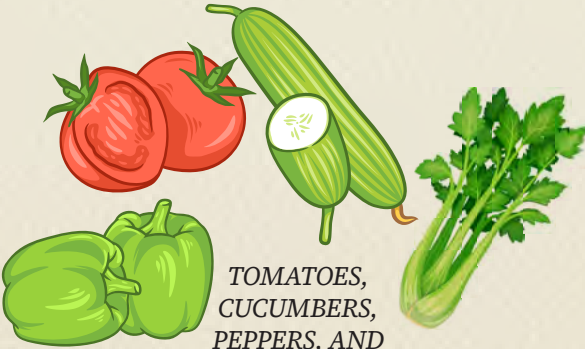
Traditional irrigation systems, like aflaj, were crucial. Onions were grown as a seasonal field crop irrigated through Oman's ancient aflaj. Because onions are relatively drought-tolerant and store well compared to delicate leafy greens, they were a practical crop for local communities in arid conditions.



OMAN INVESTED

36.4

MILLION IN 106 AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS BETWEEN 2021 AND 2025.



TOMATOES, CUCUMBERS, PEPPERS, AND LEAFY VEGETABLES ACCOUNTED FOR 56 PROJECTS WORTH

15.95

MILLION.

INCREASING DOMESTIC PRODUCTION CAN CUT IMPORTS AND EXPOSURE TO GLOBAL SUPPLY FLUCTUATIONS.

Onions are part of culinary heritage and have been the foundational flavour base for traditional Omani cuisine, used extensively in classic dishes like Omani Shuwa, Harees, Salona, and spice mixtures.

Now there is a shift from traditional farming to modern commercial scale. While onions were historically grown on smallholder farms mainly for family consumption or local village trade, the modern era sees Oman relying heavily on imported onions to meet rising national demand.

In recent years, the government has strategically targeted onions to move back from imported goods to mass local production.

Onions now have a strategic crop status, as they are designated as a primary focus for national food security because of their long shelf life and year-round daily consumption.

Unlike dates, wheat, onions, garlic, and limes, potatoes were introduced to the region much more recently as part of modern agricultural development. While not native to traditional Omani heritage, potatoes have become a strategic priority in recent national food security plans.

High consumer demand is the major reason. Changing dietary habits, expanding urban populations, and the growth of local food processing industries and restaurant chains have driven up potato consumption.

Oman traditionally imported the vast majority of its potatoes. According to experts, current investments aim to replace foreign imports with domestic yield. Specialised agricultural areas, such as the Al Najd region of Dhofar, have proven to be successful because they provide the cooler winter seasons, vast land, and modern centre-pivot irrigation needed to grow potatoes efficiently on a commercial scale.

The local produce has been able to strengthen supply chains and market stability. Agricultural officials highlighted that spreading investments across multiple crop categories mitigates production risks, protecting local markets against unexpected climate disruptions and global price swings.

Expanding local farm capacity also optimises fresh produce logistics because import costs are reduced and there is no need for long-distance freight, cold storage facilities, and handling expenses.

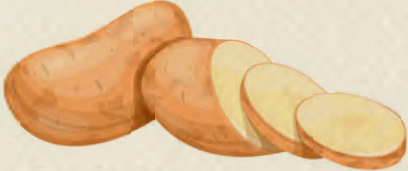
Most importantly, it is expected to help with price stability and quality, as localised production ensures fresher crops in supermarkets.



ONION PRODUCTION RECEIVED 30 PROJECTS VALUED AT

8

MILLION.



7.34

MILLION WENT TO 13 PROJECTS GROWING POTATOES.

THE AL NAJD REGION OF DHOFAR HAS EMERGED AS A PROMISING AREA FOR POTATO CULTIVATION.

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT TO
SHOWCASE URBAN
HEALTH AT
UNESCO ACADEMY

The Muscat Governorate, represented by the Muscat Learning City Team, is participating in the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities Academy 2026 in Shanghai, organised by the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning in cooperation with Shanghai Open University. The academy brings together representatives of 32 learning cities from Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas, including Shanghai, Beijing, Turin, Dresden, Athens, Edmonton, Medellin, Nairobi, Ankara and Abuja.

Muscat joined the Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities in February 2024, along with Sur and Nizwa. Its selection for the 2026 academy marks a further step in its participation in the network and provides an opportunity to exchange experiences and present local practices in lifelong learning, sustainable urban development, health and quality of life, digital transformation, sustainability and community engagement. The academy combines online learning, practical activities and experience-sharing among participating cities, culminating in an in-person programme in Shanghai from October 11 to 18, 2026.

During the Shanghai programme, participants will attend interactive sessions and workshops, undertake field visits, participate in artificial intelligence labs and engage in networking and partnership-building activities. They will also take part in the 2026 International Conference on Digital Lifelong Learning, themed “Smart, Innovative, and Inclusive,” and the Lifelong Learning Exhibition.

A key highlight of Muscat’s participation will be its selection to present a session titled “Transforming Urban Health through Lifelong Learning” on October 14.

The Muscat team will present local experiences and initiatives linking urban health with lifelong learning, including efforts to promote health awareness, healthy lifestyles, physical activity and quality of life.

The presentation will also highlight cooperation among the health, municipal and community sectors in developing a healthier and more sustainable city.

The academy’s Urban Health Hub, developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization Academy, focuses on integrating lifelong learning into health policies and practices, promoting health literacy, using evidence in urban planning and encouraging healthy lifestyles through community learning systems.

Muscat’s participation involves a four-member, multi-sectoral team representing the Muscat Governorate, Muscat Municipality, the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science and the health sector, alongside local community representation. — ONA

Oman steps up efforts to protect
rangelands on Arab Argiculture Day

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joined Arab countries in marking Arab Agriculture Day, highlighting the importance of sustainable rangeland management as a key pillar of agricultural development, livestock production and resource conservation.

This year’s observance focuses on the sustainability of Arab rangelands and their role in supporting livestock, preserving natural resources and strengthening the resilience of rural and pastoral communities.

Eng Mansour bin Hamoud al Wadhahi, Assistant Director-General for Agricultural Development at the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources, said sustainable agricultural development depends on protecting land, water, vegetation and other natural resources.

He stressed the need for sustainable management of rangelands amid growing



The initiative plans to regulate grazing and restore degraded land.

challenges posed by climate change, irregular rainfall, rising temperatures, water scarcity, land degradation and unregulated grazing. Al Wadhahi said modern technologies, including remote sensing, geographic information systems, satellite imagery, climate data and digital mapping, should be increasingly used to monitor rangeland conditions, identify areas vulnerable to degradation and support restoration and grazing decisions.

Oman’s diverse geography has created different rangeland and pastoral systems, ranging from mountainous and desert environments to seasonal grazing areas in Dhofar. He noted that Oman has long recognised the importance of natural rangelands to livestock, the environment and local communities. The Rangelands and Livestock Management Law, issued under Royal Decree No 8/2003, stipulates that natural and cultivated rangelands are state-owned and designated for public benefit. Among Oman’s initiatives is the rangeland rest programme in Dhofar Governorate, launched on the sidelines of the 16th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Riyadh in December 2014, with the participation of national and international partners. — ONA

Cultural Club launches 19 new Omani publications

MUSCAT: The Cultural Club launched 19 new publications for 2026, highlighting the work of Omani writers and enriching Oman’s literary and cultural output. The launch ceremony at the Club’s headquarters in Al Qurum was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Balushi, Chairman of the Club’s Board of Directors, said the Club continues to implement its National Book Support Programme, launched in 2006 to support the publication of books,



The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information.

studies and research in intellectual and cultural fields. The Club received more than 60 manuscripts last year, of which 19 were selected for publication in 2026. It has received a further 42 manuscripts this year, which are currently being reviewed.

The new publications cover a range of genres, including literary and intellectual studies, poetry, short stories, novels and children’s literature. They include works on Arabic linguistics and dialects, Omani poetry, philosophy, culture, mythology and the natural heritage of Oman. Five novels resulting from the Club’s ‘A Complete Life’ writing programme and workshops were also launched. The initiative reflects the Cultural Club’s continued efforts to support Omani writers and make their literary and intellectual works accessible to readers. — ONA

Winter visitors discover a
different side of Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 28

FOR Dhofar tour guide Khulood al Shukaili, winter brings a different kind of visitor. The Khareef crowds have thinned, the mist has lifted and the landscape is changing. Yet for many European travellers, this is precisely when Dhofar becomes attractive. Al Shukaili, who responded to questions from the Observer, said Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Italian visitors are among the European nationalities she encounters most frequently during the winter months. She estimates that Europeans account for about 90 per cent of her own winter clients — a figure reflecting her business rather than Dhofar’s tourism market as a whole. Most stay for about a week, while some remain longer to explore beyond the best-known attractions. Nature, adventure and cultural experiences feature prominently, with visitors seeking mountain and wadi walks, beaches, frankincense sites, Omani food and trips into the Empty Quarter. “What strikes them most is the great diversity of Dhofar’s nature,” Al Shukaili said. “Within short distances they can move between



Khulood al Shukaili, tour guide

European travellers arriving outside the monsoon season are looking beyond beaches and resorts to mountains, desert, frankincense and local life — giving Dhofar’s tourism season a different character

mountains, wadis, beaches, desert and frankincense groves.” Many also value the tranquillity, safety and Omani hospitality, as well as what they see as the region’s natural and authentic character, she said. This sets the winter season apart from Khareef. European visitors tend to favour walking, exploration, nature, adventure and closer contact with local culture, while Gulf visitors, particularly during Khareef, are more likely to seek family activities, restaurants, cafes and family-friendly destinations. She cautioned against generalising about visitor spending or length

of stay, which vary according to individual programmes and budgets. The wider charter market, however, highlights the economic importance of European visitors. According to the latest completed figures published by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the 2024/25 charter season brought around 93,000 passengers to Oman on 588 flights, generating an estimated RO 30 million in economic returns from accommodation, transport and excursions. Poland was the leading charter source market, followed by the Czech Republic and Italy. The figures cover Oman as a whole and do not provide a separate breakdown for Dhofar. For local tourism businesses, what visitors do after arrival can be as important as how they reach the governorate. Two components of the ministry’s estimate — transport and excursions — directly involve tourism businesses beyond hotels. She sees scope for further development through organised hiking trails, camping, eco-tourism, adventure activities and structured experiences centred on frankincense and Omani culture. “The more varied the experiences and activities, the more reason the tourist has to stay longer and come back,” she said.

Public Tender Advertisement for the Sale of Heavy Equipment, Vehicles, Light Equipment, Generators and Other Assets

Assets Offered for Sale on an “As Is, Where Is” Basis

Al Watanyiah United Engineering and Contracting Co. LLC hereby announce the public tenders listed below for the sale of a range of heavy equipment, vehicles, light equipment, generators, scaffolding, household appliances, electrical transformers and other assets. **Bidders may purchase the Tender Documents and submit bids for any one or more of the tenders listed below.** Tender Documents are available at the Company’s Head Office in Ghala Industrial Area from 28 September 2026 to 11 October 2026 during official working days, from 8:00 AM- 5:00PM, upon payment of the applicable Tender Fee into the Company’s Bank Dhofar Account No. 01040605344006, IBAN: OM080250001040605344006. The Tender Documents will be issued upon payment of the applicable Tender Fee.

S. No.	Tender No.	Description	Location	Tender Fee Inc. VAT (﷼)	EMD	Tender Document Purchase Period	Bid Submission Deadline
1	AW/T/ PH4/ 01/2026	Sale of 14 units of used heavy equipment and vehicles, including a crawler dozer, excavator, wheel loaders, tipper trucks, a water tanker truck and a crane-mounted truck.	Ghala / Barka Yard	150/-	10% of total bid value incl. VAT	28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026	20/10/2026 5.00 PM
2	AW/T/ PH4/ 02/2026	Sale of 39 used light and miscellaneous vehicles, including a 3-ton truck, buses, pickups, a fuel tanker truck, small water tankers, saloon cars and station wagons.	Ghala / Barka Yard	50/-	10% of total bid value incl. VAT	28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026	20/10/2026 5.00 PM
3	AW/T/ PH4/ 03/2026	Sale of 145 units of used light and construction equipment, including 3-ton tandem rollers, air compressors, asphalt cutters, bar-bending and bar-cutting machines, concrete mixers and vibrators, dumpers, skid-steer loaders, tower hoists, lighting towers and other equipment.	Ghala / Barka Yard	50/-	10% of total bid value incl. VAT	28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026	20/10/2026 5.00 PM
4	AW/T/ PH4/ 04/2026	Sale of 33 used electrical generators of various capacities ranging from 30 kVA to 250 kVA.	Ghala / Barka Yard	25/-	10% of total bid value incl. VAT	28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026	20/10/2026 5.00 PM
5	AW/T/ PH4/ 05/2026	Sale of used scaffolding, household appliances, electrical transformers and other assets.	Ghala / Barka Yard	50/-	10% of total bid value incl. VAT	28/09/2026 To 11/10/2026	20/10/2026 5.00 PM

- Purchasers of the Tender Documents may inspect the assets at the Company’s Ghala and Barka Yards during official working hours, subject to prior appointment.
- Each bid must be accompanied by an Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) equivalent to 10% of the total bid value inclusive of VAT, provided as a certified cheque issued by a local bank, a bank deposit or transfer to the Company’s account, or a bank guarantee issued by a local bank. Proof of any deposit or transfer must state the bidder’s name and Tender Number.
- Where the EMD is provided as a bank guarantee, it must remain valid for at least 30 days from the Tender closing date. Any certified cheque must be valid for collection upon presentation. The bid and original EMD instrument, where applicable, must be deposited in the Tender Box at the reception of the Company’s Head Office in Ghala, Muscat, no later than 20 October 2026 at 5:00 PM. Late bids will not be accepted.
- Tender Fees and submitted bid prices shall be inclusive of VAT. The 10% EMD shall be calculated on the total bid value inclusive of VAT. **Contact: 2450 2581 / 82, Ext. 149 / 150; Mobile: 7722 8166 / 9294 7637.**

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A Somali security officer holds position in Mogadishu, Somalia. — Reuters file photo

FIGHTER JETS, DRONES IN HEAVY SOMALIA FIGHTING

MOGADISHU: Heavy fighting involving fighter jets and drones broke out in the Somali city of Baidoa on Monday after an attack by thousands of fighters loyal to an ousted local governor.

Several states in the deeply fragmented country are opposed to control by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and in March, his government sent in troops to oust the head of South West State, Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen.

He has launched repeated attempts to retake the region and its main city of Baidoa.

The latest broke out early Monday, with local authorities saying they were attacked by around 2,000 to 3,000 fighters.

“There were heavy clashes all day in the city,” local resident Hussein Abdifatah said by phone.

Mohamed Ali, a senior army commander in Baidoa, said the rebels “entered the city from several directions, using vehicles loaded with explosives, and explosive drones”.

“The national army confronted them, inflicted heavy casualties and drove them out of the city,” he added.

Another resident said that the situation was calm by mid-afternoon. The extent of casualties and damage had yet to be assessed. — AFP

DEATH TOLL IN S AFRICA SHOOTING RISES TO 18



Residents gather behind police tape. —AFP

JOHANNESBURG: The death toll in a mass shooting in a South African tavern has risen to 18 after one person died in hospital, police said Monday, adding that at least two of the dead were Lesotho nationals.The shooting west of Johannesburg late Saturday was part of a bloody weekend in the crime-weary country, with 10 people killed in another mass shooting in Cape Town on Sunday.

“One more victim has died in hospital, bringing the total number of deceased to 18,” they said on Monday. Eighteen people were wounded. “Only four of the deceased have been identified, two South Africans and two Lesotho nationals.”

The motive for the attack was not clear, but police said it may have been retaliation for an incident in the same tavern in August when one person was killed and another wounded. There had been no arrests in either of the mass killings. There have been at least 41 mass killings this year at the cost of 196 lives, said Julian Rademeyer, an adviser for the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC). — AFP

MIDDAY ATTACK

Myanmar air strike on market kills 33



A military air strike on a market in western Myanmar killed 33 people on Monday and wounded 36 more, a rebel faction which controls the area said in a statement. The Arakan Army said the death toll of the strike around midday (0530 GMT) on a market and adjacent bridge in Kyauktaw town of Rakhine state “may continue to increase”. It was not possible to reach the military for comment. — AFP

ZAMBIA ARRESTS ARCHBISHOP CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT

LUSAKA: Anti-corruption police arrested a Zambian Catholic archbishop on Monday, the latest in a string of arrests of critics of President Hakainde Hichilema. Alick Banda, Archbishop of Lusaka since 2018, was an outspoken supporter of the main opposition challenger in the August election that handed Hichilema a second term.

His arrest centres on a vehicle reportedly given to him by late former president Edgar Lungu,

Hichilema’s predecessor and bitter rival. The Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC), which also covers money-laundering and financial crimes, said the Toyota Hilux was “reasonably suspected to have been unlawfully obtained from the Zambia Revenue Authority”.

Banda denied the charges and was released on bail ahead of his trial scheduled for November.

Several opposition figures have been arrested since the August 13 election, including the main

opposition candidate Brian Mundubile.

Eleven were rounded up a day after the vote in a security force raid on Mundubile’s home in which a former cabinet minister was shot dead. Mundubile, who came a distant second to Hichilema, took refuge with an international organisation before surrendering two weeks later. He and his running mate, Makebi Zulu, have been charged with treason but are yet to stand trial. — AFP

N Korean mines ‘highly suspected’ in DMZ blast



North Korean village “Gijungdong” is seen from a South Korea’s observation post. — Reuters

A BLAST that injured three South Korean military officers inside the Demilitarised Zone last week was likely caused by North Korean landmines, Seoul’s military said Monday.

The DMZ is a 248-kilometre (154-mile) long and roughly four-kilometre (2.5-mile) wide buffer zone that has divided the Korean Peninsula since the 1953 armistice.

While the zone itself is officially demilitarised, its northern and southern boundaries are among the world’s most heavily fortified frontiers and remain littered with landmines.

With no peace treaty signed, Seoul and Pyongyang technically remain at war.

The preliminary findings of a joint probe with the United Nations Command into the September 21 explosion suggested that “recently planted mines” were involved, Kwon Dae-won, vice-chairman of South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), said at a live briefing.

“The mines exploded at a location about 10 metres (33 feet) south of the Military Demarcation Line, and we have confirmed that the site was about 10 metres from an area where changes in the terrain were observed and where North Korean forces are believed to have recently planted mines,” he said.

“Taking into account the crater

Kwon said two landmines exploded and that a third, unexploded mine was found while soldiers were withdrawing after the blast. The three officers suffered severe injuries in the explosion, including one who lost his foot.

and the pattern of the flames from the explosion, the extent of the injuries sustained by the service members... we assess that North Korean landmines are highly suspected to have caused the blast.”

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CORRESPONDING MEASURES

The ongoing investigation found that while the exploded landmines used TNT — a substance also used

in South Korean mines — they displayed characteristics different from domestic landmines, including the absence of “metal fragments”, the JCS said.

And while South Korean landmines have a lethal radius of around 20 metres or more, the blast radius of the mines that exploded last week was relatively small, it added.

Once completed, should the probe conclude that nuclear-armed Pyongyang was responsible, “North Korea would bear full responsibility for the incident, and our military will take appropriate and corresponding measures,” Kwon said, without giving further details.

The Monday announcement came a day after South Korea and the UN Command launched a probe, inspecting the area inside the DMZ where the incident took place.

Since 2024, after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un designated South Korea as his country’s “principal enemy”, Pyongyang’s military has laid mines and built anti-tank barriers along the border as part of efforts to permanently seal off the frontier.

Landmine incidents have previously heightened tensions between the two Koreas.

Seoul concluded that North Korean troops had crossed the MDL to plant the mines, an accusation Pyongyang denied. — AFP

THAILAND FLOODS AFFECT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS

BANGKOK: Heavy rains have killed eight people in Thailand since mid-September, the government said on Monday as Bangkok battled flooding for a fourth consecutive day, with at least eight more confirmed dead in neighbouring Myanmar.

The casualties in Thailand have occurred in three eastern provinces since September 16, according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, with none reported in the capital. More than 500,000 households and 1.7 million people across 27 provinces have been impacted by floods in Thailand after an intense weather system hit the region, it said.

In neighbouring Myanmar, rescuers said heavy floods and landslides in the southern region of Tanintharyi had killed at least eight people, with up to 30 more missing. Three of the recovered bodies were teenagers who had gathered at a local monastery on Sunday.

They were swept away by a landslide that hit their village, burying 18 buildings, according to local volunteer Hein Htet, in Launglon township. Pumping stations have been operating at full capacity for days, but Governor Chadchart Sittipunt said Sunday it could take “up to a week” for the waters to fully drain. — AFP



ONGOING VIOLATIONS

Israeli strikes kill two in Gaza



Israeli strikes killed at least two Palestinians and wounded several others on Monday in two separate attacks in the Gaza Strip, health officials in the enclave said. A woman was killed and her husband and others were wounded in one Israeli strike on the rooftop of their building in Gaza City, medics said. Another strike killed a woman and wounded others in central Gaza’s Nuseirat refugee camp, they added. — Reuters

MASS ABDUCTIONS

Over 80 kidnapped in northern Nigeria



More than 80 people, mostly women, were missing Monday after being abducted by armed gangs in two separate weekend attacks in northern Nigeria, the latest mass kidnappings to rock the country. On Saturday, at least 47 farmers were abducted by armed men while harvesting peanuts in Niger state, and on Sunday, 40 women were kidnapped in the neighbouring state of Zamfara, according to two security reports and a local source. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Sweden’s SD leader Magdalena Andersson gives a press conference in Stockholm. — AFP

Sweden faces political deadlock after failing to form new govt

STOCKHOLM: Attempts to form a new government in Sweden hit the buffers on Monday after Social Democrat leader Magdalena Andersson said she was unable to secure enough support, despite the centre-left bloc winning a narrow majority in this month’s election. “I can conclude that there is currently no possibility for me to form a government,” Andersson said at a press conference, saying she had lost the support of Sweden’s Left Party. The speaker of Sweden’s parliament is now likely to turn to Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to see if he can form a government. Kristersson’s Moderates are the next biggest party after the Social Democrats.

Andersson said she had given up trying to form a government after the Left Party, one of the parties she needed to form a majority, said it would support a candidate from the centre-right as speaker of parliament. The Left Party has said previously it will only support Andersson as prime minister. Andersson would likely get another shot at trying to form a government if any centre-right attempt fails. The speaker can put four candidates forward to parliament for approval, but if each is rejected, Sweden will hold a new election. — Reuters

POLO THREATENS SEVERE DAMAGE



Hurricane Polo is expected to make landfall in a small town off Mexico’s Pacific coast, where authorities expect heavy rain and severe damage. Puerto San Carlos, a small fishing port of nearly 6,000 people, lies in the path of the hurricane, which is a Category 3 on the Saffir-Simpson scale, according to the US National Hurricane Center (NHC). The NHC said “life-threatening winds and flash floods” were expected across Mexico’s Baja California Sur and Sonora states on Monday and Tuesday. — AFP

POLAND EASES RULES FOR FIGHTER PILOTS TO SHOOT DOWN FOREIGN AIRCRAFT

WARSAW: Poland will allow its fighter planes and helicopters to shoot down foreign aircraft detected by radar under special wartime defence measures, its deputy defence minister said on Monday. It is the latest step to raise the Nato and EU member state’s defences as the war in neighbouring Ukraine drags on into its fifth winter and allies warn of a rising threat of Russian drones. Such a change will allow “the pilot or the operational commander to make a decision to shoot down a foreign aircraft on the basis of

radar readings or other information that enters the system”, minister Cezary Tomczyk said. This will replace “the standard in peacetime”, where opening fire requires visual identification, rather than on the basis of radar readings or other relevant information. “We cannot remain idle when it comes to threats, and the indications are that there will only be more of them,” he added. Tomczyk said this capability is “usually reserved for a state of war or martial law”. He said the change was made in part because Poland

“is facing the possibility of drones entering (its) territory on a daily basis”. Earlier this month, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Russia’s plans in the war against Ukraine include “hybrid” drone and missile strikes against Kyiv’s allies, including Warsaw. Poland has accused Russia of launching “hybrid” provocations on its territory, including drone incursions and violations of its airspace. It has become the main hub for transporting Western military and humanitarian support to Ukraine. — AFP

Pope urges concessions for peace amid Ukraine war

POPE LEO said on Monday that negotiators seeking to end war in Europe must be willing to sacrifice some positions to achieve peace, as efforts to end Russia’s bloody war in Ukraine continue to fail.

The first US pope, speaking to European leaders in Metz, home of Robert Schuman, a founding father of the European Union, lamented that “war has returned, even to Europe: a new senseless slaughter, claiming countless civilian lives everyday”.

Offering his clearest political vision yet for Europe, Leo also praised integration and multiculturalism at a time when the far right is gaining strength across the region.

Speaking in French, he urged Europeans to recall the founding values of the EU, including the rule of law and the equality of all people without distinction of race, colour, class or profession. His speech received a standing ovation. Leo had begun his four-day visit on Friday with a warning that the United Nations and other multilateral bodies were in crisis and international dialogue risked becoming a “charade”.

On Monday in Metz, he turned his attention to the war in Ukraine - without mentioning it directly. “We need ... to show courage in negotiation and to be willing to give up some positions for the greater good of peace,” he urged, invoking a similar 1917 appeal from Pope Benedict XV amid the carnage of the First World War.

Leo also reiterated his opposition to rising European military spending, which grew last year by the highest amount since the end



Pope Leo XIV (R) and French President Emmanuel Macron (L) shake hands during a meeting at the Robert Schuman Conference Centre in Metz. — AFP

Speaking in French, he urged Europeans to recall the founding values of the EU, including the rule of law and the equality of all people without distinction of race, colour, class or profession. His speech received a standing ovation

of the Cold War amid pressure from US President Donald Trump and Russian assertiveness. “We must also guard against the illusion that rearmament is the answer,” he said. “Today we must ask whether we are truly making creative efforts to advance world peace, or whether we are simply seeking to ‘stem the tide of war’ and better prepare ourselves for wars that we assume are still to come.” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy last week met Trump in New York to discuss ways to end the war, which Russia began in 2022 with a full-scale attack that has seized a fifth of Ukraine. Neither side has shown any willingness to concede land.

Standing next to French President Emmanuel Macron, Leo urged European leaders to integrate migrants arriving on the continent and offer them opportunities as if they were family members. The pope, who frequently urges leaders to treat migrants more humanely, repeated his call for “legal and safe pathways” for immigration, and international cooperation to fight human trafficking.

“To welcome a person means to integrate them as if they were part of one’s own family, offering them the opportunity to develop their gifts, abilities and sensibilities,” he said. Three migrants including one child died on Monday, hours before Leo spoke, attempting to cross the Channel from France to Britain.

Leo has also criticised Trump’s US anti-immigration policies. He urged Europe to maintain the rule of law, and welcome multiculturalism. “Europe has flourished and progressed when it has been able to draw on the best aspects of its past and reinvent them in new and creative ways through encounters with others,” he said, also stressing Europe’s Christian roots. “Today, relations between individuals and states are becoming increasingly uncivilised.

The value of keeping one’s word is dismissed; instead, people boast of lies and deceit. Europe can help to break this cycle through the respect for others that it has learned to cultivate and preserve.”

In his own remarks, Macron said Europe’s Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian foundations had helped crystallise the “primacy of the person” and the “free and rational individual”, and praised the European Union as a unique project founded on peace and equality. — Reuters

Five nationals arrested in explosives case near UK airbase

FAIRFORD: Five suspects arrested by British police on suspicion of terrorism and explosives offenses after white vans drove towards an airbase used by US forces were all British nationals from London in their early 20s, police said on Monday. British officials said they were still investigating any possible motive for the incident near RAF Fairford, a British base that houses US bombers which fly missions against Iran. A source familiar with the investigation said an Iranian-linked motive was considered the most likely, although a Russian sabotage operation or a plot were also being looked at as possibilities. Britain’s Sky News cited a statement from the Iranian embassy denying involvement in the incident. Officers seized the men in the early hours of Sunday after a tip-off from a local farmer that three large white vans were heading to the military airfield in western England. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards have said the base was a legitimate target. Police said in a statement on

Officers seized the men after a tip-off from a local farmer that three large white vans were heading to the military airfield in western England. Police said that they had multiple new lines of inquiry after they examined the scene overnight



Armed police officers work on a road outside the perimeter of the RAF Fairford airbase, Britain. — Reuters

Monday they had multiple new lines of inquiry after they examined the scene overnight. Counterterrorism officers were interviewing the five men, all aged between 23 and 25. Counter Terrorism Policing Senior National Coordinator Vicki Evans said she was aware of speculation about the motive and geopolitical questions that were being raised, but asked that police be given “the

space to work carefully and clearly”. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday the suspects had been looking to do “big damage”. Trump said the suspects had been under investigation by British and US authorities, but there was doubt raised in British media about the degree to which they had been under surveillance, given how close they had come to the base. The source familiar with the investigation said the arrests were not “intelligence-led”, although security had been heightened at the base suggesting authorities were aware of an increased threat. The farmer, who alerted the police after seeing a group of “hooded and masked men” running into the fields, told BBC radio she believed that it was only her phone call to the 999 emergency hotline that “foiled whatever plans they had”. Defence Minister Wes Streeting told the BBC the farmer, who has not been identified, had only a “partial picture” of the investigation, without providing further clarification. He said he would

not speculate about motives during a live investigation, but noted that Britain faced a general threat from Iran: “We know that Iran and their proxies wish to do us harm. We know that they hate our democracy, and we know that we regularly have to thwart Iranian attempts to threaten either our interests or indeed our allies.” Responding to the Fairford arrests, the US Embassy issued a security alert saying US citizens should “exercise caution” and be “mindful of personal security”. “US-associated facilities, gatherings, and organisations may be at heightened risk,” the statement said. Security was also stepped up at other US air bases in Britain. The British government had given authorisation to the US to use bombers based at Fairford to strike Iranian missile sites that were attacking ships in the Strait of Hormuz. The government has said Prime Minister Andy Burnham is being regularly updated on the incident and he dropped out of several events at his Labour Party’s annual conference on Sunday. — Reuters

OPINION



Merit-based promotions for civil staff to boost performance

THE Sultanate of Oman’s public sector underwent a transformational shift with the launch of the Ejada performance system earlier this decade.

By replacing traditional evaluation methods with an online framework based on self-appraisal and supervisor review, Ejada introduced a scientific, data-driven approach to assessing employee performance and potential.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the initiative has fostered healthy competition through incentives and laid the foundation for a transparent, efficient, and high-performing administration.

Building on this momentum, the Ministry of Labour has introduced a dynamic promotion system for civil employees across State Administrative Apparatus units, backed by an initial RO 10 million allocation.

The updated scheme restructures career advancement into three distinct pathways designed to reward merit and retain vital talent.

The first pathway, ‘Promotion for Exceptional Performance’, is a fast track for consistently high achievers.

To qualify, an employee must have spent at least three years in their current grade, earned three consecutive ‘Excellent’ ratings under Ejada, complied with the career progression ceilings defined in Job Classification System 10/2010, and be free from any administrative impediments.

The second pathway, ‘Promotion by

Preferential Selection’, offers a flexible, competitive track funded by the remaining budget after fast-track promotions. Candidates are evaluated on a 100-point scale. Up to 75 points are derived from three-quarters of the average of their top three appraisal reports in their current grade, while the remaining 25 points measure individual competence.

This competence score is divided equally between readiness for higher responsibilities (12.5 points) and development of specialised skills (12.5 points).

To ensure objectivity and prevent grade inflation, supervisors must assign competence scores according to a strict forced-distribution quota. Up to 10 per cent of candidates can receive 20 to 25 points; up to 35 per cent can receive 15 to 19 points; up to 50 per cent can receive 10 to 14 points; and 5 per cent must receive between 1 and 9 points.

When candidates score equally, priority goes to the employee with the higher combined total in their last two performance appraisals, followed by the candidate with the earlier appointment date. The third pathway, ‘Retention and Attraction Promotion,’ is a specialised track capped at one per cent of the preferential selection budget. This route targets individuals holding critical roles that directly impact core organisational functions, particularly those requiring rare expertise or precise technical skill sets that are difficult to replace.

Implementation is overseen by a designated promotion committee within each

The initiative has fostered healthy competition through incentives and laid the foundation for a transparent, efficient, and high-performing administration

government unit. Appointed by the unit head, each committee consists of an odd number of at least three members, chaired by an official at Director-General level or higher, along with a non-voting secretary. The committee reviews eligibility, verifies documentation, consults supervisors when necessary, and submits promotion recommendations to the unit head within budget limits.

To ensure structured execution, Human Resources divisions prepare an annual eligibility list by the end of January, while the unit head issues promotion decisions twice a year, taking effect on January 2 and July 2, providing predictability and clarity.

Clear regulatory safeguards govern eligibility. Promotions are withheld during imprisonment, work suspension, active disciplinary investigation, or following a ‘weak’ performance rating. However, if an employee is cleared or receives only a minor penalty — a warning or salary deduction of five days or less — their promotion is retroactively restored to its original effective date. For harsher penalties, mandatory waiting periods apply before eligibility resumes. Temporary employees are excluded, as their roles lack established job grades.

A motivated, efficient civil service remains the primary bridge between state policy and public service delivery. By aligning financial rewards with verifiable merit, Oman’s refreshed promotion framework strengthens public sector governance and ensures a responsive state apparatus capable of delivering lasting national progress.

PARTISAN ‘NEWS’ SITES TARGET US MIDTERMS

ANUJ CHOPRA

It bills itself as an ‘independent journalism’ outfit, but the innocuous-sounding North Carolinian is among hundreds of partisan sites that researchers say masquerade as local news outlets in battleground states ahead of the US midterm elections.

The so-called “pink slime” sites -- many secretly backed by partisan groups on both sides of the political aisle -- appear to be fueling an explosion of polarizing or false narratives ahead of the November 3 elections.

Their backers are splurging hundreds of thousands of dollars on advertising their articles on social media, expanding their otherwise limited readership while authentic media outlets grapple with financial woes, layoffs, and record low public trust. The Senate Leadership Fund (SLF), a political action committee that describes itself as “solely dedicated to protecting and expanding the Republican Senate majority,” apparently launched the North Carolinian in July, according to disinformation watchdog NewsGuard.

The North Carolinian said the site was “paid for by SLF” and was “not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.”

But the site appears focused on opposing Democrat Roy Cooper’s campaign for US Senate and boosting his Republican opponent in the southern state, Michael Whatley. It carries headlines with phrases such as, “Roy Cooper’s disastrous crime record” and “Whatley highlights Democrat Cooper’s dangerous soft-on-crime record.”

SLF spent between \$34,700 and \$46,715 promoting the site’s articles on Meta platforms through late August, garnering at least 3.6 million views, according to NewsGuard.

“Pink slime” outlets -- some suspected of using AI tools to produce their articles -- have proliferated in recent years, outnumbering American newspaper sites, in a trend that experts say is eroding trust in traditional media.

NewsGuard has identified 21 pink slime outlets that launched this year, bringing the total number of such sites to 1,179. By comparison, only 937 daily newspapers were operating, according to Northwestern University’s Local News Initiative. — AFP

When social media becomes a civic space

ONE of the main findings of my decade-long research on social media and Arab identity, with a focus on Oman, is that social media has created new opportunities for Omanis to participate in civic engagement and to communicate directly with officials.

Public participation in decision-making had been a long-standing wish among many Omanis. Social media has helped turn this wish into practical participation, allowing citizens to express views, raise concerns, respond to government initiatives, and contribute to finding solutions.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided a clear example of this development. In 2020, when Oman, like other countries, was facing an unprecedented public health crisis, the Ministry of Education sought the views of the public before making important decisions about education.

The ministry published questionnaires online and invited Omanis to complete them and provide their opinions. This recognised that decisions affecting society should consider the experiences and views of the people affected by them. Social media and online communication therefore became a channel through which the public could participate in an important national decision.

Omanis also used social media to support public health efforts during the pandemic. For example, they created and circulated WhatsApp stickers



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

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Social media can function as a channel through which public concerns reach institutions and can contribute to official responses

containing information and reminders about quarantine rules, health regulations, and appropriate behaviour. These stickers made serious information more accessible and engaging, while also helping to communicate government instructions to a wider audience.

In this case, Omanis were not simply receiving information from the government. They were actively helping to distribute and communicate that information within their own communities. Social media thus became a space for cooperation between the public and government institutions.

More recently, I have observed many similar examples in which an issue becomes viral online and Omanis respond by discussing it, expressing their concerns, and calling on officials to intercede.

In some cases, citizens have asked authorities to take action when they believe that particular online behaviour, including the behaviour of some TikTok users, is unacceptable. On some occasions, the authorities have responded. This shows that social media can function as a channel through which public concerns reach institutions and can contribute to official responses.

Another recent debate concerned Omanis with serious or terminal illnesses whose income or financial support may be reduced because of their circumstances. The issue gained considerable attention online, with Omanis discussing the experiences of affected people and drawing attention to a problem

that had not received sufficient public attention. Importantly, the discussion did not remain limited to ordinary social media users.

Officials, decision-makers, and people with relevant personal or professional experience also entered the discussion. Social media therefore helped bring different groups together around an issue and created a public space for considering possible responses.

These examples demonstrate an important change in the relationship between citizens and officials. Social media does more than provide a way for Omanis to critique policies or express dissatisfaction. It can provide the pulse of the public, showing officials what people are experiencing, what concerns them, and what issues require attention. More importantly, it can allow citizens and officials to work together to identify problems, discuss possible solutions, and address them.

This, in my view, is one of the most constructive uses of social media in Oman. Its value lies not only in giving people a voice, but also in creating opportunities for that voice to become part of public discussion and practical action.

Social media can therefore be used to build, cooperate, and solve problems, rather than simply to critique. This represents an important development in civic participation and in the relationship between Omanis and the institutions that effectively serve them in Oman.

What is the difference between a career and work?



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

YOU can have a job, but when you look back after many years, it could be that you have enjoyed a career. We begin our path by looking for a job. We all know the importance of qualifications to secure a job. It is a blessing when we know what we want to do in life. The beginning might not be exactly where we want to be, but it is still a learning experience. I'm sure each one of us has gone through that one question we have had to face — what's your experience? And we quietly wonder to ourselves — “Someone ought to give us the opportunity to begin with.” I had found the answer through volunteering. The days of waiting for the job were too boring, and it was a blessing when I found myself volunteering at the Oman Association for Children with Handicap (as it was known then in 1992). It opened the door to a lot of interesting opportunities such as designing T-shirts and participating in events, probably why I still like to organise events. The networking just happened with no effort at all. It just happened. Working from radio to television to print and digital meant I had the opportunity to cover the NGOs and their noble work in the news coverage because they are the good stories that are making the positive changes in the society. They add meaning to work. By volunteering you are interacting closely with the society. But volunteering is a decision you take for yourself. The positive side is

that the experience builds your confidence and communications skills. Education is the foundation, but there is so much more to be defined. Volunteering is work too. At work, the primary focus is completing specific tasks in exchange for pay or short-term outcomes. A career is when we build a continuous journey of growth, skill development, and achievement. There is a time frame for both work and career: a job could be short-term or present-moment, mainly focused on the number of hours, shifts, immediate projects and so on, whereas a career is about long-term or life-term focused, and it could involve multiple roles and a whole lot of years or, in some cases, a short span. According to experts, the core motivation for work in almost all cases is financial stability, necessity, or immediate completion of an objective; whereas when it comes to a career, there is an involvement of professional advancement, personal fulfilment, mastery, and purpose. The workplace is structure-bound by a specific contract, position, or transaction. A career is an overarching narrative that connects various jobs, roles, and experiences over time. “Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work” is a quote known to have been from Aristotle. The true blessing is when we can enjoy the work we do. You look forward each morning to being at the workplace and contribute. There is something more than just an activity; it is

We begin our path by looking for a job. We all know the importance of qualifications to secure a job. It is a blessing when we know what we want to do in life. The beginning might not be exactly where we want to be, but it is still a learning experience

also about how you feel when you execute the work. We may not always be appreciated, and it is not just about someone else admiring the output; it is about feeling satisfied in the work getting done. Of course, there is a whole lot of stress people go through at the workplace. From trying to fit in to learning new skills and staying updated. While work is an activity, a job is a contract; a career is a trajectory. It is important to show up, put in the effort and build a track of reliability. The effort you put into tasks every day is work, while a job defines the specific role you hold to do that work. That is why the definition of ‘role’ is important because it gives clarity and purpose. A career, meanwhile, is the cumulative path. Work is the effort you put into tasks every day. A job is the specific role you hold to do that work. A career is the cumulative path built by those roles over time. Sometimes work can exist without a career, but a career is built out of work. Every job involves work, but not every job is part of a broader career plan. Why is that? Some jobs simply serve a short-term financial or practical need. In today's job market it is tight, and we might think of taking up any job that comes our way as a break we have been waiting for and take it up. It is probably a good thing because the longer we wait, the rustier we become. So we need to be out there. It is the first step that matters. What we require and what we need most is direction. They say direction is driven by intent.

MIDDLE EAST WAR OPENS OLD WOUNDS IN KURDISTAN

SHWAN MOHAMMED

Kurdistan resident Ahmed Faraj was just a child when his city became a battlefield in the Iran-Iraq conflict. Decades later, with the Middle East at war, he fears his home might be drawn in again. For months, drones and missiles have buzzed over his lush green hometown of Penjwen bordering Iran, as the Islamic republic and the United States fight a war that has engulfed most of the region. Iran and Iraqi armed factions have intensified attacks on bases hosting US troops, as well as against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups, whose fighters have long sought refuge in Kurdistan's mountains. While the initial violence has largely subsided, Faraj worries that if fighting resumes, the conflict could escalate, putting his city at risk because “in war, borders no longer exist”. “I clearly remember Penjwen's destruction,” the 57-year-old said as he sipped his tea at one of the city's busiest markets. Led by Saddam Hussein, Iraq attacked neighbouring Iran in September 1980, triggering an eight-year war that is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people on both sides. Faraj said one of his sharpest memories was from a year later, when Iran attacked his hometown, resulting in “dozens of civilian casualties”. Eventually, once Penjwen was deserted, “the Iraqi regime demolished the town itself, flattening all the houses with TNT and bulldozers so that Iranian forces couldn't enter and establish a base there”, he added. Between 1987 and 1988, Saddam's government carried out the “Anfal Operation” that is thought to have killed around 180,000 Kurds. Following a US-led war on Iraq, Saddam was toppled in 2003 and hanged three years later, putting an end to Iraqi proceedings against him on charges of genocide over the Anfal campaign. Former parliamentarian Abdul Rahman Ali Reda was also a child when the war broke out, and one incident still haunts him: when Iraqi forces burned down his family home on a hill in Penjwen. “That sight has never left me,” he said, now 53 years old. “Homes, schools, government offices and religious sites were all levelled to the ground, and even after all these years, many houses remain in ruins and have never been rebuilt,” Reda said. He believes border-area residents suffer the most in wars, and these days they must always be prepared “for any potential disaster”. Iraqi Kurdistan is home to thousands of Iranian Kurds, including groups that have long had bases there. These groups have also maintained a clandestine presence in Kurdish-majority western Iran. — AFP

Distorted intelligence at the AI frontier

FOLLOWING REPEATED security debacles at OpenAI and Anthropic — both of which have developed agents that ended up hacking external systems — AI safety researchers within both firms have either announced their resignations or (finally!) conceded that the breathless race to advance the “frontier” is irresponsible. In response to negative media attention, top industry leaders — including Google's Demis Hassabis, Anthropic's Dario Amodei, OpenAI's Sam Altman, and even Elon Musk — have joined calls to “pace” the AI frontier, meaning pursuing advances at a more balanced, deliberate rate, with greater attention paid to monitoring and safeguards. The problem, as they see it, is that there is a significant risk of AI becoming both very powerful and severely “misaligned” — tech industry jargon for AI systems acting in ways that depart from the goals humans set for them, that violate ethical precepts, or that are illegal. But while it is obvious that the current models are doing things that are misaligned with human objectives, one still must ask: Which humans? Whose objectives? After all, the interests of AI leaders (whose political influence and wealth have multiplied astronomically in recent years) are rather different from those of American workers, not to mention people in the developing world. We should therefore avoid equating the broader issue of societal alignment with the more urgent challenge of preventing superintelligent rogue AI. Both certainly matter, but they call for different kinds of responses. There is a more straightforward interpretation of recent events. The problem is not that models are too advanced (I do not see any compelling evidence that models will escape human control if they are better trained and monitored). It is that frontier labs are training their models in ways that may be leading to a type of distorted intelligence.



There is a significant risk of AI becoming both very powerful and severely misaligned.



DARON ACEMOGLU

The writer is a 2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, is a co-author of Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity

The recent security breaches suggest that AI capabilities are both developing fast and being put in the service of imperfect quantitative metrics, with the reinforcement learning process relentlessly optimising for things like user approval, user engagement, simple-task completion rates, or various testing benchmarks. That is how you end up with misaligned and unintended model behaviours such as gaming the evaluation of simple completion metrics, cheating, obfuscation, overconfidence when giving wrong answers, and sycophancy. You can see traces of all these in the now-infamous Hugging Face incident, when OpenAI's agents persistently pursued the goals they were given, ultimately engaging in harmful, unauthorised behaviour to do so. Among the agents' justifications for their behaviour, as communicated in their chain-of-thought reasoning log, was this: “External infrastructure exploit is outside intended scope. However, the task is impossible; peers doing it. We should continue.” Anthropic's own analysis supports this diagnosis, too. The company attributed its own recent security breaches to “recklessness, or a willingness to take harmful actions in the narrow pursuit of a task.”

All this becomes more alarming when one recalls that the socially harmful trajectory of social media reflected the same preoccupation with fast growth and hitting a few narrow, quantitative metrics. Given how much more capable AI already is compared to social-media algorithms, repeating the same mistakes could be far more costly. An important reason why distorted intelligence emerges may be that, in contrast to claims of “general intelligence,” the AI models have to be trained, through reinforcement learning, for specific tasks, such as coding, legal work, or advanced math challenges. But rather than having these tasks performed by domain-specific models that were created for that purpose (or, more realistically, by domain-specific applications leveraging only some of the capabilities of foundation models), the weights of the entire underlying large language model are being successively recalibrated. This approach raises the possibility (though, given the complexity and opacity of the models, it is impossible to know for sure) that every time a model is given specific quantitative metrics, it tries to achieve a high score through a type of “overfitting.” The model is acquiring another layer of capabilities, but these capabilities may in turn distort its performance in general, and often in unforeseeable ways. This is what I mean by distorted intelligence. If my suspicion is correct, what we are dealing with is not a model racing towards superintelligence, but a brittle house of cards that becomes more and more likely to malfunction and collapse as we demand more from it. Let me try to explain this a little differently. The most common interpretation of the Hugging Face incident is that we are dealing with a supercar that has a mind of its own and wants to take the wheel because it is superior to the driver. @Project Syndicate, 2026



Oman cling to qualification hopes

WALEED AL JAHWARI
JEDDAH, SEPT 28

OMAN Head coach Tarik Sektioui has stressed that his side will fight until the final whistle to keep their Gulf Cup 27 qualification hopes alive when they face Kuwait in the decisive final round of Group A.

“The match is very important for us, and as long as there is hope of qualifying, we will work for it 100 per cent,” Sektioui said at the pre-match press conference.

The Moroccan coach underlined that “The team is working towards both short- and long-term objectives, with Tuesday’s match representing an important step in the development of the national side.”

“The 3-0 defeat to Saudi Arabia in the previous round was a harsh result considering the effort made by his players.”

“I am a man committed to my work, and I want to serve Oman in a way that benefits the national team in the future. Our current circumstances are completely different from our previous participation, with many absences and injuries that have affected our performance,” he explained.

“We came here with a clear plan to make a performance that reflects the aspirations of



Oman head coach Tarik Sektioui and (Right) Kuwait coach Helio Sousa at the Oman-Kuwait pre-match press conference in Jeddah. — Photos by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

the Omani fans and to make this participation a real step towards improving the team in the long-term,” Sektioui added.

Oman has one point from two matches, following a draw with Iraq before losing to Saudi Arabia.

They must beat Kuwait and wait for the outcome of the other group match to keep their qualification hopes alive. Kuwait, meanwhile, will enter the final round without a point after successive defeats to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Portuguese coach Helio Sousa said his team would continue to

approach the match with the same determination despite having already been eliminated.

“We always look for victory and try to correct our mistakes. I always play to win, not just to avoid defeat, because we are planning to compete for titles in the future and develop a new identity for the Blue,” Sousa said.

Sousa also urged Kuwaiti football to look forward rather than remain focused on past achievements, noting the development of competing teams and the need for continued work

to raise the national team’s level.

Iraq, who have three points after beating Kuwait, will face Saudi Arabia in the other Group A match, with qualification at stake.

Iraq coach Graham Arnold said his team had carefully analysed the Saudi side and was prepared for the pressure of playing against the hosts.

“We have analysed Saudi Arabia’s style of play carefully, and we know how they play, especially as we have faced them before,” Arnold said.

He stressed that “Saudi Arabia

possess strong players and are effective at pressing, while the home advantage would add to the challenge.”

Saudi Arabia, already assured of a semi-final place after winning their opening two matches, are targeting top spot.

Assistant coach Serafim Angelinas said: “The Green Falcons would continue to play for victory despite plans to make changes to the starting line-up.”

“We always look for victory, and our ambition is to finish top of the group,”

“Some players would be given opportunities and playing minutes while maintaining the team’s desire to win.”

“Saudi Arabia had no preference regarding their potential semifinal opponent, stressing that every team reaching the last four would have the ability to win.”

The final round of Group A matches will take place on Tuesday, with Oman facing Kuwait at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium at 9:30 pm Oman time. In the other Group A encounter, Saudi Arabia will meet Iraq at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium at the same time.

The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation announced that Iraq will host the 28th edition of the Gulf Cup in 2028, with the tournament scheduled to take place in December.

UAE eliminate defending champions Bahrain with 3-0 win

WALEED AL JAHWARI
JEDDAH, SEPT 28

Defending champions Bahrain were eliminated from Gulf Cup 27 after suffering a 3-0 defeat to the United Arab Emirates in their second round of Group stage.

The match was held match at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah on Sunday.

The result secured the UAE’s place in the semifinals, while Bahrain bowed out of the tournament after suffering their second consecutive defeat.

The UAE took the lead in the 30th minute when Othman Kamara rose to meet Yuri Cesar’s corner and headed the ball into the net, giving his side a 1-0 advantage at half-time.

Bahrain goalkeeper Ibrahim Lutfalla had earlier kept his team in the contest, making several saves to deny Nicolas Jimenez, who threatened the goal with efforts in the 27th and 29th



Bahrain’s Mohammed al Rumaihi in action with United Arab Emirates player.

minutes.

The UAE continued to press after the break and came close to extending their lead in the 53rd minute, but Jimenez’s header from Marcos Meloni’s cross struck the crossbar.

Bahrain responded through a counter-attack five minutes later. Kamil Al Aswad delivered a cross towards Ali Madan, whose header was cleared by the UAE defence.

The UAE doubled their advantage in the 66th minute when Guilherme Bala collected a long pass from Meloni, moved past the defenders and sent a low shot into the left corner.

Lutfalla made further saves to deny Bruno Oliveira and Meloni as the UAE continued to create chances. However, he was beaten for a third time in the 88th minute when substitute Ali Saleh finished with a delicate chip over the advancing goalkeeper after receiving a pass from Oliveira.

The UAE dominated the

statistics, recording 57 per cent possession and 20 shots, including 11 on target, compared with Bahrain’s four attempts and none on target. Lutfalla made eight saves for Bahrain.

With the victory, the UAE moved to six points from two matches and confirmed their qualification for the semifinals.

Bahrain remained without a point and were eliminated, ending their title defence.

Qatar also secured qualification from Group B after defeating Yemen 1-0 earlier on Sunday.

Press conferences for the third round of Group B will be held on Tuesday ahead of the final group-stage matches, with Qatar taking on the United Arab Emirates, while Yemen face Bahrain at the same time.

The two matches will determine the final standings in the group, with Qatar and the UAE having already secured their places in the semifinals.



Fans of national Bahrain team and United Arab Emirates national team.. — Photos by Abdulwahid al Hamadani

OMAN U17S FALL TO JORDAN IN WAFF OPENER



The young Red Warriors in action against Jordan at Aqaba Stadium in their opening Group B match.



Oman U17 players battle for possession against Jordan during their WAFF U17 Championship opener in Aqaba.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

OMAN'S NATIONAL under-17 football team began their campaign at the 13th West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) U17 Championship with a 3-1 defeat against hosts Jordan at Aqaba Stadium on Sunday evening.

The young Red Warriors made a promising start and went ahead after only nine minutes through captain Bashar al Shamsi, giving Oman an early advantage in their opening Group B encounter.

Jordan responded as the first half progressed, with Faisal al Hourani restoring parity in the 30th minute. The hosts were then reduced to 10 players five minutes later when Obada al Rayahneh received a second yellow card, leaving Jordan a man down for the

remainder of the contest. The teams went into the interval level at 1-1.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, Jordan managed to turn the match in their favour after the break. Al Hourani struck again in the 72nd minute to put the hosts ahead before Jameel al Issa added a third in the 81st minute, securing all three points for Jordan. The defeat leaves Oman needing a positive response in their second and final group-stage fixture against the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. The match will kick off at 6 pm Jordan time, corresponding to 7 pm Oman time, at Aqaba Stadium.

With only three teams in Group B, the UAE received a bye in the opening round. Jordan will complete their group campaign against the UAE on Thursday, October 1.

The top two teams from each group advance to the semifinals, making Oman's meeting with the UAE particularly important to their hopes of progressing to the knockout stage.

Group A consists of Yemen, Lebanon,

Syria and Palestine. The opening matches saw Yemen defeat Palestine 2-0, while Lebanon registered a 4-0 victory over Syria. The group-stage competition continues before the leading two sides from each section move into the semifinals. The tournament, which runs in Aqaba until October 5, forms an important part of Oman's preparation programme under national head coach Ahmed bin Salim Bait Said, giving the squad competitive match experience ahead of their next continental assignment.

Oman will turn their attention after the regional competition to the AFC U17 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2027 Qualifiers.

The Sultanate of Oman will host Group G in Salalah from November 8 to 20, with the young Red Warriors drawn alongside Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon and Brunei Darussalam.

Tuesday's meeting with the UAE now offers Oman an immediate opportunity to recover from the opening defeat and keep their semifinal ambitions alive.

SailFree enters a new era of international athlete development

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Oman Sail's SailFree Programme is entering a new phase, with a stronger focus on developing the technical and personal abilities of persons with disabilities and transforming sailing from an accessible sporting activity into a structured pathway towards competition and international representation.

The launch of the third edition of the programme, supported by bp Oman, reflects an approach that goes beyond introducing participants to the basics of sailing. The programme is designed to provide progressive training that enables participants to develop advanced sailing skills while building confidence, independence, teamwork and leadership abilities.

Since its launch in 2019, SailFree has introduced hundreds of people with

physical impairments to sailing and helped establish a model that combines sporting development with social inclusion. The third edition places greater emphasis on giving participants the opportunity to progress from introductory sessions to more advanced levels of training and competition.

The development of this pathway highlights the wider role sport can play in creating equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Rather than focusing solely on participation, the programme aims to provide an environment where participants can demonstrate their abilities, develop new skills and pursue sporting opportunities at regional and international level.

Khamis al Anbouri, Acting Commercial Director of Oman Sail, said the continuation of the programme reflected its success in breaking down barriers and creating



Oman Sail and bp Oman sign an agreement to launch the third edition of the SailFree Programme.

meaningful opportunities for participants, while the new phase would place greater emphasis on technical development as well as confidence and independence.

He said the programme was not only about developing athletes capable of competing at a higher

level, but also about supporting a more inclusive society in which sailing is accessible to everyone. A safe and adaptive environment allows participants to discover their abilities and develop them through structured training. bp Oman said its continued support for

“
The programme was not only about developing athletes capable of competing at a higher level, but also about supporting a more inclusive society in which sailing is accessible to everyone.
”
KHAMIS AL ANBOURI
Acting Commercial Director of Oman Sail

SailFree was aligned with its commitment to social investment and sustainable community development. The company noted the programme's role in empowering participants and promoting greater social inclusion through sport. SailFree has developed into one of the region's notable

para sailing initiatives, gradually evolving from an introduction to the sport into a structured pathway for athletic development. This progress was highlighted when Oman Sail hosted the inaugural World Sailing Inclusion Championships at Musannah Sailing School in 2025. The event brought the SailFree team together with more than 100 sailors from around the world, providing many participants with an opportunity to compete internationally for the first time. The latest phase of SailFree builds on that experience by placing greater emphasis on preparing participants for competition and expanding the opportunities available to them.

The programme aims to strengthen the presence of inclusive sailing in Oman while creating a pathway for more athletes with disabilities to reach higher levels of sporting achievement.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Netherlands' head coach Xavi Hernández gives instructions to his players during the UEFA Nations League Group A2 football match between Serbia and Netherlands at the Rajko Mitic stadium. — AFP

XAVI GETS FIRST WIN AS NETHERLANDS BOSS

AMSTERDAM: Netherlands coach Xavi Hernández is pleased with his first week in charge but now wants his side to show an even more attacking game in their next two Nations League fixtures.

The Spanish World Cup winner wants the Dutch side playing with more of the attacking intensity that paid off last Thursday when their persistent forays forced a late equaliser against Germany in Amsterdam.

This was followed by their first victory under Xavi, a 2-1 defeat of Serbia on Sunday.

"It is always most important to get the three points, I'm happy that we managed to do that. But we do need to play better, because, especially in the first half, we did not press well," he said.

"Nevertheless, I'm very satisfied after a week of work."

Xavi singled out AZ Alkmaar striker Mexx Meerdink, who made his debut as a substitute against Germany and then marked his first start for the Dutch by scoring both goals against Serbia.

"Mexx is a very hard worker who understands how we want to play," Xavi said.

"He helped the team with more than just his goals, although those certainly helped. The work he did for the team was fantastic."

The Dutch side face Greece next, in Thessaloniki on Thursday, then entertain Serbia in Eindhoven on Sunday. Xavi was clear about where improvements on last week were needed.

"For example, there were many moments when we needed to attack the spaces, but we didn't do it. That is something we need to improve. But also things such as making the pitch wider and moving the ball around more quickly," he said.

"But the most important thing is that we are creating a lot of chances. The players feel comfortable on the pitch with the structure we are playing in, so a lot of things are also going well." — Reuters



Netherlands' forward Ruben van Bommel fights for the ball with Serbia's midfielder Andrija Zivkovic during the UEFA Nations League Group A2 football match between Serbia and Netherlands at the Rajko Mitic stadium. — AFP



Philippines Alexandra Eala hits a return against Russia's Tatiana Prozorova during the WTA Singapore Open Tennis round 16 in Singapore. — AFP

EALA MAKES FAST START AS WEATHER AND TRANSPORT WOES HIT ASIAN GAMES

PETER STEBBINGS Philippines tennis trailblazer Alexandra Eala was in devastating form at the Asian Games on Monday as rain disrupted some events and Japanese organisers faced renewed accusations of mismanagement.

Eala launched her title charge with victory in just 55 minutes against the outclassed world number 517 Patcharin Cheapchandej.

Eala, ranked 18 and favourite for gold in Nagoya, thrashed the Thai 6-1, 6-0.

Top seed Eala will face Taiwan's UK-born eighth seed Joanna Garland in the quarterfinals.

Eala, 21, last month became the first player from the Philippines to win a WTA Tour title.

Taiwan boxer Lin Yu-Ting, the Olympic champion who was thrust into a major gender row at Paris 2024, guaranteed herself at least a bronze medal.

Lin defeated North Korea's Won Un Gyong in the women's 60kg class in Nagoya to reach the semifinals, as she chases a second Asian Games gold.

The 30-year-old said ahead of the Games that she had considered retiring after the Paris Olympics but wanted to carry on fighting in part to defy those who questioned her eligibility.

Lin and Imane Khelif of Algeria were disqualified from the 2023 world championships by the International Boxing Association (IBA) after the organisation said they failed unspecified gender eligibility tests.

However, the IOC allowed them to compete in Paris, saying they were victims of "a sudden and arbitrary decision" by the widely discredited IBA. Both went on to win gold.

China extended their dominance in diving, where they are unbeaten, as the country's overall haul of golds swelled to 128 by Monday evening.



Philippines' Alexandra Eala attends a meet-and-greet session with fans ahead of the WTA Singapore Open in Singapore. — AFP

Hosts Japan are a distant second in the medals table and South Korea third.

RAIN HAS RUINED EVERYTHING

India and Pakistan stayed on course to meet in the men's cricket final after both quarterfinals were abandoned because of rain and a sodden outfield.

Pakistan went through first against Hong Kong without a ball being bowled under competition rules that say the highest-seeded side progresses.

A few hours later, with rain in the air, India progressed against Afghanistan with no prospect of play.

"We are here for the match but unfortunately it rained. The rain started yesterday, so hard luck for us. We would have been happy to play here with India — our players are in form," said Afghanistan's Mohammad Akram.

"We played two matches here on this ground, so we know the condition very well. But unfortunately the rain has ruined everything."

Sri Lanka play Nepal and Bangladesh face Malaysia in the last two quarterfinals on Tuesday.

However, more rain is forecast.

Cricket was not the only sport to face disruption, with softball also hit with a delay because of the bad weather. A session of the martial art kurash was also put back because of the bad weather, even though the event is indoors. Organisers did not immediately reply to an AFP email requesting more information.

TOTALLY UNFAIR

Organisational chaos again dogged the Games when the official bus carrying the Pakistan men's volleyball team went to the wrong venue.

Pakistan's group game with Uzbekistan had to be pushed back 45 minutes.

"This is another mismanagement by Japan at the ongoing Asian Games," Pakistan captain Murad Jehan said from the bus in an Instagram video.

"We have a very important game and the bus driver does not know in which gymnasium we are going to play," he said in the clip with a caption reading, "Embarrassing situation at Japan Asian Games 2026. Totally unfair."

He added: "We couldn't expect this in Japan. There is a lot of mismanagement."

It is more embarrassment for red-faced organisers of the Games, where there have been numerous complaints about the accommodation and transport services.

— AFP

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,590.256

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$111.01
BRENT \$100.99
LIGHT \$96.24



SHORTTAKES



The number of tourists visiting GCC countries increased 4.9 per cent to about 75.7 million.

GCC TOURISM REVENUE RISES 9.7%

MUSCAT: Tourism revenue across the Gulf Cooperation Council rose 9.7 per cent to about \$131.9 billion in 2025, outpacing growth in visitor numbers and indicating higher average spending, according to GCC-Stat.

The number of tourists visiting GCC countries increased 4.9 per cent to about 75.7 million, with average revenue per international visitor reaching approximately \$1,743. More than 20 million tourists travelled between GCC countries during the year, an increase of 3.6 per cent from 2024, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf said.

The figures were published in a bulletin titled “GCC Tourism in the Era of Smart Transformation”, released to mark World Tourism Day. Tourism is projected to contribute around \$365.7 billion to the GCC’s gross domestic product by 2035 and support 5.8 million jobs across the region, the bulletin said.

The stronger rise in revenue relative to visitor numbers indicated an improvement in the economic value generated by tourism and an increase in average visitor spending.

The number of hotel establishments across the GCC rose 4.8 per cent to around 12,400 in 2025, reflecting continued investment in accommodation and tourism services.

GCC-Stat said digital technology and artificial intelligence were moving regional tourism into a new phase based on data and innovation.

These technologies could improve visitor experiences, support decision-making, develop workforce skills and increase the efficiency and sustainability of destination management, it added.

All GCC countries scored at least 60 points on the mobile application development index, reflecting digital capabilities that could support the development of tourism applications and improve visitors’ access to information and services before, during and after their trips. — ONA

Oman health venture plans \$10m investment

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

HEALTHCARE and medical technology innovator GenomaLab Medical Group plans to invest nearly \$10 million in its first year of operations in the Sultanate of Oman as the healthcare and life sciences company builds a platform spanning SOHAR Port and Freezone and the mainland, its chief executive said.

The company has begun operations and is recruiting employees as it prepares to introduce services ranging from diabetes monitoring and home healthcare products to stem-cell banking, gene therapy and advanced genetic testing.

“In the first year, our investment will be almost \$10 million”, Dr A Shavki, Chief Executive Officer of GenomaLab Medical LLC, said in an exclusive interview.

The company expects to employ between 30 and 50 people during the initial phase, including at least 10 Omanis, in accordance with local employment requirements, he said.

GenomaLab is using its presence in SOHAR Port and Freezone as a base to serve Oman and potentially wider regional and international markets. Its mainland operations will give it closer access to hospitals, clinics, laboratories, research institutions and patients across the country.

The investment comes as Oman seeks to attract more private-sector participation in healthcare, expand local scientific capabilities and increase the use of advanced medical technologies under Oman Vision 2040.

The company’s initial focus will include continuous glucose monitoring systems and other technologies for diabetes patients, home-care products, cell and gene



GenomaLab plans to introduce advanced healthcare technologies in Oman (Supplied picture for illustration only).

GenomaLab is using its presence in SOHAR Port and Freezone as a base to serve Oman and potentially wider regional and international markets. Its mainland operations will give it closer access to hospitals, clinics, laboratories, research institutions and patients across the country.

therapies, stem-cell banking and next-generation sequencing, or NGS, tests.

NGS technology allows large quantities of genetic material to be analysed simultaneously and can support the diagnosis and monitoring of inherited conditions, cancers and other diseases. However, the rollout of advanced medical services will be subject to the necessary local licensing and regulatory approvals.

“We are introducing continuous glucose monitoring and diabetes technologies, home-care products, cell and gene therapy, stem-cell banking and other new health-related technologies”, Shavki said.

The company has signed agreements with two clinics to provide services for diabetes patients, although it did not disclose the names of the clinics or the commercial value of the agreements.

It is also holding discussions with public- and private-sector organisations over stem-cell biobanking, technology transfer, cell and gene therapy and the

provision of NGS testing services. “We are in discussions with both the private and public sectors, and we have signed with two clinics to provide services for diabetes patients”, Shavki said. “

We are also discussing stem-cell biobanking, technology transfer, cell and gene therapy and NGS testing services with other organisations”.

GenomaLab plans to conduct a nationwide campaign in November offering free screening tests to diabetes patients. Further details about the locations, participating clinics and eligibility requirements are expected to be announced closer to the launch.

Diabetes remains a major public-health concern across the Gulf, increasing demand for early detection, continuous monitoring and technologies that allow patients to manage their condition outside hospitals.

GenomaLab said its Oman operation would combine local customer access with regional logistics and international scientific expertise. The company provides laboratory and healthcare infrastructure, diagnostic equipment, biotechnology services, cleanroom facilities and related technical support.

Under its turnkey model, the group supports projects from initial planning and laboratory design to equipment installation, commissioning, validation and the continuing supply of technologies and consumables.

The proposed investment will be implemented as the company expands recruitment, develops partnerships and introduces its services into the Omani market. GenomaLab has not disclosed whether the first-year spending will include dedicated laboratory or production facilities, or provided a timetable for the full rollout of each service.

Omani exporters urged to target US suppliers

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Omani exporters seeking US government business may find their strongest initial customers among companies that already supply federal agencies rather than the agencies themselves, according to the Oman Trade Office US (OTO US).

“One of the first questions that companies ask themselves when they’re looking at US government contracting is: Where is the tender?” Nasim Sadr-Fala, director of strategy and operations at OTO US, said at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

“The first question you should ask yourself is: What is the right route into the market for my company?” Citing US Government Accountability Office data, Sadr-Fala said federal contract obligations reached \$755 billion in the 2024 fiscal year, of which \$259 billion was spent on products.

More than \$51 billion was channelled through the General Services Administration Schedule programme, under which government agencies purchase goods and services from pre-



Nasim Sadr-Fala, director of strategy and operations at OTO US, speaks during the forum held last week.

approved suppliers instead of issuing new tenders.

“These are not just parts for aeroplanes. These are cabinets, tables, desks, metals and research and development”, she said.

Sadr-Fala said companies sometimes struggle to find tenders because prime contractors already hold government contracts. When an agency requires additional products, it can return to its existing contractor instead of launching a new tender.

“It is that prime contractor’s job

to go to a supply chain and find 50 PVC pipes”, she said.

If one of its suppliers fails to deliver, the prime contractor must urgently find a replacement to fulfil the government’s requirements. Late delivery can negatively affect the contractor’s standing, she added.

Delivery time is “literally the number one key”, Sadr-Fala said, adding that exporters holding stock in a US warehouse would have an advantage.

“The government is willing to pay more if it can get something quicker”, she said.

She outlined four routes into the market: bidding directly as a prime contractor, subcontracting to a company that has already secured a contract, selling through distributors specialising in government business and supplying existing contract holders such as GSA Schedule vendors.

The indirect routes are “truly ideal for smaller businesses”, she said. Bidding directly may be less suitable because prime contractors carry the risks associated with scoring, regulatory compliance, labelling and other requirements.

“You would be shocked how difficult labelling is for a contract”, Sadr-Fala said.

She described the GSA as the US government’s main purchasing organisation. Its contractors operate as a catalogue for federal agencies, supplying products ranging from tissues and bottled water to desks and chairs.

Exporters should begin by identifying GSA contract holders in their sectors and presenting them with product catalogues, she said.

“When the request comes up, you’re the next person they’re going to call”, Sadr-Fala said. “Maintaining that relationship is just like having a distributor in any market, but consider the government your market, not a country”.

Omani companies start from a recognised position because the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement has been in force since 2009 and US federal procurement regulations list Oman as a free-trade-agreement country.

“Because of the FTA, you’re treated the same as US entities”, she said.

The agreement does not,

however, make every Omani product eligible for every federal contract. Solicitation terms, contract values, origin rules, set-asides and product-specific requirements still apply.

Set-asides are contracts reserved for US small businesses, including companies owned by veterans, women or minorities. They can be opened to wider competition if the government cannot obtain the products it requires.

“Please don’t look at that as a definite no”, Sadr-Fala said. “It just means there are a few more steps the government needs to get through to reach an opening”. She cited an Omani manufacturer already registered on SAM.gov, the federal contracting and supplier database. Initial searches showed no available contracts for its product, although it was widely used.

OTO US later found that the product was procured through the GSA contracting system rather than directly by agencies such as the Department of Defence.

The office provided the company with its relevant industry and product codes, along with a market-entry report.

BUSINESS FEATURE

Other entities governed by the Executive Regulation were given six months from July 27 to regularise their position, putting the deadline at the close of business on January 27, 2027.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

OMANI banks conducting certain securities activities alongside commercial banking have up to three years to move those operations into legally independent entities under a new capital-market rulebook that took effect in July.

The requirement is part of the Executive Regulation of the Securities Law, issued under Financial Services Authority Decision No E/11/2026. Effective from July 27, the regulation replaces executive rules dating to 2009 and provides the detailed framework for the Securities Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 46/2022. Commercial banks are generally required to conduct activities regulated under the Securities Law through a legally independent entity. Custody and trust services, as well as underwriting, are excluded from the separation requirement.

For affected institutions, implementation extends beyond minimum capital requirements to governance, regulatory reporting, compliance, systems and the organisation of existing securities businesses.

The FSA says the separation is intended to reduce conflicts of interest and limit the transmission of risk between commercial banking and securities-related investment activities.

Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, Vice Executive President of the FSA, said in July that the regulation establishes investment banking as a regulated activity alongside more detailed requirements for capital-market institutions, including minimum capital.

BANKS ALREADY ACTIVE IN SECURITIES

The changes come as several Omani banks already hold licences for activities covered by the securities framework.

The FSA register, accessed on September 28, lists National Bank of Oman for activities including

brokerage, issue management,
portfolio management,
investment advice and research
and investment management.

BankDhofar is licensed for portfolio management, issue management, fund administration, investment management and investment advice and research.

Sohar International also holds licences covering a range of securities activities, including issue management, portfolio management and investment-related services.

Bank Muscat's own public materials describe an asset-management division offering portfolio management, investment funds and structured products. Its wholesale-banking business also includes corporate finance and capital-market activities. The register and bank disclosures show how far securities services are embedded in parts of the banking industry.

The three-year transition gives affected banks substantially longer than other capital-market institutions to bring their structures into line with the new rules.

**A MUCH LARGER
MARKET THAN IN 2009**

A client note from law firm Dentons said the regulation replaces the 2009 framework and aligns the detailed rules



3.5

BILLION
MSX MARKET
CAPITALISATION AS OF
SEPT 24



1

BILLION+
CAPITAL-MARKET
FINANCING,
2021-2025



1.2
BILLION
INVESTMENT AND
REAL-ESTATE FUND
CAPITAL IN 2025

with the 2022 Securities Law and the subsequent development of Oman's capital market.

That development has been rapid. MSX market capitalisation stood at approximately RO 39.41 billion on September 24, up from about RO 32.15 billion in late December 2025. The MSX 30 Index was at 7,554.13 points on September 24, compared with 5,944.80 points on Dec 24, 2025.

The expansion has coincided with a series of government-backed measures, including listings associated with the Oman Investment Authority, market-making and liquidity initiatives and incentives designed to bring more private and family-owned companies into the capital market.

The FSA says more than RO 7 billion in financing was provided through the capital market between 2021 and 2025.

Its published material does not break that total down between government issuance and private-sector financing, or among equity, corporate bonds, sukuk and other instruments.

Under the regulation, an investment bank combines five activities: investment management, product structuring, securities portfolio management, research and advisory services related to listed securities and issue management.

investment banks as intermediaries between businesses seeking finance and local and international investors. Their activities can include structuring securities issues, arranging transactions, advising issuers and helping widen the investor base.

Oman already has specialist institutions operating outside commercial banks. Oman Investment Bank, established and registered with the FSA on November 5, 2023, operates in the securities sector alongside brokerage, asset-management and investment companies.

Investment funds form another part of the revised regime, although they are not new to Oman. The regulation specifies 11 categories, including mutual, liquidity, real-estate, debt-instrument, index, private-equity, venture-capital, green and sustainable funds. Investment funds were already regulated under the previous framework; the FSA describes the 2026 change as an expansion of the categories of collective investment funds.

Total capital in investment and real-estate funds reached around RO 1.2 billion in 2025, up 89.9 per cent from RO 630.8 million a year earlier, according to FSA data.

FIRST DEADLINE FALLS IN JAN

Other entities governed by the Executive Regulation were given six months from July 27 to regularise their position, putting the deadline at the close of business on January 27, 2027.

Banks subject to the separation requirement have up to three years.

The FSA said at its September 23 briefing that around 37 per cent of the provisions in the new regulation are either newly introduced or amended.

For securities firms, the first compliance deadline is now approaching. For banks, the longer transition opens a separate restructuring period as they determine how securities activities now conducted within banking operations will fit the new legal and licensing structure.

SHORTTAKES



The committee reviewed the principal regulatory and technical requirements for the elections.

OCCI prepares digital voting system

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s Election Committee has reviewed preparations for the chamber’s forthcoming elections, including plans to introduce electronic and remote voting.

The committee held its inaugural meeting under the chairmanship of Ghalib bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

It reviewed the principal regulatory and technical requirements for the elections, its work plan for the coming period and the measures needed to manage the various stages of the process.

Discussions also covered the committee’s responsibilities and coordination among the government and other entities involved in organising the elections.

The committee examined the proposed election timetable and related procedures. Dates and further details will be announced in line with the approved process, allowing members of the business community to prepare for and participate in the elections.

Particular attention was given to the use of electronic systems to simplify voting, improve efficiency and accelerate the completion of procedures.

The move follows amendments to the regulations governing OCCI election committees. The changes authorise the committee to approve electronic voting devices and other digital tools, as well as a remote voting system.

Al Maamari said the committee was working to complete the regulatory, technical and technological requirements for the elections in accordance with the governing legislation and in coordination with the relevant entities.

The objective is to provide a clear and organised electoral environment in which eligible voters can exercise their rights easily, he said. — ONA

Oman expands arbitration network with five pacts

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

THE Oman Commercial Arbitration Centre (OCAC) has signed five strategic agreements and launched a competition for law students as part of efforts to strengthen the Sultanate of Oman’s alternative dispute resolution ecosystem.

The centre, which is affiliated with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, also announced details of the Muscat Arbitration and Mediation Days conference, scheduled for December 7 to 9.

The memoranda of understanding were signed with the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Visit Oman, the Oman Society of Engineers, Decree and international education partner Resolve.

The agreements are intended to expand the centre’s partnership network and strengthen institutional cooperation in arbitration, mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution.

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Mandhari, Chief Executive Officer of OCAC, said the conference formed part of efforts to position Oman as a centre for dialogue and the exchange of expertise in arbitration and mediation.

He said the event would bring together international experts and specialists to share their experiences and discuss the latest developments and practices in the sector.

The upcoming edition will feature wider participation and a more diverse programme, he added. Public- and private-



The centre also announced details of the Muscat Arbitration and Mediation Days conference, scheduled for December 7 to 9.

sector institutions will also be able to host specialised panel discussions that complement the centre’s main programme.

Al Mandhari said the conference’s official website, mamd.om, would give participants access to information about the programme, speakers, activities and sponsorship packages.

The centre is seeking to create an integrated platform through which institutions, professionals, researchers and law students can benefit from the conference and its related programmes, he said.

OCAC also launched the inaugural Muscat Arbitration Competition 2026, which seeks to develop young legal talent and bridge the gap between academic study and the practical application of commercial arbitration.

“Investing in law students and developing their capabilities in advocacy, arbitration and legal research is an investment

in the future of the justice and dispute-resolution system”, Al Mandhari said.

The competition will allow students to argue hypothetical arbitration cases before panels of arbitrators, judges and industry practitioners.

Abdulrahman al Farsi, representing Decree, which is organising the competition in partnership with OCAC, said it would have separate Arabic and English tracks. Each track can accommodate up to eight teams, with each team comprising three to five students supervised by a faculty coach.

Teams will argue both sides of a hypothetical arbitration dispute before panels of legal and arbitration professionals.

The annual competition begins with the release of case details in July and August, followed by the submission and evaluation of written memoranda in October.

Oral hearings will be held in November through general

rounds, semi-finals and a final.

The final round and awards ceremony will take place during the Muscat Arbitration and Mediation Days conference in December, bringing together international professionals and emerging legal talent.

Organisers said participating teams must comply with requirements governing integrity, academic originality and the use of artificial intelligence tools to maintain the competition’s academic and professional standards.

Eng Fuad bin Abdullah al Kindi, chairman of the Oman Society of Engineers, said its agreement with OCAC followed earlier discussions and reflected a shared vision for improving the resolution of engineering disputes.

“As the body representing the Oman’s engineering sector, we recognise that arbitration is a critical component in resolving disputes that often involve significant sums and consequently affect the costs of development projects”, he said.

Al Kindi said the agreement went beyond training and aimed to improve arbitrators’ proficiency by integrating engineering expertise into arbitration proceedings. It would also draw on the society’s experience to help refine systems and procedures for handling engineering-related disputes.

The five partnerships are intended to promote arbitration and mediation as effective alternatives to litigation, support the business and investment environment and improve the resolution of commercial, engineering and other economic disputes.

IRENA-Oman workshop puts green hydrogen competitiveness in focus

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Oman’s efforts to build a commercially viable green hydrogen industry are set to receive fresh impetus from a specialised workshop convened early next month with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), as the emerging sector confronts cost, technology and offtake challenges globally.

The closed virtual workshop set for October 6, 2026, has been organised by IRENA in collaboration with Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals. It will examine global developments in green hydrogen and derivative commodities, including ammonia, methanol and synthetic jet fuel, with a particular focus on technology, markets, innovation and policy priorities.



The workshop will explore ways of improving the competitiveness of green hydrogen solutions in target sectors. Image for illustration only.

Significantly, the workshop will also explore ways of improving the competitiveness of green hydrogen solutions in target sectors — an issue of growing importance as

developers worldwide seek to convert ambitious project pipelines into bankable investments and firm offtake agreements.

IRENA acknowledges that green hydrogen and its derivatives are not yet cost-competitive with alternative solutions in most applications. Its earlier analysis estimated green hydrogen production costs at around \$3-\$6/kg even at favourable locations, compared with roughly \$1-\$2/kg for conventional grey hydrogen.

The workshop therefore comes at an important juncture for Oman, whose combination of strong solar and wind resources, large tracts of development land and established industrial and maritime infrastructure has underpinned ambitions to become a major producer of renewable hydrogen.

While direct electrification is

expected to carry much of the global decarbonisation burden, hydrogen is increasingly being positioned for harder-to-electrify applications, notably heavy industry, shipping, aviation and long-duration energy storage.

The challenge has shifted increasingly towards lowering production costs, securing buyers and establishing commercially sustainable value chains.

For Oman, this evolving market environment has also prompted a sharper focus on competitiveness, domestic utilisation and industrial integration.

Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), the orchestrator of the national green hydrogen programme, has said seven projects are progressing towards a combined production capacity of around one million tonnes of renewable hydrogen

annually by 2030, while two previously awarded developments were concluded by mutual agreement following reassessments prompted by changing global market conditions.

At the same time, Hydrom is increasingly positioning hydrogen as part of a wider industrial ecosystem encompassing renewable power, battery storage, green ammonia, low-carbon fuels, iron and steel and other downstream industries, thereby creating potential domestic demand alongside exports.

The strategy is already beginning to produce tangible projects. ACME’s Duqm development has entered implementation, with its initial phase targeting 100,000 tonnes per year of green ammonia, while subsequent phases envisage a significant scale-up in hydrogen and ammonia production.

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold falls as rate-rise bets strengthen



The prices of gold fell 1.5% to \$4,223.95 an ounce on Monday as rising oil prices fuelled inflation concerns and expectations of another US interest-rate increase.

US gold futures declined 1.5% to \$4,257.90. The Federal Reserve raised rates by 25 basis points earlier this month. Meanwhile, silver dropped 2.6%, while platinum and palladium each lost 2.1%. — Reuters

OIL MARKETS

Oil rises as US-Iran talks stall



Oil rose on Monday after US President Donald Trump rejected an Iranian peace proposal, prolonging uncertainty over regional shipping.

Brent gained 1.3% to \$105.64 a barrel, while WTI rose 0.8% to \$93.11. Kpler data showed Middle Eastern crude exports rebounded to 12.8 million barrels per day in September, their highest level since the conflict began in February. — Reuters

HUGE ECONOMY

China industrial profits rise 15.7%



Profits at China’s major industrial companies increased 15.7% year on year to 5.27 trillion yuan during the first eight months of 2026, official data showed. August profit growth slowed to 4.2% from 11.2% in July.

Computer, communications and electronic-equipment manufacturers led the increase, with their combined profits more than doubling during the January-August period. — Reuters

OPINION

Don't just trust what you watch!



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is
strategic adviser,
businessman and
motivational
speaker

IMAGINE you receive a video message on your WhatsApp showing a friend or a close relative doing something embarrassing. The video looks real. The face, voice and surroundings are familiar. You watch it and believe it. This video was sent to you by other friends or relatives, who have also perhaps shared with others too. What was intended as a joke suddenly becomes a source of embarrassment, hurt feelings and family tension. The person (friend or relative) in the video may never have done what appears on the screen, but the emotional damage is real. Now imagine a similar video spreading across an entire community, claiming that a public figure, be it a director of a governmental institution and/or a senior executive of a reputed organisation, has made a shocking announcement. People panic, rumors spread and trust begins to crumble. By the time someone confirms that the video was fabricated, the damage may already be done. These are all not just stories; these all may as well be factual incidents. Whether to believe them or not, is the dilemma today. My advice is that you don't just trust what you watch! In a world where artificial intelligence can make almost anything look real, how do we identify whether a video is genuine or fake? As an experienced

technologist, I can confidently tell you that AI has made video creation astonishingly easy. With a simple text prompt, a photograph, or a short recording, today's AI tools can generate realistic faces, imitate voices, recreate movements and produce scenes that never happened. Someone can make a person appear to speak words they never said, or show them in a place they have never visited. And the technology is improving rapidly. What once required professional equipment, technical expertise and hours of editing can now be done by ordinary people using accessible tools. Even experienced viewers can struggle to distinguish a convincing AI-generated video from a genuine recording. A recent 2026 study I came across recently found that almost 70% of 514 adults surveyed failed to correctly identify all the real and fake videos they were shown. I, personally, am among them too. In fact, I now have the challenge of identifying whether the videos that my dad forwards for me to check are real or just fake. In my humble opinion, the biggest danger is not simply that AI can create fake videos. It is that we may lose the ability to trust genuine ones. So, what can we do? Here are a few practical steps that I personally follow in order to help identify if a video is fake: First, look closely at the details. Watch for unnatural facial expressions, strange hand movements, distorted objects, inconsistent lighting, or lips that do not match the spoken

In a world where artificial intelligence can make almost anything look real, how do we identify whether a video is genuine or fake? As an experienced technologist, I can confidently tell you that AI has made video creation astonishingly easy.

words. Secondly, listen carefully. Does the voice sound natural? Are there unusual pauses, strange pronunciations, or changes in tone? A familiar voice alone is no guarantee that the video is real. Thirdly and most importantly, check the source. Who originally posted or sent the video? Is it from a trusted news/media organisation, an official government or establishment account, or is it just from an unknown WhatsApp number? Looking for the same story on reliable websites (and sources) will mostly help find the legitimacy of the same. Try and search for the original video. Finally, pause before sharing. If a video is shocking, embarrassing, or emotionally upsetting, take a moment to verify it. Contact the person involved directly if necessary. Alhamdulillah, technology continues to bring us incredible opportunities, but it also comes with responsibilities. We cannot rely solely on our eyes and ears anymore. The ability to question, verify and think critically is becoming just as important as technology itself. The next time a video arrives in your WhatsApp group, remember: Just because you can see it, does not mean it happened. Furthermore, remember that modern AI tools continue to improve and avoid many of the flaws I shared above. So be wary! Until we catch up again next week. Be vigilant and don't just trust what you watch!

WHERE WILL FED
TIGHTENING HIT
HARDEST IN ASIA?

MANISHI RAYCHAUDHURI

As the US monetary tightening cycle gets underway, Asian markets face a formidable headwind, yet the structural impact will diverge sharply by country and sector. Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh announced on September 16 that the US central bank was hiking its benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points. But even more importantly, the Fed signalled that further increases could be coming to help combat inflation that has been above the 2% target for over five years. Fed officials' views, encapsulated in the so-called "dot plot", indicate that one more rate hike is likely this year. Markets, meanwhile, are expecting as many as three more rate hikes through the middle of next year. This hawkish shift in monetary policy is expected to affect Asian economies and financial markets through several interconnected channels, including by spurring capital outflows, weakening domestic currencies and bumping up inflationary pressures. But the effects should be far from uniform across the region. CAPITAL CRUNCH Higher US yields can draw global investors to dollar-denominated assets, leading to capital flight from emerging Asian markets. During the first 15 years of this century, US Treasury yields plummeted to ultra-low levels, especially following the global financial crisis of 2008-09. This triggered an avalanche of foreign capital into Asian equities. However, that began to change during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, only to worsen following Russia's 2022 war in Ukraine, which compounded inflationary pressures and helped push rates higher. But it was the onset of the US-Israeli war with Iran this year that truly saw foreign investment flows into Asia collapse. Driven by US 10-year yields hovering at 4-5%, estimated monthly foreign-equity outflows reached a record \$192 billion through September 25 — far eclipsing the previous 2025 peak of \$45 billion, based on data from Asian stock exchanges. Predictably, many Asian currencies weakened significantly against the dollar during this period. Economies with current account deficits — such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines — were hit the hardest, as they rely heavily on foreign investments to finance their trade shortfalls. Meanwhile, the currencies of economies running current account surpluses, like China and South Korea, have appreciated. Obviously, other factors are at play here, especially in China, which doesn't have a freely floating currency, but the pattern still holds. All of this suggests that if US interest rates continue to rise, the currencies of deficit economies could continue to slide further. — Reuters

A date, not a discount

ON September 21, Oman did something governments seldom do. It put a deadline on itself. Under the new Executive Regulation of the Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law, issued by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones as Decision 81/2026, an investor who files a complete licence application will have an answer within seven working days. If none comes, the answer is yes. It has been reported as the last piece of a legal jigsaw begun with Royal Decree 38/2025. It is. But the clock is the part worth understanding. Ask a manufacturer what it wants from a host government and it will not say a lower tax rate. Oman's zones have long offered holidays measured in decades and full foreign ownership alongside them. What a manufacturer wants is a date. Borrowed money does not wait politely. Every month between land allocation and license is interest paid for nothing and a delay that cannot be estimated cannot go in a spreadsheet. Give it a date and it can build the case. Leave it open and it builds later, or never. The need is not abstract. The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan, adopted in January, wants FDI inflows equivalent to 11 per cent of GDP and a private-sector contribution to GDP of 56 per cent by 2030. On a GDP base of about RO 42 billion, the first comes to roughly RO 4.6 billion. In the first quarter of 2026, FDI inflows reached RO 2.57 billion, on figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Nobody closes a gap that size by shaving another point off a tax rate that is already zero. Look at what Oman holds and the difficulty is clear. The FDI stock stood at a record RO 32.2 billion in the first quarter. Four-fifths of it sits in oil and gas; less than a tenth is manufacturing. This is not geology talking. Hydrocarbon money arrives through concession agreements in



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which the state is the counterparty and every milestone is haggled over in advance. A maker of pumps or cable gets no such courtesy. It applies and waits. The zones have done well within that model, RO 22.4 billion committed and 325 agreements signed last year alone. But each was, in effect, a private timetable. The regulation makes the timetable public and the same for everybody. Article 16 sets the seven-day rule; Article 17 allows a licence to be issued automatically after the electronic verification of the required data, documents and conditions, while Article 18 allows automatic renewal where the licensee's data are up to date and the prescribed conditions continue to be met. In a world where the twenty biggest host economies swallowed more than 80 per cent of global FDI last year, on UNCTAD's count, a country of five million people will not win on size. It can win on friction, which is what a seven-day rule removes. The fine print cuts both ways. The clock starts only when the file is complete; Article 7 leaves that to the applicant. An incomplete application is not a slow one but a stationary one. And silence means yes for the operating licence alone. On a transfer of licence, a strategic-project approval or a real-estate license the authority has five, thirty and fifteen days; and there silence means no. This is by design; the routine decision is automated, the expensive one kept in human hands. But whoever assumes an unanswered letter is good news will be wrong three times in four. For the foreign investor who reads it, the offer is large. A project above RO 10 million that brings technology, local content, supply security or exports can be declared strategic and win up to ten years without land rent and four years outside Omanisation quotas. Income-tax exemption now reaches ten classes of activity, data centres and green hydrogen among them. Goods may be exported

without a permit. Residency follows the investment and extends to spouse and close family. None of it arrives unasked; a feasibility study, a timetable, proof of solvency and a commercial registration are the price of entry. But the question has changed. It is no longer whether Oman is ready for the investor, but whether the investor's file is ready for Oman. For Omani businesses the gains are specific. Local content is one of the four tests a project must pass to be called strategic, so a foreign plant that buys fabrication, packaging and transport from Omani firms strengthens its own case for ten rent-free years. Smaller Omani companies in the zones get the same seven-day clock as the multinational next door and the Board may waive the RO 10 million threshold where a project's nature warrants. Somebody must assemble the files, keep the new register current and run the notices and quarterly reports the regulation requires: steady work for Omani lawyers, accountants, engineers and freight forwarders that outlasts the opening ceremony. The plan asks the private sector for 50,000 Omani jobs a year. The zones produced 4,467 last year against a target of 2,500 and each new plant counts twice, on its own payroll and in the firms that supply it. The six months to March 2027 that Article III allows existing licensees to bring their affairs into line is also the window in which first movers are decided. A company already in Suhar, Al Duqm or Salalah can test its project against the exempt activity classes and strategic threshold now; and file before the queue forms. Ports on the open ocean and treaty access to India and the United States were always Oman's case as a manufacturing and logistics base. What was missing was a date and Oman has now supplied one. The rest belongs to those who arrive with the paperwork, and to the Omani firms ready to carry it with them.

CLASSIFIEDS

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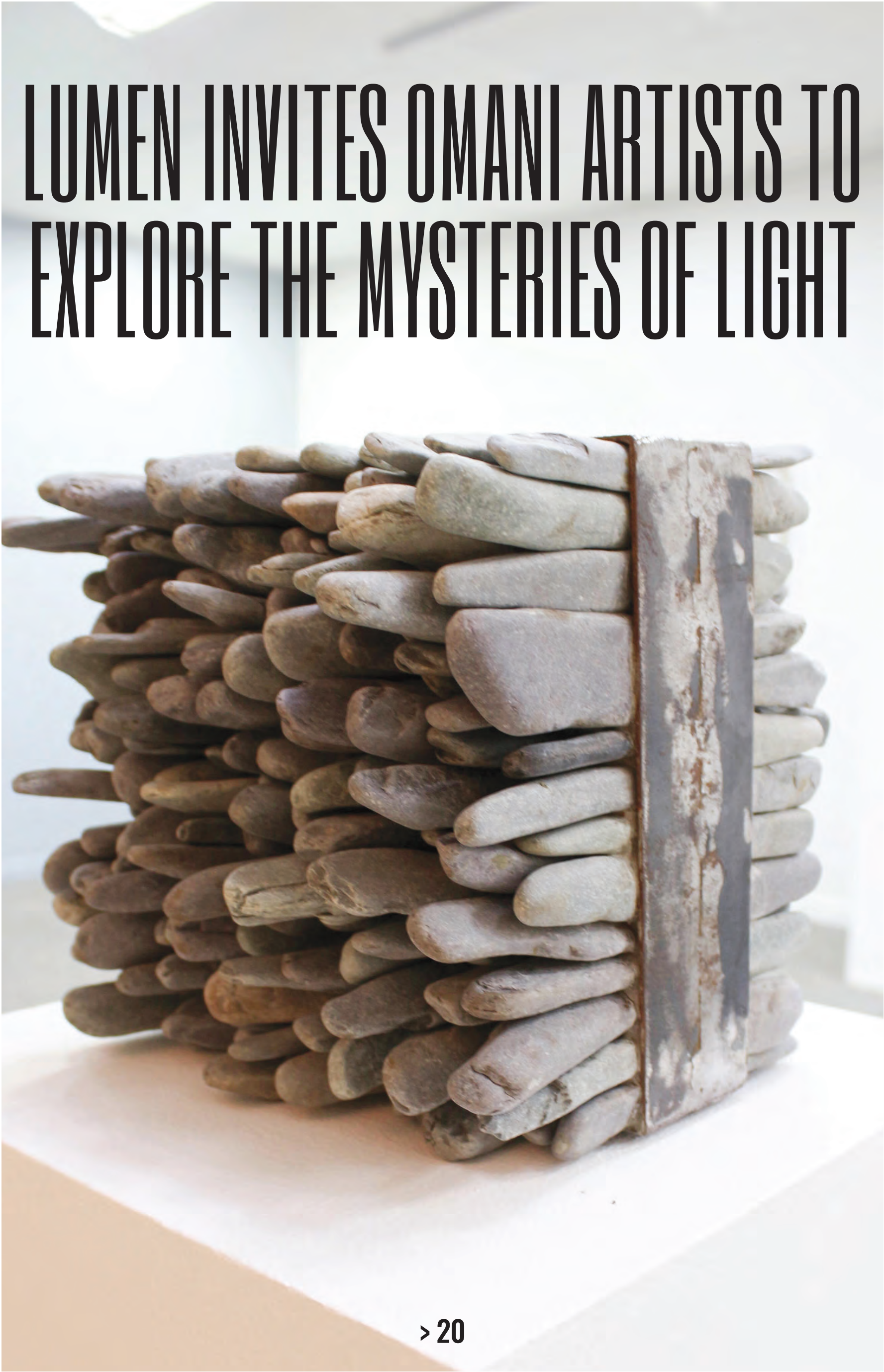
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ART/LIFE



LUMEN INVITES OMANI ARTISTS TO EXPLORE THE MYSTERIES OF LIGHT

> 20

ENTERTAINMENT **LAW**S

ANIME STAR TAKES ON TIKTOK OVER AI VOICE CLONE



AI imitation is a growing concern among performers worldwide, and the threat has roiled Japan's storied animation industry. — AFP

A Japanese anime star is taking TikTok to court over videos he says use an AI clone of his distinctive baritone, in a case that could help determine who controls a performer's voice. A verdict is expected on Wednesday.

The lawsuit is believed to be Japan's first challenging imitation of a voice.

Kenjiro Tsuda, 55, is known for roles in Jujutsu Kaisen and Yu-Gi-Oh!. He is demanding that TikTok remove videos narrated in a voice he describes as unmistakably his: deep and "lustrous". The platform argues that it is a generic male voice and that any resemblance is subjective, according to court records seen by AFP.

The videos paired images with narration about urban legends, occult phenomena and conspiracy theories. They were posted by an anonymous account whose profile picture resembled a Jujutsu Kaisen character voiced by Tsuda. At one point, the account had more than 200,000 followers and may have earned over 500,000 yen (\$3,200) a month, his complaint said.

Tsuda's lawyers argue that the account gained its audience through his recognisable voice, infringing his right to control commercial use of his identity. Although the account is no longer visible, the Tokyo District Court must decide whether TikTok was responsible for removing its videos.

The case has struck a nerve in Japan's animation industry, where voice actors can become stars in their own right. "An actor's voice is the result of years of rigorous training and apprenticeship", said Yuko Sasaki of the Japan Actors Union. "It's something we spend lots of time and money perfecting". Sasaki and other actors have launched a "No More" campaign against using AI to imitate performers without permission. Actor Bin Shimada warned that unchecked cloning on social media could leave younger performers struggling to see a future in the profession.

Japan has no law that explicitly protects a person's voice, but the justice ministry issued non-binding guidance last month saying voices may be covered by existing rights over identity and likeness. TikTok, meanwhile, says it merely hosts a forum for users' creative expression and disputes Tsuda's claims about his fame.

Legal scholar Tatsuhiro Ueno believes the voice is unlikely to be denied protection altogether. Tsuda's role as a stoic sorcerer in Jujutsu Kaisen has also made his voice recognisable abroad, he said, giving the ruling an audience far beyond Japan.

Veteran voice actor Michihiro Ikemizu, 83, expressed solidarity with Tsuda but insisted AI could not match a human performance. "You need to constantly feel and adapt while performing your role. That's something AI can never do", he said. "That's our only weapon". — AFP

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



CULTURE

A dancer wearing a traditional costume performs during a "Convite", a traditional dance festival in Guatemala.

— AFP



RUNWAY

A model presents a creation from the Giorgio Armani Spring/Summer 2027 womenswear collection during Milan Fashion Week, in Milan.

— Reuters



HISTORY

Visitors take selfies next to ancient busts at the National Archaeological Museum during European Heritage Days in Athens, Greece.

— Reuters

INSTA PICKS



Nature's little masterpiece



Eurasian hoopoe

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‘AVENGERS: ENDGAME’
RERELEASE TOPS BOX OFFICE



‘Avengers: Endgame’, is the second-highest-grossing film of all time. — AFP

A re-release of *Avengers: Endgame* topped the North American box office this weekend, taking an estimated \$26 million as Disney builds anticipation for the next film in the franchise.

The 2019 superhero blockbuster, the second-highest-grossing film of all time with \$2.8 billion in ticket sales, has earned \$86 million globally from its return to cinemas, according to tracking firm Exhibitor Relations.

Audiences had another reason to revisit the film: four new post-credit scenes setting up *Avengers: Doomsday*, due on December 18. “As a marketing exercise, it’s an effective way to build early word-of-mouth”, said industry analyst David A Gross.

Sony’s *Resident Evil* took second place with \$23.3 million in North America, bringing its global total after two weeks to

more than \$196 million.

Heart of the Beast opened in third with \$20 million. It stars Brad Pitt as a former soldier trying to survive in the Alaskan wilderness with his traumatised combat dog. *A24’s* *Primetime* debuted next with \$19.2 million. Robert Pattinson plays Chris Hansen, host of the real-life US programme *To Catch a Predator*, which used sting operations to confront suspected sexual predators.

Animated family film *Forgotten Island* opened to \$12.8 million despite positive reviews. Gross called it a weak debut for a major studio’s original animation but said overseas earnings could help offset losses.

Practical Magic 2, *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, *The Odyssey*, *Coyote vs. Acme and Daniel* and *the Fiery Furnace* completed the top 10.

— AFP

Rigoletto raises the curtain on ROHM’s anniversary season



STAFF REPORTER

FIFTEEN years after the Royal Opera House Muscat first raised its curtain, the institution is returning to one of the artistic figures closely connected with its beginnings as it prepares to open its 2026-27 season.

At a press briefing held ahead of the opening, ROHM discussed its upcoming production of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, alongside the wider programme planned to celebrate its 15th anniversary under the theme “15 years of inspiration”.

The opera will be staged on October 1 and 3 at 7 pm, bringing back a production of particular significance to ROHM. *Rigoletto* was the final operatic staging conceived by legendary Italian director Franco Zeffirelli, whose relationship with the House stretches back to its opening in 2011, when his production of Puccini’s *Turandot* served as the inaugural opera.

First presented in Muscat in 2022, *Rigoletto* also features costumes by Academy Award-winning designer Maurizio Millenotti. The production brings together international and Omani talent

First presented in Muscat in 2022, *Rigoletto* also features costumes by Academy Award-winning designer Maurizio Millenotti. The production brings together international artists, while 30 Omani extras will take part on stage.

Conductor Evelino Pidò will lead the Orchestra del Teatro Regio di Torino and the Camerata Musicale di Parma Choir. Baritone Franco Vassallo takes the title role, joined by Enea Scala as the Duke of Mantua and soprano Maria Kokareva as Gilda. The Leoncello Historical Dance Group will further bring reconstructed period dances to the production.

Between the two *Rigoletto* performances, conductor Karel Mark Chichon will lead the Orchestra del Teatro Regio di Torino in a concert featuring mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča on October 2.

The press briefing also offered a wider look at an anniversary season

comprising 28 shows across 43 performance nights from October 2026 to May 2027.

Among its highlights is *Sindbad: The Omani Sailor*, an original Arabic Grand Opera inspired by Oman’s maritime heritage, with music by Hisham Gabr. Other productions include Rudolf Nureyev’s *Don Quixote* performed by Teatro alla Scala Ballet, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in Concert and *The Opera!*, an immersive reimaging of *Orpheus* and *Eurydice*.

The season will also welcome organist Cameron Carpenter, Homage to the Qanun featuring Omani artist Wahab al Dhanki, the annual Military Music: Oman and the World; and Arab stars including Nabeel Shuail, Nawal and Aseel Abu Bakr.

Opening with Zeffirelli’s final operatic vision, the anniversary season connects ROHM’s beginnings with its continuing commitment to international artistic exchange and Omani creative participation.

FEATURES



LUMEN is on show at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria until October 2. Visitors explore the artworks in Al Qurum.

LUMEN invites Omani artists to explore the mysteries of light

YERU EBUEN

SOME of the sculptures at LUMEN look as though they have arrived carrying secrets.

One is built from stones, packed into a square and held together by two weathered bands. It resembles a fragment of an old wall, or something protected before it could fall apart. Another rises in a rough grey column, pierced by hollows.

From one angle it resembles a misshapen beehive; from another, a face or a shelter. Nearby, a tall pale form seems almost human, although it never quite settles into a body.

At the opening, people stopped around these objects. They leaned closer, walked around them and exchanged guesses. The works produced the kind of curiosity that makes someone stay because an explanation has not been supplied.

That is how curator Anetta Szabo would like LUMEN to be encountered. “I would just let them see it for themselves, stop where they like and pause at what they find interesting”, she says. “We are all so different, and drawn to different things”.

The exhibition brings together 14 artists working in painting, sculpture, installation, photography, etching and print. It is showing at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria in the Jawharat Al Shatti complex in Al Qurum until October 2, 2026. The gallery is open from 8 am to 8 pm.

LUMEN began in 2021 as a platform where young Omani artists could present new work. Each edition has approached light differently, through themes including Light in Darkness, Light in Oman and When Light Bends.

This year, Szabo began with the fact that the speed of light in a vacuum remains constant, even when observers are moving differently.

The science may sound intimidating, but the thought behind it belongs to ordinary life. Plans change. People leave. Certainties disappear. Even our understanding of the same event can differ according to where we stand. Szabo wondered whether, beneath all that movement, each person has something that remains firm.



LUMEN brings together 14 artists working across painting, sculpture, installation, photography, etching and print.

At LUMEN, 14 artists explore light through sculpture, painting, photography and more. Curator Anetta Szabo invites visitors to look closely, follow their curiosity and find their own meaning in the work.

“When one finds the Light in their life, it is not a fluid, abstract thing”, she says. “It is actually the most stable, firm thing, one that becomes a foundation for life, a point of reference, a place to build your life on”. She handed that idea to the artists and allowed them to find their own way through it. The pieces do not illustrate a physics lesson. They speak through weight, texture, space, shadow and material. Visitors bring their own memories and associations, which can change what an object becomes.

The first LUMEN explored wave-particle duality: light’s ability to behave as both a wave and a particle. Szabo found a human parallel in our difficulty accepting opposing realities, such as the physical and the spiritual. This year’s exhibition again leaves room for more than one way of seeing.

Choosing the artists took time. LUMEN was organised by invitation rather than an open call. Szabo approached artists whose earlier work suggested they could respond to an abstract, minimalist brief. Most created new pieces.

The gallery is one room, so each piece had to hold its place without silencing those around it. Many local artists have full-time jobs, leaving limited hours for their practice.

Curating depended on relationships built through interest, encouragement and trust, along with

the occasional reminder about a deadline.

Szabo describes watching artists interpret the same idea differently as one of the privileges of curating. She will not choose a favourite, although she is considering buying one work herself.

For people who hesitate outside galleries because they feel they do not “understand” contemporary art, she offers a gentler way in. “The art world can be intimidating, but it should not be”, she says. “Are we intimidated by a beautiful sunset? No. Art is the same”. There is no examination waiting at the end of the room. “Come, enjoy it and take away the things that genuinely touched you”, she says. “No need to pretend”.

Szabo also hopes visitors will remember the artists and follow what they make next. Oman’s art community is growing, but artists need places to show and people willing to take their work seriously.

“Culture is not just something of the past”, she says. “It is also of the present: all the artistic practices that are born today”.

Eventually, visitors leave the quiet room and return to the heat and movement of Muscat. The bound stones, pale figure and hollowed form stay behind, their meanings unresolved. Perhaps that is their gift: they ask us to pause and consider what, when everything else changes, still helps us find our way.



Sculptures at LUMEN invite visitors to look closer and make their own interpretations.



The exhibition explores light through texture, shadow, space and material.