

OMAN
Observer
دولة عمان

VOL. 45, NO. 312
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

2010000387405

12

EVENEPOEL WINS
RECORD 4TH
STRAIGHT WORLD
TIME-TRIAL TITLE

ROYAL DECREE

CHARTER ON
ESTABLISHING
DCO RATIFIED

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Decree No 86/2026 ratifying the charter establishing the Digital Cooperation Organisation (DCO). Article 1 ratifies the Digital Cooperation Organisation (DCO) charter signed in Riyadh on February 5, 2023, in accordance with the attached formula. Article 2 stipulates that the competent authorities shall deposit the document of ratification of the aforementioned charter in accordance with its provisions. Article 3 says that this Royal Decree should be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from the date of issue. — ONA

IN BRIEF

HM’S CONDOLENCES
TO RULER OF DUBAI

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, on the death of his brother, Shaikh Ahmed bin Rashid al Maktoum. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathy. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased’s soul in peace in paradise and to grant Shaikh Mohammed and all members of his family patience and solace to bear the loss.

OMAN FACE IRAQ IN
GULF CUP OPENER



Oman will look to maintain their strong presence in the Gulf Cup after reaching the final six times in the last 10 editions. The Red Warriors will compete in Group A at Gulf Cup 27 in Jeddah alongside hosts Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. Moroccan coach Tarik Sektioui, who took charge in March, succeeded Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz and became the first Arab coach to lead Oman at the Gulf Cup in 30 years. **DETAILS ON P10**

ONSET OF DHOFAR ’S SARB SEASON



The Sarb season is a distinctive natural phase in Dhofar Governorate following the subsidence of the Khareef season, endowing the governorate with markedly different features in terms of weather, nature and touristic and economic activity. It typically begins at the end of September and continues until roughly mid-December, though the timing of its onset and the intensity of its manifestations vary from one area to another. As the influence of the monsoon winds recedes, the fog begins to dissipate gradually and the sky grows clearer, while hours of sunshine increase and humidity levels fall compared with the Khareef months.

DETAILS ON P3

LEADERS TO DISCUSS
MIDEAST TENSIONS

Oman attends 81st Session of UN General Assembly

THE Sultanate of Oman is participating in the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, to be held from September 22-28.

The session will discuss the most prominent issues and challenges facing the world, as well as ways to enhance joint international action to consolidate peace and security and achieve sustainable development.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman is headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, among a high-level international presence bringing together state leaders, heads of government, foreign ministers, and representatives of member states.

The convening of the 81st session comes at a time when the world is going through a delicate phase marked by escalating crises and conflicts, alongside growing political, economic, humanitarian, and climate challenges, in addition to consecutive tensions and crises in the region that cast a shadow over regional and international security and stability.

Under these circumstances, the Sultanate of Oman continues its diplomatic approach based on dialogue and understanding, advocating for prioritising peaceful and political solutions, and respecting the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, thereby



A security drone flies near the United Nations flag as the UN prepares for world leaders to convene for the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York City, US, on Monday. — **Reuters**

contributing to containing tensions and creating appropriate conditions to address crises through diplomacy and dialogue, away from escalation and expanding circles of conflict.

The participation of the Omani delegation is expected to feature a busy diplomatic programme, including participation in a number of high-level meetings and events, in addition to bilateral and multilateral meetings with officials and representatives of several countries and international organisations.

Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations in New York, emphasised that the high-level participation of the Sultanate of Oman in the work of the session represents an important opportunity to renew its diplomatic message calling for supporting and enhancing preventive diplomacy and settling disputes through peaceful means, as well as highlighting the priorities of Omani diplomacy embodied in dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective action in building a more peaceful, stable, and sustainable future.

Speaking to Oman News Agency, he pointed out that the participation comes as an affirmation of the importance of multilateral cooperation, sustainable development, and increasing respect for human dignity and coexistence. — **ONA**

Oman sees rise in museums to 34, castles at 64

MUSCAT: The bulletin ‘Culture Statistics 2026-2025 Data,’ issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), monitored the key indicators of the cultural sector in the Sultanate of Oman during 2025, addressing a number of cultural fields and activities.

The bulletin clarified that the number of museums in the Sultanate of Oman reached 34 in 2025, including 12 government museums and 22 private museums, while their total number of visitors

reached 538,729, a fall of 28 per cent compared to the previous year, with a daily average of 1,476 visitors. Visitors to the Oman Across Ages Museum accounted for 46 per cent of total visitors to government and private museums. In the field of archaeological and historical sites, the total number of archaeological and historical sites and monuments reached 33,775 in 2025, while the number of restored archaeological and historical sites reached 441.

The number of castles and



The number of castles and forts of a tourist nature reached 64.

forts of a tourist nature reached 64, representing 12 per cent of total castles and forts, while the number of their visitors reached 849,146, an increase of 26 per cent compared to the previous year, with a daily average of 2,326 visitors. Nizwa Fort recorded the highest proportion of visitors at 35 per cent of total visitors to castles and forts of a tourist nature. In the field of nature reserves, their number stood at 33 reserves in 2025, including 15 terrestrial-marine reserves,

covering a total area of 17,835 square kilometres, while receiving 185,411 visitors. Furthermore, the total number of public gardens, parks, and plazas reached 497 by the end of 2025, with Muscat Governorate accounting for 28 per cent of them.

In performing arts, the number of theatres reached 27, while the total number of theatrical performances reached 160 during 2025, averaging 6 performances per theatre, and the number of theatrical troupes reached 82. — **ONA**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Al Sharqiyah North Municipal Council on Monday held a meeting that discussed domestic development. — ONA

Development of tourism in Rimal Al Sharqiya on agenda

IBRA: The Municipal Council of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate on Monday held a meeting during which it discussed several topics in the field of domestic development and public services. Key agenda items included the development of the tourism area in the Rimal Al Sharqiya, as well as the optimum use of the governorate’s tourism assets and the promotion of investment projects in the governorate. The meeting was chaired by Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, who also heads the Municipal Council. The meeting looked into an investment plan for establishing food security and livestock projects in the Wilayat of Sinaw. The Council also addressed challenges related to the road connecting the wilayats of Ibra and Al Mudhaibi and discussed a proposal to install sign boards to facilitate public access to government institutions and service facilities, in addition to an initiative on promoting afforestation in the governorate and enhancing urban facilities. — ONA

Quran competition commences in Al Amerat



AL AMERAT: The preliminary qualifiers of the Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition, in its thirty-fourth edition, commenced in the Wilayat of Al Amerat, Muscat Governorate. The competition is organised by the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of the Royal Court and will run for four days at the Waqf Quranic School in Al Amerat. Yousuf bin Mohammed al Balushi, Vice-Chairman of the competition’s Preliminary and Final Qualifying Committees, stated that the competition aims to encourage young men and women to memorise the Holy Quran, master its recitation, intonation, and accurate and sound reading. It also seeks to cultivate distinguished and proficient reciters of the Holy Quran, in addition to instilling spiritual values, developing Quranic skills, fostering honourable competition, and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s presence in international Quranic competitions. — ONA

EMPTY QUARTER BORDER CROSSING MARKS SAUDI NATIONAL DAY

IBRI: The Sultanate of Oman joined the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in celebrating its National Day at an event organised by the Secretariat-General for National Celebrations, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, at the Empty Quarter ‘Al Rub’ Al Khali’ border crossing in Al Dhahirah Governorate, which links the Sultanate of Oman with the Saudi land border. The celebration was held under the auspices of Brigadier Ali bin Moosa al Kindi, Commander of Al Dhahirah Governorate Police, in the presence of Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the



Sultanate of Oman. It featured a number of artistic performances and activities embodying the depth of the solid relations binding the two countries. The ceremony commenced with musical pieces performed by the Royal Army of Oman band, alongside a visual presentation showcasing the depth of the steadfast relations between the two countries, a lyrical tableau and a Razha folk arts performance presented by a folk arts troupe.

The celebration also included a performance entitled ‘From My Country Oman to Saudi Arabia,’ a participation by the Saudi folk arts troupe, a paragliding display, and a collection of sung folk tableaux, as well as the Al Azi and Al Ayyala arts. It is worth noting that the celebration of Saudi National Day reflects the depth of the profound fraternal bonds and ties of affection connecting the two countries and peoples, and embodies the relations of cooperation between them across various fields. The celebration was attended by officials from the Omani and Saudi sides. — ONA

Oman and Saudi Arabia founded upon wise vision

THE Kingdom of Saudi Arabia celebrates its 96th National Day on September 23, having achieved diverse accomplishments under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, and His Royal Highness Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister. The Kingdom continues to strengthen its presence at both the regional and international levels and within the Gulf integration march through diversified economic growth and an expanding investment base. The firmly established fraternal relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are founded upon the wise vision of the leaderships of the two sisterly countries: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, and His Royal Highness Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Relations between the two countries have witnessed partnership across various political, economic, commercial, investment, and cultural fields. The volume of trade exchange between the two countries in 2025 amounted to approximately RO 2,475.4 million, while during the first six months of 2026 it reached approximately RO 1,086.2 million. Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman, explained that the Kingdom’s celebration this year comes under the slogan “Our Pride Lies in Our Nature,” which is founded upon



Oman has become one of the most important tourist destinations for Saudi families, given its distinguished authenticity of people, social values and cultural heritage. — ONA



IBRAHIM BIN SAAD BIN BISHAN
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman

authentic values such as generosity, courage, authenticity, determination, and munificence — values that are genuine and deeply rooted in the Saudi people. The Saudi ambassador said that the Kingdom, as it celebrates its National Day, recalls the journey of a nation founded by the late King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al Saud — a journey dedicated to building the human being and unifying the state, which has had a prominent presence in its Arab, Islamic, and international surroundings. He noted that, thanks to the leadership and wise vision of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and his Crown Prince, the Kingdom has witnessed major transformations in economic

development and the empowerment of the private sector, investment, human development, tourism, entertainment, sustainable energy and industry. He affirmed that Omani-Saudi relations enjoy generous patronage and attention from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and His Majesty the Sultan. The Kingdom is advancing towards the ambitious targets of Vision 2030, and the Sultanate of Oman is proceeding along its developmental path within Oman Vision 2040. Between the two visions lies a vast space that can be transformed into joint projects, investments, economic integration, and cooperation in future sectors. — ONA

RO 20m plan to transform Oman’s vocational training system

The Ministry of Labour is implementing a 2026-2030 development plan for Oman’s vocational training system aimed at aligning programmes and specialisations with labour market needs and preparing national talent for emerging professions. Dr Maimouna bint Abdullah al Rawahi, Assistant Director-General of Vocational Colleges at the Ministry of Labour, said the development of vocational training is based on continuously assessing current and future labour market requirements and anticipating changes in economic and technological sectors. She said vocational training has evolved beyond providing specific technical skills to encompass curriculum development, practical training, institutional governance, staff development, infrastructure and stronger partnerships with the private sector. The updated development plan includes 20 projects linked to the

The projects are intended to strengthen the quality of training and improve the ability of vocational colleges to respond to changing labour market requirements



Eleventh Five-Year Plan, with an allocation of RO 20 million. The projects are intended to strengthen the quality of training and improve the ability of vocational colleges to respond to changing labour market requirements. Al Rawahi said the development plan builds on work that began in 2021, when a joint working group was formed to prepare an integrated plan for developing the vocational training system. A comprehensive plan completed in 2022 included 39 projects estimated at RO 35 million. She noted that some initiatives that did not require additional funding were

subsequently implemented, alongside efforts to improve quality, assess international practices and enhance institutional performance. The ministry redirected efforts in January 2026 towards updating the development plan and linking it to the 11th Five-Year Plan, ensuring that projects and resources are aligned with national development priorities. Al Rawahi stressed that updating programmes and specialisations must be a continuous process based on indicators of demand for skills and professions. She said the focus should increasingly shift from responding to existing labour market needs to anticipating future jobs and the skills they will require. She identified the private sector as a key partner in the next phase, particularly in identifying required skills and supporting practical training. — ONA

بنك دحفار
BankDhofar



Lionel Messi,
Official Mastercard Ambassador

Visit [bankdhofar.com](#)

Limited-edition
Messi Mastercard.
Get your branded card
only in 2026



Get your card today
For more information



SHORT TAKES



The workshop features the participation of approximately 150 employees.

WORKSHOP
DISCUSSES SHARED
GOVT SERVICES,
E-INTEGRATION

SALALAH: The awareness workshop titled ‘Shared Government Services and E-Integration,’ organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, began in Salalah.

The two-day workshop features the participation of approximately 150 employees from government entities.

The opening of the event was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

Eng Sami bin Suhail Bait Fadhil, Director-General of Infrastructure and Digital Platforms at the Ministry, stated that the workshop seeks to enhance awareness of shared government services and their role in achieving e-integration among government bodies, as well as introduce the policies and controls governing the utilisation of these services.

He explained that the ‘E-Systems Integration Policy Document for State Administrative Units’ represents a framework of rules and controls regulating the interconnection of government systems and the electronic exchange of data and information, thereby contributing to facilitating access to services and accelerating transaction processing, while ensuring the protection of data and information.

He pointed out that the ‘National Government Integration Platform’ currently links 81 government entities, with the daily volume of data exchanged via the platform exceeding 1.5 million, while total data exchanged across the platform during 2025 exceeded 600 million, reflecting the extent of reliance on e-integration in delivering government services.

The workshop covers a number of themes, including defining the role of Oman Government Network, the National Center for Information Safety and Electronic Certification, and the National Government Platform for E-Integration, alongside mechanisms for benefiting from their services. — ONA

UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL
CITY TREATS
RARE WRIST
DEFORMITY

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital in the University Medical City has succeeded in treating a rare case of Madelung’s deformity in the wrist, using advanced techniques in surgical planning and 3D printing, in a procedure considered the first of its kind in the Middle East.

This rare deformity affects the growth, shape, and function of wrist bones, requiring precise surgical planning.

The team relied on advanced



The team used advanced techniques in surgical planning and 3D printing.

imaging to create a 3D model and surgical guides specifically designed for the patient, which enhanced the accuracy of the correction and the safety of the procedure, contributed to reducing operation time and potential complications, and enabled the patient to leave the hospital on the same day following the surgery.

This achievement reflects the University Medical City’s direction towards localising modern medical technologies and developing advanced specialised services. — ONA

Khareef Dhofar draws 1.1m
visitors by end-August

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
SALALAH, SEPT 21

THE Khareef Dhofar Season attracted 1,116,051 visitors between June 21 and August 31, 2026, marking an 8.6 per cent increase compared with the same period last year, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Omani visitors accounted for the largest share, with 816,719 arrivals, representing 73.2 per cent of the total. Visitors from GCC countries numbered 183,861, while those from other nationalities reached 115,471.

The figures highlight the continued popularity of Dhofar as a summer destination, with domestic tourism accounting for the bulk of visitor arrivals alongside a strong flow from GCC and international markets.

Of the total visitors, 284,667 arrived in Dhofar by air during the period. Road travel remains an important mode of transport, particularly for Omani and GCC visitors taking advantage of road links between Dhofar, other parts of Oman and neighbouring Gulf countries.

The Khareef season transforms Dhofar during the summer months, bringing cooler temperatures,



The seasonal influx also provides a significant boost to the local tourism economy.

Omani visitors accounted for the largest share, with 816,719 arrivals, representing 73.2 per cent of the total. Visitors from GCC countries numbered 183,861, while those from other nationalities reached 115,471

mist-covered landscapes and lush greenery, while offering a mix of natural, cultural and recreational attractions.

The seasonal influx also provides a significant boost to the local tourism economy, benefiting hotels, furnished apartments, restaurants, cafes, transport and car rental operators, tour companies, retailers and small and medium enterprises.

GCC visitors remain an important segment of the market, with the 183,861 arrivals recorded by the end of August, reflecting strong regional demand. Dhofar’s relatively cooler weather, natural attractions, road accessibility and family-oriented activities continue to make it an

attractive summer destination for Gulf visitors.

Despite the strong regional and international presence, domestic tourism remains the main driver of the season. The 816,719 Omani visitors underline Dhofar’s appeal among residents seeking cooler weather and a seasonal change from the high summer temperatures elsewhere in Oman.

Meanwhile, the 115,471 visitors from other nationalities highlight opportunities to further strengthen Dhofar’s appeal in international markets, particularly among travellers interested in nature, culture and distinctive seasonal experiences.

Dhofar’s Sarb season: A renewed landscape of tourism

SALALAH: The Sarb season is a distinctive natural phase in Dhofar Governorate following the subsidence of the Khareef season, endowing the governorate with markedly different features in terms of weather, nature and touristic and economic activity. It typically begins at the end of September and continues until roughly mid-December, though the timing of its onset and the intensity of its manifestations vary from one area to another.

As the influence of the monsoon winds recedes, the fog begins to dissipate gradually and the sky grows clearer, while hours of sunshine increase and humidity levels fall compared with the Khareef months.

Yet the end of the Khareef season does not mean the disappearance of the rains’ traces; quantities of water and moisture linger in the soil, and the vegetation cover



continues to grow for a time. Meadows, wildflowers and seasonal plants therefore emerge across mountainous areas and plains.

These conditions afford the visitor a scene quite different from

the misty, rain-laden landscape for which Dhofar is renowned during the Khareef season, as visibility becomes clearer and the details of the mountains, plains and coastline emerge more fully.

The wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout and their surrounding areas stand out as important destinations during the Sarb season, owing to their geographical diversity, which brings together mountains, highlands, plains, pastures, green expanses, wildflowers and plants, coastal vistas and villages and rural areas.

This diversity renders the region suited to overland excursions, photography and the exploration of nature, particularly as visibility improves and the atmosphere settles.

Among the striking scenes of the Sarb season is the movement of camels — their migration between grazing areas in search of grasses and plants — as the camels benefit from the vegetation cover left behind by the Khareef rains, spreading across pastures and mountainous and rural areas. This scene is not merely a natural

phenomenon; it reflects the continuity of traditional grazing patterns and the local community’s enduring bond with the seasons of nature.

The movement of camels amid the meadows and mountains also lends a heritage dimension to the touristic experience, particularly in areas that combine natural scenery with rural life.

The touristic significance of the Sarb lies in its offering an experience distinct from the Khareef season. Whereas the Khareef is associated with fog, drizzle and monsoon rains, the Sarb is marked by clearer, more settled weather, allowing the visitor to engage in a variety of activities, such as excursions and exploration in mountainous areas, visiting plains and pastures, photography, observing wildflowers and plants, enjoying coastal vistas, and becoming acquainted with rural life and local heritage. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting reviewed the Union’s activities over the past period. — ONA

Majlis Ash’shura participates in Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting

CAIRO: The Majlis Ash’shura participated in the work of the 43rd session of the Executive Committee of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, which was held today in the Egyptian capital, Cairo.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Shaikh, President of the Union, with broad participation from representatives of Arab councils and parliaments.

During the meeting, the committee discussed a number of topics listed on its agenda and reviewed reports submitted by competent committees, alongside the report of the Secretariat General regarding the Union’s activities over the past period.

The meeting featured discussions on developments concerning candidacy for the position of President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and examined the emergency item that the Arab Parliamentary Group intends to submit during the 153rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, scheduled to be held in the city of Arusha, Republic of Tanzania, next October.

The meeting also discussed the proposed initiative to enhance joint parliamentary cooperation within the framework of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC), as well as the request submitted by the Council of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) regarding granting observer status to the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The Council was represented at the meeting by Dr Hamoud bin Ahmed al Yahyai, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura and Member of the Executive Committee of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union.

— ONA

RARE ARABIAN TAHR SPOTTED IN DHOFAR

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

WILD enthusiasts and hikers in Dhofar spotted a wild goat Arabian Tahr (Arabitragus Jayakari) scaling rocky cliffs of Dhofar recently.

The Arabian Tahr, which is locally known as ‘Waal’, is an endangered and endemic to Oman and neighbouring UAE and lives in the Hajar Mountains. Wildlife experts say it is a very shy animal and sightings like this are becoming increasingly rare but also important as they usually live on steep rocky cliffs.

Since Arabian Tahr is a species at the verge of extinction, Oman is doing a lot to protect it - it’s one of the symbols of Oman’s wildlife conservation. The Anglo Omani Society says the Arabian Tahr was named in honour of Dr Atmaram Sadashiv Grandin Jayakar (ASG Jayakar, 1844–1911), a surgeon-lieutenant colonel in the Indian Medical Service and a dedicated naturalist who served as the British Agency Surgeon in Muscat in the late 19th century. Dr Jayakar first obtained and sent the initial specimens of the animal from Jebel Taw in Oman to zoologist Oldfield Thomas, who formally described and named the species in his honour in 1894.

“In honour of the Arabian Tahr, the ESO (Environment Society Oman), Oman’s first NGO focused on conservation, has made it part of its logo together with a sea turtle because the two animals are its two flagship species, representing the full range of Oman’s natural heritage that ESO works to protect,” an ESO spokesperson said, adding, “The Tahr in particular was chosen because it’s uniquely Omani, found



The Arabian Tahr, which is locally known as ‘Waal’, is an endangered and endemic to Oman.

Local environmental authorities have stepped up anti-poaching patrols and camera-trap monitoring in recent years, and images from the public are now a vital part of tracking the population.

almost only in Oman, it is a symbol of national pride and is listed as ‘Endangered on the IUCN Red List’, with fewer than 2,500 left in the wild due to habitat loss and poaching - exactly the type of species ESO was created to save. Its survival reflects the health of Oman’s fragile mountain ecosystems, just as the turtle reflects the health of the marine ecosystem.”

“To see a healthy, adult male in the open during daylight means this habitat is still intact and relatively undisturbed,” said a conservationist. “These mountain goats are indicator species. If they are doing well, the whole mountain ecosystem is doing well.” Perfectly camouflaged, with its light brown coat blending

into the rocks, the Tahr can climb near-vertical cliffs and survive for long periods without water, getting moisture from plants.

Local environmental authorities have stepped up anti-poaching patrols and camera-trap monitoring in recent years, and images from the public are now a vital part of tracking the population.

Siraj Zidan, the hiker who grabbed the rare photo from a distance said the goat watched for a moment before disappearing over the ridge in a few effortless bounds - leaving behind only this photograph, a sign of hope for mountain wildlife, and a reminder of the wild beauty still holding on in Dhofar’s mountains.

IHG Oman celebrates Global Customer Appreciation Week 2026



IHG Hotels & Resorts across Oman are coming together to celebrate Global Customer Appreciation Week (GCAW) 2026, under the theme “On the Move. Leading the Way, Together.”

The annual initiative provides an opportunity for IHG teams to recognise and thank valued customers, guests and partners for their continued trust, loyalty and collaboration.

As part of this year’s celebrations, IHG teams across Oman are connecting with customers and partners through dedicated visits, appreciation activities and meaningful conversations, celebrating the relationships that continue to shape the hospitality journey.

From corporate partnerships and business travel to leisure experiences, these interactions reflect IHG’s commitment to building meaningful connections and creating lasting experiences for guests and partners.

“Our customers and partners are at the heart of what we do. Global

Customer Appreciation Week gives us an opportunity to pause, connect and express our sincere gratitude for the trust and relationships that continue to move our business forward. These partnerships inspire us to keep creating meaningful experiences and looking ahead to new opportunities together,” said Krunal Ahya, Director of Sales & Marketing, Crowne Plaza Muscat.

“GCAW is a wonderful reminder that hospitality is ultimately about people and relationships. We are grateful to our customers and partners for their continued confidence and support. Every conversation and connection strengthens our shared journey and motivates us to continue moving forward together,” said Eddy Daccache, Director of Sales & Marketing, voco Muscat Al Mouj.

As IHG teams across Oman continue to engage with customers and partners, GCAW 2026 celebrates not only the relationships built over the years, but also the opportunities ahead — reinforcing IHG’s commitment to leading the way, together.

Hundreds join ESO’s ‘Strides for Nature’ charity run

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) organised the ‘Strides for Nature’ charity run on September 19 at Al Mouj Muscat to mark World Cleanup Day and raise awareness about waste management and environmental conservation.

The event brought together hundreds of runners, families and volunteers in support of Oman’s natural environment. The run was led by Guinness World Record holder Fahad al Abri, the Omani athlete, fitness trainer, musician and wellness advocate.

Volunteers supported the event by managing logistics, ensuring route safety and assisting participants throughout the run.

The event was supported by several sponsors and in-kind partners, with Renaissance Services SAOG as Gold Sponsor.

Andrew Dawson, CEO of Renaissance Services SAOG, said protecting Oman’s natural environment is a shared responsibility and highlighted the company’s long-standing partnership with ESO.

“Strides for Nature is a wonderful way to bring the whole community into these conservation efforts,” he said, noting Renaissance’s support for ESO initiatives, including research and capacity-building programmes benefiting young Omanis.

Oman Health Exhibition & Conference 2026 Opens in Muscat, Advancing Healthcare Innovation and Collaboration



THE Oman Health Exhibition & Conference (OHEC) 2026 opened today at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC), bringing together healthcare leaders, policymakers, industry professionals, investors, researchers and innovators for three days of dialogue, knowledge exchange and business collaboration aimed at supporting the continued development of Oman’s healthcare sector.

Hosted by the Ministry of Health, the 2026 edition was inaugurated in the presence of His Excellency Dr. Ahmed bin Salim Al-Mandhari, Undersecretary for Planning and Health Regulation, Ministry of Health, Sultanate of Oman, as the Chief Guest.

The opening proceedings commenced with the inauguration and welcome remarks, followed by a presentation titled “The Advantage of Oman as a Health Tourism Destination” by Majid Zangooei, Secretary General of the Health Tourism Development Center of Islamic Countries (HTDC). His Excellency was presented with a token of appreciation before undertaking an official tour of the Oman Health Exhibition, where participating organisations showcased healthcare solutions, technologies, products and services.

Aligned with the healthcare priorities of Oman Vision 2040, OHEC 2026 places particular emphasis on strengthening Oman’s healthcare ecosystem through medical and health tourism, clinical innovation and localisation, preventive healthcare, occupational health, sustainable investment, pharmaceuticals and MedTech. The conference programme focuses on establishing Oman as a regional medical tourism hub, fostering sustainable care and investment,

driving clinical innovation and localisation, and promoting proactive models of healthcare.

The 2026 edition is strengthened by the support of a broad network of government and private-sector stakeholders, strategic partners and sponsors. Key supporters include the Ministry of Health and the Research and Innovation Authority, alongside Sohar International Bank as Main Sponsor, Madayn as Registration Sponsor, and Development Bank as Gold Sponsor, reflecting a shared commitment to advancing healthcare innovation, investment and collaboration in Oman. The list of strategic partners includes the Athar Health Endowment Foundation, the Health Tourism Development Centre for Islamic Countries, the National Travel Operator platform, and the Oman Energy Association (OPAL). The event is further supported by National Pharmaceutical Industries Company and Muscat Pharmacy as Silver Sponsors, while Dhofar Pharmaceutical Industries and Al Zahrawi Group participate as Associate Sponsors, alongside Frost & Sullivan as the Research and Knowledge Partner, and Azal Health Marketing. This broad participation reflects the collaborative approach required to advance healthcare innovation, investment, localisation and patient-centred services across the Sultanate.

Oman Health Exhibition & Conference 2026 continues until 23 September 2026 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC), Muscat. The exhibition is open to visitors from 11:00 AM to 9:00 PM across all three days, offering healthcare professionals, industry stakeholders and the wider community the opportunity to explore healthcare solutions, technologies, products and services while connecting with participating organisations from Oman and international markets.

RIA ANNOUNCES PROCEDURES FOR LINDAU NOBEL LAUREATE MEETING

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) has launched procedures for applications wishing to participate in the 76th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting in the field of Physiology and Medicine, scheduled to take place in Germany from June 27 to July 2, 2027.

Through this process, the RIA seeks to offer outstanding Omani researchers and students an opportunity to participate



in this event with the aim of upgrading their capabilities, expanding their chances to engage in international cooperation and enhancing their communication skills with a select group of renowned global Nobel Laureates.

The annual gathering allows for the nomination of three young scientists from the Sultanate of Oman. The nominees will undergo assessment by the organisers to select the most

qualified candidates to represent Oman at this event, which brings together about 40 Nobel Laureates and 600 young scientists representing more than 80 countries. Participation in the event is reserved exclusively for undergraduate students, holders of Master's and PhD and postdoctoral researchers in the fields of Physiology and Medicine. The registration deadline for the event is October 19. — ONA

Al Seeb Fort restored to revive heritage

AL SEEB Fort, one of the prominent historical and cultural landmarks in Muscat Governorate, has been reconstructed as part of efforts to preserve Oman's architectural heritage and enhance its tourism potential.

Built more than 200 years ago, the fort served as the headquarters for managing the affairs of the wilayat, settling disputes and issuing judicial rulings.

The two-storey fort comprised a council, or Barza, on the ground floor, where disputes were heard. It also included an office for the notary public, a detention room, stores and a rest area for guards. The upper floor was originally used as a residence for the wali and his family.

Eng Asma bint Hilal al Kharousi, Director of the Department of Castles, Forts and Historical



The reconstruction was carried out in accordance with available archaeological evidence.

Landmarks, said the reconstruction was carried out in accordance with available archaeological evidence.

It served as the residence of the wali and his family before becoming the administrative headquarters of the wilayat.

The reconstruction project, undertaken by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, drew on old photographs, historical sources and oral accounts to determine the fort's original appearance, dimensions, architectural features, layout and functions.

Work began on September 11, 2023, and was completed on October 15, 2025.

The removal of debris and cleaning of the site revealed remains of the original foundations, which were documented and used to determine the locations and dimensions of the buildings and architectural elements before reconstruction.

The fort occupies an area of 2,975 square metres and consists of a main block known as Al Qasaba, along with administrative and service facilities including the Sabla, guards' rest area and steam room. — ONA

mcdمسقط للمقاصة والإيداعMuscat Clearing & Depository

TENDER NOTICE

Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (S.A.O.G) would like to float the Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Eligibility	Tender Fee	Tender Documents Sale Dates	Tender Submission Closing Date
MCD-2026-003	Website & Mobile Application Revamp	Vendors specialized in this field	100 OMR (non-refundable)	22 - 27 September 2026	1 October 2026 12:00 PM (Muscat Time)

Tender Documents (RFP) shall be obtained from Procurements & Services Department (email: procurements@mcd.om), Muscat Clearing & Depository, First Floor, MBD, RUWI, Sultanate of Oman (Tel.: +968-24822212 or +968-24822231) during office hours after paying the participation charges mentioned above, to be paid into MCD Bank account details provided below.

All Vendors who are bidding must provide a bank guarantee from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY COMPANY, valid for (90) days from the date of submission of the proposal in response to the RFP.

Riyada card holders from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) must attach a valid copy of the card in order to be exempted from tender fees and submission of bid bond.

MCD 's Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract Agreement shall be applicable.

MCD is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.

MCD Bank Account details: -
Bank Name & Branch : Bank Dhofar, MBD Branch
Bank Account Name : Muscat Clearing & Depository Company
Bank Account Number : 01010010875001
SWIFT/BIC Code : BDOFOMRXXX

71 SCHOOLS TO UNDERGO EQA EXTERNAL REVIEWS

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (EQA) on Monday began conducting external review visits for the first semester of the 2026-2027 academic year, covering 71 government and private schools across Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi and Dhofar governorates.

The visits form part of the Authority's external review programme, which seeks to assess school performance, identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, and provide indicators and data to support efforts to enhance school performance and the quality of education.

Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukaili, Chairperson of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education, said the launch of the external review visits marks an important stage in the Authority's efforts to strengthen the quality of school education.

She noted that the reviews are based on clear standards and frameworks and are designed to provide an objective and comprehensive assessment of school performance, supporting schools in their efforts to improve and develop.

"The external review process is not limited to assessing performance levels. It also aims to support schools in identifying development priorities and strengthening effective educational and administrative practices," she said.

Dr Al Shukaili added that the process is intended to



contribute to improving the learning environment and the quality of educational outcomes, in line with Oman's national development priorities.

Dr Thuraya bint Saif al Hosni, Director-General of the Centre for School Education Quality Assurance, said external review visits represent an important tool for strengthening school performance and quality.

She explained that the field visits enable review teams to directly assess practices adopted by schools, analyse different aspects of performance and identify areas requiring further development and improvement.

"The findings of the external reviews will provide schools and relevant authorities with indicators and data that can be used in preparing development plans," she said, adding that the findings would also support quality and innovation practices and contribute to improving the learning environment and student learning outcomes.

Dr Al Hosni noted that the Authority is coordinating with relevant departments

within the Ministry of Education to ensure that the education sector benefits from the findings of the external reviews and translates them into development plans aimed at improving the learning environment and raising student learning outcomes.

Dr Mohammed bin Yahya al Abri, Director of the External Review Operations Support Department, said the Authority had completed preparations for the field visits to the targeted schools during the first semester.

He explained that the reviews would be carried out according to defined standards and procedures to ensure a systematic and objective assessment.

"The external review teams will collect and analyse evidence and assess educational and administrative practices within the schools," he said.

The process is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of school performance, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and support ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of education in Oman.

Ministry of Social Development

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
461/2026	Supply and installation of security surveillance cameras for both (Early Intervention Center – Intellectual Disability Center) at Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of supplying alarm, security and safety equipment and devices and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Sunday 11-10-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 01-11-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
462/2026	Supply and installation of interactive screens for Al-Wafa centers for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities at South Al-Sharqiya Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of supplying communications and information technology devices and their accessories and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth class	Sunday 11-10-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 01-11-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Tuesday 22/09/2026**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



US President Donald Trump greets the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People. — Reuters files

CHINA CONFIRMS XI TO VISIT US FOR TRUMP TALKS

BEIJING: China's leader Xi Jinping will visit the United States this week for talks with President Donald Trump, Beijing confirmed on Monday, expressing hope they will strengthen "strategic stability" between the world's two largest economies. Xi will make a state visit to the United States from Wednesday to Friday, a government statement said.

Foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said the two leaders would "have an in-depth exchange of views on major issues concerning China-US relations and world peace and development". Beijing would "work with the US to enrich the substance of the relationship of constructive strategic stability between China and the US... (and) properly manage differences", he added.

Trump will personally welcome Xi at Joint Base Andrews on Wednesday before their meetings the following day, a US official confirmed. The US leader was greeted by China's vice-president when he landed in Beijing for his state visit in May. "I'll be discussing almost everything with him," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. Vice Premier He Lifeng, China's top negotiator for trade, held talks Sunday with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent in New York to lay the groundwork for the top leaders' summit. — AFP

UK HIT BY NEW AIR TRAFFIC OUTAGE, CANCELLING FLIGHTS

LONDON: UK flights faced fresh disruption on Monday, with some cancelled due to a technical issue at the nation's air traffic control agency — the second such outage in two weeks. The National Air Traffic Services (NATS), plagued by several incidents in recent years, apologised for the latest incident at a centre in Scotland that has since been fixed. "We are working with airports and airlines to... minimise any further disruption," NATS said in a statement.

It followed an outage on September 8 and 9, when a software glitch caused more than 2,000 UK flight cancellations and numerous delays, affecting more than 330,000 passengers. "The issue at our Prestwick centre in Scotland... is unrelated to the issue two weeks ago," said a NATS spokesperson.

In its latest update, aviation analytics firm Cirium said 72 out of more than 6,000 flights to or from the UK had been cancelled. "If this were the end of the day... this level of cancellations is close to normal — around one per cent," it noted in a statement. "However, as it's early in the day, we anticipate that operational performance will degrade quickly." It added that while Glasgow and Belfast had experienced "high cancellations... London-area airports are not particularly impacted".

Transport minister Heidi Alexander acknowledged that the new incident, which she referred to on X as an "IT issue", "will be deeply frustrating for passengers after the previous issue". — AFP

COP31 HOST SAYS AI'S CLIMATE FOOTPRINT TO BE A SUMMIT PRIORITY

NEW YORK: COP31 host Türkiye said on Monday that pursuing "climate-responsible AI" and pushing tech companies to power data centres with clean energy would be priorities when it stages the summit in November. The annual UN climate conference is taking place in Antalya, where the hosts are asking countries to support initiatives to tackle emissions from waste, climate-proofing cities and boosting electrification.

On Monday, COP31 President and Turkish Climate Minister Murat

Kurum announced that the summit would also address "growing fears over the rise of AI" and its carbon footprint. "COP31 will meet this moment," Kurum said in a statement in New York, where he is attending the annual Climate Week event. "We must openly discuss AI's growing energy consumption and it is time for governments to start setting the terms. We expect companies to be transparent about their energy use and to power their operations with clean energy."

A "political pledge" on how AI can support climate goals was being developed with a United Nations agency, and a draft would be unveiled before the summit, the COP31 presidency said. A second initiative would showcase pilot projects to "demonstrate the responsible use of AI in practice."

The pledge would be voluntary and not require the approval of the nearly 200 nations that take decisions by consensus during the hard-fought UN-sponsored climate summits. — AFP

Pakistan launches fresh strikes on Afghanistan

PAKISTAN'S government said on Monday that air strikes killed at least 28 militants in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, with one security official saying two Afghan provinces were targeted. Hours earlier, Afghan Taliban officials accused Islamabad of killing at least three civilians in overnight air strikes on its territory. The attacks broke nearly three months of relative calm.

Zabihullah Mujahid, chief spokesperson of the Taliban-run Afghan government, said the Afghan side "will respond appropriately to this aggression." A Pakistani official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the strikes happened in the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Kunar. Pakistan's Information Ministry gave the death toll but its military did not immediately comment.

Relations between the former allies have been strained for years, with Islamabad accusing Kabul of harbouring militants who stage cross-border attacks. Conflict escalated this February and hundreds died in air strikes, drone attacks, and artillery fire in the first half of the year. Afghanistan's Taliban government denies harbouring anti-Pakistani insurgents and says militancy is



An Afghan resident salvages from the rubble of a destroyed house in the aftermath of a Pakistani air strike in the Nurgal district of Afghanistan's Kunar province. — AFP

The new air strikes came after a police facility in the northwestern Pakistani district of Kohat was attacked by militants on Friday, killing at least 24 people. Prior militant attacks in Pakistan have often prompted retaliatory strikes from Pakistan

Pakistan's internal problem.

The new air strikes came after a police facility in the northwestern Pakistani district of Kohat was attacked by militants on Friday, killing at least 24 people. Prior militant attacks in Pakistan have often prompted retaliatory strikes from Pakistan. A separate exchange of fire on Sunday killed six Pakistani soldiers and eight militants in the adjacent district of Hangu near the Afghan border, according to a Pakistani army statement.

At least one house in Kunar

province was hit in the strikes on Monday, killing three members of the same family and injuring four others, Taliban deputy spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat said in a post on X. In Paktika, two locations were bombed, destroying a shop and an unoccupied house, with no casualties, he added.

"Everyone was frightened," said Mula Khan, a 55-year-old resident who heard the strikes. Pakistan's widening insurgencies are waged by competing groups with different support bases and ideologies but a common enemy in the Pakistani state. Last week's attack in Kohat was claimed by a militant group.

At the time, that stood in stark contrast with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its insurgency against the Pakistani government in the northwest. Bahadur's group turned against Pakistan after a major Pakistani military offensive around 2015 that targeted a safe haven of the group in North Waziristan district, Basit said. That pushed the group's fighters into Afghanistan.

The long-term repercussions of that shift are still playing out today, said Basit, as Bahadur's group has become "an umbrella of different militant groups which are the architect and Gul Bahadur is the face." — Reuters



INCLUDING A CHILD, ISRAEL KILLS THREE IN GAZA

GAZA: Gaza health officials said Israeli fire killed three people, including a woman and a child, and injured several others across the Palestinian territory on Monday. Officials at Nasser hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis said the body of a child, Ismail al Bardawil, was brought to the medical facility after Israeli tanks opened fire on tents for displaced people in the Al Mawasi area. Mahmoud Bassal, the spokesman for Gaza's civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authority, said the child was 11 years old.

In the central Gaza Strip, Al Awda hospital officials said 31-year-old Fidaa Toutah died from her wounds after being shot by Israeli forces on Salah al-Din street east of Nuseirat refugee camp. Officials at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City said a man, Mohsen Ahmed Bahjat, died after being shot in the head by a drone in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip.

It said its teams had transported nine wounded people to hospitals following Israeli fire in Khan Yunis in the south and Bureij refugee camp in the centre of the territory. — AFP

UNWAVERING EFFORTS

Indonesia continues struggle to curb fires



Dozens of planes and thousands of personnel fighting huge forest fires in Indonesia are struggling to contain them while neighbouring Malaysia stepped up efforts to combat toxic haze. The government has deployed 64 aircraft and 54,000 personnel to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra since last month to try and put out the fires by water bombing. The hazardous smoke has blanketed parts of the country as well as Malaysia and Singapore for weeks. — AFP

PRECAUTIOUS WARNINGS

Evacuations urged as Typhoon nears Japan



Hundreds of flights were cancelled and more than one million people were under evacuation advisories in Japan as Typhoon Dujuan approached Tokyo, potentially bringing record rainfall. Japan Airlines cancelled 135 flights and All Nippon Airways scrapped 140, while more than 9,000 households near Tokyo were without power. More than 1.6 million residents in and around the capital were urged to evacuate, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. — AFP

A SERIES OF BLASTS

Syrian army ammunition depot explodes



A series of explosions tore through an army weapons depot in northern Syria, the fourth such incident this month, wounding several people and sending villagers scattering. Four people were hurt, including one by falling shrapnel, the Emergency and Disaster Management Ministry said. Rescue workers had helped residents flee nearby homes as authorities closed roads leading to the site. The Defence Ministry said it was investigating the causes of the explosions. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



New Zealand’s black robin is critically endangered

NEW ZEALANDERS PICK ENDANGERED BLACK ROBIN AS BIRD OF THE YEAR

WELLINGTON: A record number of New Zealanders turned out at the polls this month, not for national elections but to vote for their Bird of the Year — the critically endangered black robin.

The diminutive native lives on the remote Chatham Islands, 800 kilometres off the South Island’s east coast.

In the 1980s only five of the birds remained, including one reproductive female. Now, there are about 350 black robins living in two protected populations.

The black robin topped the pecking order ahead of the famed flightless parrot, the kakapo, and the native karearea falcon, which came in second and third.

The annual Bird of the Year competition is run by independent conservation organisation Forest and Bird, and has been the subject of significant controversy in the past decade.

In 2019 there were accusations of Russian interference after hundreds of votes were registered from IP addresses in the country.

Forest and Bird deemed most of the votes were legitimate, and said it did not affect the victory of the hoiho, or yellow-eyed penguin.

In 2023 the puteketeke won the title after receiving the celebrity backing of Last Week Tonight comedian John Oliver, who urged his viewers to vote for the lake dweller.

Forest and Bird’s Rebecca Hatch said voter numbers had soared this year, but not due to foreign interference.

“This year has seen record numbers of votes with 105,000 people choosing their favourite,” Hatch said.

“New Zealanders have really shown up for nature. Roughly one in every 50 Kiwis voted,” she said, referring to the country’s people and not the native, flightless birds.

The black robin received more than 26,000 votes.

The Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust ran the campaign for the black robin and is seeking to create a third habitat for the birds to expand their biodiversity. — **AFP**

US MEDIA OUTLETS TO SUE TRUMP ADMIN

Three leading US news outlets announced on Monday they will go to court after being banned from the White House, as President Donald Trump claimed that media critical of his administration is a ‘Cancer’ threatening national security.

CNN, MS NOW and Politico said in a joint statement that they were filing suit after Trump last week ordered them to be barred from the presidential complex.

The ban marks a major escalation in Trump’s years-long assault on the US media, especially on outlets that report critically on him and his administration.

“This morning, we notified the government that we are filing a lawsuit today to protect our First Amendment rights and defend the principle that the government does not decide what the press reports or publishes,” CNN, MS NOW and Politico said in their statement.

The outlets said the White House revoked their journalists’ credentials “without notice or process” because it “objected to our reporting.”

“Left unchallenged, this threatens press freedom and the public’s right

to independent journalism free from government interference,” they said on Monday.

Trump was unrelenting on Monday, writing on social media that his administration was not targeting “the Free Press” but was “instituting an assault on the FAKE NEWS, something that has grown like Cancer.”

“It is corrupt, purposeful, pervasive, fully coordinated, and totally out of control,” Trump claimed, writing it was a “threat to our National Security, and must be stopped, NOW!” — **Reuters**

Merz promises to defend democracy amid setbacks

GERMANY’S EMBATTLED Chancellor Friedrich Merz vowed on Monday to keep his ruling coalition together for the sake of the country’s ‘democratic future’ after crushing defeats in two regional elections fuelled speculation about how long he will stay in his post.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) scored another win on Sunday, in the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where Merz’s CDU sank to 4.9 per cent, below the threshold to stay in parliament and its worst result since the party was formed in 1945.

The AfD’s top state candidate, Leif-Erik Holm, predicted on Monday that “the chancellor certainly won’t make it to the end of the year. I think the twilight of the chancellor’s era has begun.”

But Merz, 70, made clear he has no intention of quitting as leader of Europe’s biggest economy, at the helm of a coalition with the centre-left SPD.

“We are determined to live up to the historic responsibilities our country is facing,” said Merz. “It is about nothing less, and nothing more, than the democratic future of our country.”

Merz has faced growing pressure after the latest bruising results, which also saw the far-left Die Linke beat his centre-right party in the city state of Berlin, where the AfD also made strong gains. The setbacks came with speculation already at fever pitch about Merz’s future after the AfD scored its biggest electoral



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz gives a statement after first exit polls of the Berlin and Mecklenburg Western Pomerania state elections, at the CDU headquarters in Berlin. — **Reuters**

The setbacks came with speculation already at fever pitch about Merz’s future after the AfD scored its biggest electoral triumph yet in a vote in Saxony-Anhalt state

triumph yet in a vote in Saxony-Anhalt state on September 6.

Merz however pushed back at criticism that his own low popularity ratings were behind the election defeats.

“The reasons for these election results go far beyond my own person,” he said.

“We are witnessing a profound transformation of the political party system in Germany as well as in many other countries around the world.”

Fighting speculation that his CDU/CSU bloc may try to oust him, Merz took the unusual step on Sunday of addressing the nation on TV just minutes after the first exit polls were announced.

Merz admitted that his CDU had suffered a “disaster” but vowed to stay the course, push on with reforms and govern with “backbone, steadfastness and patience”.

The chancellor has also cleared his calendar for the following days and skipped a trip to New York for the UN General Assembly to deal with potential aftershocks from the votes.

When Merz took office in May last year, he vowed to reboot a flagging economy, rebuild the military to deter Russia and reduce irregular immigration to soothe voters’ fears and lure them away from the AfD.

But his personal approval ratings are hovering just above 10 per cent, with reforms moving slowing and Europe’s biggest economy still struggling to get back on its feet.

Highlighting the economic woes, tens of thousands of auto workers staged protests nationwide on Monday demanding more action to protect jobs, following waves of cuts at top carmakers like Volkswagen and their suppliers.

Sunday’s election losses also looked set to cause more turbulence between the CDU and junior coalition partners the SPD.

While SPD leaders pledged to remain in the coalition, they hinted that they wanted to reopen talks on social and economic reforms, recently agreed on after months of often rancorous negotiations with the CDU.

“We stand by this coalition,” said Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil, who is the SPD’s co-leader.

But he added that “things can’t go on” as they had been.

“We need open and honest debates, including within the government, about the course of reforms,” he added. — **AFP**

Putin’s party secures record majority as Kremlin tightens grip on power

Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party won a record supermajority in the Duma, authorities announced on Monday after a tightly controlled three-day election without parties critical of the Kremlin or the war in Ukraine. Electoral chief Ella Pamfilova said preliminary results showed United Russia — which has dominated Russian politics for 25 years — won 355 of the Duma’s 450 seats.

The result handed Putin’s party an increased supermajority and beat its previous record of 343 seats. The supermajority means it can change the constitution, if it needs to.

The Kremlin said the result of the first parliamentary election since Moscow sent troops to Ukraine in 2022 showed Russians were united around Putin, who has been in power since New Year’s Eve 1999.

The conflict has killed hundreds of thousands, displaced millions and hit ordinary lives in Russia more than ever this year. Moscow has banned criticism of its military campaign and the only party that called for an end to the war was removed from the election.

“These indicators, of course, point to the highest level of consolidation within Russian society around the head of state,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a briefing with journalists. Elections under Putin are tightly controlled and few in

The result handed Putin’s party an increased supermajority and beat its previous record of 343 seats



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia. — **Reuters**

Russia doubted United Russia would win.

Putin had encouraged Russians to vote in support of troops in Ukraine and Moscow also organised voting in occupied Ukraine. Pamfilova said turnout was over 59 per cent, thanking Russians for voting despite what she called “psychological pressure on Russia.”

Russia’s Ukraine campaign broke its ties with the West. Kyiv hit Moscow with its biggest drone attack of the war on Sunday, the last day of voting, killing two people and setting an oil refinery ablaze.

“Despite the extreme situation, we were successful in ensuring the maximum security of these elections,” Pamfilova told a Moscow press conference, thanking security services for ensuring

the vote went ahead. The election result is expected to further tighten Putin’s grip on power. Some fear a new military mobilisation in Russia. Putin has denied this is in the works, while Kyiv accuses Moscow of planning a callup in coming weeks. Russia’s Communist party came second in the vote, winning 40 seats. The nationalist LDPR party took 25 seats and the New People party won 20.

The election took place amid the escalation of the Ukraine war in recent months, with no diplomatic solution in sight. For the Kremlin, it served as a barometer on the mood of Russians towards the war. In some regions, voting also took place for the heads of regions. In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov — known for ruling the Muslim-majority republic with an iron fist — won 99.85 per cent of the vote, the electoral commission said.

Opposing Kadyrov is hugely dangerous in Chechnya, which is known for extra-judicial killings. Putin’s political opponents are in exile, prison or dead. The EU’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas dismissed Russia’s “so-called” election.

“The Kremlin silenced dissent, barred the only registered party that opposed its war in Ukraine, and shut out international election monitors. The veneer of democracy is all that remains in Russia,” Kallas said. — **AFP**

Sarb opens new tourism season for Dhofar



EDITORIAL

WITH the astronomical beginning of Sarb, the Sultanate of Oman, and Dhofar Governorate in particular, enters a season of unique beauty and calm.

Extending until mid-December, Sarb is characterised by clear skies, moderate temperatures, low humidity and tranquil seas, marking a distinct transition from the misty grandeur of khareef.

More than just a climatic phase, Sarb represents a significant economic, tourism and cultural opportunity that deserves greater national attention.

For decades, the tourism narrative of Dhofar has been rightly dominated by khareef, when the mountains turn green and the governorate attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from within and outside Oman.

However, Sarb offers a different, yet equally compelling proposition. The atmosphere is crystal clear, visibility is high, and the landscape, washed clean by the monsoon, is vibrant.

Coastal areas become ideal for swimming and marine activities, while the desert hinterland of Dhofar, with its golden dunes and star-filled nights, becomes accessible and inviting.

This makes Sarb an ideal season for a more diversified tourism product. It is the perfect time for family tourism, adventure tourism, camping, diving, and cultural festivals.

For domestic tourists and international visitors seeking sun and mild weather as

winter sets in across Europe and Asia, Dhofar during Sarb can be a destination of choice. This aligns directly with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which calls for sustainable tourism development, economic diversification, and year-round tourism activity.

The economic significance of Sarb extends beyond tourism. It is a season of agricultural abundance and economic activity. With the end of the monsoon, farmers in the Dhofar plains begin harvesting seasonal crops.

The frankincense trees, central to Dhofar's heritage and economy, are tended during this period. The calm seas allow fishermen to return to the sea in full force, boosting fish landings and supporting food security.

The moderate weather also provides a vital window for construction, logistics and infrastructure projects that may have slowed during Khareef.

Crucially, Sarb is a season that directly supports small and medium enterprises. Tour guides, owners of guesthouses and chalets, operators of 4x4 vehicles, restaurants, honey and frankincense sellers, and handicraft producers all benefit when tourist activity is extended beyond the two months of khareef.

By lengthening the tourism season to four additional months, we create more sustainable livelihoods and reduce the seasonal nature of employment in the governorate.

To fully realise this potential, a concerted and integrated effort is required. First,

Sarb aligns directly with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which calls for sustainable tourism development, economic diversification, and year-round tourism activity

there is a need for targeted marketing that positions Sarb as a distinct season, not merely as an aftermath of khareef. A clear identity for Sarb, built around concepts of clarity, serenity, and harvest, can attract a different segment of travellers.

Second, connectivity must be maintained. The momentum of flights and transport services seen during Khareef should not drop sharply, but be sustained through attractive packages and events.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality and the private sector, can play a leading role in organising festivals, desert experiences and marine activities during this period.

Third, community empowerment is essential. Training local youth as guides for desert and mountain trails, supporting families to develop agritourism and farm stays, and helping SMEs to market their products will ensure that the benefits of Sarb tourism remain within the local community.

Dhofar is blessed with a unique environmental diversity that few regions in the world possess. It has a monsoon with greenery, and it has Sarb with clarity. If khareef showed Dhofar at its most dramatic, Sarb shows it at its most serene and productive.

Transforming Sarb from a meteorological term into a recognised economic and tourism season will not only support livelihoods in Dhofar but will also strengthen Oman's position as a year-round destination that celebrates its natural diversity in all seasons.

PHILIPPINE TRIBE IN LIMBO OVER US-LED TECH HUB

PAM CASTRO & CHAD WILLIAMS

Tribal leader Petronila Munoz walked across the sweeping Philippine grasslands she has called home for generations, uncertain about its future, as a sprawling tech hub for a US-led initiative takes shape.

With little information and no prior consultation, the Indigenous chieftain said her Aeta Hungey tribe was uncertain how much of their land could be affected or what will become of the livelihood it provides.

"There's still no clarity," Munoz said inside the tribe's traditional meeting hall.

"What will happen to us? That's our biggest question."

In April, the US announced that the Philippines had joined Pax Silica, a US-led effort to strengthen supply chains for semiconductors and rare earth elements and reduce participating countries' dependence on China.

The Philippines has designated a 1,620-hectare site in New Clark City in Tarlac province, north of Manila, for a manufacturing hub aimed at producing high-end components for use in artificial intelligence data centres.

The government estimates the initiative could attract up to \$70 billion in investment and create about 190,000 jobs, a major boost to a country with more than three million unemployed people.

The project has a long timeline. No tenants have been confirmed.

Plans to domestically process the country's mineral resources could be even further away. For about 1,000 Aetas, however, the prospect of displacement is already here.

In July, they received a letter from the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) warning that the project 'could affect your occupied lands.'

Munoz said visiting BCDA employees told them to leave by December and relocate to an area about 16 kilometres from their current home, without providing a master plan showing which parts of their ancestral domains would be affected.

Munoz said the BCDA has offered them just 30 pesos per square metre for their lands, an offer all declined. "Our lives, our livelihood and our culture are tied to this ancestral land," Munoz said. "Land is more important. Money runs out." — AFP

When social media becomes the detective

RESEARCHING social media has given me a front-row seat to one of the most fascinating developments of the past decade: the rise of online sleuthing communities.

Sometimes called Internet sleuths, citizen detectives, or true-crime creators, these self-appointed investigators use platforms such as TikTok and YouTube to analyse court cases, examine evidence, interpret behaviour, and offer theories to enormous audiences. Whether they are right or wrong, their ability to influence public opinion is undeniable.

I first became fully aware of their power during the televised defamation trial involving Johnny Depp and Amber Heard. I happened to be visiting the United States at the time, so I was able to follow the proceedings directly on Court TV and online.

I watched the testimony and evidence and formed my own opinion. At the same time, however, my social media feeds were filled with TikTok creators dissecting virtually every moment of the trial. They analysed statements, facial expressions, audio recordings, legal arguments, and exchanges between the witnesses and lawyers.

Many of these creators helped their audiences understand details that might otherwise have been overlooked. Their interpretations reinforced my own conclusion that Depp's account was more persuasive.

More importantly, they demonstrated that legal proceedings were no longer being interpreted only by journalists and



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Online communities can democratise access to information, question simplistic media narratives, and help ordinary people engage with complex evidence

professional commentators. A new class of social media analysts had emerged, capable of shaping the dominant public narrative in real time.

Since then, I have seen similar communities form around many other cases. One that particularly challenged my perception of social media sleuthing was the case of Lindsay Clancy.

When I was visiting the United States during the summer, I encountered numerous TikTok theories suggesting that her husband might have been responsible for the deaths of their children. Some creators treated this speculation almost as established fact, despite the lack of evidence supporting it.

After following longer and more detailed discussions by YouTube commentators, I came to understand the case very differently. Clancy was accused of committing filicide - the killing of one's own children (three in her case).

Some commentators discussed the concept of altruistic filicide, a term used for cases in which a parent believes, however irrationally or delusionally, that killing a child will somehow protect the child from suffering. The term may help describe a particular motive or psychological state, but it should not be mistaken for a moral justification.

The case also led to difficult conversations about postpartum depression, postpartum psychosis, and criminal responsibility.

On our own Omani social media platforms, a prominent Omani

lawyer explained when severe mental illness might affect a person's legal culpability and when it would not. This distinction is crucial.

A psychiatric condition may provide context and, in certain legal systems, affect whether someone possessed the mental capacity required for criminal responsibility.

Nevertheless, an explanation is not automatically an excuse, and public discussion should not erase the victims or declare someone innocent before the evidence has been properly considered.

These cases revealed both the value and the danger of social media sleuthing.

Online communities can democratise access to information, question simplistic media narratives, and help ordinary people engage with complex evidence. Yet they can also amplify rumours, reward confident speculation, and turn incomplete theories into apparent truths.

Perhaps their greatest power lies not in solving cases but in framing them. Most people do not watch an entire trial or examine all the available evidence. They rely on edited clips and interpretations from creators they trust.

Social media sleuths therefore become informal gatekeepers of public understanding. Their influence carries real responsibility: curiosity and collective analysis can illuminate the truth, but when certainty outruns evidence, the same communities can distort it.

Are you bored? It could be you are too comfortable



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

WE LIVE in the golden age of seamless living. Maybe it will get better and better. The solar lights switch on automatically when the sun sets and darkness sets in.

Seamless living refers to a lifestyle where technology, design, and daily routines are perfectly integrated to eliminate friction, stress, and unnecessary effort. The goal is to make your day-to-day experiences fluid, automated, and intuitive.

Does your home have lights, a thermostat, security systems, and appliances that talk to each other and adapt to your habits automatically? There are pillows that have memory. There is voice and sensor control that manages your home environment without needing to flip switches or manually adjust settings.

Last week, at the Oman Climate Week, I had an opportunity to hear experts talk about sustainability. In many ways, the concept of sustainability is directly linked to our lives.

Algorithms anticipate our preferences, and they want to know more and more about what we like and don't. Meanwhile, seamless living ensures cars heat our seats before we sit down, and groceries appear at our doorstep without us ever exchanging a glance with another human. A friend ordered groceries, and in the list she did not realise she had ordered sugar twice, and now she has 10 kg of sugar in her kitchen. With our latest facilities, we do not have to walk around and choose and weigh groceries and wait in line to pay or have the trouble of finding parking to begin with.

Comfort has never been more accessible — or more mind-numbingly dull.

Let us explore comfort and friction.

Comfort offers safety, but friction offers character. When every experience is smoothed out, optimised, and predictable, life flattens. This is probably why most teenagers are bored. Life got too easy.

Look back — when are the times when you are most excited and have lots to say?

The most memorable moments of your life almost certainly involved a minor disaster: getting lost in a city where you didn't speak the language, a disastrous first meeting that turned into a four-hour talk, or an outdoor trip ruined by sudden rain.

Why were they interesting? They were unpredictable.

When you spend extra money or time buying total comfort, you are often paying to eliminate the very unpredictability that makes an experience worth remembering. It is so smooth that somewhere along boredom settles in and at times even motivation.

The Hedonic Treadmill of Ease: Comfort loses its novelty fast. The first time you get food delivered in 20 minutes, it feels like magic; the tenth time, it's just Tuesday.

Imagine if you had gone to the restaurant, there are sights and sounds to entertain you. Incidents that make us reflect and think. Someone to irritate you because he/she honked just before it turned green. Maybe you might have even debated who is a better driver — men or women?

At the restaurant, the lighting had an

Comfort offers safety, but friction offers character. When every experience is smoothed out, optimised, and predictable, life flattens. This is probably why most teenagers are bored. Life got too easy

influence on you; the ambience made you smile and relax. The aroma of the food turned out to be an appetiser.

The “Memory Dividend”: Smooth, comfortable days blur together into a single, forgotten blur. Discomfort acts as an anchor in time — it creates a sharp memory you can revisit for years. It is not a mere coincidence that you remember the first day in the boarding school so vividly.

I remember mine so clearly even today. I dreamt that I was at home and my grandfather had come to wake me up. I wondered why he was using a bell. Woke up to find the warden waiting for us to rise and shine. The choke in the throat was so painful that it was tough to produce a ‘good morning’ greeting. The warden, the teacher within days, turned out to be a wonderful mentor. She was strict but was a person who took time to explain why the rules were set in place.

A good life is not just a series of pleasant sensations. It requires contrast. You cannot truly appreciate a hot shower or a warm bed until you’ve been freezing and exhausted. Imagine if we did not have mountains or slopes.

For one, we would not have quotes on mountains: “Life’s a bit like mountaineering — never look ‘down,’” Edmund Hillary.

So these are some suggestions to be tried out — how about taking the scenic route without GPS, sitting at the counter of a restaurant alone, or saying yes to an invitation that makes you a little nervous? Both are easy, but rough edges give life its texture.

IN ‘TENZING’, A SHERPA MOUNTAINEER GETS HIS DUE

PAULA RAMON

It took years for Tenzing Norgay to secure his place in history as the man who, alongside New Zealander Edmund Hillary, first reached the summit of Mount Everest.

And it has taken far longer for the story of his feat to be memorialised in film.

“I don’t know why it took so long to tell this story,” said Jennifer Peedom, the director of the biographical drama “Tenzing.”

“For me, it’s always been the most interesting Everest story,” she said in an interview.

The Apple TV film, which landed at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) after its world premiere at Telluride, recounts the first confirmed ascent to Everest’s summit in 1953.

But it focuses on the journey from the perspective of Norgay, the Sherpa mountaineer who, together with Hillary, completed the climb that until then was deemed impossible.

Norgay’s story was long overshadowed in previous accounts told from a Western perspective of the historic trip up the mountain, which measures 29,031.7 feet. The son of a yak herder, Norgay “had to overcome so much adversity just to get to the starting line on Everest, let alone to be the first man to reach the summit,” said Peedom.

“It’s one of the great achievements of the 20th century, and I wanted to put Tenzing as a protagonist of that story, of his own story.”

Bringing the tale to the screen was not without its obstacles, said the film-maker, whose own career began as a camera operator in the Himalayas. “It was a process of earning trust over what turned out to be many years,” said the Australian director, whose award-winning 2015 film “Sherpa” details the risky work done by the people who carry the equipment and supplies up Everest to make climbs possible for foreigners.

It was Peedom’s direction that drew in the actor Willem Dafoe, who portrays Colonel John Hunt, the expedition’s leader.

For the 71-year-old, the experience was an “adventure” — not just because of the physical challenge, but because of the connection with nature. And at its core, the film was an opportunity to give credit to a person who, along with overcoming enormous physical obstacles, faced classicism and exclusion.

It’s “this kind of hangover from, you know, a colonial world, that this man was not considered,” Dafoe said. “But in the end, he turned out to be the most capable, and he stuck to his guns,” the actor continued.

“He wasn’t discouraged, even though there were lots of impediments in this way.” Norgay took part in several failed Everest expeditions prior to joining the one led by Hunt. — AFP

Merz clings on after German poll ‘disaster’

CHANCELLOR Friedrich Merz was clinging to power on Monday after his conservative party tumbled to its worst regional election defeat in postwar Germany and members of his coalition clashed over his unpopular reform agenda.

Merz himself described Sunday’s loss in the northeastern state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania as a “disaster” as his party for the first time missed the 5 per cent threshold for entering a state parliament.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) took first place. While it fell well short of a majority, it was the second time the party had topped a state election within a month, which it sees as building momentum towards national power.

Merz’s party also bled votes in a second election in the state of Berlin, which could see the far-left Die Linke party, the descendants of the Communist party that once ran East Germany, take power in a coalition after winning most seats.

Sunday’s results may not prove a knock-out blow for Merz, but his low approval ratings, unpopular reforms and the AfD’s surge have left his future in the balance.

Several conservative state premiers met on Sunday to take stock after having publicly backed Merz in an open letter last week.

“The meeting was not about a revolt or a plot against Chancellor Merz,” one of the participants of the meeting said.

“However, there was agreement that the Chancellor needs to deliver more following the CDU’s difficult results in the state elections.”

Within minutes of the results coming in on Sunday, Merz in televised remarks vowed to press on with his reform agenda that he says is vital to revive sluggish growth in Europe’s largest economy and keep it globally competitive.

But members of his centre-left coalition partner, the Social Democrats, pushed back. That includes Manuela Schwesig, the popular incumbent state premier of



ANDREAS RINKE

The writer is Chief Political Correspondent for Thomson Reuters



MATTHIAS WILLIAMS

The writer is based in United Kingdom, and is currently a Lead Writer, Germany and Austria and Switzerland at Thomson Reuters



German Chancellor and leader of Germany’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Friedrich Merz addresses a press conference in Berlin on Monday. — AFP

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, who has sharply criticised the federal government’s pension reforms.

Schwesig said she was “very irritated” by Merz’s remarks. “I think more humility is actually called for on the part of the Chancellor,” she told the ARD broadcaster.

The AfD party leads in national opinion polls but has been kept from power by the other main parties’ refusal to work with it, in a policy known as the “firewall” that has been increasingly scrutinised as the AfD gained strength. Its hardline stance on immigration has left some in Germany of migrant background questioning their future.

“The fact that the AfD is in the lead is quite a bitter pill to swallow,” said Yasmin Goudarzi, an educational scientist who attended an election event hosted by a migrant organisation in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania’s capital Schwerin.

In Berlin, Die Linke topped the polls in a state election for the first time on a campaign to nationalise housing from corporate landlords and put a cap on rents, echoing the rise of New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

“From today, we’re changing Berlin together,” said Die Linke’s lead

candidate Elif Eralp, the 45-year-old daughter of left-wing Turkish parents who fled a coup in Türkiye in 1980.

Elected last year on a promise of reforms to return Germany’s stagnant economy to growth, Merz has struggled to win over voters, as a stream of communication missteps served to compound resentment over unpopular pension, tax and healthcare reforms.

Disillusionment with his government has hung over the campaigns in both Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Berlin, where voters have focused on soaring energy and housing costs.

Schwesig, sometimes seen as a potential next SPD national leader, is likely to remain in power in her state.

“Yes, I would have imagined a different outcome as well because, let’s say, the troublemakers who voted for the AfD clearly weren’t paying attention in history class,” said Detlef Spelker, a passerby in Schwerin.

“We’ve been in a similar situation before, almost 100 years ago. Inflation, problems with jobs, nobody had any money. We’ll see what this brings now. I don’t know whether they’ll deliver.”

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Action from Seeb's victory over Ibri in the third round of the Sohar International Cup.

AL MAQBALI DOUBLE LIFTS SEEB AS DHOFAR, SUR TRIUMPH

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Abdulaziz al Maqbali scored twice as Seeb defeated Ibri 3-0 to provisionally top Group Two in the Sohar International Cup, while Dhofar overcame Fanja 2-0 and Sur rallied to beat Samayil 3-1 in the third round.

At Seeb Stadium, the hosts secured their second successive victory to move onto seven points, leaving Ibri without a point.

Al Maqbali opened the scoring in the 19th minute, converting an opportunity inside the penalty area during an otherwise evenly contested first half. Ibri tried to respond but lacked the finishing touch, while Seeb went into the interval protecting their narrow advantage.

The visitors made two changes at half-time, but Seeb struck again just two minutes after the restart. Jawad al Izzi advanced down the left and delivered a precise cross for Al Maqbali to head home his second.

Ahmed al Riyami completed the scoring in the 63rd minute, meeting a cross inside the penalty area and finding the net. Seeb remained organised throughout the closing stages, with Ibri unable to seriously threaten goalkeeper Mutasim al Wahaibi.

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Dhofar scored once in each half through Ahmed al Shanfari and Abu Kamara to secure victory over Fanja in Group One.

Both sides created openings before the breakthrough. Fanja's Khalid al Sulaimi had an effort blocked early on and later tested Dhofar goalkeeper Mazin al Kasbi, while Kamara headed over at the other end.

Al Shanfari put Dhofar ahead in the 43rd minute, finishing a well-worked move to give the hosts the advantage at the interval.

Fanja sought a way back after the restart, but Kamara extended Dhofar's lead in the 68th minute with a powerful header from a corner.

Al Kasbi subsequently denied substitute Omar al Hosni's header before Al Nawras al Farsi fired over as Fanja pressed to reduce the deficit. Both teams finished with 10 men after Fanja's Lavisa and Dhofar's Omar Adil were sent off in stoppage time.

Meanwhile, Abdullah al Musharafi struck twice as Sur overturned a half-time deficit against Samayil at Sur Sports Complex.

Mohammed al Muhaijri gave Samayil the lead from the penalty spot in the 29th minute after being fouled inside the area.

Sur emerged with greater purpose after the break, and Al Musharafi equalised in the 49th minute. Four minutes later, Mohammed al Mujaini put the hosts ahead as their improved attacking play began to tell.

Samayil struggled to turn their attempts at a response into clear opportunities, while Sur continued to threaten through quick attacks down the flanks.

Al Musharafi settled the contest in the third minute of stoppage time, adding his second and Sur's third to complete the comeback.



Head coach Tarik Sektioui guides the Red Warriors through today's training session in Jeddah as tactical preparations continue.

OMAN FACE IRAQ IN GULF CUP OPENER IN JEDDAH

WALEED AL JAHWARI
JEDDAH, SEPT 21

OMAN will look to maintain their strong presence in the Gulf Cup after reaching the final six times in the last 10 editions. The Red Warriors will compete in Group A at Gulf Cup 27 in Jeddah alongside hosts Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait.

Moroccan coach Tarik Sektioui, who took charge in March, succeeded Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz and became the first Arab coach to lead Oman at the Gulf Cup in 30 years.

Sektioui said: "We know Oman have reached the last two finals, and we want to play strong matches and go as far as possible."

He added "The tournament will also serve as preparation for the 2027 Asian Cup and the 2030 World Cup qualifiers."

Sektioui selected a 26-player squad, retaining several experienced players.

The absence of a number of players sparked debate, but the Oman Football Association confirmed that their exclusion was a technical decision by the coach.

Oman have emerged as one of the leading contenders in the tournament in recent years, winning the title twice in 2009 and 2017. They have also finished runners-up four times, including the last two editions in 2023 and 2024.

Oman will open their Gulf Cup 27 campaign against Iraq on Wednesday in Jeddah, with both sides looking to make a strong start in Group A.

Iraq will be seeking a fifth Gulf Cup title after winning the competition four times, in 1979, 1984, 1988 and 2023. They also finished runners-up twice, in 1976 and 2013.

Iraq will enter the tournament looking to bounce back from their group-stage exit in the previous edition.

The Iraqi side will also be without several World Cup players due to injury,



Omani national team's ongoing preparations ahead of the upcoming fixtures.

including Kamil Saadi, Mohannad Ali, Hussein Ali Haider, Youssef Al Amin and Kevin Yacoub.

Oman and Iraq have met 10 times in the Gulf Cup, with Iraq winning six and the other four matches ending in draws. Oman have yet to beat Iraq in the competition.

Their most recent Gulf Cup meetings came in 2023, when the sides drew 0-0 in the group stage before Iraq won the final 3-2 in Basra.

Overall, Iraq have scored 25 goals against Oman in the Gulf Cup, while Oman have scored seven.

A total of 33 referees from 11 countries will participate in the tournament, with three referees representing each country. The countries are Oman, Saudi Arabia,



Head coach Tarik Sektioui guides the Red Warriors through today's training session in Jeddah as tactical preparations continue.

Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Portugal and the Netherlands.

Eight VAR referees from eight countries will also take part in Gulf Cup 27, representing Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Netherlands, Morocco and China.

Oman will be represented by three referees, led by international referee Qasim al Hatmi, with Nasser al Busaidi and Hamad al Ghafri.

The pre-match press conference for the Oman-Iraq opener will be held on Tuesday at the Media Centre at Hilton Jeddah. The press conference will give media representatives an opportunity to hear from the coaches and players ahead of Wednesday's Group A encounter.

SHORT TAKES



An all-Omani squad departed for Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games marking a landmark moment with their maiden participation.

ALL-OMANI CRICKET TEAM HEADS TO JAPAN ASIAN GAMES

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The dream of seeing an Oman team made up entirely of home-grown players compete at the Asian Games will become a reality soon as the all-Omani men's cricket squad departed for Japan for the 20th edition of the multi-disciplinary Games in Aichi-Nagoya 2026.

This landmark participation in Japan represents another major step in the development of Oman cricket.

After securing historic qualification in Singapore earlier this year, Oman will now take their place among Asia's cricketing nations with a 15-member squad comprising entirely Omani players—the first time the Sultanate will compete at the Asian Games.

Oman are also the only GCC country competing in the men's T20I cricket tournament, adding further significance to their appearance in Aichi-Nagoya.

For Oman Cricket, this occasion is the culmination of an ambition nurtured over several years. "We had planned and wished for an all-Omani team at the Asian Games for many years. Finally, we have one," said Duleep Mendis, Oman Cricket Chief Development Officer.

"Our boys did very well to qualify and make history in Singapore and we are proud of them. We wish them the very best in Japan and are hopeful that the boys will give their best on their debut in the Asian Games."

The project to develop this team began in March 2025 following the team's inclusion in the Asian Games qualifiers.

The biggest breakthrough came in the Asian Games qualifiers in Singapore in May 2026, where Oman defeated Singapore and Bahrain to earn their place in Aichi-Nagoya.

CHALLENGING ASSIGNMENT

The men's competition features 10 teams, with the six lower-seeded sides divided into two groups.

Oman are in Group B alongside Hong Kong and Malaysia, while Group A comprises Afghanistan, Japan and Nepal.

The top two teams in each group advance to the quarterfinals, where heavyweights India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have already secured places with first round bye.

Oman begin their campaign against Hong Kong on September 25, before meeting Malaysia on September 26. A first-place finish in Group B would put Oman up against Bangladesh in the quarterfinals, while second place would mean a meeting with Pakistan. The quarterfinals will be played on September 28 and 29, the semifinals on October 1, and the bronze-medal and gold-medal matches on October 3.



The podium winners celebrate their achievements after the final round. — Pictures by Asaad al Badri

Pakistan secure qualifier title, Oman take second spot

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

PAKISTAN secured the overall title as the World Cup Qualifying Tournament for Tent Pegging concluded on Sunday at the Al Wattayah Equestrian Arena of the Royal Oman Police Mounted Unit, with the final day held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The three-day qualifier, organised by the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation under the supervision of the International Tent Pegging Federation, brought together six national teams competing for qualification places at the Tent Pegging World Cup, scheduled to be held in Jordan in November 2026.

Oman finished strongly in the final round, taking first place in the team standings for the third day. Pakistan secured second place, while Qatar finished third.

The individual competition also produced a strong showing from Pakistan. Tsawar Abbas claimed first place, with compatriot Mohammad Sagheer finishing second. Oman's Hisham Ali Al Bakri completed the individual podium in third place.

Following the combined results from the three days of competition, Pakistan topped the overall team standings, with Oman finishing runners-up and Qatar taking third place. The final day attracted a large crowd, creating a lively atmosphere at the Al Wattayah arena as spectators followed the decisive competitions and supported the Omani riders throughout the closing programme.

BUSAIDI PRAISES OMAN'S HOSTING
Sayyid Mundhir bin Saif al Busaidi, Chairman of the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation, praised the standard of competition and Oman's organisation of the qualifier, describing the event as a positive demonstration of the country's experience in hosting international



Riders in action during the final day of the World Cup qualifier.

equestrian competitions. He said the six participating teams produced closely matched performances, which kept the competition open and exciting until the final rounds. With only two qualification places available for the World Cup, the narrow margins between the teams added further intensity to the contest.

Al Busaidi said the success of the event was supported by the readiness of the competition arena, the coordination between the organising committees and the cooperation of government and private institutions. He also highlighted the work of the judging, veterinary, medical, technical and administrative teams, as well as the support provided by the Royal Oman Police. He noted that the qualifier provided valuable opportunities to strengthen the experience of Omani personnel in organising international events and to exchange expertise with visiting teams and international officials.

OMAN TURN FOCUS TO WORLD CUP
The federation chairman also confirmed that the Omani team's performance would be assessed in detail ahead of the World Cup. The preparation programme will include intensive training camps, individual and team sessions, and work on the physical, technical and mental aspects of performance, alongside appropriate preparation of the horses.
Al Busaidi said the federation's ambition extends beyond participation, with the national team aiming to compete strongly at the World Cup in Jordan.
The conclusion of the qualifier marked three days of international tent pegging competition in Oman, combining speed, precision, horsemanship and technical skill, while further strengthening the Sultanate's position as a host for major events in the sport.

GUtech crowned champs at International University sport event

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) claimed the overall title at the International Day of University Sport event after topping the standings with 1,144 points.
Sultan Qaboos University finished runner-up with 984 points, while Oman Dental College secured third place with 899 points.

The competition brought together 340 male and female students from nine higher education institutions at Active Oman. Around 300 runners contested the five- and 10-kilometre races, while another 40 students competed in bowling, pistol shooting and golf.



GUtech, Sultan Qaboos University and Oman Dental College receive the top-three awards at the closing ceremony.

Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Directorate-General of Sports Activities, the event was held in cooperation with the Oman Committee for University Sports and the Oman Automobile

Association.
The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Shibli, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Higher Education.
Participating institutions included

GUtech, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Dental College, University of Nizwa, Muscat University, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Middle East College, Oman College of Health Sciences and International Maritime College Oman.
Zayana al Yaarubi, Director of the Specialised Activities Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said the event reflected the growing importance of university sport and cooperation between the participating organisations.
"We are moving forward through the combined efforts of all partners to give university sport a stronger presence and identity," she said.
"We have talented male and female students whom we hope to see play a visible role in sport.

Sport is a healthy way of life, and participation in these activities benefits them and their future."
Athari bint Adil al Jabri of Muscat University said the competition allowed her to experience new sports and develop different skills. She explained that pistol shooting demanded concentration and controlled movement. Her previous bowling experience helped her perform with greater confidence, while golf introduced her to new techniques.
Milad Karmi, UTAS, highlighted the importance of sporting events in encouraging students and employees to remain active, particularly when study and work require long hours in front of screens.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



First place finisher Remco Evenepoel of Belgium and third place finisher Paul Seixas of France celebrate on the podium after the Men's Elite individual time trial at the 2026 Union Cycliste Internationale. — AFP

EVENEPOEL WINS
RECORD 4TH
STRAIGHT WORLD
TIME-TRIAL TITLE

MONTREAL, Canada: Jacques KLOPP Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel etched his name into the history books with a dominant fourth successive world time-trial victory in Montreal on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Belgian came into the race as the overwhelming favourite and he did not disappoint.

Evenepoel was already more than half a minute ahead of the rest by the second intermediate time-check just over half way through the race.

By the finish, the Belgian had put almost a minute into second-placed Filippo Ganna with Paul Seixas taking third another 15 seconds back.

Evenepoel became the first man to win the time-trial world title four times in a row, while also equalling the record number of overall titles held by German Tony Martin and Swiss Fabian Cancellara.

"It's amazing. It was obviously the goal to come and win here for the fourth time in a row. It was a big motivation," said Evenepoel.

"I'm super happy. It was a wonderful experience."

Already the Olympic champion in both this discipline and the road race, Evenepoel has not lost a time-trial since the 2025 Tour de France.

He has enjoyed his best season to date, winning the Amstel Gold Race, Clasica San Sebastian and Grand Prix de Quebec, as well as finishing second behind Tadej Pogacar at the Tour de France.

His next objective will be to win a second road-race world title next Sunday, and become the first man to do the double in the same year.

"There's quite some time to rest now and enjoy this special course," he said. "Full focus on Sunday from Tuesday."

Ganna had started slowly and was only 10th at the first time-check, but by the third, he had moved up into second spot.

But he could not make any headway into Evenepoel, who did not stop increasing his lead from the start to the finish.

NERVOUS REUSSER

In the women's race, Swiss Marlen Reusser retained her world time-trial title as her main rival Demi Vollering finished a disappointing eighth.

Time-trial queen Reusser celebrated her 35th birthday with an ultimately comfortable victory, but not before Briton Zoe Backstedt gave her a scare.

Backstedt had been quickest at the first two intermediate time-checks on the 39.2 km course but Reusser powered away in the second half to beat the 21-year-old by 40 seconds, with German Franziska Koch finishing third, a further six seconds back. — AFP



Remco Evenepoel (BEL) competes in the Men individual time trial at the UCI Road World Championships. — Imagin Images



Oman's national hockey team prepare for their Group B clash against Malaysia at the Gifu Green Stadium.

MIXED FORTUNES FOR
OMAN AT ASIAN GAMES

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

OMAN'S campaign at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 continued on Monday, as the beach volleyball team suffered an opening defeat while shooter Khalid al Kalbani produced a strong showing in the men's 10m Air Rifle qualification.

Oman B, comprising Ahmed al Hosni and Khalfan al Maamari, went down 2-0 to Thailand at the Hekinan Ryokuchi Beach Court. Thailand controlled the Group B encounter to win 21-11, 21-12.

Al Hosni said the pair had expected a demanding start against an experienced Thai side, adding that their attention had already turned to the next match against Iran.

"Every match has its own circumstances. This defeat is behind us and we will continue working hard for the next challenge," he said.

Al Maamari described the encounter as an important learning experience in the pair's first official competition together. He said the team would analyse its errors and seek a stronger performance in the remaining group matches.

Oman B will face Iran on September 23 and Timor-Leste on September 26. Oman A, represented by Mazin al Hashmi and Hood al Jalboubi, begin their group fixtures against the Philippines and Qatar on September 24 and 27 respectively.

In shooting, al Kalbani narrowly missed out on a place in the final after finishing 13th among 47 competitors in the men's 10m Air Rifle qualification at the Aichi Prefectural General Shooting Range. He scored 627.8 points.

China's Sheng Lihao topped the qualification standings with 635.4 points, followed by compatriot Ma Sihan on 633.0. India's Rudranksh Patil placed third with 631.8.

Hamed al Khatri finished 41st with 612.5 points. Al Kalbani returns on Tuesday for the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event, while Naghmush al Hattali begins his three-day skeet competition.

Oman's fencing team will also begin its Asian Games challenge on Tuesday, with the opening contests



Oman's Ahmed al Hosni and Khalfan al Maamari in action against Thailand in the beach volleyball competition at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026.



Oman's beach volleyball team suffered an opening defeat while shooter Khalid al Kalbani produced a strong showing in the men's 10m Air Rifle qualification round

Omani shooter Khalid al Kalbani competes in the men's 10m Air Rifle qualification at the Aichi Prefectural General Shooting Range.

scheduled for 5 am Muscat time. The national hockey team face a difficult Group B test against Malaysia at the Gifu Green Stadium at 10 am Muscat time. Oman lost their opener 2-0 to China, while Malaysia began with a 7-0 win over Uzbekistan.

Meanwhile, Oman's athletics team arrives in Nagoya on Tuesday with 11 athletes competing across several disciplines. The squad will aim to build on Oman's athletics success at the previous Asian Games, where Hussein al Farsi claimed bronze in the men's 800m.

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,550.450

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$112.41
BRENT \$101.20
LIGHT \$97.40



SHORT TAKES



The exhibition was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation.

Oman health expo targets investment and innovation

AJIB SALIM AL HAJRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The 15th edition of the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference opened at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on September 21, presenting the Sultanate of Oman's healthcare sector as a destination for investment in pharmaceuticals, medical products and health technology.

Held under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and organised by CONNECT, the three-day event runs until September 23 under the theme of integrating health tourism, sustainable care and clinical innovation.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation.

"It aims to bring together all those interested in the health sector and the industries of the health sector to share experiences, share successes and explore opportunities", Dr Al Mandhari said.

The event seeks to highlight investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman's pharmaceutical and medical-product industries, he said, with companies from inside and outside the country presenting diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation technologies, including artificial intelligence applications.

Balqees al Makhmari, Director of Investment Empowerment at the Ministry of Health, told the opening ceremony that enabling investment "begins with understanding the needs of the investor and the sector together", easing the investor's journey and supporting projects "from idea to implementation".

The real value of health investment, she said, "lies in its impact on people's health and the quality and sustainability of the care they receive".

Participants ranged from Omani digital-health start-ups exhibiting for the first time to established regional suppliers and new international entrants.

"An excellent exhibition, as always", said Abdullah bin Mahmoud al Sharfi of a Gulf medical-equipment supplier that has operated in the region since 1989 and in the Sultanate of Oman since 2017, supplying surgical, imaging and laboratory equipment. "We hope more companies come forward and take part in the years ahead".

Oman sets 20% threshold for off-plan marketing

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

PROPERTY developers in Oman's special economic zones and free zones must meet a threshold equivalent to 20 per cent of a project's total cost before marketing units off-plan or accepting reservation payments, under the new executive regulation of the Law of Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

The law was issued by Royal Decree 38/2025. The value of construction work already completed counts towards the threshold. Developers are separately barred from using the project escrow account to raise financing for the development, so any remaining amount needed to meet the 20 per cent threshold must come from the developer's own resources or external borrowing before any money is taken from buyers.

Developers may not advertise off-plan units to the public by any means or accept reservation payments before obtaining approval from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) or the entity responsible for managing, operating and developing the economic zone concerned.

Approval also requires proof that an escrow account has been opened in the project's name with a bank licensed in Oman, engineering plans showing the number, location and area of the units, evidence that a consultant and contractor have been appointed and a copy of the proposed marketing or advertising material.

The regulation caps spending from the escrow account on marketing or advertising at 3 per cent of the amounts held in the account.

A separate provision requires developers to retain at least 5 per cent of the sale value of each unit in the escrow account for one year from the date the unit is registered in the owner's name. The retained amount is intended to cover proper execution of the project and the repair of construction



The new rules require project escrow accounts, cap marketing spending at 3% and retain 5% of each unit's sale value for one year after registration.

The law was issued by Royal Decree 38/2025. The value of construction work already completed counts towards the threshold. Developers are separately barred from using the project escrow account to raise financing for the development, so any remaining amount needed to meet the 20 per cent threshold must come from the developer's own resources or external borrowing before any money is taken from buyers.

defects that may emerge after completion.

Release of the retained amount after the one-year period requires an application by the developer to the bank, supported by a certificate signed by the unit owner, the project consultant and the developer confirming that the unit is free of construction defects. OPAZ may instruct the bank not to release the money where the buyer and developer are in dispute over such defects.

An escrow account and an escrow agreement with the bank are mandatory wherever a development involves the sale of units off-plan or the collection of money from buyers before completion. Payments made by buyers, together with funds the developer obtains to finance the project, must be deposited in the account, which is dedicated to that development.

Withdrawals must correspond to actual construction progress and be supported by a certificate from the project consultant. The account cannot be closed without OPAZ approval and OPAZ or the zone operator may instruct the bank to withhold payments where there are grounds to do so.

Funds in the escrow account cannot be used to finance another project or meet obligations unrelated to the development. The regulation also sets a 10,000-square-metre minimum land area for a licensed real-estate development project, although the OPAZ board may grant an exception for projects that

contribute to local content.

Eligible land must be designated for residential, commercial, mixed residential-commercial or tourism use and the built-up proportion must comply with ratios set by the authority.

Applicants must demonstrate the financial capacity to execute the project, submit an overall planning drawing for approval and provide a copy of the escrow agreement.

Applications for a real-estate development licence must be decided within 15 working days once all required information and documents have been submitted. Unlike project licences elsewhere in the regulation, failure to respond within that period is deemed a rejection rather than an approval.

Refusals must be reasoned and may be appealed to the OPAZ chairman within 60 days. Where additional documents are requested, applicants have 30 days to supply them. If they do not, the application is deemed cancelled.

Licensed developers must file quarterly reports on project progress and unit sales, obtain approval for any change to approved plans and notify the authority of anything likely to delay or stall the project.

If a project does stall for any reason, the developer must submit a full report on the causes within 30 days.

OPAZ is then required either to identify a remedy allowing the project to be completed or to refer the matter to the competent court.

MDO makes maiden Africa foray with Botswana copper-gold JV

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Minerals Development Oman (MDO) is making its first investment foray into Africa through a majority-owned joint venture in Botswana, marking another step in the Omani state-backed mining company's push to build an international portfolio alongside its domestic investments.

MDO has signed a binding term sheet with Botswana state-owned Exploration Investment Company Botswana (EICB) to establish a joint venture focused on the exploration and development of copper and gold resources.

MDO will hold a 76 per cent stake in the venture. The agreement was signed during His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to Botswana.

MDO described the move as part of its strategy to expand its mining investment portfolio and pursue promising opportunities in international markets.



MDO's Mattar al Badi (left) with a representative of Exploration Investment Company Botswana (EICB) at the signing last week.

"Our entry into Botswana is not simply about expanding geographically. It is about building a strong international portfolio while creating greater value from mining, at home and abroad", MDO Chief Executive

Officer Mattar al Badi said.

"Botswana offers exciting geological potential and we look forward to exploring what lies beneath its ground while strengthening the ties and creating opportunities between the people of Oman and Botswana", he added.

The venture is particularly significant because of Botswana's position within the Kalahari Copper Belt (KCB), a major mineralised corridor extending from Namibia into northwestern Botswana and increasingly recognised as an important global copper exploration and production district.

The Botswana section of the belt hosts significant sediment-hosted copper-silver mineralisation and established operations including Khoemacau and Motheo. Large areas of prospective geology remain concealed beneath Kalahari sand cover, creating opportunities for modern geophysical, geochemical and data-driven exploration.

EICB, meanwhile, was established by Botswana to stimulate mineral exploration, consolidate geological data and help turn promising prospects into investable projects.

Its mandate includes copper and other strategic minerals, with the Kalahari Copper Belt among its areas of focus.

The Botswana venture builds on MDO's emerging international strategy. In August, the company signed a memorandum of understanding with Kazakhstan-based gold producer Solidcore Resources covering technical cooperation and knowledge transfer across geology, exploration, mining, mineral processing, metallurgy and project development.

Unlike the Botswana deal, however, the Solidcore arrangement is currently a non-binding cooperation framework rather than an equity joint venture. The Botswana agreement therefore represents a more substantive step in MDO's international expansion and its maiden entry into Africa.

BUSINESS FEATURE



Image generated by AI

CAN DIGITAL MONEY BE SHARIA-COMPLIANT?

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

AS digital payments become increasingly embedded in Oman’s economy, an accompanying question is gaining importance for its rapidly expanding Islamic-finance industry: can digital cash be Sharia-compliant?

The answer does not depend simply on whether money exists electronically. Islamic-finance principles focus on what an instrument represents, how it is created and exchanged, whether it provides legitimate economic utility and whether its structure involves *riba*, or interest; *maysir*, or gambling; and excessive *gharar*, meaning uncertainty.

The question is commercially significant for the Sultanate of Oman. By the second quarter of 2026, assets held by Islamic banks and windows had exceeded RO 9.6 billion, accounting for 19 per cent of total banking-sector assets, according to the Central Bank of Oman.

Quarterly profits topped RO 23 million, while the sector maintained a non-performing loan ratio of 3.3 per cent.

Oman’s Islamic banking industry has grown rapidly since the Islamic Banking Regulatory Framework was introduced in 2012. The CBO is now seeking to deepen the Islamic money and sukuk markets while encouraging responsible digital innovation.

Asia al Raisi, Deputy Chief Economist for Investment and Market Operations at the CBO, said the central bank had identified five priorities: deepening the Islamic money market, accelerating sukuk development, promoting responsible digital innovation, strengthening governance and supervision; and directing more financing towards Oman’s economic transformation.

Speaking at the IFN Oman Forum 2026, she said the CBO’s open banking and digital banking frameworks would provide a regulatory foundation for innovation while maintaining requirements covering cyber resilience, data protection and governance. The development comes as Oman’s consumers and businesses increasingly replace cash and cheques with cards, mobile applications, electronic gateways and instant bank transfers.

The value of transactions processed through local electronic-payment gateways jumped 76.3 per cent to approximately RO 3.2 billion in 2025, according to CBO data. Transaction volumes surged from 67 million to more than 168 million.

Point-of-sale transactions exceeded RO 7.5 billion, increasing 33.2 per cent, while the number of QR-code payments rose 133.5 per cent. QR transactions were valued at approximately RO 8 million, nearly three times the level recorded a year earlier.

These figures show that digital money is already part of everyday commerce. However, bank balances, electronic wallets, central bank digital currencies, stablecoins

and decentralised cryptocurrencies are fundamentally different instruments.

An electronic transfer of Omani rials does not create a new currency. It moves an existing, officially recognised currency through a digital channel. A decentralised cryptocurrency, by contrast, may derive its value from software-defined scarcity, network participation and market demand rather than the backing of a central bank.

SHARIA TEST GOES BEYOND TECHNOLOGY
Islamic scholars generally assess digital financial instruments according to their substance and use rather than the technology on which they operate.

The principal tests include whether the asset has lawful utility and recognisable value, whether ownership and delivery are genuine; and whether transactions avoid interest, deception, gambling and excessive uncertainty. How an asset is traded

Islamic banking industry has grown rapidly since the Islamic Banking Regulatory Framework was introduced in 2012. The CBO is now seeking to deepen the Islamic money and sukuk markets while encouraging responsible digital innovation.

also matters: an instrument regarded as permissible in itself may still be used through an impermissible lending arrangement, derivative or speculative transaction.

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy examined electronic currencies under Resolution No 237 but did not issue an unrestricted ruling declaring all cryptocurrencies either Sharia-compliant. It identified unresolved questions concerning their nature, value, trading and associated risks and called for further research.

The absence of a universal judgement means each cryptocurrency must be examined individually. A Sharia opinion covering one token cannot automatically be applied to thousands of other digital assets with different structures and uses.

At an Islamic-finance gathering in Muscat, digital-asset developer Max Freeman argued that digital cash could be Sharia-compliant if it were designed around Islamic principles.

Discussing Epic Cash, a privacy-focused cryptocurrency developed through a proof-of-work protocol, Freeman said coins were awarded to miners as “a lawful gain for a service rendered”. Miners use computing resources to validate transactions and maintain the distributed ledger.

Freeman contrasted this arrangement with proof-of-stake networks, where participants commit their coins to help validate transactions and receive rewards. He argued that staking could resemble compound interest because rewards are linked to the amount of capital held.

Islamic-finance research suggests that the distinction may not be absolute. Proof-of-stake validators perform a network function and may lose part of their committed assets for improper behaviour. Its Sharia status could therefore depend on the contractual arrangement, the source of rewards and the risks undertaken, rather than simply on the receipt of additional coins.

Proof of work does not automatically guarantee Sharia compliance either. Mining involves competition for rewards, volatile costs and potentially heavy electricity consumption.

A comprehensive assessment would have to consider resource use, governance, market manipulation and whether the resulting asset provides genuine economic utility or is traded mainly for speculative gain.

PRIVACY AND REGULATION
Financial privacy is another point in the debate. Privacy-focused cryptocurrencies can prevent employers, competitors and other outsiders from tracing a user’s balance and complete transaction history.

Freeman described the preferred balance as “lawful disclosure, yes; indiscriminate surveillance, no”, arguing that holders should be able to disclose transactions selectively to accountants, auditors and regulators.

Commercial privacy may protect lawful wealth and sensitive business information. However, it must coexist with customer-identification, sanctions and anti-money-laundering obligations.

The Financial Action Task Force requires countries to regulate virtual-asset service providers and subject them to preventive controls comparable to those imposed on financial institutions. A privacy-focused asset would therefore need mechanisms enabling regulated providers to identify customers, assess risk and report suspicious activity.

In Oman, Sharia compliance and legal recognition are separate issues. The CBO has cautioned that cryptocurrencies are not legal tender, are not backed by the central bank and do not carry the protections available to regulated banking products.

The Financial Services Authority requires businesses undertaking virtual-asset activities to register and comply with anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorist-financing requirements.

DIGITAL AND ISLAMIC FINANCE

Key indicators from the Central Bank of Oman and IFN Oman Forum 2026.

ISLAMIC BANKING

Assets, Q2 2026

RO 9.6bn+

19% of banking-sector assets

Quarterly profit

RO 23m+

Second quarter of 2026

Non-performing loans

3.3%

Sector ration

DIGITAL PAYMENTS - 2025

Gateway transaction value

RO 3.2bn

↑ 76.3% year on year

Gateway transaction value

168m+

Up from 67m in 2024

Point-of-sale value

RO 7.5bn+

↑ 33.2% year on year

QR transaction growth

133.5%

Fastest-growing channel

QR transaction value

8m

Nearly three times of 2024

Global Islamic assets

\$5tn

GCC share: nearly 70%

Sources: Central Bank of Oman; IFN Oman Forum 2026

SHORTTAKES



The agreement was signed by Dr Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami, PDO Managing Director and Girish K Saligram, Weatherford President and CEO.

PDO awards Weatherford 274-well drilling contract

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has awarded Weatherford a three-year integrated drilling services contract covering 274 wells in Marmul and the Greater Saqr Standardised Satellite Fields Development, as the company seeks to increase production while reducing costs.

Weatherford will deliver oil production and water injection wells through a phased programme intended to improve operational efficiency and allow more predictable planning of rigs and other resources across the fields.

PDO said the integrated contract model was expected to lower costs by about 20 per cent compared with conventional pricing arrangements while providing greater cost certainty and strengthening contractor accountability.

“Our ability to grow production competitively and responsibly is fundamental to maximising the value of Oman’s hydrocarbon resources,” PDO Managing Director Dr Aflah bin Said al Hadhrami said.

“This agreement marks another important step in advancing that ambition, supporting production growth as a key pillar of our Journey of Transformation, For Oman,” he added.

Al Hadhrami said the contract would also support PDO’s local-content objectives by investing in Omani talent, building national capabilities and retaining more economic value in the Sultanate of Oman.

Weatherford President and Chief Executive Officer Girish K Saligram said the contract would build on the operational performance and efficiencies achieved through earlier work in the Marmul and Greater Saqr fields.

Al Wusta draws 6.3 bn in Al Duqm investments

THE cumulative investment in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm reached about RO 6.3 billion by the end of 2025, strengthening Al Wusta Governorate’s position as a centre for industrial, energy, logistics and fisheries development, officials said.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor of Al Wusta, said investments were helping localise industries, develop value chains, increase in-country value and create opportunities for small and medium enterprises.

The governorate is also investing in roads, waterfronts, municipal facilities, lighting and other public infrastructure as it seeks to improve living standards and support private-sector growth.

Municipal projects include waterfront developments in Al Duqm, Al Jazir and Mahout, as well as the paving of internal roads in residential and commercial areas. The Duqm municipal slaughterhouse is being built at a cost exceeding RO 243,000, while a central market in the Wilayat of Mahout costs about RO 303,000.

Projects planned for 2027 include walking and fitness tracks, parks, green spaces, village waterfronts and additional lighting and public services.

Earlier projects included the development of waterfronts in Haima, Mahout, Shannah, Al Lakbi and Ras Madrakah, as well as Ras Suqrah and Al Jazir Public Park. Al Kathiri said energy, fisheries, mining and natural resources were among the governorate’s main economic pillars. Fisheries development investments were



Recent agreements have reinforced investor interest in Al Duqm.

estimated at RO 611.5 million, including a shrimp-farming project in the Wilayat of Al Jazir valued at RO 462 million and designed for annual production capacity of 220,000 tonnes.

The Simak seafood processing plant in Al Duqm represents an investment of RO 28 million and has annual production capacity of 12,000 tonnes.

Mineral projects include a solar-salt production venture in Mahout targeting annual capacity of two million tonnes. A silica project currently produces about 100,000 tonnes annually, with plans to raise output to 300,000 tonnes within five years.

Al Kathiri said 1,667 Omanis had secured private-sector jobs in the governorate during 2026, while contracts had been awarded to 422 SMEs.

Total investment in fisheries projects across Al

Wusta exceeded RO 636.9 million, covering aquaculture, production, processing and other value-added activities. Existing fisheries industries accounted for about RO 79 million of investment and included two seafood canning plants, 18 fish collection, processing and packaging facilities, seven fishmeal and fish-oil plants, two value-added processing plants and 26 ice plants.

Artisanal fisheries production in Al Wusta reached about 246,200 tonnes in 2025, accounting for roughly 34 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman’s total fish production, Al Kathiri said.

Fisheries infrastructure projects include the expansion of Al Lakbi fishing port in Al Jazir, the construction of a fish market and ice plant and a residential complex for fishermen from

outside the governorate.

A fishing port in Mahout has also been approved at an estimated cost of RO 36 million, with implementation procedures being finalised. The project is expected to improve fish landing, handling and marketing services and attract related businesses.

Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Chief Executive Officer of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said projects in the zone were generating direct and indirect employment, supporting SMEs and creating new opportunities for local communities. Recent agreements have reinforced investor interest in Al Duqm.

Ten investment and cooperation agreements valued at more than RO 2.9 billion, equivalent to about \$7.5 billion, were signed for projects in the zone.

Asyad Shipping sells three tankers for 68.4m in fleet renewal push

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Asyad Shipping Company SAOG has agreed the sale of three tankers — two very large crude carriers and one medium range product tanker — for a combined RO 68.44 million (\$177.7 million).

The company disclosed both transactions to the market earlier this week. Together, they are expected to deliver an aggregate positive profit impact of about RO 29.5 million (\$76.5 million), recognised across the relevant reporting periods in 2026 and 2027.

The larger of the two deals covers the VLCCs Seeb and Samail, sold for RO 61.7 million (\$160.2 million). Asyad Shipping said it received a deposit and advance payment on



The two deals are expected to generate a positive profit impact of approximately RO 29 million.

September 18. Both vessels were built in 2011 and have been in the fleet since delivery.

The company will continue to trade the ships before handover, operating Samail until October or November 2026 and Seeb until mid-January 2027, a move it said would allow it to maximise returns from current freight market conditions.

Proceeds are due on successful delivery of each vessel. The two sales are expected to generate a positive profit impact of approximately RO 29 million (\$75.2 million).

In a separate disclosure, Asyad Shipping announced the sale of the MR tanker Al Amerat for RO 6.74 million (\$17.5 million). A 10 per cent advance payment was received on September 20. The vessel was built in 2008 and has been part of the fleet

since. It is due to be delivered to its new owner at the end of September, with the balance of proceeds payable on delivery.

The transaction is expected to produce a positive profit and loss impact of around RO 0.5 million (\$1.3 million). Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer, linked both disposals to the company’s fleet renewal and portfolio optimisation strategy.

“The VLCCs, Seeb and Samail, have been part of our fleet for over 15 years and their sales marks another step in our fleet renewal strategy, allowing us to capitalise on the current strong market environment”, he said.

“As four new-build VLCCs join our fleet by end 2026, we are delivering

on our commitment to modernise our asset base, enhancing efficiency, and our competitiveness”.

On the MR sale, he said: “It was an opportunistic time to sell Al Amerat, an 18-year-old MR tanker which has been with us since 2008.

As we release older tonnage as part of our fleet renewal plan, we pave the way for younger, modern ships that have higher ESG credentials, and are more fuel efficient”.

Asyad Shipping, which trades on the MSX under the symbol ASCO, owns and operates a fleet of approximately 90 vessels serving more than 60 countries. The company has been operating for over 20 years across five segments: crude, dry bulk, gas, liner and products.

PRICE STABILITY

Gold holds near one-week high



Gold prices held largely steady near a one-week high reached on Friday. Spot gold was little changed at \$4,379.74 per ounce, while US gold futures for December delivery slipped 0.1 per cent to \$4,419.40.

Other precious metals also strengthened on Monday, with silver gaining 0.8 per cent, platinum rising 0.2 per cent and palladium advancing 0.7 per cent. — ONA

MONETARY POLICY

China keeps key lending rates unchanged



China kept its benchmark lending rates unchanged, maintaining the one-year Loan Prime Rate at 3 per cent. The National Interbank Funding Centre also left the five-year LPR, which influences mortgage pricing, unchanged at 3.5 per cent.

The decision maintains existing borrowing benchmarks as policymakers continue to navigate the country’s economic conditions. — ONA

PRICE DECLINE

Oil slides to 11-day low



Oil prices fell to an 11-day low as investors weighed prospects for US-Iran diplomacy and a partial recovery in Saudi shipments. Brent dropped 2.6 per cent to \$101.20 per barrel, while WTI fell below \$98.

Markets are watching potential diplomatic engagement during the UN General Assembly as hopes of negotiations ease concerns over continued supply disruptions. — ONA

OPINION

Don't let Artificial Intelligence make you useless



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

IMAGINE a lawyer who used to spend hours reading contracts, identifying risks and writing legal arguments. Today, this same lawyer just asks AI to review the contract, identify the risks and prepare the response.

The lawyer, by using AI tools, has become faster and more productive. Nevertheless, the lawyer is also becoming lazier, too comfortable and is at risk of becoming useless in the future. Quite specifically, being replaced by an AI-powered machine that is doing the job.

Let us further examine the case. What if this same lawyer, after becoming dependent on AI tools for the job for a long period of time (months), now receives answers from AI that the lawyer cannot recognise as wrong? Imagine that.

The lawyer, having probably stopped practising the skill, is now no longer able to challenge the machine. Eventually, the lawyer becomes useless and easily replaceable.

Another example is a software developer who once understood how to build an application from the ground up. Today, AI can generate the code, explain errors and even suggest the architecture.

The developer, in return, is also faster and more productive and can now deliver projects much faster.

Nevertheless, what happens if the software developer increasingly accepts whatever AI produces without understanding the underlying code? A serious problem can arise where the developer may be able to operate AI but no longer be able to develop without it. Again, the importance of the software developer may be reduced.

This is the paradox of AI. The technology designed to make us more productive can, if we are not careful, gradually make some of our own skills unnecessary. This includes skills that we may seriously need when AI gets something wrong.

What does it mean to become “useless” because of AI? It does not necessarily mean losing your job. It means losing the ability to perform the fundamental parts of your profession without depending on a machine.

You become excellent at asking AI for answers, but weaker at producing, questioning or defending those answers yourself. And this is not just a theoretical concern.

A 2025 study by researchers from Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University surveyed 319 knowledge workers and examined 936 real-world examples of AI use at work.

It found that greater confidence in AI was associated with less critical thinking.

The researchers also observed that AI shifts human effort from doing the

The lawyer, by using AI tools, has become faster and more productive. Nevertheless, the lawyer is also becoming lazier, too comfortable and is at risk of becoming useless in the future. Quite specifically, being replaced by an AI-powered machine that is doing the job.

work towards verifying, integrating and supervising AI-generated work.

So, how do we avoid becoming professionally dependent on AI? My humble opinion is to simply never outsource the skill you want to keep.

Use AI to challenge your thinking, not replace it. Before asking AI to solve a problem, try solving it yourself. Ask AI to critique your idea rather than immediately giving you one.

When it writes something for you, read, verify and improve it. Occasionally do important tasks without AI simply to keep the muscle exercised.

Most importantly, remain curious about your profession. Learn the fundamentals. Understand the technology.

Keep practising. AI should become your copilot, not your brain. Because the future may not belong to people who compete against AI.

It may belong to people who know how to use AI while still being capable without it.

Truth be told, AI has revolutionised the way we work and has made many people more productive. Nevertheless, the more I personally use AI and see the way people use it, the more I fear that dependence on AI may make us useless.

Until we catch up again next week, avoid becoming too dependent, but master and appreciate the professional skills you already have.

HORMUZ SHUTTLES
KEEP OIL FLOWING,
BUT AT A HIGH COST

RON BOUSSO

A new shuttling system is reshaping the Middle East oil market, as producers seek to keep exports flowing despite the escalating regional conflict. The question now is whether this complex, expensive process is a stopgap measure or the global energy market's new normal.

Several miles off Oman's coast, south of the Strait of Hormuz, rows of tankers lie at anchor. Many sit alongside each other, connected by ropes and hoses as they transfer crude from one vessel to another, creating a floating bridge between the Middle East's oilfields and the global market.

Ship-to-ship (STS) transfers have become a vital lifeline for Gulf producers as they adapt to the disruptions caused by the Iran war, now entering its seventh month. Once loaded, a tanker disconnects and heads for its destination, typically a refinery in Asia. The “mother vessel” then returns to the Gulf via Hormuz to reload and repeat the process.

The system cuts the distance any one ship must travel, reducing the risk of transiting the strait, even as an increasing number of tankers are crossing through a narrow corridor along Oman's coastline under US naval protection, with their navigation systems switched off.

Exports through Hormuz have reached around 6.5 million barrels per day (bpd) so far in September, the highest since the brief spike after the June ceasefire, according to Kpler data.

This operation is a testament to the energy industry's remarkable ability to adapt to supply shocks. Yet, it is also a sign of how costly and complex it has become to move oil out of the world's most important exporting region.

Before the US-Israeli conflict with Iran erupted in February, the Strait of Hormuz handled roughly a fifth of global oil consumption. Iran's blockade brought traffic to an abrupt halt, however, forcing producers to divert flows where possible and cut output. Many shipowners balked at sending vessels through an active conflict zone and the few willing to take the risk demanded unprecedented premiums.

The energy industry, however, rarely stands still. Faced with a shortage of available tankers, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) developed the STS workaround.

Instead of using vessels to complete round-trip voyages of several weeks to buyers in Asia, it began employing them in April as shuttle tankers, transporting crude from Gulf terminals to the safer waters of the Sea of Oman. There, the cargoes could be transferred to larger ships for the onward journey.

The strategy maximised the use of a limited and expensive tanker fleet and allowed at least some vital exports to continue.

In fact, UAE oil exports in September are set to reach 3.6 million bpd, higher than the 2025 average of 3.4 million bpd. — Reuters

Oman's diversification
has a scale-up problem

ASK a procurement manager on any large project in Al Duqm or Suhar a simple question: how many Omani suppliers could deliver a RO 2 million contract on time, to international standards, with audited accounts? The honest answer is rarely more than a handful.

That gap, not the number of licences issued, is where Oman's diversification will be won or lost.

The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) expects 300,000 direct jobs for Omanis, including 50,000 a year in the private sector. Large projects can build the plants. They cannot, on their own, build the firms that hire at that scale.

The common reading of Oman's SME data is reassuring. By mid-2026 the National Centre for Statistics and Information counted 267,535 small and medium enterprises; and the 136,459 registered with Riyadh generated about RO 9.2 billion, or 21.8 per cent of GDP.

Those are real achievements. But look at the composition: 116,195 micro, 19,196 small and just 1,068 medium.

Fewer than one enterprise in a hundred has reached the size that can absorb a serious contract, employ dozens rather than a couple and reinvest. Oman does not have a start-up problem. It has a scale-up problem and the Oman Vision 2040 ambitions in manufacturing, logistics and tourism all rest on solving it.

Consider why this matters mechanically. A logistics hub is not a port; it is the freight forwarders, cold-chain operators, packaging firms and maintenance contractors that cluster around it. A manufacturing base is not a factory; it is the tier-two and tier-three suppliers that make the factory's local content real.

Petroleum Development Oman has shown what happens when those suppliers exist.

Its in-country value programme lifted local retention of supply-chain spend from 18 per cent in 2012 to around 42 per cent,



DR YOUSUF
HAMED
AL BALUSHI
yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

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

The country counts more than 267,000 small enterprises and other SME categories, but only 1,068 medium ones in Riyadh's database. Oman Vision 2040 will be decided by whether that second number moves.

with roughly \$900 million annually reaching SMEs and 83 manufacturing facilities established along the way.

That is one company in one sector.

Replicate the same discipline across Asyad, the free zones and the hydrogen projects; and the plan's private-sector jobs become arithmetic rather than aspiration. Fail to replicate it and Oman imports its supply chain along with its investment.

The constraint is not money in aggregate; it is money reaching the right firms. The Central Bank of Oman has required banks to lend at least 5 per cent of their portfolios to SMEs since 2013, yet the actual share stood at about 3.7 per cent, roughly RO 1.27 billion, in 2025.

The IMF's 2025 review of Oman put its finger on the reason: most small firms run on cash, without audited statements, so banks cannot price the risk and decline it instead.

The Development Bank lends up to RO 20,000 to micro firms and RO 250,000 to SMEs, but the company trying to move from RO 500,000 in turnover to RO 5 million sits in a gap, too large for Riyadh's tools and too opaque for a commercial bank. That is precisely the tier the country needs most.

So what would make SMEs succeed at the scale Oman requires? I would put it in one word: SAUCE. Supply-chain integration, so that every anchor project reports the share of contract value going to Omani firms, as PDO does and as the free-zone authority has sought to promote at 10 per cent inside the special economic zones.

Access to finance built for growth, meaning receivables financing and guarantees keyed to signed contracts rather than land collateral and a bank SME share that finally clears 5 per cent.

Upskilling in the unglamorous disciplines of bookkeeping, quality certification and tendering; Riyadh's readiness programme trained 7,453 people last year and the next cohort should be owners

of small firms who intend to become medium ones.

Contracts and cash flow, because the Esnad platform's 10 per cent price preference means little if a supplier waits four months to be paid.

And ease of doing business, measured by the calendar: the ten ready-made workshops opened at Nizwa this February and the 395 industrial land approvals granted to Entrepreneurship Card holders are the right idea; their value will be judged by how quickly a firm goes from allocation to first invoice.

For an investor, this changes due diligence: the depth of the local supplier bench in a governorate is now a hard variable in project economics, not a social-responsibility footnote.

For a young Omani weighing a job application against a business licence, the message is that the country's demand sits in firms of roughly fifty to 150 employees and annual revenues of RO 1.25 million to RO 5 million and that joining or building one is where careers will be made.

For a bank, the 1,068 medium firms are a market that will either be served or lost to non-bank lenders.

Three indicators will settle whether this argument holds. First, Riyadh's count of medium enterprises: if it is still near 1,000 in 2028, scale-up is not happening. Second, the SME share of bank credit in the Central Bank's monthly bulletin, where 5 per cent is the floor, not the ceiling.

Third, private-sector hiring against the plan's 50,000 a year. If those jobs arrive mainly through large projects with imported supply chains while the medium tier stays flat, I will have been wrong about the mechanism, though not, I suspect, about the eventual cost.

Oman has spent a decade making it easy to start a business. The next five years will decide whether it is possible to grow one. The plants are coming. Whether the firms around them are Omani is still an open choice.

CLASSIFIEDS

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

Sales Executive
required
For working in oil
and gas / building
materials industry
Vehicle Driving
license preferred
Email: kirit@
bustaninternational.
com
Mobile: 95544641

SALES
professional with
5 yrs Experience
in Medical sector.
Graduate,
Available in
Muscat.
akhilmanu777@
gmail.com
Contact: 76323324

LOGISTICS
Documentation
Executive.
Indian male,
25 years, BBA,
PG Diploma in
Logistics & SCM
and have 2 years
of experience
in this field.
Seeking a
position in
Logistics field
+968 7506 9882
Mail:
shafazhussain18@
gmail.com

INDIAN
electrical
engineer more
than 20 years
experience
in "MEP"
construction
field in Oman
seeks suitable
job. Contact:
92919281

ACCOUNTS/
SALES Indian
male (b com)
having 2+ years
of experience
in India
accounts sales
looking for
suitable
placement,
join immediately.
Contact:
76324360

OPERATIONS
Support /
Tendering
/ Contract
Management /
Procurement
professional
with 18+ years'
Oil & Gas
experience.
NOC & driving
license
available.
96227272,
jjijlmathew@
gmail.com

15+ experience
in building
material,
project sales &
Trade market,
deal with
corporate
project
customers,
looking for a
suitable job.
Contact
78384283

LOOKING for
SUPPLY CHAIN /
SALES jobs
Indian male
24 years.
Commerce
graduate,
Experience
in logistics,
procurement
and sales
in reputed
company
in Oman.
Valid Oman
D/L. Contact
+96891121694,
issacantony2002@
gmail.com

INDIAN Male,
BSc, 20 years
experience seeks
suitable position
as System
Administrator /
System Engineer.
Contact:
93642216

**PEST CONTROL
OMAN CO. L.L.C.**

**Supply of Pesticides, Gel (Cockroaches),
Public Health Chemicals, Agriculture
Chemicals, Snake Repellent, Rodent Baits
and other insect repellent from
UK & USA**

**PROFESSIONALS in
Pest Control Service,
Bedbug Treatment,
Rodent Treatment,
Snake Treatment
and Termite
Treatment [Pre
& Post Construction]**

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

PAKISTANI
male, having
diploma in
mechanical
engineering,
10+ years
experience as
“sales engineer”
in UAE and
15 years
experience
as “operation
manager” in
Oman with D/L.
Looking for job
Contact:
99495131
email: manzoor.
Ahmed1997@
gmail.com

INDIAN male
MBA Graduate
with 15yrs
experience in
Oman seek
suitable senior
position in
finance office
admin., sales
DTC. Contact:
94158080

LOOKING for
warehouse
manager role.
Indian male,
14 years GCC
experience with
driving licence.
Available to join
immediately.
Please contact:
92991621

Indian male, 10
year experience
in Oman as
Coordinator
have Driving
licence. Contact:
95645241

QUALIFIED Hotel Management graduate from India with a Bachelor's degree and hands-on experience in Food & Beverage and Guest Services. Trained with leading hospitality brands including DoubleTree by Hilton, Grand Hyatt and Taj Gateway. Skilled in customer service, F&B operations, order management, teamwork and problem-solving, with a positive attitude and strong commitment to service excellence. Available for immediate joining in Oman. Kindly contact 91124083, 78021569

**Quality car rentals
at competitive prices.**

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



JUNIOR SALES EXECUTIVE REQUIRED

A leading supplier of Oil & Gas Materials in Oman is seeking a Junior Sales Executive with 2-3 years of sales experience.

REQUIREMENTS:

- 2 - 3 years of experience in Oil & Gas industry sales
- Valid Oman driving licence (mandatory)
- Good communication and customer relationship skills

APPLY NOW  **sales@bhatia-brothers.co.om**
 92508594

10000 sqm plus
area of open yard
fully blacktop
with compound
wall, wide gate
& CCTV for
immediate rent in
Jifnain. Contact:
99853040

4 Ready made
office space for
rent in Bank Melli
Iran building
MBD area Ruwi,
opposite Centre
point.
Contact: 99011352.

INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. Contact: 94158080

OMAN  DAILY
Observer

● SITUATION WANTED

*** NOW FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER
ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY**

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

To advertise please contact:
Tel: 71455532/ 71455531/ 71455530
Email: adv@omaninfo.om

To advertise in Ministry of Information channels

عمان مباشر الثقافية الرياضية إذاعة القرآن الكريم إذاعة سلطنة عمان إذاعة الشباب **عُمان** OMAN DAILY Observer

To advertise

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdiyar_info izdiyar.info

ازدهار
izdihar



ART/LIFE



FROM CLAY TO MARBLE: A SCULPTOR'S JOURNEY

> 20

ARTISTIC RECOGNITION

MARSHALL'S 'BLACKNESS' ART CELEBRATED



Much of Marshall's work carries a powerful message about representation, placing black people in ordinary settings such as beauty salons and parks.

He has arguably done more than any living painter to bring black figures into Western galleries, but Kerry James Marshall remains uncomfortable with being seen as a trailblazer on the eve of another major retrospective of his work.

"It's not a reasonable assumption to believe that there were no black people in pictures before I had some kind of revelation that they should be there", the Alabama-born American said in Paris.

He cites the work of his mentor Charles White (1918-1979), whom he compares with some of the greatest figurative painters, as well as portraits by 16th-century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch and statues of Ancient Greece.

Few contemporary artists, however, have done as much to mainstream black portraiture. Marshall counts stars including Sean Combs and Jay-Z among his collectors, holds the auction record for a living black artist and is now receiving unprecedented recognition outside the United States.

His travelling retrospective, "The Histories", has received acclaim at London's Royal Academy of Art and Zurich's Kunsthaus before arriving at the Musee d'Art Moderne in Paris, where it opened on Friday.

The exhibition includes monumental works such as "De Style" (1993), depicting clients at an African American hair salon who stare towards the viewer beneath a calendar showing the date of Rodney King's beating by Los Angeles police officers in 1991, an event that preceded race riots.

In "Black Painting" (2003), a barely discernible couple embrace in a dark bedroom, with a book by African American activist and former Black Panther Angela Davis on the bedside table.

"The first thing you see is that they're black figures, but then you have to move on from that to everything else that's happening in the picture", Marshall said.

Much of his work carries a powerful message about representation, placing black people in ordinary settings such as beauty salons and parks, while echoing the conventions of classical European portraiture, where black subjects were often depicted as servants or slaves.

Marshall renders his figures' skin in jet-black, describing "blackness" as "a rhetorical device" and an aesthetic framework that allows viewers to consider it as something complex and rich.

Marshall, now 70, grew up in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, before moving to Los Angeles with his family in the 1960s.

Living in predominantly black and poor South Central, he witnessed gang violence and the 1965 Watts riots.

He emerged as a major figure relatively late, receiving his first major retrospective only a decade ago. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

A woman dressed in imperial style costumes poses for a selfie beside the moat which surrounds the Forbidden City in Beijing. — AFP



MUSIC FESTIVAL

Muse performs at the iHeartRadio Music Festival at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada, US. — Reuters



ARCHITECTURE

View of the Schwerin Palace in Schwerin, northern Germany, on the state elections' day in the northeastern federal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. — AFP

INSTA PICKS

 **drsreejith_wildlife**
Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman

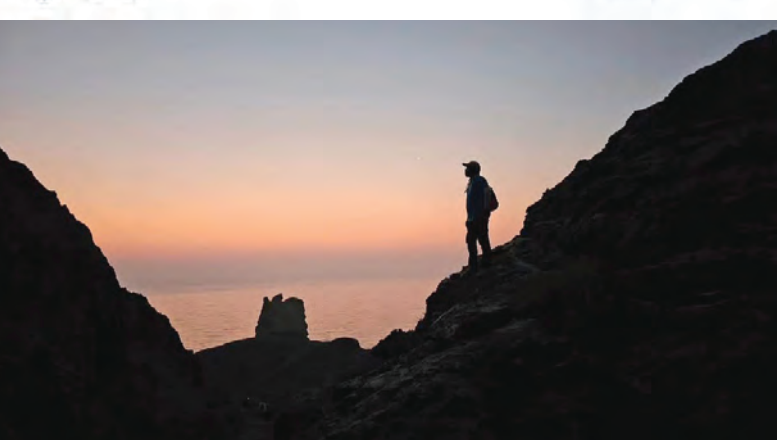
Follow



Small in size, mighty in character

 **zohur_hussain**
Sidab

Follow



Sunsets at Sidab Trail

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

HORROR MOVIE ‘RESIDENT EVIL’ TOPS BOX OFFICE



“Resident Evil” displaced last week’s top performer, Warner Bros’ “Practical Magic 2”, into a distant second place.

“Resident Evil”, a horror movie based on the popular video game franchise, swept the North American box office with a \$60 million opening weekend, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The Sony-distributed movie is directed by Zach Cregger and stars Austin Abrams, who plays a medical courier battling mutant creatures while attempting to deliver a package to a remote hospital. The strong debut put the film comfortably ahead of the weekend’s other major releases.

“Resident Evil” displaced last week’s top performer, Warner Bros’ “Practical Magic 2”, into a distant second place. The long-awaited sequel stars Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman and follows modern-day witches facing a curse that sees any man they fall in love with doomed to an early death.

“Practical Magic 2” took \$12.2 million after last weekend knocking Sony’s “Spider-Man” from its weeks-long perch at the top.

“Spider-Man” earned another \$6.5 million this weekend, bringing its total take in the United States and Canada to \$944.5 million. It was followed by another of 2026’s strongest performers, “The Odyssey”, which took \$4.9 million.

For the second consecutive weekend, “Coyote vs Acme” took fifth place, with Will Forte and animated character Wile E Coyote earning another \$4.5 million for Falling Forward Films.

Rounding out the top 10 were “The Runner” (\$3.2 million), “Daniel and the Fiery Furnace” (\$3.1 million), “Transformers: The Movie” (\$3.1 million), “The Weight” (\$2.3 million) and “Buddy” (\$1.9 million). — AFP



The newly identified Leopardus tilcayo in Bolivia’s Yungas cloud forest.

NEW CAT SPECIES SPOTTED IN BOLIVIA AFTER 100 YEARS



The small cat has light brown fur with distinctive rosette markings.

A diminutive wild cat inhabiting Bolivia’s cloud forests has been identified as a previously unknown species, marking the first time in more than a century that a new living cat species has been formally named and described.

Known as Tilcayo by local communities, the cat belongs to a group called tiger cats found across much of South America.

It was discovered in Bolivia’s lush Yungas forest, a mountainous region characterised by high humidity and cloud-covered forests. Measuring about 46 cm long and weighing around 1.4 kg, it is smaller than the average domestic cat.

Researchers used genetic data to confirm the animal as a new species, giving it the scientific name Leopardus tilcayo while retaining its local name.

“Its fur is light brown ... with irregularly shaped rosettes across its body”, said Paola Nogales-Ascarrunz, a National Geographic Explorer and author of the study published in Current Biology.

Remains of small rodents in scat samples suggest they may form part of its diet, while camera-trap evidence indicates it may be more active at night.

Tiger cats are considered cryptic species because they cannot easily be distinguished by appearance



The discovery highlights the rich biodiversity of Bolivia’s threatened Yungas forests.



Researchers believe the cat may feed on small rodents and be active at night.

alone, said evolutionary biologist Jonas Lescroart of the University of Antwerp and study co-lead author.

The team analysed DNA from 38 cats across several South American countries, including eight museum specimens, finding that tiger cats comprise five genetically distinct species. Genetic analysis suggested the Tilcayo lineage separated from other tiger cats about 1.4 million years ago.

The researchers also identified a new tiger cat subspecies in Peru’s Yungas, named Leopardus tigrinus antisuyo.

The findings could affect conservation assessments. The International Union for Conservation of Nature currently treats tiger cats as two vulnerable species with declining populations, but the researchers have shared their findings for a future review of the five lineages separately.

This is particularly important for the Yungas, which faces growing pressure from deforestation, agricultural expansion, fires and mining.

Researchers highlighted forest restoration, protection of native forests and maintaining habitat connections as urgent priorities.

“There are many undiscovered species out there in the world and they are at risk of disappearing before we even discover them”, said Eduardo Eizirik, senior author of the study. — Reuters

FEATURES



FROM CLAY TO MARBLE:
A SCULPTOR’S JOURNEY

BUTHIANA AL RIYAMI

FOR a long time, since he was a small kid, developing his senses and following his innate love for nature, long before he even knew what a chisel was, Ali al Jabri was already a sculptor. He just didn’t know it yet.

Ali has his own perspective on creativity. He believes that it is a quiet accumulation, a lifetime of images and moments settling into memory and that is the most interesting part of his story, which did not begin in a studio or a classroom. It began in the soil.

Al Jabri’s surroundings moulded him into a sculptor; he grew up in a farming community, surrounded by fields. As children, he and others would gather the clay left behind after the floods, working it in their hands a small act of invention. There was wood too and stone, all of it raw material for a childhood spent building.

“It was pure joy”, he recalls, speaking of those moments from his early days. Today, when he looks back, he recognises it differently and sees it as an early, unknown apprenticeship. Training of the hands and of the eye.

One of the highlights Ali remembers very well is the day he tried to fire a piece of clay, with no real understanding of what firing even meant. He did not know the science of it, only that he wanted the clay to hold, to last, to resist. “It was curiosity that

pushed me”, he recalls.

One memory in particular has stayed with him: the quiet role his father played. He recalls when his father returned, he would bring back small, unfamiliar treasures. Once it was a box of Lego. For Al Jabri, it became a rich experience. After a few days, he ignored the instruction booklet and built houses. The skills of construction and creation would later resurface in his fascination with sculptural installation.

By the time he joined Sultan Qaboos University to study art education, that instinct had a language to grow into. Courses in sculpture and ceramics sharpened what childhood had only hinted at, so he learned how to read material and how to trust the process of making.

It was there that someone finally said the word aloud. His professor, the late Dr Abdulwahab Abu Zeid, looked at him and said: “Ali, you are a sculptor”. It was not a passing compliment. It stayed with him and it was a turning point in his journey; from that moment, Al Jabri began to feel the weight of a responsibility, towards a field that, barely had a presence in Oman.

He then started to move between materials, each material answering to a different chapter of his life. He began with clay, moved to plaster, then to iron and cast metal and eventually to marble and wood, the two materials

that define him. Each material was more than a substance; it was like a teacher that taught him something new about form, about mass.

In 2012, a new chapter opened in a marble workshop led by Ayoub al Balushi. A year later, he worked alongside Al Balushi training sculptors in a wood workshop and wood became his signature. “I found in marble the solidity of the earth and its extension through time”, he says, “and in wood, the warmth and the living presence of the material”. Together, they let him build a visual dialogue.

Certain pieces have marked that journey. His very first plaster work won third place nationally, a piece he keeps, because it marks the true beginning of his professional life.

Then came his first marble piece, which also won Oman’s top prize. He keeps them in his personal collection. To him, they are not simply sculptures but rather witnesses to the two moments that truly transformed his path.

So, when people ask him, Al Jabri finds that he cannot give them a single date. The story began in the clay, in a box of Lego, in the curiosity of a child who tried to fire clay. It found its name later, when his professor told him what he was. It was a long accumulation that carried him from shaping clay to a full understanding of its nature; making sculpture not just his craft, but his life’s responsibility.



ALI AL JABRI
Omani sculptor and visual artist

Ali al Jabri’s professor, the late Dr Abdulwahab Abu Zeid, looked at him once and said: “Ali, you are a sculptor”. It was not a passing compliment. It stayed with him and it was a turning point in his journey; from that moment, Al Jabri began to feel the weight of a responsibility, towards a field that, barely had a presence in Oman.

