

O M A N  D A I L Y

Observer

VOL. 44, NO. 229
PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:24 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:57 AM

DHUHR 12:16 PM

ASR 03:34 PM

MAGHRIB 07:03 PM

ISHA 08:25 PM



2010000387405



INBRIEF

HM GREETES CONGO, SOMALIA, BURUNDI, RWANDA, CANADA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo on his country’s Independence Anniversary.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes for Congo’s progress, development and stability under the leadership of President Felix Tshisekedi. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further growth in a manner that serves mutual interests.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also sent a cable of greetings to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia on his country’s National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Hassan in achieving further accomplishments and aspirations that serve the people of his country.

His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further progress and growth in all spheres.

His Majesty the Sultan also sent a cable of greetings to President Evariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi on his country’s National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Evariste and the people of his country.

His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of greetings to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda on his country’s National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Kagame in achieving his people’s aspirations of further progress, stability and growth.

His Majesty the Sultan also sent a cable of greetings to Governor-General Mary Simon of Canada on her country’s National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to Governor General Mary Simon, wishing Canada further prosperity and growth. His Majesty also wished the bilateral cooperation and partnerships further expansion in various fields to serve the interests of the two countries’ peoples. — ONA

RO 3.4 MILLION REHABILITATION CENTRE OPENS



Muscat Taafi Centre, the main specialised facility in Oman to provide treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals recovering from addiction, was officially opened in the Wilayat of Al Amerat on Monday. **REPORT ON P2**



Grape season is expected to continue until early August, with locally grown grapes seeing strong demand in regional markets due to their rich flavour and high quality. A scene from Al Rawdah village, Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi.

Photo by **ABDULAZIZ AL RIYAMI**

More Israeli strikes amid hopes of Gaza truce talks

ISRAELI STRIKES killed at least 58 people across Gaza on Monday as residents in the enclave’s north reported one of the heaviest bombardments in weeks, while Israeli officials were due in Washington for a new ceasefire push by the Trump administration.

A day after US President Donald Trump urged an end to the 20-month-old war, a confidant of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected at the White House for talks on a Gaza ceasefire, Iran, and possible wider regional diplomatic deals.

But on the ground in the Palestinian enclave, there was no sign of fighting letting up. The Israeli military issued evacuation orders on Monday to residents in large districts in the northern Gaza Strip, forcing a new wave of displacement.

“Explosions never stopped; they bombed schools and homes. It felt like earthquakes,” said Salah, 60, a father of five children, from Gaza City. “In the news we hear a ceasefire is near, on the ground we see death and we hear explosions.”

Israeli tanks pushed into the eastern areas of Zeitoun suburb in Gaza City and shelled several areas in the north, while aircraft bombed at least four schools after ordering hundreds of families sheltering inside to leave, residents said.

At least 58 people were killed in Israeli strikes on Monday, health authorities said,



A woman sits amidst the damage at an UNRWA school sheltering displaced people that was hit in an Israeli air strike on Monday. — Reuters

including 10 people killed in Zeitoun and at least 13 killed southwest of Gaza City.

Twenty people, including women, children and a local journalist were killed in an Israeli air strike on a beachfront cafe in Gaza City, medics said. The Palestinian Journalist Syndicate said more than 220 journalists had been killed in Gaza since the war began in October 2023.

The Israeli military said it struck militant targets in northern Gaza, including command and control centres, after taking steps to mitigate the risk of harming civilians. There was no immediate word from Israel on the reported casualties southwest of the Gaza Strip and the beachfront cafe. The bombardment followed new evacuation orders to vast areas in the north, where Israeli forces had operated before and left behind wide-scale destruction. The military ordered people there to head south, saying that it planned to fight Hamas fighters operating in northern Gaza, including in the heart of Gaza City.

The Israeli military acknowledged on Monday that Palestinian civilians were harmed at aid distribution centres in the Gaza Strip, saying that new instructions had been issued to Israeli forces following “lessons learned”.

Since Israel lifted an 11-week aid blockade on Gaza on May 19, allowing limited U.N. deliveries to resume, the United Nations says more than 400 Palestinians have been killed while seeking handouts of aid. **SEE P6**

Metal Compass Project marks highest point of Jabal Samhan

SALALAH: The Environment Authority in Dhofar Governorate, in cooperation with the National Survey Authority and the Royal Air Force of Oman, on Monday implemented the Metal Compass Project at the summit of Jabal Samhan.

The project aims to document the highest elevation point in Dhofar Governorate and transform it into a prominent environmental landmark on Oman’s tourism and environmental map. Implemented

within the Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve, the project provides valuable data about the reserve’s characteristics to enhance environmental, tourism and cultural awareness.

A concrete block topped with a metal compass structure marking the four cardinal directions and nearby environmental/tourism landmarks has been installed at “Moden” summit to highlight the reserve’s cultural and natural identity.



Standing at 1,757.6 metres above sea level, Moden summit represents one of Oman’s most distinctive natural locations and the country’s second-highest mountain peak.

Zahrán bin Ahmed Al Abdulsalam, Director-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, stated: “This project establishes Jabal Samhan summit as a promising environmental, tourism and cultural landmark offering unique experiences for both visitors and

local communities.” The project enhances the reserve’s status as a premier ecotourism destination while preserving its rich natural resources and authentic cultural values. Al Abdulsalam added that it invites enthusiasts to explore the reserve’s natural, geological and biological aspects, which will expand fundamental knowledge for deeper understanding of its unique ecosystem and guide conservation efforts. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The exercise is being conducted by participants of the 38th course. — ONA

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF
FOLLOWS UP AL
HAZM EXERCISE

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces, along with SAF commanders and several senior officers, followed up on Monday at the Joint Command and Staff College part of the “Al Hazm” exercise.

The exercise is being conducted by participants of the 38th course, representing various military and security services as well as several friendly nations.

Attendees were briefed by the college’s faculty on the progress of the exercise, while the participants provided an explanation of their engagement with the exercise scenarios and the proposed solutions to the hypothetical challenges across its various stages and activities.

The “Al Hazm” exercise, running from June 23 to July 2, forms part of the course’s general curriculum and serves as the culmination of a series of exercises undertaken by the Joint Command and Staff College students. It aims to achieve the intended training objectives while aligning with the requirements of joint military operations. — ONA

SALALAH AIRPORT
FORECASTS 900,000
PASSENGERS IN 2025



Most of the airlines currently operating to Salalah remain unchanged.

SALALAH: Salalah Airport is witnessing a steady increase in passenger traffic, with officials projecting further growth in the coming year.

Dr Ali bin Bakheet Fadhil said that the airport welcomed 626,000 travellers in 2024, with expectations for the figure to rise to 900,000 passengers in 2025.

Dr Ali noted that most of the airlines currently operating to Salalah remain unchanged, with the exception of Saudi Airlines, which has launched its services to the governorate for the first time.

“We welcome the new guests to Dhofar,” he said, referring to the Kingdom’s national carrier. Saudi Airlines is the only new entrant to the list of operators serving Salalah Airport.

The airline now runs three weekly flights from Jeddah to Salalah, he confirmed. Dr Ali also stated that domestic flights make up 60 per cent of total air traffic to Salalah, while the remaining comprise regional flights, primarily from the GCC and India.

Highlighting connectivity from neighbouring countries, he said Salalah receives 52 flights per week from the UAE, nine from Qatar, nine from Kuwait and 15 from Saudi Arabia, describing the numbers as a positive increase in regional demand.

OMAN, RUSSIA
DISCUSS
COOPERATION
IN FOOD
SECURITY

ROME: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Monday held a meeting with Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, on the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the 44th session of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Conference being held in Rome, Italy.

The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation in the fields of food



The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation in the fields of food security and investment. - ONA

security and investment. The two sides also touched on means of exchanging expertise in developing the sectors of agriculture, fisheries and water resources.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Nizar bin Al Julanda al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Italian Republic. — ONA

Taafi Centre to offer
services for addicts

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

THE Ministry of Health celebrated the inauguration of the Muscat Taafi Centre, the main specialised facility in Oman to provide treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals recovering from addiction, in the Wilayat of Al Amerat, under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, and in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The centre is the first government institution in the Sultanate of Oman dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. It was established in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Al Jisr Foundation for Charitable Work, as part of a national vision to address the growing addiction issue and to provide comprehensive care in a safe and integrated environment.

Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, explained that the centre includes 170 beds — 40 for recovery and 130 for detoxification and medical and psychological rehabilitation. This reflects the scale of the project and the importance of its services. He pointed out that over 495 addiction cases were recorded in 2024, highlighting the urgent need for specialised centres like this one, which is designed to cover all stages of treatment: from detoxification to psychological rehabilitation, and finally to recovery and community support.

Dr Al Lamki added that what distinguishes the centre is its integrative approach, bringing together the efforts of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social



The centre is the first government institution in the Sultanate of Oman dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. — ONA

Development, and the Royal Oman Police to provide comprehensive treatment under one roof — addressing the previous gap in psychological and rehabilitative services, which were formerly scattered among Al Masarra Hospital and other institutions.

Dr Yousuf bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, noted that the centre goes beyond medical treatment. It follows modern methods based on psychological and social rehabilitation in an interactive environment that includes artistic and skill-building activities such as drawing, reading and writing, as well as a private library and creative spaces.

Dr Mahmood bin Zaher al Abri, Secretary of the National Committee for Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, stated that Oman records an average of 480 addiction cases annually, with 52 per cent of them concentrated in Muscat Governorate, followed by Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South. He noted a worrying rise in the abuse of “shabu” (methamphetamine) since the

Covid-19 pandemic, which causes psychotic symptoms and violent behaviours that may lead to suicide attempts. He also mentioned plans to develop an electronic system to document cases and ensure confidentiality, along with follow-up programmes in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development.

Aseela al Zaabi, Head of Muscat Taafi Centre, emphasised that the opening of the centre marks a qualitative leap in the provision of addiction treatment services in Oman. She pointed out that the services previously offered at Al Masarra Hospital have now been transferred to the new centre in Al Amerat, enhanced with more comprehensive and advanced facilities.

It is worth noting that the total cost of the project amounted to RO 3.4 million — RO 2.5 million from PDO and RO 900,000 from Al Jisr Foundation. According to Dr Al Abri, the second phase of the centre will include an expansion to 300 beds, in addition to other centres under construction in Suhar and Dhofar.

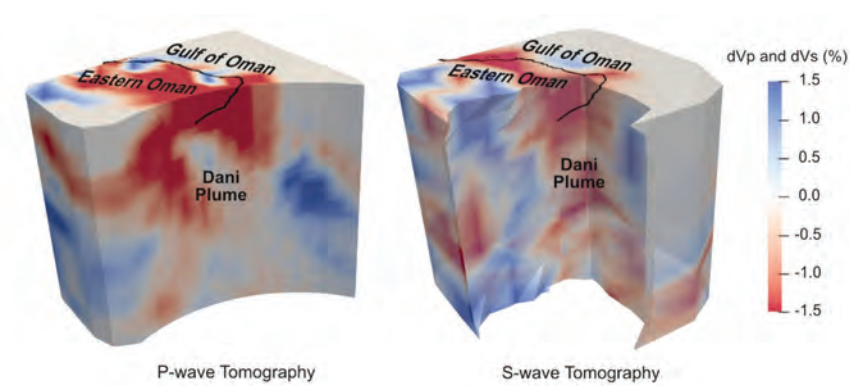
‘Ghost plume’ found beneath Oman harmless

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyouusef

The huge column of hot rock, known as a mantle plume or a ‘ghost plume’, which rises from deep inside the earth beneath Eastern Oman, has been identified by experts as harmless, not causing any volcanoes or obvious signs on the surface like other plumes around the world.

“This discovery of the long-hidden plume of magma beneath Oman’s Salma Plateau is important because it shows that there may be many more hidden plumes beneath continents, quietly shaping landscapes and even plate movements without creating volcanoes,” said Harith al Kubaisy, Research Assistant at the Earthquake Monitoring Centre, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Scientists explain that these ghost plumes may carry heat from deep inside the earth to the surface, affecting how the planet cools down and evolves over time. This finding changes



the way we think about the Earth’s inner workings, as not all plumes are visible at the surface.

“Normally, mantle plumes are detected when they melt rocks and create volcanoes, like those seen in Hawaii or Iceland. But the Dani plume, as scientists have named it, stays hidden because Oman’s crust is very thick (over 100 kilometres deep), preventing the hot material from reaching the surface to form volcanoes,” he added.

First detailed in the journal Earth and Planetary Science

Letters, the finding reveals a new class of deep mantle plumes that shape continents silently, without the typical signature of surface volcanoes.

While plumes typically leave a visible volcanic trail — like Hawaii’s island chain—the Dani plume’s evidence may have been erased by subduction activity in the nearby Makran zone. Still, researchers say this finding opens the door to discovering more ‘ghost’ plumes, particularly in regions with similar thick crusts, such as Africa. As seismic

technologies advance, more silent subterranean forces shaping Earth’s history may come to light.

Researchers from different countries used data from earthquakes around the world, collected by a network of seismic stations in Oman and the UAE, to create 3D images of the Earth’s interior. These images showed a large area where seismic waves travel more slowly, indicating the rock is hotter than its surroundings.

The plume rises from more than 660 kilometres underground all the way up towards the crust.

“Although there is no volcanic activity linked to the Dani plume, scientists have found other signs of its existence. The land above it is slightly higher than surrounding areas, suggesting the hot plume is pushing the ground upwards from below, which is called dynamic uplift. They also noticed special changes in deep underground layers, which occur when temperatures are higher,” Al Kubaisy said.

SHORT TAKES



The event was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. — ONA

AL AWABI CHARITY TEAM LAUNCHES DONATIONS PLATFORM

AL AWABI: The electronic donations platform for Al Awabi Charity Team was officially launched on Monday in Al Awabi, Al Batinah South Governorate.

Al Awabi Charity Team is an affiliate of the Ministry of Social Development, and the Zakat Committee of the wilayat which is affiliated to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, in the presence of several officials from various government entities.

Sultan bin Said al Rawahi, Head of Al Awabi Charity Team, stated that the platform aims to facilitate the donation process for citizens and residents, enhancing support for charitable initiatives carried out by the team and the Zakat Committee. — ONA

DECISION-MAKING 12 EXERCISE BEGINS AT NDC



Participants from various military, security and civilian agencies are taking part in the exercise. — ONA

MUSCAT: The annual strategic exercise (Decision Making 12) began at the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies, on Sunday and continues until July 8.

Participants in the 12th course from various military, security and civilian agencies are taking part in the exercise which is attended by a number of experts and advisers from military and security agencies, ministries and government establishments and the Guidance Authority at the National Defence College.

Exercise Decision Making 12 represents a practical translation of the theoretical and academic knowledge acquired by the course participants in the field of strategic studies, including the latest training techniques at the national, regional and international levels. It also translates academic skills and theoretical programmes within the general curriculum and academic courses. — ONA

NCEM MEETING REVIEWS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

MUSCAT: The National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM) held its first meeting of the year on Monday at the Police General Command under the chairmanship of Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs and Chairman of the NCEM.

The meeting reviewed national efforts in emergency management, the level of coordination among all relevant sectors, and measures to enhance emergency response



Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi presided over the meeting. — ONA

procedures.

During the meeting, the electronic emergency management system platform was launched.

The platform aims to improve and streamline the National Committee’s work in managing and exchanging information and data related to handling emergencies across various stages, including monitoring, early warning, preparedness and response.

The electronic system will link all sectors of the Emergency Management Committee, subcommittees in the governorates, operation centres and relevant entities involved in emergency management. — ONA

MoSD launches phase two of summer centres

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

THE activities of the second phase of the Ministry of Social Development’s (MoSD) participation in the 2025 Summer Centres in Al Batinah North Governorate have begun.

The participation, supervised by the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, is a continuation of community efforts to harness the energies of children and youth during the summer vacation.

Sultan bin Qais al Abri, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Social Development in Al Batinah North Governorate, said, “The participation comes within the framework of effective partnerships between various community institutions to provide an educational and recreational environment for our students during the summer, contributing to building their personalities and developing their capabilities in various fields.”

The efforts to activate summer centres activities came through quality activities implemented by civil society organisations across the governorate. They were organised with the participation of charitable groups and civil society organisations, the Al Wafa Centres for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities and Omani Women’s Associations. The participation of OWA included a variety of programmes and workshops, including traditional crafts and palm-frond workshops, in addition to scientific programmes and workshops in the



The summer centres help harness the energies of children and youth during the vacation

field of creative thinking, a number of health workshops and various volunteer initiatives.

As for the Al Wafa Centres for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, their activities varied across several wilayats in Al Batinah North Governorate, focusing on a number of artistic industries, including gypsum and accessories, and candle mould making.

As part of the participation of charitable groups and civil society organisations, the Liwa Charity Harvest Team organised

several interactive workshops, including the ‘Protect Yourself’ workshop and the ‘Skilful Speaker’ workshop, in addition to awareness programmes titled ‘Your Awareness Saves Lives’ and the importance of cybersecurity.

This participation affirms the importance of activating institutional community work and integrating efforts between government agencies and civil society organisations, contributing to enhancing the capabilities of children and adolescents and honing their skills in a safe and stimulating environment.

Oman chairs Arab Planning Institute’s board meeting

TRIPOLI: The annual meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Planning Institute (API) was held in Tripoli, Libya, under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

The meeting discussed approaches for implementing the Institute’s 2025-2030 strategy approved at the API’s meeting held in Kuwait in January 2025. Kuwait meeting focused on supporting efforts to promote sustainable

development in Arab countries.

Today’s meeting laid emphasis on ways to launch the second phase of a development index titled “Government Spending Efficiency Index in Arab Countries”. The index aims to enhance transparency and efficiency in the management of government resources.

The meeting was held in pursuance of the institute’s expansion of its training activities. The API annually

organises more than 25 virtual training sessions on relevant topics like decentralisation, local development policies, digital transition, the management of small and medium enterprise (SMEs) and sustainable and ‘green growth’ (environment-based economic development).

On the sidelines of the meeting, Dr Al Saqri conferred with two Libyan ministers: Mohammed al Zaidani, Minister of Planning, and Mohammed al

Huweij, Minister of Economy and Trade. The meeting stressed the importance of activating the provisions of the Omani-Libyan Joint Committee and a scheme for private sector cooperation between Oman and Libya, with a view to investing in the reconstruction of Libya.

The two sides also discussed ways of boosting economic cooperation and exchanging expertise in the fields of planning and sustainable development. — ONA

Wadi Darbat to be illuminated with 6-km LED lighting

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 30

Wadi Darbat, one of Dhofar Governorate’s most iconic natural destinations, is set to receive a major upgrade with the installation of a 6-kilometre LED lighting system, aimed at enhancing visitor experience during the peak khareef season.

According to municipal officials, the project involves the installation of 150 lamp posts fitted with 180-watt energy-efficient LED lights. As of this week, approximately 85 per cent of the foundational works have been completed. The full system is scheduled to be operational by July

8, 2025.

The lighting initiative is part of a broader plan by Dhofar Municipality to improve infrastructure, accessibility and public safety in key tourism zones. Once completed, the illuminated stretch will enable safer evening visits, extend operating hours for small businesses, and add a new visual dimension to the valley’s natural appeal.

Nestled between mountain ridges and seasonal waterfalls, Wadi Darbat lies roughly 40 km northeast of Salalah. It is one of the most photographed and visited locations in Oman during the khareef (monsoon) season, which typically runs from late June to early



September. The valley transforms into a lush, green paradise with flowing streams, mist-covered hills, and vibrant biodiversity, attracting

both domestic and international tourists.

Each year, thousands of visitors travel to Wadi Darbat to experience its unique climate and scenic trails. The site is also home to seasonal markets and pop-up businesses, many of which are operated by local families and small entrepreneurs.

Enhancing tourism infrastructure, particularly in nature-based and heritage-rich destinations like Dhofar, is central to national efforts to attract more visitors and support local job creation.

By offering safer and more enjoyable evening access, the new lighting system is expected

to increase footfall during the cooler evening hours — benefiting hospitality, transport and food vendors alike.

Dhofar Municipality is continuing to invest in similar public service upgrades across the governorate, including rest areas, walking paths, digital payment systems and waste management services.

The khareef season remains a vital component of Oman’s domestic tourism economy, with Salalah International Airport seeing a surge in arrivals and accommodation occupancy reaching peak levels during July and August.

SPOTLIGHT



Experience Better

Their future starts today!

Change to AWASR, Fastest Internet In Oman

Get Ashel Educational Platform for free!

Unlimited data for all plans





SUBSCRIBE NOW !
WhatsApp
80001000
Website: awasr.om

PLASTIC
TABLE
COVERS
POSE FOOD
SAFETY

RISK



AHMED AL KAABI

AS TRAVEL AND SUMMER VACATION season begins and large numbers of citizens and residents head to Dhofar Governorate to enjoy Salalah's autumn weather, family outings and open-air picnics are on the rise. During these gatherings, plastic table covers - commonly known as 'sufrah' - are widely used for their convenience and easy cleanup. However, using them incorrectly can pose serious health risks.

As part of its 'Safe Food' campaign, the Food Safety and Quality Center at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has issued a recent awareness message warning against placing food directly on plastic covers, especially during outdoor trips and communal meals.

These plastic sheets are not designed for direct food contact; they are intended to protect surfaces from dirt. When hot or oily foods are served directly on them, harmful chemicals can leach into the food and eventually enter the body.

These risks may not show immediate symptoms but can accumulate over time, leading to chronic health issues such as hormonal imbalances, digestive system irritation, and increased risk of liver and kidney diseases.

The campaign highlights unsafe practices such as serving hot dishes directly on plastic sheets at home, in restaurants, or during large gatherings.

Authorities strongly recommend using food-safe serving tools, such as glass or

certified 'Food Grade' plastic plates. They also advise placing a barrier like baking paper or wax paper on the plastic surface if necessary, or opting for food-grade paper covers. Natural alternatives such as palm or banana leaves can also be used if properly cleaned.

Clinical nutritionist Dr Nouf al Zaabi explains that these plastic covers often contain chemicals like phthalates and bisphenol, which can migrate into food, especially when exposed to heat or fat. Many people mistakenly view the 'sufrah' as a simple cleanliness measure, unaware of its potential to compromise food safety.

Dr Al Zaabi notes that continuous exposure to such chemicals can contribute to digestive issues and skin allergies. She stresses that even in casual settings like picnics or family feasts, using proper, food-safe tools is an essential health precaution.

Ultimately, the campaign underscores that prevention starts with awareness. By making small changes in daily habits, families can better protect their health and foster safer eating practices throughout the community.

“
Plastic covers often contain chemicals which can migrate into food, especially when exposed to heat or fat and continuous exposure to such chemicals can lead to digestive issues and skin allergies
”
DR NOUF AL ZAABI
Clinical nutritionist

SHORT TAKES



OMAN AIR JOINS ONEWORLD ALLIANCE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, announced on Monday a myriad of potential benefits for inbound tourism as well as sustainable initiatives aligning with Oman Vision 2040. Additionally, they have introduced a range of services and facilities for guests, including access to hundreds of new connections and all-new loyalty benefits across the world.

Oman Air, which recently announced the expansion of its network, including the launch of a non-stop Muscat–Amsterdam route from July 1, 2025, officially joined the oneworld alliance as its 15th member airline. This move creates significant new benefits for its guests and elevates Oman’s position on the global map. During a press meeting with the top officials of the carrier, the management expressed hope that Oman Air’s membership in one of the leading global alliances would increase international awareness and inbound tourism potential for Oman.

“Oman Air is honoured to be joining the oneworld alliance, whose members and global footprint represent the best of what international travellers want to experience. We will be able to offer seamless travel to over 900 destinations in 170 countries and territories, adding to the limitless benefits to the end-user, while keeping pace with the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040,” said Con Korfiatis, CEO of Oman Air.

As a full oneworld member airline, Oman Air’s top-tier guests will gain access to all oneworld priority benefits, including a network of nearly 700 Business lounges globally, as well as newly opened oneworld branded lounges in Amsterdam’s Schiphol and Seoul’s Incheon Airports. Likewise, Oman Air will provide oneworld Emerald, Sapphire and Ruby customers with a full suite of oneworld benefits, including earning and redeeming miles, earning status points, priority check-in and boarding and lounge access.

Through seamless connectivity across the airline’s 15 world-class member airlines, travellers from key markets like the United States, Japan and Australia can now enjoy smoother, more convenient journeys to Oman. Oman Air has announced an expanded double daily Muscat-London route starting in October. Oman Air now serves 42 destinations across 22 countries, with onward connections to hundreds more through the oneworld alliance.

FORUM DISCUSSES EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES



The discussions addressed how education reflects and is influenced by local culture.

MUSCAT: As part of the “Horizons of Civilisation” programme, which aims to stimulate cultural and intellectual movement in the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth represented by the Literary Forum organised a discussion session on Monday titled “Culture and Sciences (Educational Sciences) and Sustainable Development.” The session is one in a series of events launched by the Forum to enrich contemporary cultural discussions and offer a platform for constructive dialogue among intellectuals and educators in Oman.

Participating in the session was Prof Dr Saif bin Nasser al Maamari, a renowned expert in educational sciences and Professor of Curriculum and Teaching Methods at the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University.

NATIONAL PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS OMAN’S INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

MUSCAT: The documentation and preservation of rare Omani manuscripts stand as one of the most significant national projects showcasing Oman’s intellectual heritage. These manuscripts hold a rich cultural treasure that revives the history of ancestors and chronicles the stories that shaped Oman’s identity and ancient legacy across different eras.

Nasr bin Nasser al Busaidy, Head of the Documentation and Inventory Department at the Directorate of Manuscripts in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, emphasised



Manuscripts undergo multiple stages before being fully documented. — ONA

that the preservation, printing and dissemination of Omani manuscripts are among the most vital national projects highlighting Oman’s intellectual heritage. “This

effort is not confined to Oman’s borders but extends worldwide,” he said. He noted that several influential Omani figures have been recognised by Unesco, including the linguist Al Khalil bin Ahmad al Farahidi (inscribed in 2005) and the physician and pharmacist Rashid bin Umailra al Rustaqi (inscribed in 2013).

Al Busaidy explained that the manuscript preservation process at the ministry’s Directorate of Manuscripts is meticulous and labour-intensive, aiming to restore the original text as written by authors centuries ago. — ONA

Oman among toppers in insurance regulation

THE International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS), headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, has published a detailed assessment confirming the Sultanate of Oman’s advanced regulatory and supervisory framework for the insurance sector. The evaluation demonstrates Oman’s strong compliance with the Insurance Core Principles (ICPs).

This follows a comprehensive assessment of the Financial Services Authority (FSA) under the IAIS Membership Assessment Programme in early 2024, making Oman the fifth country worldwide to undergo this review — after Guernsey, Morocco, Mexico and Albania.

The year-long IAIS evaluation involved multiple phases, including preparation, training, legislative review, and an on-site visit. The assessment team — comprising representatives from international regulatory bodies and independent experts — met with the FSA and key sector stakeholders, including insurance companies, brokers, auditors, government officials and the Oman Insurance Association.

The report results indicate a strong level of compliance with international insurance standards, with the majority of principles rated as “Compliant” or “Largely Compliant.” It highlights Oman’s significant progress in implementing risk-based requirements and enhancing technical supervision, including actuarial review.

The report also provides recommendations for developing certain



The evaluation demonstrates Oman’s strong compliance with the Insurance Core Principles. — ONA

supervisory aspects, forming a basis for performance improvement and policyholder protection in the insurance market.

The IAIS programme evaluates regulatory bodies’ adherence to 24 international insurance standards, which serve as the benchmark for effective insurance supervision. It also reviews supervisory policies and practices in the insurance sector, measuring their alignment with IAIS global standards.

Notably, the IAIS Insurance Core Principles represent a global framework designed to guide regulators worldwide in implementing best practices for insurance regulation and supervision. These standards cover various supervisory aspects, including governance, risk management, policyholder protection and financial stability, serving as a key reference for assessing regulatory effectiveness and promoting legislative harmonisation among nations. — ONA

Soft skills training programme help job seekers

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 30

In an era where creativity, communication and innovation define the workforce, the Clubs Cultural Creativity Competition 2024–2025 in Al Batinah North has emerged as more than just a cultural initiative but rather launched to develop future-ready youth.

Organised by the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Batinah North, under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the competition continues to equip young Omanis with essential soft and technical skills aligned with today’s job market demands.

As the second phase of the competition unfolds, young participants are not only showcasing artistic talent, but also building critical competencies such as public speaking, entrepreneurship, media literacy and creative expression, skills that employers increasingly value.

This week’s events featured intense contests in Nabati poetry, classical Arabic poetry, vocal performance and music. These disciplines sharpen



This week’s events featured intense contests in Nabati poetry, classical Arabic poetry, vocal performance and music.

communication, emotional intelligence, linguistic precision and cultural literacy, key ingredients for success in media, education and creative industries.

Winners included Badr al Sinani from Al Khabourah Club in poetry and Salem al Marzouqi from Saham Club in vocal performance, reflecting the diverse range of youth excellence in the governorate.

Khalifa al Balushi, Head of the Competition Committee in Al Batinah North, highlighted

the developmental impact of the initiative. “These competitions are vital for preparing youth to meet the challenges of modern career landscapes and also to preserve our heritage and culture. Whether it’s debating, presenting ideas, performing artistically, or launching innovative solutions, the experiences here build real-world confidence and transferable skills that open doors professionally.”

Earlier rounds included

competitions in debate, sports commentary and innovation and entrepreneurship, areas directly connected to job market trends.

Arwa al Balushi from Al Suwaiq Club won the debate category, while Majees Club topped the innovation and entrepreneurship section, emphasising the link between creative thinking and economic opportunity.

The ministry’s vision behind this competition is clear: to create inclusive spaces that empower young Omanis, enhance their employability and position them as active contributors to national development. These competitions act as incubators for potential, enabling youth to transform raw talent into tangible outcomes.

As Oman moves towards global success, initiatives like the Clubs Cultural Creativity Competition ensure that cultural engagement isn’t just about preserving heritage but about building the future workforce, one idea at a time, to be successful in all fields with self-confident youth able to transfer knowledge into products worldwide.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Bangladesh opened on Monday the murder trial of student protester Abu Sayeed.

BANGLADESH OPENS MURDER TRIAL OF STUDENT PROTESTER

DHAKA: Bangladesh opened on Monday the murder trial of student protester Abu Sayeed, whose killing last year escalated demonstrations nationwide that ultimately ousted then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Sayeed died aged 23 in the northern city of Rangpur, the first student demonstrator killed in the police crackdown on protests.

Footage of his last moments on July 16, 2024 was shown repeatedly on Bangladeshi television after Hasina’s downfall. Prosecutors at Bangladesh’s war crimes tribunal have charged 30 people in connection with the killing. Only four are in custody with arrest warrants issued for the remaining 26.

Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August last year, according to the UN, when Hasina’s government ordered a crackdown in a failed bid to cling to power.

Chief prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam said the court had accepted the formal charges, marking the opening of the trial.

“We have stated that Sheikh Hasina ordered the then interior minister to use lethal weapons; the inspector general of police at the time carried out the instruction, and the forces on the ground, under senior police officers, executed the order,” Islam told journalists. — *AFP*

INDIA CHEMICAL FACTORY BLAST KILLS AT LEAST 12



NEW DELHI: A powerful explosion at an Indian chemical factory killed at least 12 people and injured several others on Monday, turning chunks of the building into rubble, a fire officer said. “We have recovered 12 bodies so far,” said B Nageshwara Rao, district fire official at the site of the blast in Sangareddy in India’s southern Telangana state.

“We are searching through the debris for more bodies.” Industrial disasters are common in India, with experts blaming poor planning and lax enforcement of safety rules.

Footage on Indian television showed plumes of black smoke soaring into the sky. Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that the “death of several people has caused great distress”. Vivek Venkataswamy, the state’s labour minister, said that those injured were being treated, including some who had been “stuck under the debris”. Venkataswamy said the cause of the explosion was being investigated. — *AFP*

DISTRESSED FISHING BOAT

Migrant boat sinks off Italy, one dead



A migrant boat sank between Tunisia and Italy, leaving one woman dead, though the Italian coastguard managed to rescue 87 survivors, the Red Cross said. After setting out from La Louza in Tunisia, the fishing boat sank in the middle of the night when it was approximately 72 kilometres from Italy’s Lampedusa island. Tunisian fishermen in the area alerted Italian authorities, they said, adding that at least five or six migrants were believed to be still missing. — *AFP*

INDIAN TECH HUB STATE PUSHES JAIL TERMS FOR ‘FAKE NEWS’

BENGALURU: Draft legislation by India’s tech hub state of Karnataka that would impose jail terms of up to seven years for spreading ‘fake news’ and other misinformation has stirred concerns among free speech activists that it could lead to censorship.

With nearly 1 billion Internet users, the stakes are high in a sprawling country of many ethnic and religious communities where fake news risks stirring deadly strife and AI deepfake videos have

alarmed officials during elections.

Karnataka’s bill, the strictest of its kind yet, stipulates that those posting ‘fake news’ and ‘anti-feminist’ content, or ‘promoting superstition’, would face imprisonment along with potential fines. The 11-page Karnataka Mis-Information And Fake News (Prohibition) Bill does not define such offences in practice, but said special courts and a regulatory committee would be set up to implement it.

“Misinformation is fairly subjective and every person who uses the internet is susceptible to falling within the dragnet of this law,” said Apar Gupta, founder of the Internet Freedom Foundation, a New Delhi-based digital advocacy group which first made the Karnataka draft legislation public.

Priyank Kharge, Karnataka’s IT minister, said on Friday “there is a lot of misinformation on the proposed Misinformation Bill in public”. — *Reuters*

Gaza rescuers say Israelis kill 34 as ceasefire nears

GAZA’S civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed 34 people on Monday, including 11 waiting for aid, as momentum built behind a ceasefire push for the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a day earlier that his country’s ‘victory’ over Iran had created ‘opportunities’, including for freeing hostages held by fighters in Gaza.

His comments raised hopes for a new ceasefire in the conflict that has created dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

Key mediator Qatar said on Monday that ‘momentum’ had been created by the Iran-Israel ceasefire.

“We won’t hold our breath for this to happen today and tomorrow, but we believe that the elements are in place to push forward towards restarting the talks,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari told journalists.

Meanwhile, on the ground, Gaza’s civil defence agency said that 34 people had been killed by Israeli strikes or gunfire since midnight.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that “11 people (were) killed near aid distribution points in the central and southern parts of the territory.”

Eyewitnesses and local authorities have reported repeated killings of Palestinians near distribution centres over recent weeks. Samir Abu Jarbou, 28, said by phone that he had gone with four relatives to pick up food aid



Palestinian children line up to receive a hot meal at a food distribution point in Nuseirat. — *AFP*

Local authorities have reported repeated killings of Palestinians near distribution centres over recent weeks

in an area of central Gaza around midnight. “Suddenly the (Israeli) army opened fire, and drones started shooting. We ran away and got nothing,” he said.

“The situation is catastrophic. We are suffering from terrible hunger. My only wish is to succeed in getting a bag of flour to feed my seven siblings.” Bassal said 23 people were killed in at least seven separate strikes across the territory, mainly in the north. When asked for comment, the Israeli military said it needed more information to look into the reports. Restrictions on media in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean the news agency is unable to independently verify the full tolls and details provided by rescuers. Israel’s military issued a fresh evacuation order on Monday, for

several areas in and around Gaza City.

“For your safety, immediately evacuate further westward and southward toward Al Mawasi,” the military’s Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee posted on X.

Despite being declared a safe zone by Israel, Al Mawasi has been hit by repeated strikes. Of the 251 hostages seized during the assault, 49 are still held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

Meanwhile, Palestinians in northern Gaza reported one of the worst nights of Israeli bombardment in weeks after the military issued mass evacuation orders on Monday, while Israeli officials were due in Washington for a new ceasefire push by the Trump administration. — *AFP*

SQUID GAME BANGKOK

Peach, Junior, Bella and Minnie dressed in Young-hee costumes pose for a picture with a person dressed as a Pink Guard from the South Korean Netflix series ‘Squid Game’ during a promotional event of ‘Squid Game 3’ final season at City Hall Square in Bangkok, Thailand. Thousands of fans gathered in Seoul on Saturday to celebrate the final ‘Squid Game’ season, ending a global Netflix hit that is seen as a symbol of South Korea’s cultural clout. The third and final season was released last week, concluding the series that sees desperate people compete in deadly versions of traditional children’s games for a massive cash prize. Director Hwang Dong-hyuk said he had “poured everything” into the series, which launched nearly four years ago. “So while it’s sentimental to see it end,” he said, “there’s also a sense of relief”. — *Reuters*

CRUCIAL JULY POLLS

Support for Japan PM slips ahead of vote



Support for Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba’s government has slipped ahead of key national elections next month, a poll showed with his cash handout plan to help the public deal with inflation having failed to impress voters. The current ruling bloc of Ishiba’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and junior partner Komeito lost its lower house majority last year. A poor showing in the upper house elections slated for July 20 would likely weaken his grip on power further. — *Reuters*

SIMULATED MARITIME TARGETS

Warships conduct drills in Sea of Japan



Russian warships and coastal missile systems struck simulated maritime targets with cruise missiles during exercises in the Sea of Japan, TASS state news agency reported, citing Russia’s defence ministry. The ships and missiles systems, all part of Russia’s Pacific Fleet forces, ‘carried out a joint missile strike against a complex target setup in the Sea of Japan, simulating enemy ships’, TASS cited. “All targets were successfully hit.” — *Reuters*

SHORTTAKES



the launch of the Sevilla Platform for Action during the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, in Seville, Spain. — Reuters

UN CHIEF URGES AID AMID CLIMATE CHAOS, CONFLICTS

SEVILLE: UN chief Antonio Guterres urged the world to “rev up the engine of development” at an aid conference on Monday as US-led cuts jeopardise the fight against poverty and climate change. Dozens of world leaders and more than 4,000 representatives from businesses, civil society and financial institutions are in the Spanish city of Seville for the June 30-July 3 meeting to seek fresh impetus for the crisis-hit sector.

But the United States is snubbing the biggest aid talks in a decade, underlining the erosion of international cooperation on combating hunger, disease and climate change.

Guterres told the opening of the conference that two-thirds of UN sustainable development goals set for 2030 were “lagging” and more than \$4 trillion of annual investment were needed to achieve them.

President Donald Trump’s gutting of US development agency USAID is the standout example of aid cuts, but Germany, Britain and France have also slashed funds while boosting spending in defence and other areas.

The Oxfam charity says the cuts are the largest since 1960, while according to the World Bank rising extreme poverty is affecting sub-Saharan Africa in particular.

Disruption to global trade from Trump’s tariffs and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine have dealt further blows to the diplomatic cohesion necessary for concentrating efforts on helping countries escape poverty.

The crisis meant children going unvaccinated, girls dropping out of school and families suffering hunger, said Guterres.

He urged nations to “change course” and “repair and rev up the engine of development to accelerate investment” in “a world shaken by inequalities, climate chaos and raging conflicts”.

A blistering heatwave that is scorching southern Europe welcomed delegates, an example of the extreme weather that scientists say human-driven climate change is fuelling.

Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said it was “time to take a step forward and not only reaffirm our commitment, but also redouble it”.

Among the key discussion points is reforming international finance to help poorer countries shrug off a growing debt burden that is holding back progress in health and education.

The total external debt of least developed countries has more than tripled in 15 years, according to UN data. — AFP

IRAN JUDICIARY SAYS OVER 900 KILLED DURING WAR WITH ISRAEL

TEHRAN: Iran’s judiciary said at least 935 people were killed in the country during its 12-day war with Israel, state media reported on Monday, nearly a week since a ceasefire took hold.

“During the 12-day war waged by the Zionist regime against our country, 935 martyrs have been identified so far,” the official IRNA news agency quoted judiciary spokesman Asghar Jahangir as saying. The death toll included 132 women and 38 children, Jahangir

said. He added that the death toll from an Israeli strike on Tehran’s Evvin prison has risen to 79, and includes inmates, visiting relatives and administrative staff. Israel on June 13 launched a major bombing campaign against Iran, killing top military commanders and atomic scientists. The Israeli strikes hit military bases, nuclear sites as well as residential areas across Iran. Iran retaliated with waves of missiles and drone strikes which hit major cities in Israel including Tel

Aviv and Haifa, killing 28 people, according to Israeli authorities. A ceasefire between Iran and Israel took effect on June 24. Meanwhile, Iran has said it intends to continue its nuclear programme, even in the wake of its war with Israel.

“As long as the Islamic Republic of Iran is a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it must be able to exercise its rights,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Ismail Baghai said in Tehran on Monday. — AFP

Idaho firefighter ambush shooter found dead

US authorities found the body of a lone gunman suspected of starting a wildfire on Sunday then shooting at firefighters tackling the blaze in the northwestern state of Idaho, killing two.

The suspected shooter was found dead with a firearm on Canfield Mountain in Kootenai County — a popular park and hiking area — following an hours-long standoff as the fire raged.

“Based on preliminary information we believe that was the only shooter,” Kootenai County’s Sheriff Robert Norris told a news conference on Sunday evening, adding “there is no threat to the community at this time.”

Norris said authorities believed the fire was “intentional,” without providing details on the shooter’s identity.

“We do believe that the suspect started the fire and that it was an ambush, and it was intentional,” he told reporters.

“These firefighters did not have a chance.” About 300 law enforcement officers were deployed to the scene.

Two firefighters were shot dead, while a third was wounded and taken to hospital for surgery. “He is fighting for his life, but he’s in stable condition,” Norris said. The attack was carried out with high-powered rifles, the sheriff told an earlier news conference.

Local TV footage showed dense white smoke billowing above a hilly, forested area. Authorities warned on Sunday evening that the wildfire was still active.

Local fire chief Pat Riley said he was “heartbroken” by the attack. He told local TV station KHQ that no evacuations had been ordered, though the fire was still burning.

Asked if there was a concern about the fire spreading, he told KHQ: “Yes there is. To what extent, I can’t say, because we can’t get people to where the fire’s at.”

Serious gun violence is common across the US, where many states have few barriers to the purchasing of firearms, despite widespread support for greater gun control.

There have been 189 mass shootings in the US this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive — which it defines as four or more people shot.



An armoured police vehicle leaves an area where multiple firefighters were attacked when responding to a fire in the Canfield Mountain area outside Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, US. — Reuters

Idaho Governor Brad Little described the attack as a “heinous direct assault on our brave firefighters.”

He said in a social media post he was “heartbroken” by the attack. The motive for the shooting was not known and Norris did not provide any details on the suspect, saying officers were still working to identify the man.

More than 300 law enforcement officers from the city, county, state and federal levels responded to the scene of the shooting, including two helicopters with snipers aboard. Norris said the shooter used a high-powered sporting rifle to fire rapidly at first responders, with law enforcement initially unsure of the number of perpetrators involved. Norris would not provide more details on weapons recovered, saying officers would likely find more guns at the scene on Monday, once the fire was extinguished.

Firefighters came under fire almost immediately upon arriving at the scene and did not know where the gunfire was coming from. The suspect was found using cell phone location information and his body

was removed by a SWAT team as the fire approached.

Video showed smoke billowing from heavily wooded hillsides and armed responders preparing, while several ambulances and emergency vehicles were seen entering a nearby hospital.

“FBI technical teams and tactical assets are currently on the scene providing support,” FBI deputy director Dan Bongino wrote on X. Firefighters received the first call of a fire around 1:21 pm and about 40 minutes later, reports emerged that they were being shot at, Norris said.

“This is a heinous direct assault on our brave firefighters,” Idaho Governor Brad Little said on X. “I ask all Idahoans to pray for them and their families as we wait to learn more.”

Gun ownership is widespread in the US, where the Constitution protects the rights of Americans to “keep and bear arms.”

Deaths related to gun violence are common - 17,927 people were murdered with a gun in 2023 in the US, according to the most recent available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. — AFP

Wildfires rage in Turkiye, France as early heatwave hits

ISTANBUL/PARIS/SEVILLE: Firefighters battled wildfires in Turkiye and France on Monday as an early heatwave hit the region.

In Turkiye, wildfires raged for a second day in the western province of Izmir, fanned by strong winds, Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli said, forcing the evacuation of four villages and two town neighbourhoods.

Turkiye’s coastal regions have in recent years been ravaged by wildfires as summers have become hotter and drier, which scientists say is a result of human-induced climate change.

In France, where temperatures are expected to peak on Tuesday and Wednesday, wildfires broke out on Sunday in the southwestern Aude department, where temperatures topped 40 degrees Celsius, burning 400 hectares and forcing the evacuation of a campsite and an abbey, authorities said.

The fires were under control but not yet extinguished, authorities said on Monday.

Weather service Meteo France put a record 84 of the country’s 101 departments on an orange heatwave alert from Monday until midweek. About 200 schools will be at least partially shut over the next three days because of the heat, the Education Ministry said.

Authorities sent out heat alerts across the region.

Spain is on course for its hottest June on record, the national meteorological service AEMET said, forecasting the peak of the heatwave on Monday.

“Over the next few days, at least until Thursday, intense heat will continue in much of Spain,” said Ruben del Campo, a spokesperson for the weather agency.

In Seville, southern Spain, where global leaders were gathering for a United Nations conference,



Tourists walk under parasols as they visit the Colosseum during a summer heatwave in Rome. — Reuters

temperatures were expected to hit 42 C.

“It’s awful,” municipal worker

Bernabe Rufo said as he cleaned a fountain. “We need to be looking for shade constantly.”

Tourists were also seeking ways to cope with the heat.

“I guess water, water and shade, water and shade,” said 51-year-old visitor Nicole Shift, who got up early to enjoy Seville’s historic sites before the heat got too intense.

In Italy, the Health Ministry issued heatwave red alerts for 16 cities. Weather website IlMeteo.it said temperatures on Monday would go as high as 41 C in Florence, 38 C in Bologna and 37 C in Perugia.

The Lombardy region, part of Italy’s northern industrial heartland, is planning to ban open-air work in the hottest part of the day, heeding a request from trade unions, its president said.

Even in the Netherlands, usually cooler than many other parts of Europe, the Royal Meteorological Institute warned temperatures could reach 35-40 C in parts of the country in the coming days, with high humidity. — AFP

OPINION

Oman on the right track in environment protection



OMAN is actively working to reduce plastic pollution through a phased ban on single-use plastic shopping bags, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 agenda for sustainable consumption and environmental protection. The Environment Authority is leading this initiative, with the goal of eliminating single-use plastic shopping bags nationwide by 2027. The ban is being implemented in stages to allow businesses and consumers to adapt gradually. The first phase, which began on July 1, 2024, targeted pharmacies, hospitals, and clinics. The second phase, effective from January 2025, expanded the ban to include textile stores, clothing outlets, eyewear shops, mobile phone vendors, watch retailers, furniture stores, and household goods suppliers. The third phase of the ban will begin on Tuesday and will encompass additional segments of the retail and food sectors. This includes fruit and vegetable shops, grocery stores, packaging units, candy factories, sweet shops, bakeries, gift shops, and outlets selling bread, pastries, and confectionery. Businesses in these categories will be required to switch to eco-friendly alternatives like reusable cloth or paper bags. The Environment Authority is actively monitoring compliance with the ban.

Violators face fines ranging from RO 50 to 1,000, with repeat offenders subject to doubled penalties if another violation occurs within a month. The authorities are also conducting field visits to raise awareness and ensure adherence to the regulations. The initiative aims to promote environmental awareness and encourage the use of recyclable and eco-friendly bags. It may be noted that while several retailers encourage reusable bags, including cotton-made, thicker plastic reusable bags are still available across the country, leaving it to the consumers to decide whether they need to use them or not. Oman banned the import of plastic bags from January 1, 2023. Companies, institutions and individuals are prohibited from importing plastic bags and violators will be fined RO 1,000 on the first offence, which will be doubled on the violation. The Sultanate of Oman is also supporting and developing environmental monitoring work by installing vehicle tracking devices with units to determine locations and monitor fuel consumption and environmental efficiency of cars. The decision to ban plastic bags has played a significant role in spreading environmental awareness and promoting a culture of using recyclable and eco-friendly bags, such as those made from fabric or durable leather.

The ban is part of a broader plan to preserve the Omani environment and wildlife, and to achieve sustainable environmental development goals.

Oman’s commitment to a greener future is evident in its phased approach, with the expectation that more sectors will adopt eco-conscious practices, bringing the nation closer to a plastic-free retail landscape by 2027. The ban is part of a broader plan to preserve the Omani environment and wildlife, and to achieve sustainable environmental development goals. The move supports national sustainable development goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040 and aligns with international initiatives, such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and global agreements like the Stockholm and Basel Conventions. Oman is actively engaged in environmental protection and the conservation of its natural resources, with a focus on sustainable development. The Environment Authority plays a central role in this, aiming to provide high-quality services related to environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources. Oman has implemented several initiatives to address environmental challenges and promote sustainability. The National Zero Neutrality Programme is a priority, aiming to balance carbon emissions through projects in various sectors, including energy, industry, transport and buildings.

After Iran, pressure mounts on Netanyahu to end Gaza war

MICHAEL BLUM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s rise in popularity during the war with Iran may already be fading, as pressure mounts at home to end the conflict in Gaza. Netanyahu claimed victory over the Islamic republic in the 12-day war that ended with a ceasefire last week. Political scientist Assaf Meydani, in a column on Israeli website Ynet on Saturday, said that alongside a “victory for both Trump and Netanyahu” in Iran, the Israeli leader “will have to explain a series of failures”. Most notable among them, according to Meydani, is Netanyahu’s “failure to end the campaign in Gaza”, where Israel has been fighting to crush Hamas since October 2023. “Hamas, though battered, has not been destroyed, and ‘Swords of Iron’ has become prolonged attrition,” Meydani said, using Israel’s name for its military campaign in the Gaza Strip. Now that that war is over, domestic and international pressure has resumed to secure an end to the fighting in Gaza. A public opinion poll published by Israel’s Kan public broadcaster the day after Tuesday’s ceasefire with Iran suggested a rise in support for Netanyahu. But while his approval ratings went up compared to previous polls, 52 per cent of respondents in the Kan survey still said they wanted Netanyahu — Israel’s longest-serving prime minister — out of office. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said they wanted the Gaza war to end, compared to 22 per cent who favoured continuing the fighting. Liri Albag, who was released from captivity in January under a short-lived truce, told the crowd that Netanyahu and Trump “made brave decisions on Iran. Now make the brave decision to end the war in Gaza and bring (the hostages) home.” Netanyahu has also faced renewed pressure from one of his political rivals, former prime minister Naftali Bennett. “Netanyahu must step down. He has been in power for 20 years... that’s far too long”, Bennett told Israel’s Channel 12 in an interview. Gil Dickman, a prominent activist demanding action by Israel to secure the release of the hostages, said that while “the operation in Iran was a success”, Netanyahu had “failed” to “make people forget his responsibility” for failing to prevent Hamas’s unprecedented 2023 attack. — AFP

Which Iran will we get?

THE 12-day war that pitted Iran against two nuclear powers, Israel and the US, is one of those conflicts that permits all sides to declare victory. For the Islamic Republic, that declaration came quickly, and centred on the fact that the regime is still standing. Despite heavy losses and widespread damage, there was no collapse, no revolt, and no regime change. To many Iranians, especially among the opposition abroad (some of whom — from the exiled crown prince, Reza Pahlavi, to the former armed group Mojahedin-e-Khalq — openly cheered the strikes), the scale of the onslaught suggested an intent to topple the government. But a revolt was always unlikely, given who was calling for it. The urban middle class — the backbone of Iran’s civic and professional life — was not going to rise up on behalf of the two foreign powers most associated with decades of coercion and violence in the region. Thus, whether ordinary Iranians “won” or not will depend on what comes next: how the government responds, how quickly it can rebuild civilian infrastructure, and whether it offers concessions to a middle class that rallied around the flag in the face of a brutal bombing campaign. Some change was already coming well before Israel attacked. Since mid-2023, the Islamic Republic has been showing signs of a strategic shift inward. It did not directly enter the fray after Hamas’s October 7th attack on Israel, nor in response to its allies in Lebanon and Syria coming under pressure. Owing to mass protests in 2022, the regime curtailed street-level enforcement of the unwritten dress code. Then came Masoud Pezeshkian’s surprising election to the presidency in June 2024. A more reform-minded figure, he succeeded Ebrahim Raisi,



DJAVAD SALEHI-ISFAHANI

The writer is Professor of Economics at Virginia Tech, is a research fellow at the Economic Research Forum in Cairo and an affiliate of the Middle East Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center

The real question will not be who won or lost. It will be whether Iran uses the pause to double down on economic development, or whether the trauma of war will provoke an ideological hardening.

who had made hijab enforcement a priority and cracked down violently on protests. By contrast, when a new hijab law was passed, Pezeshkian refused to enforce it, allowing a new social norm to take hold. Moreover, the Iranian economy is not as weak as foreign media coverage often suggests. The data do not paint a rosy picture, but nor do they point to an imminent collapse. Despite the draconian US sanctions imposed in 2018 (after Donald Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear deal), the economy has been slowly recovering. By 2024, GDP had surpassed its 2018 peak, and growth averaged around 3 per cent per year – aided by oil exports that benefited from the Biden administration’s lax sanctions enforcement. Still, the Pezeshkian administration’s economic reforms likely bolstered the urban middle class’s willingness to stand with the government in the face of Israeli air strikes. Iran’s rather measured response to the US attack on its nuclear sites shows where its leaders’ priorities lie. They see renewed conflict as a distraction from their development mission, originally laid out in the 2005 Twenty-Year Vision Plan to place Iran among the region’s top economies by 2025. The immediate question is whether the recent war will push Iran further toward militarisation and an expanded role for the state in the economy, or toward greater freedom for civil society and the private sector. Many will remember how the bloody eight-year war with Iraq in the 1980s led to entrenched rationing, central planning, and dominance by state-linked institutions. It took nearly two decades of reform to reintroduce market principles and revive the private sector. Iran may be better positioned today, because the war was limited in scope, and the private sector

and market institutions are more firmly established. Just as the Iran-Iraq War led to vast development investments that acknowledged the contribution of rural communities, this one may catalyse a similar gesture of recognition for the urban middle class. If so, that would go far toward achieving the kind of social consensus (vefagh) that Pezeshkian is seeking. Two decades ago, the joke in Iran was that the Islamic Republic had a consistent Korea strategy, except that sometimes it resembled the North, and sometimes the South. Now Iran faces a similar choice. The North Korean model may seem attractive to some, with its nuclear deterrence, stifling of dissent, and closed borders. But most observers familiar with Iran’s culture, religion, history, and temperament would not regard this as a viable option – even after a war that has exposed Iran’s vulnerability in the absence of nuclear weapons. Undoubtedly, there will be tensions between rebuilding the military and addressing civilian needs – from shoring up the water supply to distributing gasoline and dealing with youth employment. Fortunately, unlike a military buildup, economic reconstruction can be advanced through broadly felt policies that attract private-sector engagement and reduce the budgetary trade-off between defence and development. Assuming the cease-fire holds, the real question will not be who won or lost. It will be whether Iran uses the pause to double down on economic development, or whether the trauma of war will provoke an ideological hardening. The pro-development option may be constrained by the nature of the regime; but the alternative – a permanent wartime posture – is economically and socially untenable. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

How conflicts reshape air travel



ANUPREETA DAS

The author is NYT reporter



NIRAJ CHOKSHI

The author is NYT reporter

WHEN Israel launched surprise missile attacks on Iran, prompting retaliatory strikes, Gulf countries closed their skies, forcing more than two dozen of the world’s major airlines to divert or cancel flights.

When India and Pakistan engaged in a brief but intense conflict in May, Pakistan and India each banned the use of their skies by the other’s airlines.

After Russia began its war on Ukraine in 2022 and closed its airspace to Western airlines, many American and European airlines were forced to redraw flight paths — a disruption that remains today.

In recent years, airlines worldwide have increasingly had to deal with geopolitics, as extended wars and sudden conflicts require them to abruptly remap major routes and recalculate profitability.

The risk was clear in 2014, when a Malaysia Airlines jet was shot down over a part of Ukraine controlled by pro-Russia separatists, killing all 298 people on board. In December, dozens died when an Azerbaijan Airlines plane crashed while over Russian airspace, likely after being hit by its air defence systems.

More than 4.5 per cent of the world’s land mass is affected by conflict, a rise of 65 per cent since 2021, according to a report last year by Verisk Maplecroft, a risk consultancy.

Conflict is among the biggest causes of disruption for the civil aviation sector, which operates more than 100,000 commercial flights carrying 10 million people a day. Airlines must already balance passenger demand, weather, fuel costs, government regulations, and pilot and crew schedules for each flight.

The recent exchange of attacks between Iran and Israel was particularly disruptive for global carriers because Middle Eastern cities are often pit stops between Asian and European destinations. Qatar Airways was forced to divert more than 90 flights after Iran’s strike on an American military base in Qatar last Monday, disrupting travel for more than 20,000 passengers.

Despite the ceasefire between Iran and Israel, airlines are prepared for the possibility that attacks might resume. Many have suspended routes through the Middle East.

Since 2022, many airlines have had to reroute flights to avoid Russia, the world’s biggest country by area, with an airspace crucial to long-distance flights connecting Europe and North America to large parts of Asia.

An extra hour of flying the kind of large plane used on long, international routes can add about \$10,000 in costs, mainly in fuel, labour and maintenance expenses, said Andreas Schäfer, a professor at the UCL Energy Institute at University College

Whether caused by a long war or brief skirmish, the closing of skies to air travel is having big effects on cost, convenience and safety

London. In a competitive market with limited demand, that can quickly bring an airline “very close to the limits of profitability,” he said.

Some carriers added stops to previously nonstop flights or abandoned newly unprofitable routes. Others flew with fewer passengers or less cargo because demand had fallen or the airlines couldn’t justify the expense of flying the longer distances with a full load. In extreme cases, business models had to be redrawn.

Finnair, which is based in Finland, a neighbour to Russia, had spent decades making itself a hub for flights between Europe and Asia. That strategy unravelled after the war began.

Its flights to Asia are now as much as 40 per cent longer than before, severely hindering Finnair’s ability to compete with Chinese airlines, which remain free to use Russian airspace. A direct flight from Helsinki to Shanghai, for example, is now just under nine hours on China’s Juneyao Airlines, but takes more than 12 hours on Finnair. As a result, Finnair has had to focus on flights elsewhere.

Unable to fly over Russia, American carriers suffered too. A popular nonstop route between New Delhi and Newark on United Airlines that flew over Russia took as little as 13 hours; since the war of Ukraine, US airlines have been flying via Europe, which has added an hour or two.

Germany’s Merz takes disinformation ‘very seriously’

Social media is awash with deliberate lies about German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, with the number significantly increasing since Merz’s inauguration as chancellor, according to the government and disinformation analysts.

A government spokesman said they were seeing ‘both disinformation and personal defamation as well as propaganda across many channels,’ apparently aimed at discrediting Merz and his party, the centre-right Christian Democrats.

Recent false claims related to the government’s work include the introduction of a school tax, an increase in weekly working hours and home visits to verify sick leave.

What appears to link these fabricated stories is that they are designed to provoke strong emotional reactions. One fake video shows Merz allegedly promoting dubious financial products. The video appears to be embedded in an online article from a daily newspaper, but both the video and the article are fake - they never appeared on the newspaper’s website. An analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), an independent organisation focused on combating disinformation, also noted the spread of false claims targeting Merz since the collapse of former chancellor Olaf Scholz’s centre-left coalition late last year.

Analyst Pablo Maristany de las Casas said that since his inauguration and his stated commitment to continue supporting Ukraine, disinformation campaigns have ‘intensified.’

Merz was also the subject of one of the more high-profile disinformation campaigns just after he took power, when a video circulated online claiming that French President Emmanuel Macron had hidden a bag of cocaine during a trip to Kyiv.

Merz, who was travelling with Macron and was sat at the same table, was falsely accused of hiding a spoon allegedly used for cocaine consumption. The ‘bag’ was in fact a tissue, the Élysée Palace confirmed.

Maristany de las Casas identified two potential sources of the fake news about Merz: Kremlin-linked actors who may perceive Merz’s strong advocacy for increased support for Ukraine as a direct threat; and far-right social media users who are also targeting Merz for his stance on issues such as migration and his refusal to form a coalition with the far-right AfD party.

Merz takes the disinformation ‘very seriously,’ according to the government spokesman.

Maristany de las Casas also noted that Merz is primarily attacked by disinformation online on a political level, whereas figures in the previous government were targeted with more personal attacks.

He said that the attacks on Merz differed from those normally aimed at female figures, such as the former foreign minister and new UN General Assembly President Annalena Baerbock. Campaigns targeting women often focused on gender-specific aspects, such as “appearance or private life,” the analyst said. — dpa

Defence hike: Europe is making a big mistake

LEAVING Brussels by train, the Audi factory is one of the first things you see. Made up of gray, rectangular buildings, the site was long one of Belgium’s biggest car producers. Slick and productive, it was a fitting symbol for the capital of Europe. Early this year, however, it succumbed to the industrial crisis overtaking the continent and was unceremoniously shut down. Spots of graffiti are already visible on its once pristine walls.

In recent months, the story of the Audi factory has become the story of Europe. Both are down on their luck, in danger of being swept away by the century’s new geoeconomic tide. In Brussels, the response to the predicament has been equally in tune with the times — as part of a wider military revamp, ministers claim, the former car factory should be turned into a weapons producer. Such a relaunch, proponents say, would aid Europe’s strategic autonomy and create 3,000 new jobs.

Across Europe, policymakers are converging on the same strategy, hoping to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, increased military spending would make Europe safe from Russia and independent from America, at last securing its superpower status. On the other hand, it would revive Europe’s ailing industrial sector, under pressure from Chinese competitors and rising energy costs. Pumping money into the military, so the argument goes, is the way to fight the twin crises of geopolitical vulnerability and economic malaise.

These hopes are likely to prove delusive. Europe’s militarisation push, suffering problems of both scale and efficiency, is unlikely to work on its own terms. But it carries a bigger danger than failure. By focusing on defence at the expense of all else, it risks taking the European Union not forward but backward. Rather than a major advance, breakneck rearmament could well amount to a historic mistake.

Europe’s new approach is usually given an older name: military



ANTON JÄGER

The writer is a contributing NYT Opinion writer and a lecturer in politics at Oxford University

Europe is headed for neither military Keynesianism with a social dividend nor a defence strategy suitable for an aspiring superpower. Rather, it risks getting the worst of both worlds: a meager economic recovery without long-term prospects for growth

Keynesianism. Originally, the concept referred to the tendency of mid-century governments to counteract economic downturns through increases in military spending — a combination supposedly first pioneered by the Nazis in the 1930s, then globalised by the Americans in the 1940s. More recently, the term has been applied to President Vladimir Putin’s war economy in Russia.

Yet it is far from clear whether Europe’s current efforts warrant such a description. For one, the continent is simply undergoing a return to military spending levels before 1989. At its peak in the 1960s, for instance, German military expenditure reached just under 5 per cent of gross domestic product; Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s target, announced last week, is 3.5 per cent. Such a restoration hardly qualifies as a great leap forward — certainly not matching the concept of the “Zeitenwende”, or “turning point”, that has been used to describe the change in approach.

The public benefits of the strategy — the Keynesianism part — remain equally unclear. Though Germany has slightly eased its debt rules, European policymakers remain reluctant to run up budget deficits. More money for the military will strain already tight budgets, taking away from social programmes, infrastructural development and public utilities. Instead of military Keynesianism, a better comparison for Europe’s defence bonanza is the Reaganism of the 1980s, in which increased military spending and social retrenchment went hand in hand. There are more problems with the remilitarisation push. For one, many former industrial sectors will acquire a vested interest in war-making abroad — hardly as reliable a source of profit as consumers buying cars. And more money for the military doesn’t necessarily mean better results, either. As the economist Adam Tooze notes, Europeans collectively lavish ample sums on their “zombie armies” and receive strikingly little in return, both in terms of manpower and material. No European company, for

example, ranks in the top 10 defence companies by turnover.

Then there is the quintessentially European problem with coordination. With tanks and hardware already expensive, the costs of continental rearmament will be multiplied by the union’s decentralised decision-making, in which nations separately vie for contracts. Glimpses of such inefficiency are visible in the stalling efforts at shell production for the war in Ukraine. On top of this muddle, the first payouts of Europe’s splurge are likely to go to American producers while European factories get up and running. In a telling irony, the initial beneficiaries of the potlatch will be not European but American. These logistical constraints should be weighed alongside the cultural limits to remilitarisation in Europe. In response to calls for renewed mobilisation, for example, one German podcaster spoke for many: “I’d rather be alive than dead.” Even so, European policymakers are determined to sell rearmament as a condition for the continent’s entry into the 21st century. Last week’s Nato summit, at which almost all members pledged to raise military spending in the next decade to 5 per cent of GDP produced a pageant of such views. The number of wars around the world, with a fresh one recently threatened in Iran, supposedly underlines the need for Europe to be a fighting continent once more. This strategy, officials claim, combines military independence with commercial revival.

Neither of these outcomes is likely. On its current course, Europe is headed for neither military Keynesianism with a social dividend nor a defence strategy suitable for an aspiring superpower. Rather, it risks getting the worst of both worlds: a meager economic recovery without long-term prospects for growth, and sumptuous payouts to a defence sector that would not allow Europe to match its peers. A quick journey to Brussels, where the Audi factory still stands empty, should suffice to convince visitors of this truth.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The course led by Dr Ali al Yaarubi, Head of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at SQU

OOA ORGANISES SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY COURSE

On Monday, Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) launched a Sports Psychology course at its headquarters, organised under the umbrella of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC). The course is attended by a number of specialists and stakeholders from various relevant institutions. It comes as part of ongoing efforts to develop and qualify national sports professionals in the psychological and mental aspects of athletic preparation — areas that have become essential components of a comprehensive sports training system. The course is led by Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, Head of the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). It focuses on enhancing participants' understanding of modern sports psychology and its practical applications. Additionally, it equips them with tools and techniques necessary for psychological preparation to support athletes before, during, and after competitions — ultimately contributing to improved performance and mental stability. The course covers a wide range of topics related to the psychological dimensions of sports, including motivation building, self-confidence, strategies for managing anxiety and stress, mental imagery skills, focus and mental resilience under pressure. It also addresses the promotion of sportsmanship, the creation of a positive psychological environment, effective team communication and leadership styles in sports and their psychological impact on athletes. Furthermore, the course explores the use of modern technology in analyzing athletes' psychological and behavioral performance.

The primary goal of the course is to empower participants to design comprehensive psychological preparation programmes that align with athletes' needs throughout the sports season. It also aims to provide effective strategies for handling competitive situations, develop communication and motivation skills within sports teams and incorporate digital tools and applications to support mental performance.

This course is one of the academy's specialised programmes, reflecting OOC commitment to integrating modern scientific concepts into sports practice. It seeks to enhance the quality of psychological preparation in line with the demands of regional and international competitions, contributing to the creation of an integrated sports environment that supports the sustained success of Omani athletes.

Al Manar racing secure 5th place in Gold Cup

SPA, BELGIUM: Al Faisal al Zubair, Jens Klingmann, Ben Tuck and Neil Verhagen picked up valuable points for finishing fifth in the Gold Cup category at the CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa in Belgium on Sunday.

After qualifying their Al Manar Racing by Team WRT BMW M4 GT3 EVO down in ninth place for the flagship event in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup powered by AWS calendar third round, the quartet quickly made their way into the top five and held fourth place briefly on a few occasions on the demanding Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

In front of a record crowd of over 128,000 people who witnessed the weekend's action, the Al Manar Racing crew completed 546 laps but were just two short of the triumphant Verstappen. com Racing Aston Martin and the second-placed Garage 59 McLaren that lost out on a potential victory with a tyre issue in the final hour.

The CSA Racing McLaren finished third and the Wright Motorsport Porsche was fourth on the same lap as the Al Manar Racing by Team WRT BMW. The result keeps the team firmly in contention for the Drivers' and Teams' Championships. They now hold second in the Team's series and third in the Drivers' Championship.

Al Zubair said: "The race was not the greatest for us in terms of the result. But, the most important thing was that we did the best we could with the power they gave us with the BMW."

Klingmann took the wheel for the first session and started the race from ninth in the Gold Cup category. After three laps, the German had climbed to seventh with the Herberth Motorsport Porsche leading the way in the hands of Joel Sturm into the second hour after 24 laps.

Tim Heinemann then took over the leading Porsche and Tuck replaced Klingmann in the Al Manar Racing BMW but the team slipped back to ninth in the changeover.

The crew managed to climb to fifth through the 4hr 30min hour mark but slipped back to seventh through 6hr 30min. During the night stint, after 10hr 30min, they had moved back up to fourth and then slipped back to fifth shortly after daybreak. They retained fifth through mid-morning. With six hours remaining, Klingmann was again at the wheel and the Al Manar Racing car was in fifth with the Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin leading the way. Klingmann climbed to fourth with 5hr 40min on the clock but Verhagen took over for the next stint and the team was back in fifth place with four hours left on the clock.

The Garage 59 McLaren then snatched the lead. Tuck was give driving duties for the final session and the Briton safely brought the BMW to the finish in fifth



Al Manar Racing by Team WRT



Al Faisal al Zubair during the race

place in the Gold Cup section.	2. Al Manar Racing by Team WRT 69pts
Thursday morning's free practice session was the Garage 59 McLaren card the quickest lap of 2min 17.422sec to get the better of the Herberth Motorsport Porsche and the Team RJN McLaren. A dozen Gold Cup crews took part in the session and Al Manar Racing's Verhagen topped the times in the BMW with a lap of 2min 19.042sec.	3. CSA Racing 66pts
	4. Garage 59 33pts
	5. Optimum Motorsport 30pts
	6. Tresor Attempto Racing 29pts
	6. Paul Motorsport 29pts
	8. Team RJN 26pts, etc
	DRIVERS – latest Gold Cup standings
	1. Lulham/Vermeulen/King 91pts
	2. Rougier/Gachet/Kell 66pts
	3. Al Zubair/Klingmann/Tuck 65pts
	4. Pla 33pts
	5. Pretti/Smalley/Macdonald 31pts, etc
TEAMS – LATEST GOLD CUP STANDINGS	
1. Verstappen.com Racing 91pts	

Medvedev exits, Sabalenka moves into Wimbledon second round

LONDON: Daniil Medvedev found the roasting conditions and a French opponent who had not won a match on grass for three years too hot to handle on Monday as the ninth seed suffered a 7-6(2) 3-6 7-6(3) 6-2 loss to Benjamin Bonzi in the Wimbledon first round. The Russian, who reached the semifinals at the All England Club last year, got all hot and bothered as Bonzi brought out what he described as his "A-game" to dispatch the 2021 U.S. Open champion on Court Two, which felt like an oven throughout the three-hour match.

With Medvedev desperate to preserve his 100% record of reaching at least the second round at Wimbledon, he took out his

frustrations on his racket, smashing it to the ground after Bonzi had got the better of him yet again in the third set.

But there was no respite for the former world number one. "I was surprised by his level... there was not much I could do," Medvedev told reporters.

While spectators took shade under umbrellas, large-brimmed hats, newspapers and any other makeshift item they could grab to block out the burning sun, the only respite the players got was a 10-minute break at the end of the third set with Wimbledon's heat rule coming into force as the temperature soared above 32 degrees Celsius.



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action.

That did little to revive Medvedev, however, as he immediately fell behind 2-0 to world number 64 Bonzi in the fourth set and it was a setback he could not recover from.

When the Russian netted a backhand, it brought up a first match point for Bonzi, and the Frenchman was celebrating his first win over a top-10 player at a major seconds later after Medvedev smacked a forehand long. "This is special for me today. This is my first top 10 win at a slam. I love this place," a beaming Bonzi told the crowd.

"Daniil is a great player. Sometimes its easier to play an opponent like him in the first

round as the players are not used to playing on grass early in the tournament.

"I had nothing to lose and I played my A-game."

SABALENKA POWERS PAST BRANSTINE
Top seed Aryna Sabalenka overcame Canadian qualifier Carson Branstine on a sweltering Court One to get her quest for a first Wimbledon title up and running with a 6-1 7-5 win on Monday. With the thermometer soaring above 30 degrees Celsius, the Belarusian turned up the heat early to win the opening five games and looked primed for a quick finish. — Reuters

SHORTTAKES



LeBron James

JAMES OPTS
IN WITH LAKERS FOR
NEXT NBA SEASON

LOS ANGELES, UNITED STATES: LeBron James is exercising his \$52.6 million player option to rejoin the Los Angeles Lakers next season, hoping to challenge for his fifth NBA title, according to multiple reports on Sunday.

ESPN and The Athletic reported James, a four-time NBA Most Valuable Player (MVP) who turns 41 in December, will be watching the Lakers’ off-season roster moves as he prepares for a record-setting 23rd NBA campaign.

“LeBron wants to compete for a championship,” James’s agent, Rich Paul, told ESPN. “He knows the Lakers are building for the future. He understands that, but he values a realistic chance of winning it all.

“We understand the difficulty in winning now while preparing for the future. We do want to evaluate what’s best for LeBron at this stage in his life and career. He wants to make every season he has left count, and the Lakers understand that, are supportive and want what’s best for him.”

James, the NBA’s all-time scoring leader, has not said whether he sees the 2025-26 NBA season as possibly his last or whether he plans to play longer.

He would surpass the mark he shares with Vince Carter for the most career NBA seasons and needs only 50 more contests to break the all-time NBA record for most regular-season games played — 1,611 set by Robert Parish from 1976-1997.

James this past week posted a social media video of his first workout since suffering a left knee injury in a playoff loss to Minnesota.

James averaged 24.4 points, 8.2 assists and 7.8 rebounds a game for the Lakers last season. He has career averages of 27.0 points, 7.4 assists and 7.5 rebounds.

The forward’s legacy includes 21 NBA All-Star selections as well as NBA crowns with Miami in 2012 and 2013, Cleveland in 2016 and the Lakers in 2020. — AFP



Costa Rica goalkeeper Keylor Navas (1) and United States of America defender Alexander Freeman (16) battle for the ball. — Reuters

Freese shines as US down
Costa Rica in Gold Cup

GOALKEEPER MATT FREESE was the hero as the United States defeated Costa Rica 4-3 on penalties to reach the semifinals of the CONCACAF Gold Cup on Sunday. Freese made three saves in the shoot-out after the game finished 2-2 at the end of regulation to send US manager Mauricio Pochettino’s side into a semifinal meeting against Guatemala.

Harvard-educated New York City FC keeper Freese saved spot-kicks from Juan Pablo Vargas, Francisco Calvo and Andy Rojas to leave 20-year-old US substitute Damion Downs to sweep in the winning penalty at the US Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

“Penalties are my thing,” Freese said afterwards. “On the plane ride over here to Minnesota I was studying the penalties so I was ready for it if we needed it.

“It was a full team effort — it really shows the energy and the mentality of this group to come back from 1-0...then you know, everyone steps up for PKs and does a great job.”

The USA will now face a Guatemala side who stunned Canada in Sunday’s other quarterfinal, winning 6-5 on penalties after

a 1-1 draw.

The game had gone to penalties after an entertaining period of regulation that saw the United States recover from an early goal to take the lead before Costa Rica hit back in the second half.

EARLY BLOW Pochettino’s side got off to the worst possible start when Costa Rica took the lead from the penalty spot after just 12 minutes.

Poor positioning down the US left flank allowed Costa Rica to attack, and a clumsy challenge from Max Arfsten bundled over Kenneth Vargas in the box.

Guatemalan referee Walter Lopez pointed to the spot immediately and Francisco Calvo duly drilled the spot-kick past Freese.

The US thought they had been handed a lifeline in the 35th minute when Juan Pablo Vargas caught Malik Tillman on the back of the ankle with a sliding tackle. The incident was reviewed by VAR and Lopez again pointed to the spot. Tillman, who had never previously taken a penalty in his professional career, stepped up to face Costa Rican legend Keylor Navas, and promptly smashed his spot-kick against the foot of the post. The US did not have long to wait for

their leveller, however, which came with a large slice of luck in the 43rd minute.

Arfsten found space down the left and picked out Diego Luna in the penalty area, and the midfielder’s shot took a wicked deflection off Alexis Gamboa on its way into that net.

The US started the second half the same way they finished the first, and this time it was Arfsten’s turn to score.

Tillman burst free on the edge of the area and laid off into the path of the over-lapping Arfsten, who steered in a low finish into the bottom corner.

The US almost made it 3-1 moments later only for Chris Richards’ powerful header to be clawed away by the 38-year-old Navas.

The US would rue that miss after Costa Rica leveled in the 71st minute. Carlos Mora showed great trickery to bamboozle Luca de la Torre and Arfsten down the right before cutting inside and shooting.

Freese saved but Mora passed to Alonso Martinez on the rebound who fired in the equaliser for 2-2. Martinez almost gave Costa Rica a dramatic winner in the 85th minute but his curling shot cannoned off the post with Freese beaten, setting up the penalty drama. — AFP

Potgieter wins playoff on 5th hole for Detroit title

WASHINGTON: South African Aldrich Potgieter sank a birdie putt from just inside 18 feet on the fifth playoff hole to win the Rocket Classic for his first US PGA Tour title.

The 20-year-old grabbed the victory in just his 20th PGA start, beating American Max Greyserman in the hour-long playoff drama after American Chris Kirk had been eliminated on the second extra hole.

The playoff had returned to the par-three 15th at Detroit golf Club for the second time when Potgieter, who had missed winning putts on the two prior extra holes, sank the winning putt after Greyserman missed a 34-foot birdie putt.

“Finally got one to the hole and saw the ball roll end over end and

just knew it was going to go in,” Potgieter said.

“I’m just happy to walk away as a winner.”

Greyserman and Kirk each shot 67 and 54-hole leader Potgieter fired a 69 to finish deadlocked after 72 holes on 22-under 266.

Potgieter made two bogeys in the first five holes but battled back with birdies on three of the last six holes and a clutch five-foot par putt at 18 to make the playoff.

“It was definitely a tough day,” Potgieter said. “The start didn’t go my way. I struggled to make putts, left a lot short.”

All three birdied the first playoff hole, the par-four 18th, and at the first extra playing of the 15th, all three missed their birdie putts but



Aldrich Potgieter poses with the trophy. — Reuters

Kirk missed his par effort from just inside four feet to drop out.

“Just really disappointed right now,” six-time PGA winner Kirk said. “I’m really happy with how I played. Just mis-read that last putt.”

Potgieter and Greyserman both parred the par-four 16th and birdied the par-five 14th to set up the close, which made Potgieter the youngest South African to win on the PGA Tour.

“Big thanks to my family and friends, coaches and everyone who has been involved to get me to this point,” Potgieter said, noting his family’s sacrifice for his career.

“We had to give up a lot, moving to Australia, moving back. Emigrating is definitely not the easiest thing. Coming alone at the

start of my career to the States and giving it a grind — having my dad here has helped so much.”

Greyserman, twice a PGA runner-up last year, will have to wait longer for a breakthrough triumph.

“Unfortunately I didn’t get the job done,” he said. “I thought I hit a lot of good shots down the stretch. Very pleased with how I handled myself down the stretch.

“Putts just didn’t drop but I hit a lot of good putts. This one is going to sting for a little bit but I’ll have to get back to work.”

Potgieter’s best prior PGA finish was a Mexico Open playoff loss to American Brian Campbell in February. Americans Michael Thorbjornsen and Jake Knapp shared fourth on 267. — AFP



PSG BLANK INTER MIAMI, BAYERN TO CWC QUARTERS

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN steamrolled Lionel Messi’s Inter Miami 4-0 to reach the Club World Cup quarterfinals on Sunday, where they will face Bayern Munich after they overcame a spirited Flamengo side. The German giants defeated the Brazilians 4-2 in Sunday’s other last 16 clash with a brace from Harry Kane, after the European champions proved far too strong for Miami’s cast of ageing stars. Miami hoped Messi’s magic could help them produce an unlikely result against the Argentine star’s former club, but the Major League Soccer side were dismantled by Luis Enrique’s rampant team. Messi and his former Barcelona team-mates Luis Suarez, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba had done well to reach the last 16 but the gulf in quality between the teams was laid bare in Atlanta. Joao Neves netted twice for PSG,

who benefited from a Tomas Aviles own goal, while Achraf Hakimi was also on target for the treble-winners. “Clearly, we are experiencing a historic season for our club, we aim to go far in this competition,” said Luis Enrique. Messi was the main draw, as fans chanted his name and most of the 66,000 crowd were clad in Miami’s hot pink, interspersed with Argentina shirts. PSG dominated from the start and took the lead when Neves nodded in unmarked at the back post from a free-kick. With the Ligue 1 champions pressing high and keeping possession Javier Mascherano’s Miami found it hard to get Messi involved. The 38-year-old’s intermittent interventions were not enough to hold back the Parisian tide. PSG doubled their lead in the 39th minute when veteran holding midfielder Busquets got his footwork wrong, with Ruiz stealing the ball

and combining with Barcola to set up Neves again. “He played a very good game... in this team everyone can score and make decisive contributions,” said Dembele. Aviles then deflected Desire Doue’s cross into his own net, and Hakimi netted the fourth before half-time to put PSG out of sight. Eight-time Ballon d’Or winner Messi produced a brilliant pass for Suarez early in the second half, but the Uruguayan could not finish to offer Miami a lifeline. Despite the impossibility of a comeback Messi seemed determined to bow out with a bang. When Suarez was fouled on the edge of the box Messi had the chance to repeat his free-kick winner against Porto in the group stage, but his effort hit the wall. Luis Enrique sent on winger Ousmane Dembele for his first appearance at the tournament after a hamstring injury, but the Frenchman looked rusty and PSG

could not expand their advantage. Miami’s second-half performance was respectable and the defeat was by a lesser margin than the French side’s 5-0 Champions League final thrashing of Inter Milan. “I think we were above the expectations people had for us (at the tournament)... obviously we were facing the best team in the world playing football right now, so it was difficult,” said Alba. **BAYERN ‘CAN BEAT ANYONE’** Kane produced two lethal finishes as Bayern beat out Filipe Luis’ Flamengo side backed by a passionate following at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami. “It’s going to be another tough game — PSG have had an amazing season,” said England international Kane. “We played them earlier in the year and we came out on top. “We know it’s going to be difficult but we can beat anyone when we’re

at our level, we’ve shown that in the tournament so far.” Erick Pulgar headed Joshua Kimmich’s corner into his own net and then Kane’s deflected drive flew into the bottom corner as Bayern took a two-goal lead. The three-times Copa Libertadores champions battled back in as Gerson smashed a shot past Manuel Neuer to delight most of the 61,000 crowd. Leon Goretzka restored Bayern’s lead but former Chelsea midfielder Jorginho pegged them back once more from the penalty spot. Kane settled the contest with a fine touch and finish to set up the quarterfinal clash against PSG. “Then what more do you want? Top top sides playing each other on the biggest stage — we’ll be ready for that.” — AFP



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
4,500.874

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$68.61
BRENT \$66.61
LIGHT \$65.61



TAKE YOUR BUSINESS TO NEW HEIGHTS

Discover the benefits of the SME Account by BankDhofar.



بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

Visit [bankdhofar.com](#)

IMPRESSIVEPORTFOLIO



Building on its portfolio of seven bilateral alliances – with India, Qatar, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Pakistan, Spain and Uzbekistan – OIA added two new partnerships in 2024, with Jordan and Türkiye.

OIA’S EXPANDING STRATEGIC ALLIANCES BOOST FDI AND KNOWLEDGE INFLOWS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

THE Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – the Sultanate of Oman’s integrated sovereign wealth fund – has broadened its network of strategic partnerships in a move that is helping channel foreign direct investment (FDI), global expertise, and financial reserves into the country.

Building on its portfolio of seven bilateral alliances – with India, Qatar, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Pakistan, Spain and Uzbekistan – OIA added two new partnerships in 2024, with Jordan and Türkiye.

In May 2024, OIA signed a term sheet with Jordan’s Social Security Investment Fund to establish a joint investment company, capitalised at \$100 million on a 50:50 basis. The entity will target key sectors such as telecommunications, agriculture, tourism, pharmaceuticals and logistics across Oman and Jordan.

Later in November, a partnership agreement was inked with Türkiye’s OYAK Fund to launch a \$500 million joint investment fund focused on sectors including food, healthcare, energy, mining, logistics and manufacturing.

These developments, along with robust performance from earlier partnerships, were highlighted in OIA’s recently published 2024 Annual Report.

Among the Authority’s most prominent collaborations is the Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), initially launched in 2011 with the State Bank of India (SBI). OIJIF has since grown into three separate funds:

Fund I (\$100 million) completed full divestment by September 2024, posting a net internal rate of return (IRR) of 8.1%. Investments had spanned consumer goods, banking and financial services, IT, defence, and chemicals. Fund II (\$230 million) reported a 14.7% net IRR as of September 2024, with investments in pharmaceuticals, healthcare, automotive, and other growth sectors. Fund III, agreed in late 2023, targets a size of \$300 million, with OIA and SBI each committing \$50 million.

Also delivering strong results is Al Hosn Investment Company, a 2007 joint venture between OIA and Qatar Holding. With a capital of RO 250 million, the company manages 13 investments, including real estate, valued at RO 233 million. Notably, it facilitated over RO 290 million in FDI through its management of the Falcon Portfolio under Qatar Holding.

In 2024, Al Hosn participated in key IPOs such as OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP) and OQ Base Industries (OQBI), and recorded a 24% rise in net profit over the previous year.

Established in 2008 with Vietnam’s State Capital Investment Corporation, Vietnam Oman Investment Company has a capital base of \$200 million.

Locations for proposed Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Airport

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

THE Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is in the process of appointing a consultancy firm to select a site for the newly announced airport at the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Speaking at the media briefing last week, CAA Chairman Naif bin Ali al Abri, said: “Regarding the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Airport, in truth, there are several options for the location, and no final decision has been made yet. Therefore, we will soon appoint a consultancy firm to study these sites and then select the most suitable location based on various considerations and data.”

According to the Chairman, upon the selection of a suitable



The proposed airport is expected to boost tourism to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

location, “a feasibility study will be conducted, covering operations, design, costs and so on, until the details are submitted to the relevant authorities to decide whether or not to proceed,” he further noted.

First announced last year, the proposed airport is part of a broader strategy that includes the development of six new domestic airports. Other airports planned include sites in Suhar, Musandam, and Masirah Island.

In earlier statements to the *Observer*, the Chairman unveiled that the new developments aim to enhance air connectivity to drive tourism, logistics and attract investments.

Last year, a total of 203,629 tourists travelled to the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The airport is expected to further boost visits to the mountain-top destination, which is currently accessible only by four-wheel drive vehicles.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning also unveiled a \$2.4 billion development project in the wilayat, the “Al Jabal Al Aali Destination”, which will include 2,527 residential units, hotels and a health and wellness village.

First Oman-made long stroke pump unit launched

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

OMAN has taken a bold step toward becoming a regional manufacturing hub for artificial lift systems with the successful production of the first Long Stroke Pump Unit (LSU) made entirely within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Developed by Oilfields Smart Technologies LLC (OST), this milestone marks the country’s emergence as a serious player in oilfield technology.

In an exclusive interview with *Oman Observer*, Mohammed Alawi, Business Development & Technical Director at OST, said: “A significant number of wells in Oman already use artificial lift solutions, with most equipment currently imported.

By manufacturing these units locally, we’re establishing a base for in-country production that can evolve into a regional supply hub — if market feedback is strong, we’re ready to scale quickly.”

Artificial lift systems are critical to extracting oil from the most mature oilfields in MENA, because of many reasons like low-pressure reservoirs, challenging fields, etc. OST’s locally produced LSU introduces a cost-effective and technically advanced alternative to widely used methods such as beam pumps, PCPs, and ESPs.

“The long stroke technology



The full value chain — from concept design to commissioning — is being built inside the Sultanate of Oman.

offers several technical benefits,” Alawi explained.

“It’s especially effective in wells with high gas-oil ratios, heavy oil, or high-temperature and deviated good conditions. It also offers high energy efficiency, long lifespan, low operating costs, and minimal maintenance.”

The company’s innovation aligns closely with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to diversify the national economy and foster local industrial capabilities.

By building and assembling complex artificial lift systems domestically, OST is creating new job opportunities and driving the development of specialised engineering and manufacturing skills among Omani professionals.

Meanwhile, Abdulmalik

al Bahri, CEO at OST said, “Clients often cite overseas supply and service delays as a concern. By moving manufacturing to Oman, we can reduce lead times, lower costs, and offer more responsive support. This is also a chance to transfer know-how into the local economy — from mechanical and control engineering to reservoir analysis and materials science.”

OST’s manufacturing and support network includes workshops in Samayil Industrial City in the north and Al Mazyuna Free Zone in the south — strategically located to support oilfields across Oman’s geography. The company is also open to establishing mobile or fixed facilities closer to clients as needed.

The initiative is supported by a joint venture between Al Olia for Investment and Industry Gate LLC, an Omani firm involved in energy projects since 2014, and Dutch Smart Technology Holding B.V. (DST), a Netherlands-based investor in oil and gas innovation. This partnership provides OST with both local grounding and international technical expertise.

According to Alawi, the specially engineered belt-driven LSU features advanced automation capabilities, including variable frequency drives (VFD), dynamograph monitoring, and load control systems. These allow for precision pumping and improved safety, tailored for high-performance onshore operations.

“While the LSU’s rated capacity can reach up to 1,500 to 2,000 barrels per day, its actual output depends on well conditions like reservoir pressure, oil composition, and GOR,” he said. “

In fact, LSUs have recorded over 4,500 bpd in the Permian Basin in Texas. So the ceiling is high if the well/reservoir conditions can feed it.”

The full value chain — from concept design to commissioning — is being built inside the Sultanate of Oman. This effort not only enhances In-Country Value (ICV) but also opens doors for young Omanis to pursue careers in high-tech manufacturing and oilfield services.

ADVERTORIALS

EXCELLENTAPP



This accolade highlights the Bank’s unwavering commitment to enhancing customer experience.

Bank Muscat honoured with platinum award for exceptional mobile banking growth and innovation

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has proudly received the prestigious Platinum Award from Infosys Finacle, recognising its significant increase in mobile banking application users.

This accolade highlights the Bank’s unwavering commitment to enhancing customer experience and delivering innovative services that adapt to the evolving needs of its clientele.

The mobile app boasts a user-friendly interface and introduces cutting-edge features, including biometric login options such as facial recognition and fingerprint authentication, ensuring secure and seamless access to banking services.

The latest version of the app has undergone extensive enhancements, improving the design and functionality of over 200 banking services, all aimed at offering a cohesive and integrated user experience that underscores the bank’s dedication to innovation and excellence.

Customers can now enjoy a wide range of services, including card encoding through mobile banking, instant account openings for children and the ability to create secure numbers for debit, credit and prepaid cards.

Other functionalities include opening a “Themar” savings plan account, applying for a prepaid “Shukran” card, making payments via Quick Response (QR) codes, obtaining stamped account statements and submitting requests for card delivery by courier. Additionally, users can easily manage checks, pay fines to the Royal Oman Police and update their contact information for credit and prepaid cards.

The application also facilitates payment for utilities such as electricity, water, telecommunications and school fees, as well as enabling quick international transfers to countries including India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Bangladesh, covering over 70 countries in total. Users can also access a Zakat calculator and donation services.

The application features a modern homepage designed to facilitate easy access to the latest services and products offered by the Bank.

It enhances user convenience by displaying card options tailored to specific categories. Customers can enjoy greater privacy with the option to show or hide their account balance within the app interface, as well as share essential account details such as name, number, SWIFT and IBAN.

The updated version also includes a customisable control panel with a side menu that highlights customer preferences and frequently used options.

This new design is aligned with the growing number of customers utilising the bank’s digital channels, reflecting the bank’s commitment to innovation and excellence in developing internet and mobile banking services as part of its customer-centric vision.

BANKDHOFAR REINFORCES COMMITMENT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS WITH EDUCATION SAVINGS PLAN

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is underscoring the benefits of its time-tested Education Saving Plan, a dedicated financial solution to empower parents in building a secure financial foundation for their children’s higher education.

Designed for both Omani nationals and expatriate residents, the Education Saving Plan allows parents or guardians to start building a dedicated fund for their child’s education with flexible features and attractive returns.

The BankDhofar Education Saving Plan offers an impressive



The plan allows parents or guardians to start building a dedicated fund for their child’s education with flexible features and attractive returns.

opportunity for parents to start a higher education fund for their

children, with the deposit tenure extending until the beneficiary reaches the age of 18. Parents can initiate their savings journey with an accessible monthly minimum deposit of RO 10.

This tailored approach allows customers to earn returns of up to 60% over the full tenure, with interest rates of up to 5%, depending on the duration of the deposit.

The plan also offers the opportunity to invest through the Social Protection Fund, making it accessible to families across income brackets.

Award-winning sedan Kia K4 unveiled in Oman

OPENING

a bold, daring and progressive new chapter, Reliable International Automotive LLC unveiled the much-anticipated, class-leading sedan, the Kia K4 in an exclusive event with customers from the public and private sectors.

The dynamic sedan is now officially available for the Omani market.

Set at the Kia showroom in Wattayah, an official from Reliable International Automotive commented on the occasion, “We are excited to be able to present this progressive vehicle in front of our audience today. Kia, through K4 brings in the fastback profile, a high tech interior and a user-centric design that truly impresses.

It is no surprise that Kia K4 is the winner of 2024 Good Design Award”.

The evening progressed with formal introductions of the Kia K4, discussing Kia’s change-inspired ideas, future plans and a detailed product presentation on the vehicle.

Shortly after, the audience applauded the grand reveal of



The dynamic sedan is now officially available for the Omani market.

the dynamic K4, unveiling its attractive futuristic exterior.

Providing a deep insight into Kia’s design philosophy of Opposites United, the dynamic Kia K4, highlighted key features and performance attributes.

“With precision crafted in every detail, the Kia K4 creates a fun-to-drive yet exhilarating driving experience.

The 2.0 engine, paired with a six-speed automatic transmission, offers a maximum

power of 150 hp for an efficient yet responsive drive”. The presenter shared with the audience.

During his presentation, he highlighted the strengths of the Kia K4 and how it can be a powerful companion for daily commute.

He shared that the extended 2,720 mm wheelbase projects a sporty, high-performance profile and the enhanced lowered seating position

enhances presence, creating a dominating on-road profile.

Complemented by generous space for passengers and their belongings, the K4 offers the best-in-class 508L luggage storage”.

Soon after the reveal, the audience experienced the aesthetically pleasing K4, witnessing the bold statement it makes with its fastback and forward-looking profile.

Built to impress and designed with the modern, young, bold and energetic drivers in mind, the Kia K4 offers an experience that goes beyond expectations.

Later in the evening, the first owner of the all-new K4 was felicitated, marking the beginning of a highly anticipated and growing base of K4 customers in Oman.

Now available at Kia showrooms across Oman in 2 trims, the all-new Kia K4 comes with a special summer offer.

Customers can enjoy a welcome bonus of RO 500 on purchase, along with complimentary first-year insurance, registration and service coverage for up to 100,000 km.

HAKKASAN MUSCAT UNVEILS THE ‘CANTONESE JOURNEY’ MENU

MUSCAT: Hakkasan Muscat at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort invites diners to embark on The Cantonese Journey, an exciting new dining experience that will be available through to the end of the year.

This exclusive menu is a masterful ode to Oman’s extraordinary natural bounty, where the finest locally sourced ingredients are thoughtfully elevated through Hakkasan’s signature artistry and contemporary Cantonese flair.

At the heart of The Cantonese Journey lies a deep commitment to celebrating Oman’s rich culinary heritage and supporting the local community. By partnering with dedicated local fishermen, renowned for their sustainable seafood practices and local organic producers, Hakkasan Muscat ensures every ingredient tells a story of authenticity, sustainability and respect for the land and sea.

This collaboration allows the kitchen to craft dishes that are not only vibrant and fresh but also deeply connected to the rhythms of the Sultanate



This exclusive menu is a masterful ode to Oman’s extraordinary natural bounty.

of Oman’s seasons and traditions.

“This menu is a heartfelt tribute to the land and sea of Oman,” said Chef Leon Lee, Head Chef at Hakkasan Muscat. “By harnessing the freshest, seasonal produce and seafood from within the Sultanate of Oman, we have crafted a dining

experience that is both deeply rooted in place and unmistakably Hakkasan, designed to create unforgettable moments through refined, vibrant and authentic flavours”.

Under Chef Leon’s visionary guidance, The Cantonese Journey reinterprets classic Cantonese cuisine through the prism of Omani local essence.

Priced at RO18.8 per person, the 3-course menu offers an exquisite selection of eight meticulously curated dishes. The experience begins with an ethereal Wild Mushroom Soup, simmered with seasonal vegetables from local organic farms, followed by a delicate trio of steamed dim sum featuring Omani hamour, succulent shrimp and sweet crabmeat spruced from Muttrah Fish Market.

The palate is then awakened by the bold, textured Szechuan Beef Croquant, perfectly balanced with pickled radish. A dessert of Vanilla “Sider” Mirage rounds out the journey with notes of local honey, vanilla cream and date sponge layered beneath crispy honeycomb textures.

SOHAR Port and Freezone wins RoSPA gold award

SUHAR: In recognition of its commitment to the highest health and safety standards, SOHAR Port and Freezone has been awarded the RoSPA Gold Sector Award for Health and Safety for the full year of 2025, marking its second consecutive win.

This achievement, presented by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), the UK’s largest and most respected safety awards programme now in its 68th year, highlights SOHAR Port and

Freezone’s dedication to fostering a safe, efficient and sustainability-driven operational culture.

The awards attract nearly 2,000 entries annually from over 50 countries, impacting over seven million employees worldwide, underscoring the significance of this achievement.

Commenting on the recognition, Eng Batti al Shibli, Harbour Master at SOHAR Port and Freezone, stated: “We are proud to receive the RoSPA



Award for the second year in a row, a reflection of the strong partnerships we have built with our tenants, operators and stakeholders.

This international recognition is a tangible outcome of our shared commitment to upholding world-class health and safety standards, while fostering an operational environment rooted in sustainability and efficiency.

We remain focused on this path, working together to create a

safer workplace that reflects our long-term vision of institutional excellence”.

This award aligns with SOHAR Port and Freezone’s strategic direction to build a world-class operational ecosystem, driven by a deeply embedded safety culture and long-term partnerships that continue to strengthen the port’s competitiveness as a leading industrial and logistics hub in the region.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES

AL BATINAH NORTH CONTRIBUTES 11.1% TO OMAN’S GDP



SAEED AL ABRI
OCCI Chairman in North Al Batinah Governorate

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

Al Batinah North Governorate is fast becoming a major economic driver for Oman, contributing 11.1% to the national GDP in 2024 — up from 3.7 billion Omani rials in 2023 to 4.3 billion rials in 2024, marking an impressive 16% growth. This trans-

formation is the result of a clear, strategic road map led by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the governorate, closely aligned with Oman Vision 2040. Unlike traditional action plans, the Chamber’s approach focused on empowering the private sector, improving the business environment and enhancing institutional performance.

A total of 88 targeted initiatives and programmes were launched, covering service development, system integration and investment promotion. These efforts have reshaped the governorate’s economic structure and boosted its national standing.

Heavy industries were the main contributors, generating RO 1.9 billion — 44.2% of the governorate’s GDP. The logistics and services sector followed with RO 1.1 billion, or 25.6%, while agriculture and other diversified sectors made up the remainder. This diverse portfolio highlights the region’s sustainable and balanced development model.

Saeed al Abri, Chairman of the Chamber in Al Batinah North, attributed the success to effective planning and institutional leadership. “This progress is the result of structured planning and strong performance monitoring. The Chamber has moved beyond advocacy — it actively links the private sector to national goals,” he said. Al Abri also stressed Oman’s global trade advantage: “Oman has some of the lowest customs duties on exports, thanks to our balanced foreign policy and trade agreements. Our products are trusted and competitive worldwide.” Al Batinah North’s strategic location on the Arabian Sea, combined with advanced infrastructure such as SOHAR Port and Freezone and Industrial City, continues to draw global investment. — ONA

GCC INFLATION EASES TO 1.7% IN 2024

MUSCAT: The average inflation rate across Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries declined to 1.7% in 2024, down from 2.2% in 2023, according to the figures released by the Gulf Statistical Centre. The data showed varying trends among key spending categories. Housing saw the highest increase at 5.7%, followed by restaurants and hotels, as well as culture and entertainment, both rising by 1.8%. Education costs climbed 1.7%, while food and beverages increased by 1.5%, and miscellaneous goods and services rose by 1.1%. Conversely, several categories recorded deflation. The transport sector saw the sharpest drop at 2.0%, while prices for furniture, tobacco, communications, clothing and footwear, and health services also dipped — by 1.6%, 1.1%, 1.0%, 0.7%, and 0.2% respectively. Over the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, inflation in the region displayed moderate fluctuations. The rate was 1.7% in 2020, increased to 2.4% in 2021, and peaked at 3.1% in 2022, before tapering off in 2023 and returning to 1.7% in 2024. — ONA

UPWARD MOMENTUM

S&P, Nasdaq futures climb to record highs



Futures tracking the S&P 500 and Nasdaq touched record highs on Monday, as optimism over US trade negotiations with its key partners helped support upward momentum in markets. Shares of technology heavyweights rose premarket after Canada scrapped its digital services tax targeting US tech firms, just hours before it was due to take effect, in a bid to advance stalled trade negotiations with the US. — Reuters

CEO TALK

Innovation is not a luxury, it’s a responsibility

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

TO Maryam al Aamri, innovation is not luxury — it is a responsibility. As the CEO of Matterz Group, Oman’s first company dedicated to developing skills and behaviors through innovation, she is redefining how institutions and communities adapt, grow, and lead in an ever-changing world. Speaking to the Observer, Al Aamri said, “I introduce myself as a woman committed to shaping Oman’s future by embedding innovation at the heart of communities and institutions. Through Matterz Group, I focus on building integrated ecosystems that empower people, cultivate skills, and drive sustainable impact. I believe innovation is not a luxury, it is a responsibility we must all embrace to create a resilient, thriving society.” According to the entrepreneur, social innovation means applying creative, practical solutions to social and institutional challenges in ways that are sustainable and inclusive. “At Matterz, we live by activating this concept by involving communities and organisations directly in designing the solutions they need, ensuring relevance, ownership, and long-term impact,” she commented. Her journey began in 2010, with Youth Vision, a platform specialised in social youth entrepreneurship dedicated to designing programmes and services that develop the skills of young Omanis and prepare them for future leadership. “My journey began in 2010 with Youth Vision, rooted in a simple but powerful belief in the transformative potential of young people,” she recalled. “Over time, this initiative evolved through continuous learning, listening, and experimentation. It matured into Matterz Group, a national platform committed to enabling institutions and communities to innovate, grow, and lead meaningful change.” As Matterz Group evolved, it brought together key subsidiaries under one umbrella. One such subsidiary is



I introduce myself as a woman committed to shaping Oman’s future by embedding innovation at the heart of communities and institutions.

MARYAM AL AAMRI
CEO, Matterz Group

Innovation Hub, which focuses on designing solutions, while Skillerz, another arm, drives talent development. “Bringing Innovation Hub and Skillerz under one umbrella was a strategic step to create a unified ecosystem. It reflects the belief that innovation requires more than just ideas it demands the skills and behaviour needed to execute them. By merging talent development with innovation solutions design, we are equipped to better address complex challenges in a holistic and scalable way,” she said. According to the CEO, what sets Matterz Group apart is its commitment to turning innovation into a “living competency” rather than just an occasional project. “Matterz and Innovation Hub are committed to institutionalising innovation rather than treating it as a side initiative... Today, we observe clear gaps in critical innovation skills and readiness within many institutions. At Matterz, we work to close these gaps by designing programmes that enhance organisations’ ability and youth alike to adapt, innovate, and thrive amidst complexity, ensuring that innovation becomes an embedded capability rather than an external dependency.” However, Al Aamri’s work extends beyond the private sector. According to the CEO, she has participated in over 200 community driven programmes in Oman. One standout achievement was Matterz Group’s contribution to developing

the Corporate Innovation Guideline for government entities under Oman Vision 2040. “This project was not just about drafting a document; it was about empowering institutions to create internal DNA environments where innovation could thrive as a daily, sustainable practice, transforming how they lead, serve, and adapt in a fast-changing world.” Her work has earned her recognition beyond Oman. Earlier this year, Al Aamri was named the country’s first female Global Distinguished Ambassador by the Global Innovation Institute (GInI). “Being recognised as Oman’s first female Global Distinguished Ambassador by the Global Innovation Institute (GInI) was both a responsibility and an opportunity. It highlights the importance of having Arab institutions and communities represented in global innovation conversations and opens new pathways for institutions in Oman to take a more influential role internationally. I hope it inspires more women to step into influence with purpose and confidence.” Al Aamri describes her leadership style as a balance between achieving measurable results with inspiring a broader vision for systemic change. “I believe real transformation happens when communities and institutions build their own innovation capabilities, making innovation a way of life rather than a passing initiative. While I’m proud to inspire young women and change-makers, my priority is building systems and solutions that deliver impact. Inspiration becomes real when it’s rooted in results— and when it empowers others to do even more.” Looking ahead, Al Aamri envisions the Matterz group expanding regionally and globally. But most importantly, she is focused on legacy. “The legacy I aspire to leave is a resilient model that transforms innovation from isolated efforts into a dynamic, collective force shaping future economies and societies, transforming how we live, learn, and lead across generations.”

OMAN’S EXPAT WORKFORCE RISES SLIGHTLY TO 1.81 MILLION IN MAY

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 30

The number of expatriate workers in Oman edged up to 1,810,354 in May 2025, compared with 1,808,940 in April, according to the latest figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data shows a monthly increase of 1,414 workers, reflecting steady labour demand in key sectors despite broader efforts to boost national employment under Oman Vision 2040. The construction sector remained the largest employer of foreign labour, with 436,301 workers, followed by wholesale and retail trade with 272,774, and manufacturing with 179,418. By nationality, Bangladeshi



The construction sector remained the largest employer of foreign labour, with 436,301 workers.

By nationality, Bangladeshi workers topped the list at 623,186, followed by Indians at 507,695, and Pakistanis at 318,208.

workers topped the list at 623,186, followed by Indians at 507,695, and Pakistanis at 318,208. Most expatriates worked in the private sector (1.41 million), while others were employed in the family and communal sectors. In terms of occupation, engineering and technical jobs made up the largest share, followed by service-related roles, sales, and agriculture. Oman continues to monitor foreign labour trends as it seeks to balance economic growth with national workforce development goals.

DEADLINE SET

Korea seeks extension to 90-day tariff pause



South Korea will seek an extension to the 90-day pause in US tariffs that is set to expire next week, as negotiations are likely to continue past the deadline set between Seoul and Washington, a senior trade official said on Monday. South Korea held its first trade talks with the US last week since the two countries agreed to craft a trade package reducing US tariffs before the US 90-day pause ends on July 9. — Reuters

DEMAND OUTLOOK

Oil prices steady on easing Middle East risks



Oil prices held steady on Monday as Middle East risks eased while a possible Opec+ output increase in August and uncertainty over the global demand outlook weighed on the market. Brent crude futures edged down by 22 cents, or 0.3%, to \$67.55 a barrel, ahead of the August contract’s expiry later on Monday. US West Texas Intermediate crude was down 32 cents, or 0.5%, at \$65.61 a barrel. — Reuters

OPINION

Ignoring the signs of a sinking organisation? Here’s what happens



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

MY last week’s article on signs that one should look for of whether their organisation is sinking received a lot of attention.

I promised to continue to write follow-up articles that would ultimately lead into fruitful insights that organisations and their related stakeholders can follow, review and choose to adapt (based on my professional experience on the same) for their kind perusal.

This week, my article is on what to expect if signs are ignored. Briefly, from the outside/externally, your organisation may have had a well-established brand, a strong customer base and experienced/solid leadership in place.

Internally, however, signs such as profits declining, projects delaying, revenue falling, operational costs rising and consequently share price dipping.

Details that can be obtained for any publicly listed organisation on a stock market (Muscat Stock Exchange) and/or via the organisation question’s (especially private ones) audited financial performance results. The question is, what happens if one ignores these important warning signs? Simply, serious consequences if not a doom/fatal at the end.

I have had the opportunity to observe and evaluate both high-performing and underperforming organisations. A consistent pattern I have seen in organisations that

collapse is not the lack of information but rather the failure to act on the information (or signs per se) they already have.

Reasons include but are not limited to denial, fear of change, bureaucracy, personal agendas, accountability and sometimes the ego of the “so what” mentality.

Ignoring or putting a blind eye on some of the signs mentioned would result in severe situations for employees, customers and competition, to name a few.

For employees, the good and talented would be leaving the organisation for another one (or worse, to a competitor with all your information for an easy grab), while the remaining others may be doing the job for the sake of survival (instead of progression).

For customers, they would slowly but surely start to leave and/or stop buying from the organisation altogether.

Even worse, just go to the organisation’s competitor (and never return competitors, they will take the chance to get ahead by taking the good employees and the quality customers ultimately.

The public will lose trust and the investors will sell (or avoid buying shares) as well. And by the time the rest of the stakeholders realise and begin to ask tough questions, the cost of recovery would become significantly higher, not only in money but also in time, people and the strong reputation built over the

For employees, the good and talented would be leaving the organisation for another one (or worse, to a competitor with all your information for an easy grab), while the remaining others may be doing the job for the sake of survival (instead of progression).

years. When the leadership delays decisions, especially after noting certain warning signs, the entire organisation begins to operate in confusion. Baseless meetings would suddenly increase without practical solutions. Internal politics would continue to rise and of course decisions would be made based on relationships and not on merit.

Critical and senior roles would be reshuffled around frequently. Priorities on what to focus on and work on will change every now and then. In short, the organisation in question would be moving in circles.

As reported last week, only 1 in 10 companies that go into performance decline ever make a successful and sustained turnaround. This too can happen to your organisation if not taken seriously.

As I had noted last week, these articles are not written to point fingers or criticise any specific organisation as such. It is only a professional reflection, reminder and part of my periodic knowledge-sharing activities. For leaders, employees and observers who are seeing the early cracks (signs), know that the earlier the action, the higher the chance of survival.

Leadership must rise above emotion and take the necessary decisions to protect the organisations in question. A true leader sees trouble before it arrives and moves before it’s too late.

TARIFFS WILL
EXTEND TOYOTA’S
LEAD OVER JAPAN INC

KATRINA HAMLIN

TARIFFS will accelerate Toyota Motor’s advantage. The world’s largest carmaker is barely raising its prices in the US, despite President Trump’s 25% levy on auto imports.

If Tokyo fails to win a reprieve, manufacturers with slimmer margins will struggle to emulate the \$222 billion company and could lose market share fast.

Toyota said this month that it will raise prices for some vehicles sold in the country by an average of \$270 as part of a regular review. This represents just 0.7% of the mean unit price for a Toyota car sold in North America, according to Visible Alpha.

Other Japanese carmakers appear to have opted for similar tactics in the first month of tariffs: the value of auto imports from Japan to the US fell 24.7% in May from a year earlier, though volumes dropped just 3.9%, according to official trade data released on June 18.

These numbers suggest importers lowered the price of vehicles before duties, in effect absorbing the cost of levies rather than letting sticker prices rise.

For most companies, that strategy will not be sustainable. Toyota’s operating margin was 10% in the financial year that ended in March, while the average for a basket of its domestic peers was 5%.

That gives Toyota exceptional flexibility to keep prices stable; even if it absorbed costs associated with the levies, operating profit would only decline some 7%, Morningstar analyst Vincent Sun calculates.

By contrast, Honda Motor would face a 25% drop in earnings if it tried the same approach, while struggling Nissan Motor’s operating loss would grow by nearly a third, Sun reckons.

In the end, weaker companies will have little choice but to ask customers to foot the bill. Even if a US-Japan bilateral trade agreement were to halve the levies, Japanese importers stateside would probably still have to pass through about 80% of the impact on consumers, consultancy AlixPartners estimates.

That bodes ill for their market share. Those who can’t avoid hiking may lose out to Toyota or, worse for Japan, to non-Japanese brands like Tesla. That would hurt: the US is the largest single market for Honda and Nissan; and imports to the country accounted for more than a tenth of their global sales volume in 2024.

Toyota might be able to cope with the tariff pain if it endures, but Japan Inc, overall, will lose.

— Reuters

GCC economic integration
through connectivity

OMAN

stands at a pivotal crossroads, where global energy dynamics, regional instability and long-term economic aspirations intersect.

As geopolitical risks in the Strait of Hormuz amplify uncertainties, Oman emerges not only as a neutral mediator but also as a proactive architect of future-ready economic solutions — anchored by Duqm’s development and strengthened by Oman Vision 2040.

The Strait of Hormuz remains a critical artery for global energy, with over 20 per cent of the world’s petroleum and one-fifth of global LNG transiting its waters. While recent diplomatic efforts have helped to ease tensions, the vulnerabilities of this chokepoint persist.

Oman’s strategic response is Al Duqm — a secure and stable alternative that mitigates geopolitical risk while ensuring efficient, uninterrupted energy and trade flows.

Al Duqm’s location outside the Strait of Hormuz is more than strategic — it is economically transformative. It shortens shipping times by up to three days, significantly reduces freight and insurance costs; and shields trade routes from geopolitical tensions.

These features provide Oman and its partners with a dependable, cost-effective trade gateway via the Arabian Sea.

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), spanning 2,000 square kilometres, is the largest of its kind in the MENA region. It is home to the 230,000 bpd Duqm Refinery and the Ras Markaz Oil Terminal, with a storage capacity of 26 million barrels.

These facilities position Al Duqm as a vital energy hub, supporting both conventional and clean energy ambitions.

Connectivity is at the heart of Oman’s national strategy. Modern highways, upgraded airports and a planned regional railway will further integrate Al Duqm into regional and global logistics networks.

These efforts aim to establish a seamless, multimodal economic corridor linking Oman with its GCC



The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), spanning 2,000 square kilometres, is the largest of its kind in the MENA region.



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI
yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

neighbours and beyond.

This is the time for GCC-wide cooperation. Oman cannot shoulder the burden alone. Shared infrastructure — such as road corridors, pipelines and port linkages — must be a collective effort among GCC members.

Collaboration with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait is essential to building resilient economic corridors that bolster regional energy security and trade diversification.

Oman’s policy of neutrality and balanced diplomacy reinforces its role as a trusted regional partner. This credibility attracts investment, reduces perceived risks and enables Oman to engage constructively with all stakeholders.

Partnerships such as the Duqm Refinery with Kuwait, road connectivity with Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and discussions around regional rail demonstrate the viability of cross-border collaboration.

From a diplomatic and economic standpoint, Oman’s neutrality remains one of its most powerful strategic assets.

This stance uniquely facilitates consensus-building among diverse regional actors, fostering an environment conducive to investment and significantly lowering the perceived risk premium for major long-term infrastructure projects.

This role is particularly important for neighbouring Gulf nations

like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, which are actively seeking diversified export routes and secure logistics solutions amidst evolving regional dynamics.

For instance, Qatar’s ambitious LNG expansion could significantly benefit from Al Duqm’s strategic redundancy in storage and export, enhancing market access and reliability.

Likewise, Oman’s transparent collaboration with the UAE and Saudi Arabia on critical energy and logistics initiatives directly supports the ambitious goals outlined in Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE’s Energy Strategy 2050.

Collaborative projects such as the strategic Ibri-Duqm road connecting Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with future railway initiatives, are designed to create seamless economic corridors for mutual benefit.

The successful partnership in the Duqm Refinery with Kuwait exemplifies Oman’s capacity for effective cross-border industrial integration.

For major energy-importing nations in Asia and Europe, Oman offers a dual advantage: stable, secure delivery points for conventional energy and promising new partnerships in the clean energy sector — especially as Oman scales up its green hydrogen exports.

Al Duqm, in particular, presents highly attractive investor incentives, including 100% foreign ownership, multi-year tax exemptions and robust regulatory support that streamlines business operations.

These conditions create an exceptionally welcoming landscape for global investors and sustainable private sector growth.

These comprehensive strategic efforts are intricately aligned with Oman Vision 2040 — Oman’s overarching national blueprint for economic diversification and long-term sustainability.

The Vision aims to significantly increase non-oil GDP, attract private investment and foster innovation-led growth across multiple sectors.

The role of the private sector in this transformation is not only encouraged but considered essential.

ART/LIFE



FILM

Brad Pitt’s ‘F1’ cruises to top of North America box office



“F1: THE MOVIE,” starring Brad Pitt as a washed up Formula One driver who gets one last shot at redemption, sped to the top of the North American box office in its debut weekend with \$55.6 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

“This is an outstanding opening for an original action sports drama,” said David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, noting that both critics and audiences have loved the racing film from Apple and Warner Bros.

“How to Train Your Dragon,” Universal and DreamWorks Animation’s live-action reboot of the popular 2010 film, slipped to second place with \$19.4 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The family-friendly film tells the story of a Viking named Hiccup (Mason Thames) who strikes up a friendship with Toothless the dragon.

In third place was Disney/Pixar Animation’s latest original film “Elio,” at \$10.7 million in the United States and Canada.

“Elio” tells the story of a young boy who is mistaken by aliens as an intergalactic ambassador for Earth. The voice cast includes Oscar winner Zoe Saldana.

“M3GAN 2.0,” the sequel to Universal’s 2022 film about a murderous doll, opened in a disappointing fourth place with \$10.2 million.

“The idea of a child-sized humanoid robot doll powered by AI generated a lot of interest the first time, but that interest has fallen apart,” Gross said.

In fifth place was Columbia Pictures’ zombie sequel “28 Years Later,” which took in \$9.7 million.

Critics’ reviews and audience ratings have been strong for the Danny Boyle-directed threequel, which picks up — as the title suggests — more than a generation after the initial outbreak of the Rage Virus. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model presents a creation for the Jacquemus Menswear Spring-Summer 2026 collection show as part of the Paris Fashion Week at the Orangery of the Palace of Versailles in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

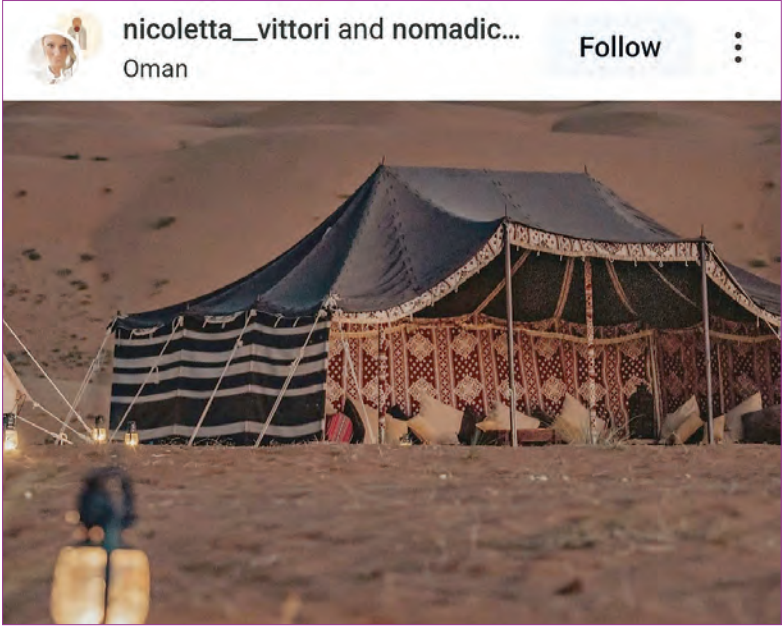
A performer in full costume near to the Circus Field on the final day of the Glastonbury festival at Worthy Farm in the village of Pilton in Somerset, south-west England. — AFP



HERITAGE

An eel set meal is seen at an eel restaurant in Tokyo. Japan’s agriculture minister said on June 27, the country would oppose any call by the European Union to add eels to an endangered species list. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Silence of the Desert



Beauty of Remote Places

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Frankfurt Book Fair 2025 hosts guest country Philippines



THE PHILIPPINES will be presenting its literature as guest of honour at this year’s Frankfurt Book Fair, which runs in October from 15 to 19, the organisers have said.

“This year, we are opening a window to the Pacific,” Book Fair Director Juergen Boos said at the presentation of the guest country programme in Frankfurt on Thursday. The appearance will also help to “dispel clichés,” he said.

The Philippines consists of 7,641 islands and, in addition to the official language Filipino, there are more than 130 other languages.

The Philippines will bring “a multitude of voices to Frankfurt,” said the initiator of the guest country appearance, Loren Legarda. The country has interesting perspectives on natural disasters and colonialism, dictatorship and diaspora, visions of the future;

and the threat of climate change, she said.

The architect responsible for the Guest of Honour Pavilion at the exhibition grounds, Stanley Ruiz, said it will mainly feature materials typical of the country such as shells, bamboo and pineapple fabric.

Visitors will be able to discover the most important works of Philippine literature, the organisers said. Before and after the Book Fair, visitors can also experience Philippine culture at exhibitions, concerts and film evenings throughout Germany.

Around 100 delegates will be travelling to the event, according to the organisers. A special feature will be the so-called FlipTop Rap Battles – competitions involving spoken word – which are particularly popular in the Philippines. — dpa



Tiny tots merged science, art and sustainability in a dazzling showcase

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

IN A DELIGHTFUL

fusion of curiosity, colour and conscience, young students spotlighted science, art and sustainability at a vibrant exhibition held at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The event was more than just a celebration of academic excellence; it became a living gallery demonstrating how learning can be experiential, expressive and deeply engaging — even for the smallest learners.

From vivid paintings to thoughtfully crafted installations made of recycled materials, the young creators offered an inspiring insight into how scientific understanding can emerge through art. One display compared decaying and fresh fruits to illustrate biological processes, while another used plastic waste — bottle caps, wrappers and discarded items — to create messages of environmental responsibility. It was learning with a purpose, art with a message.

Organised by A'soud Global School, Salalah, the event recognised high-achieving students across various academic levels, in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Education, proud parents and community dignitaries.

Chief guest Omar bin Bakhit al Kathiri, Assistant Director of the Department of Private Schools at the Directorate General of Education in Dhofar Governorate, was deeply moved by the fusion of themes.

“It is heartening to see such young minds combining academic brilliance with artistic expression and a strong sense of responsibility towards the environment,” he said, commending the school’s dedication to nurturing well-rounded learners.

Principal Damon Hewson echoed these sentiments. “This event reflects the shared effort of students, parents and educators. We are immensely proud of what these children have accomplished,” he noted, highlighting how the platform allowed students to shine beyond traditional metrics of success.

The exhibition’s theme, “Exploring Science in Art”, resonated strongly



with visitors. Children’s works drew connections between nature, scientific phenomena and sustainable practices — often in ways that were both whimsical and insightful.

A proud mother shared, “The way my son explained how he used plastic waste to create his artwork was impressive. This kind of learning goes far beyond textbooks — it encourages critical thinking and creativity”.

What truly stood out was the inclusion of Omani heritage in many projects. Embroidery pieces featuring traditional motifs shared space with science-themed art, illustrating how the school fosters a balance between cultural identity and modern knowledge.

“My daughter stitched a beautiful pattern using Omani cultural symbols. It was amazing to see how students are being guided to embrace their heritage while exploring contemporary themes,” said another parent.

Music and poetry recitations added rhythm to the celebration, proving once again that young learners thrive when education is immersive and expressive.

A teacher leading the art exhibit summed up the day with heartfelt conviction: “As educators, it is our mission to ignite curiosity and creativity in every child. Today’s event is a testament to what young minds can achieve when they are nurtured in the right environment”.

FEATURES



A CHALLENGING
CROSS-COUNTRY
TREK IN WADI
AL AA 'LA



KHALED ABDUL MALAK

ON A HOT June day, our group set out on an exciting trip to cross Wadi Al Aa'la — a narrow, rugged canyon deep in the Jabal Shams area. We started near the small village of Kurb, with the aim of reaching the village of Yasab. There were five of us: Nadhira, Rami, Sultan, Mohamed and myself. We were all eager to take on the challenge, but also fully aware of how tough and unpredictable the terrain could be.

Our plan was simple but important: camp near Kurb on Friday night, then get an early start on Saturday to cross the wadi before the afternoon heat and potential rain. The summer weather in Oman can be extreme — the temperature earlier that day was 44 °C and the last thing we wanted was to get caught out as the clouds gathered.

Our journey began in the afternoon. Nadhira arrived at 2:30 PM to pick me up from Al Mawaleh. We then headed north, driving along the outskirts of Muscat towards Al Rustaq. As we approached the mountains, the scenery started to change dramatically. Oman's landscape is quite different from the rest of the Gulf countries. While many Gulf states are mostly flat deserts or wide plains, Oman has tall mountains, deep valleys and narrow wadis cut out over thousands of years. This makes it ideal for outdoor activities like hiking, climbing and canyoning — things that could really help boost travel and tourism in the country.

We passed through Wadi Al Sahtan — a scenic area known for its steep cliffs and green patches — and took a few moments to appreciate the views. The drive was quite intense, especially as the road became narrower and more winding. We eventually met up with Rami, who was coming from Yasab and then continued along a rough, steep track that clung to the mountainside. The views here are unforgettable — canyons plunging hundreds of metres, rugged peaks towering above.

After an hour or so of driving, we reached Kurb at around 7 PM. The temperature had dropped from the scorching heat of the day, reaching a much more comfortable 28 °C. We hurried to set up our tents, cook some food and relax under the clear night sky. Our friends from Yasab started arriving around 11 PM and

we all prepared ourselves for an early start. Sleep was short, but the excitement was high — we knew we had a long day ahead.

We woke around 4 AM, energised by the cold mountain air. Rami set up his portable coffee machine and soon we were all drinking fresh, hot coffee that really woke us up. After a quick breakfast, we packed our climbing gear — ropes, harnesses, anchors — everything needed for a technically challenging day. I looked back on an earlier trip in September 2019, when I first crossed this wadi with friends including my wife Marta and my daughter-in-law Sally. That experience had been tough but incredibly rewarding and I was eager to see how this attempt would compare.

The climb started on loose scree, a mixture of small stones and gravel that tested our balance. We moved steadily, knowing the crossing involved descending four big drops — 15 metres, 70 metres, 30 metres and another 70 metres — each requiring careful abseiling. The first few went without issue, but then we encountered a problem: our rope had twisted during one of the descents, making it impossible to continue. We spent nearly three and a half hours trying to untangle it, which was frustrating and put us on a tight schedule.

To make things worse, dark clouds appeared overhead and we could see rain in the distance. Realising we didn't have much time left before the weather turned worse, we made the decision to turn back. Pushing on might have been dangerous, especially on slippery rocks. I climbed back with Mohamed and Nadhira to retrieve the rope from the top of the final drop. It took about an hour, but finally, we rejoined Rami and Sultan at the bottom of the wadi.

We took a few moments to rest, eat some snacks and decide our next move. With the weather worsening, we knew it was safest to head back rather than risk being caught in the rain in such a remote spot. The hike back was tiring, but just as we reached the foothills, the rain started falling gently, cooling everything down and making the rocks a little easier to navigate. The clouds hanging over the mountains made everything look dramatic — an image that highlights Oman's unique landscape, quite different from the flat dunes most see in the region.

Walking back the way we came, we felt relief and satisfaction that we had made the right call.