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NADHIRA AL HARTHY: A LEGACY WRITTEN ABOVE THE CLOUDS

The first Omani woman to stand atop Mount Everest was killed in a tragic avalanche while climbing Broad Peak in Pakistan, sparking an outpouring of grief across the Sultanate

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman has been plunged into mourning following the tragic death of pioneering mountaineer Nadhira bint Ahmed Al Harthy on Thursday, whose life was cut short in a devastating avalanche while climbing in northern Pakistan, bringing an abrupt end to the extraordinary journey of the woman who inspired a generation by carrying the Omani flag to some of the world's highest and most dangerous peaks.

Nadhira was among a 10-strong team of climbers reported missing following the avalanche in Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan while attempting to climb Broad Peak, the

world's 12th-highest mountain at 8,047 metres.

Her death – alongside that of the Nepalese climber Pur Baha-dur Gurung – was announced by the Alpine Club of Pakistan on social media on Friday.

Nadhira etched her name into Oman's history books in 2019 when she became the first Omani woman to conquer Mount Everest, planting the national flag atop the world's highest mountain and inspiring countless young Omanis to dream beyond perceived limits.

Nadhira, who was the second Omani national to summit Mount Everest after late Khalid Al Siyabi, became a landmark figure for adventurers across the Sultanate of Oman. **>A6**

PAYMENT METHODS

Major changes from August 1: What citizens and residents need to know

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Several new measures took effect in Oman from August 1, 2026, affecting public transport, digital government services and financial matters that could impact many expatriates.

Mwasalat buses go cashless
One of the biggest day-to-day changes is for public transport users. Mwasalat city buses in Muscat and Salalah will no longer accept cash.

Electronic payment methods
Passengers must now pay using approved electronic payment methods, including bank cards and supported mobile wallets. The move is aimed at reducing boarding times, improving operational

efficiency and advancing Oman's digital transformation agenda.

THEQA login adopted
From August 1, users accessing the Tax Authority's electronic portal must authenticate through the THEQA digital identity application.

The new login system is designed to strengthen the security of online tax services and replaces previous authentication methods. Users are advised to activate their THEQA account and ensure they have an NFC-enabled smartphone

before accessing the portal.

New Indian banking rules
Thousands of Indian expatriates in Oman could also be affected by changes introduced under India's Banking Laws (Amendment) Act, 2025, which came into force from August. Under the new rules, unclaimed dividends, matured fixed deposits and unredeemed shares that have remained inactive for the prescribed period will be transferred to the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF), a central government fund.

While account holders will still be able to recover their money, claims will no longer be processed directly through banks. Instead, they will have to follow the IEPF claim procedure to retrieve the transferred funds.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

His Majesty holds talks with UK PM

LONDON: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik discussed on Thursday, during a telephone call with Andy Burnham, Prime Minister of UK, the developments in the region and the means to achieve de-escalation and prevent further escalation in order to establish the foundations of peace and security.

They also discussed ways to elevate the strategic partnership, in a manner that enhances mutual interests, opens broader horizons for cooperation, and supports the aspirations of the peoples of both countries toward further progress. — **ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN 60 key tenders worth OMR365mn awarded

1 The total number of tenders issued by the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority during the first seven months of 2026 reached 60 at an estimated cost of about OMR365 million. **>A2**

OMAN Over OMR1bn projects being implemented

2 Galfar Engineering and Contracting, is currently executing projects worth over OMR1 billion across Oman, spanning infrastructure, water, roads and infrastructure. **>A3**

MARKET Oman's natural gas production rises

3 Oman's production of natural gas witnessed a growth of 6.7 percent until the end of June 2026, reaching 29.54 billion cubic metres. **>B1**



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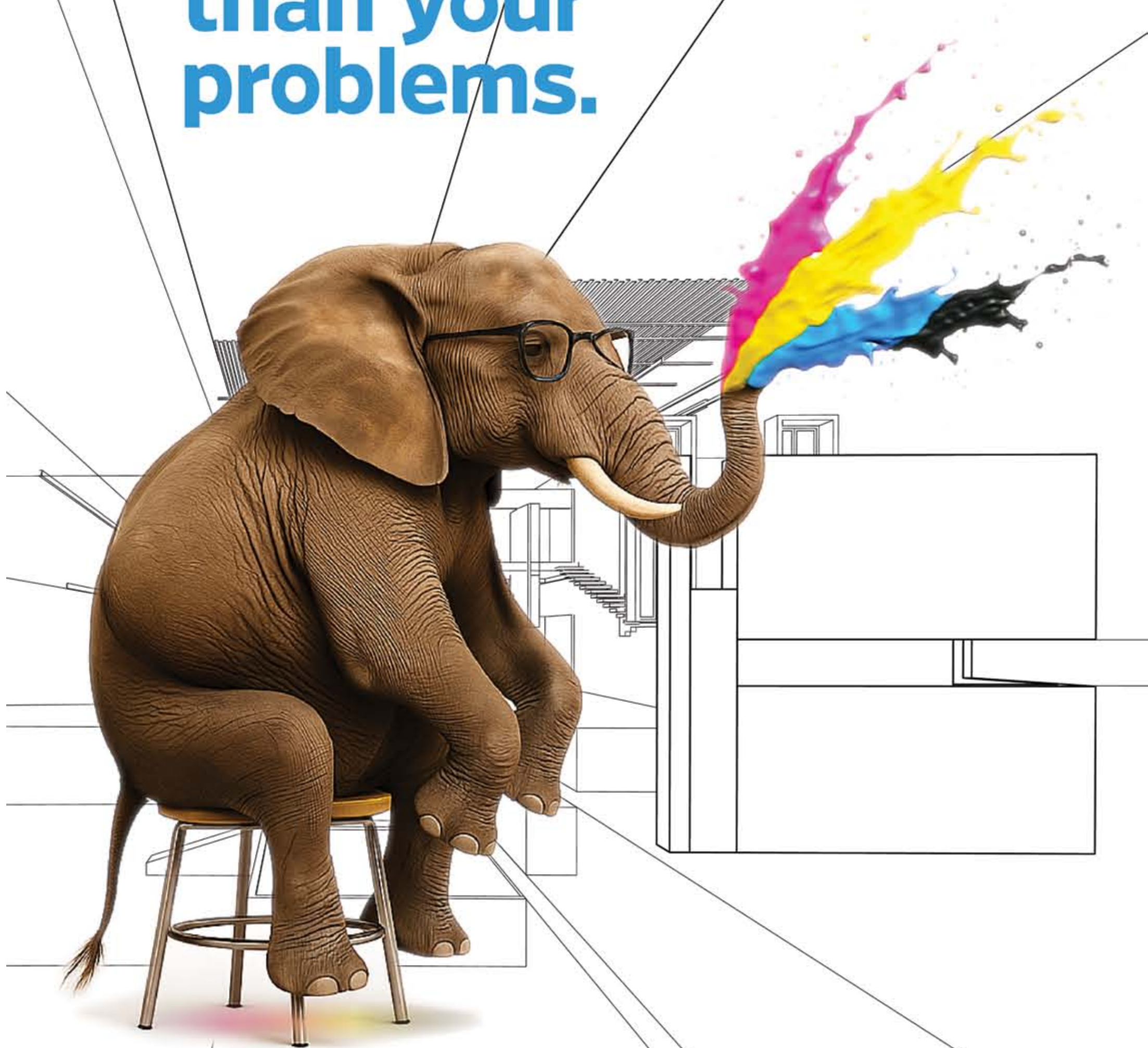








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60 tenders worth OMR365mn awarded for key development projects till end July

This comes within the framework of efforts aimed at improving the level of services provided to citizens and residents, and enhancing the efficiency of public spending in line with the strategic priorities of Oman Vision 2040

Times News Service

Muscat: The total number of tenders issued by the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority during the first seven months of 2026 reached 60 at an estimated cost of about OMR365 million.

This comes within the framework of efforts aimed at improving the level of services provided to citizens and residents, and enhancing the efficiency of public spending in line with the strategic priorities of Oman Vision 2040, in addition to accelerating the implementation of development projects and raising the efficiency of public services in various sectors.

The Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority explained that the tenders included a number of vital projects aimed at strengthening the infrastructure and reducing the effects of climatic phenomena.



The most notable among this is the project to establish a flood protection system for the Al-Duraiz area in the Wilayat of Ibbri in the Al-Dhahirah Governorate, the establishment of a flood protection system in the Niabat of Samad Al-Shan in the North Al-Sharqiyah Governorate.

In addition the tenders were issued for the project to establish a flood protection dam on Wadi Al-Rajma in the Wilayat of Liwa in the North Al-Batinah Governorate and Wadi Al-Khouthd in the Muscat Governorate, and the establishment of a flood protection system in the Wilayat of Sadah in the Dhofar Governorate.

Tenders were also issued for the health sector. These include tenders for the supply of laboratory supplies (chemicals, reagents, glassware, equipment, consumables, disposables, and miscellaneous supplies) 2027-2029, the provision of food and catering services to various Ministry of Health hospitals and dialysis units, and the project to manage, host, and support the electronic health portal.

Regarding the roads sector, tenders were issued for the implementation of the dual carriageway of the Al-Kamil and Al-Wafi-Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan-Jaalan Bani Bu Ali road, the design and

support of the sustainability of health services and the enhancement of drug security. Also a project to expand the Muscat Expressway was awarded with a value of OMR157 million, with the aim of increasing the capacity of the road, improving the flow of traffic and supporting the urban and economic growth witnessed by the capital, Muscat.

Strategic roads

The awarded tenders also included the implementation of strategic roads such as the project to dualise the Empty Quarter Road-Phase One in Al Dhahirah Governorate at a cost of OMR8.3 million. The project is considered as one of the projects supporting logistics connectivity and trade movement.

Also projects to complete the remaining works of the Al Batinah Expressway-Package Three at a value of OMR21.7 million, and the construction of the dualisation of the Ibra Road (Al Yahmadi-Al Qafisi) at a value of OMR29.1 million was also awarded.

Also, tenders was awarded for the construction of the fishing port in the Wilayat of Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate at a cost of OMR36.8 million, the construction of the Sur Cultural and Youth Centre at a value exceeding OMR3.5 million, as well as the construction of the Omani Genome Center and Biobank in Muscat Governorate at an actual cost of OMR4.2 million was awarded.

In addition, framework contracts for legal consulting services was also awarded at an actual cost of OMR50 million. These include the provision of light and electric vehicles, trucks and heavy equipment to government agencies, the addition of suppliers to the framework contracts, in addition to assigning the project of automating and governing the purchase of travel tickets and accompanying services for employees in government agencies.

COMMENTARY

Legal Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Oman: Explained



The Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 92/2025, establishes a rights-based legal framework for the protection and social integration of persons with disabilities, grounded in dignity, equality, non-discrimination, and full participation in society.

In an exclusive interview with Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Chairman of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, explained that “the law applies to all persons with disabilities, and the executive regulation must specify the rights enjoyed by persons with disabilities residing in the State, irrespective of the type and degree of their disability.”

“The law guarantees civil rights including personal freedom, protection from violence and exploitation, the right to sue, and safeguards during arrest or detention. It secures the right to education without discrimination, with dedicated integration programmes for those aged four to twenty-two, health-care rights including early detection and rehabilitation, and social rights such as marriage, family life, and housing priority,” he noted.

He further stated that “cultural, sporting, and technological access rights are also recognised, alongside customs and VAT exemptions on assistive devices and vehicles, and fee exemptions for licences to build facilities dedicated to persons with disabilities or to modify buildings for accessibility, and fees for opening a commercial activity owned by persons with disabilities, limited to one establishment

or company.”

“A major employment provision requires government entities generally, and any employer with 40 or more workers, to fill 5% of their positions with qualified persons with disabilities, alongside a two-hour daily reduction in working hours with full pay for employees with disabilities, or for those caring for a parent, child, or spouse with moderate or severe disabilities,” he said.

“A National Committee for Persons with Disabilities has been established to propose national policy and legislation, review quality standards for rehabilitation programmes, and coordinate implementation across relevant entities. Persons or entities found in violation of this law are liable to fines and imprisonment, with increased penalties for repeat offences,” he noted.

He concluded by stating that the law reflects Oman’s broader commitment to safeguarding the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and ensuring their full and equal integration into society.

(Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm (info@mohammedibrahim.net), (+968 244 87 600) was established on 14th December 2006 and is serving clients through its offices in Muscat and Sohar, as well as operating on a request basis in other areas. It offers legal representation across a wide range of practice areas that include Labour Law, Corporate, Commercial, Contracts, Banking and Finance, International Trade, Foreign Investment, Insurance, Maritime Law, Construction and Engineering Contracts, International Arbitration, Intellectual Property and more).

GOVERNMENT UNITS



Ministry of Labour announces 1,222 job opportunities

Times News Service

Muscat: The Ministry of Labour announced the availability of 1,222 job opportunities in a number of government units, including 1,107 jobs for holders of Bachelor’s degrees and post-General Education Diplomas, and 115 jobs for holders of General Education Diplomas and below, within the

framework of a plan based on the actual needs of government units.

The ministry explained that registration for these opportunities will remain open until August 13, 2026, noting that this announcement is part of a series of job announcements for the administrative units of the state that the ministry issues during 2026.

DHOFAR MUNICIPALITY

Food outlet closed

MUSCAT: Dhofar Municipality has temporarily closed a food establishment in the governorate after preliminary laboratory examinations indicated that a sampled food product was undercooked and contained traces of blood, pending the completion of further testing.

The municipality said the action followed reports circulated on social media regarding the preparation and serving of one of the food products at the es-

tablishment. A health inspection team immediately visited the site, collected samples of the product, and referred them to the relevant laboratory for analysis.

According to the municipality, the initial test results revealed that the sampled product had not been fully cooked and contained traces of blood. As a precautionary measure, the establishment was temporarily shut down until all laboratory examinations are completed.

EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO IN MUSCAT HOLDS RECEPTION ON KING MOHAMMED VI’S ACCESSION TO THRONE

The Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Muscat on Thursday held a reception on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the Accession of King Mohammed VI, of the Kingdom of Morocco, to the throne of the Kingdom. The ceremony, held at Grand Hyatt Muscat Hotel, was attended by a number of officials in the Sultanate of Oman, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Oman and officials from the Foreign Ministry. – ONA



Dhofar Al Majd Convoy selects Duqm as a major stop on its 11th edition journey

The convoy forms part of a national tourism route that passes through several governorates and wilayats of Oman

DUQM: As part of its eleventh edition, the Dhofar Al Majd Convoy selected the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) as a major stop along its journey from Muscat Governorate to Dhofar Governorate. The convoy forms part of a national tourism route that passes through several governorates and wilayats across the Sultanate of Oman, highlighting the country's diverse tourism, economic, and cultural attractions.

The convoy's visit coincides with SEZAD's Stop by Duqm promotional campaign, launched to promote Duqm in particular and Al Wusta Governorate in general, while encouraging travellers heading to and from Dhofar during the Khareef season to stop in Duqm and discover its diverse natural, tourism, and service offerings.

The convoy's stop in Duqm reflects the campaign's core message—"Stop by Duqm... Make It a Stop Worth Taking"—by transforming a transit point into a complete visitor experience. Participants were able to explore Duqm's pristine coastline, unique geological formations, natural attractions, and the region's rapidly developing tourism infrastructure and investment projects.

Amjad bin Ali Al Fairooz, Chairman of the 4WD Champions Club, said that Duqm was selected as a key destination because of its strategic location, diverse tourism assets, and well-developed facilities that meet the needs of travelers un-



dertaking long-distance journeys.

He added that Duqm represents an important part of the convoy's itinerary, offering participants the opportunity to witness the region's urban and economic development while exploring its coastal and natural attractions. He noted that the convoy aims to showcase Oman's geographical and tourism diversity while promoting domestic tourism and strengthening social connections among participants.

For his part, Mohsin bin Salem Musan Al Kathiri, Acting Head of Events and Exhibitions at SEZAD, said that hosting the convoy aligns

with the Authority's efforts to strengthen Duqm's position as a key tourism and service destination for travelers heading to and from Dhofar, complementing the objectives of the "Stop by Duqm" campaign. He explained that the convoy's visit helps deliver the campaign's message to a wider audience both inside and outside Oman by showcasing the experiences and attractions visitors can enjoy during their stay in Duqm. He added that SEZAD continues to leverage tourism initiatives and events to stimulate economic activity and support small and me-



dium-sized enterprises, tourism establishments, and service providers during the Khareef season. He also emphasised that Duqm has evolved into a fully integrated city with modern infrastructure, advanced tourism facilities, and comprehensive services, making it an ideal destination for travelers seeking both relaxation and exploration.

Organised by the 4WD Champions Club, under the umbrella of the Automobile Association of Oman, the convoy aims to highlight Oman's leading tourism, economic, and cultural assets through a route



that passes across several governorates and wilayats, promoting domestic tourism and showcasing the country's rich diversity.

This year's convoy includes 72 participants traveling in 38 four-wheel-drive vehicles, with participants from Oman as well as Kuwait, India, Jordan, and Egypt, reflecting the convoy's growing regional reach and international participation.

During their stay in Duqm, participants visited several tourism and natural attractions while exploring the integrated infrastructure, facilities, and development



projects within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The delegation also visited SEZAD's headquarters, where Eng. Abdullah bin Salem Al Hakmani, Director of the Technical Affairs Department, delivered a presentation on Duqm's Master Plan. The presentation highlighted the region's long-term planning vision, ongoing and future tourism development projects, and Duqm's future growth strategy, providing participants with valuable insights into the area's tourism and investment potential.

The convoy's visit reinforces the objectives of the Stop by Duqm campaign by encouraging travelers to transform their journey through Duqm into a memorable destination experience, combining tourism, nature, and investment opportunities while strengthening Duqm's position as one of Oman's emerging tourism destinations.

Through the Stop by Duqm campaign, SEZAD seeks to encourage travelers to discover Duqm's beaches, natural attractions, marine activities, camping destinations, and integrated tourism and hospitality services, contributing to tourism growth, local economic development, and the promotion of Duqm and Al Wusta Governorate as key destinations on Oman's domestic tourism map.

Bella Company Wins Best Brand in Customer Experience Award in Luxury Sanitaryware Category



Bella was felicitated with the 'Times of Oman Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Award in Luxury Sanitaryware Category' at the Times of Oman CX Awards 2026. The awards presentation was co-located with Oman CX Forum 2026, held at Hotel Kempinski, Muscat. The premier event was attended by over 325 CX leaders across sectors in Oman.

Bella has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to customer experience by offering a premium portfolio of luxury sanitaryware solutions that combine elegant design, superior craftsmanship, and innovative functionality. Serving homeowners, architects, interior designers, and developers across Oman, the company has established itself as a trusted destination for world-class bathroom solutions that enhance modern living spaces.

With a customer-centric approach focused on quality, personalised service, and design excellence, Bella provides

carefully curated collections from internationally renowned brands, supported by expert product consultation and dedicated after-sales service. Its commitment to understanding customer preferences and delivering tailored solutions has earned the confidence of customers seeking luxury, performance, and lasting value.

By continuously investing in premium product offerings, showroom experiences, and customer service excellence, Bella continues to set benchmarks in customer experience within the luxury sanitaryware sector. Its dedication to innovation, sophisticated design, and exceptional service reinforces its position as one of Oman's leading providers of luxury bathroom solutions.

The Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Awards are instituted by Times of Oman, in collaboration with Muscat Media Group, Gulf Leaders Circle and TEvents. They are presented to the leading brands that are ahead of the curve in

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meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The winners are selected based on an extensive consumer survey conducted by the Times of Oman.

ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

Al Mouj Muscat attracts FDI worth OMR880mn, contributes OMR878mn to Oman's GDP

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat has attracted OMR880 million in foreign direct investment (FDI) since its launch 20 years ago, while generating more than OMR1 billion in total revenues and contributing OMR878 million to Oman's gross domestic product (GDP), according to an economic impact study.

The study, prepared by a specialized consultancy to assess the project's economic and social impact, highlighted Al Mouj Muscat's role in supporting sustainable development, boosting investment, and diversifying Oman's economy.

Ahmed Al Massan, Acting CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said the integrated waterfront development has played a significant role in promoting tourism and related industries, while supporting entertainment, sports, and private-sector growth.

He said the project has supported 167 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with local content reaching 43.6 percent, equivalent to OMR560 million.

Al Mouj Muscat is home to a number of international hotels, including The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, voco Muscat Al



Mouj, and Kempinski Hotel Muscat. The Okura Al Mouj Muscat Resort, scheduled to open in 2027, will become the first Japanese-branded resort in Oman.

Al Massan noted that Al Mouj Golf has hosted 11 international tournaments, strengthening the destination's profile as a regional sports hub. Meanwhile, Al Mouj Marina, with 400 berths, supports marine tourism and entrepreneurship through 31 SMEs specializing in tourism services, alongside waterfront retail, restaurants, and cafés.

He said the project's diversified business model—covering residential real estate, hospitality, retail, marina facilities, and

leisure—has delivered strong long-term financial performance, with shareholder returns reaching 337 percent.

The integrated community is home to residents and investors from more than 90 nationalities. To date, 3,272 residential units have been delivered, housing over 8,000 residents, with the population expected to reach around 19,000 upon full completion of the development.

The project has also created 2,200 direct jobs and 5,738 indirect jobs, while investing OMR1 million in training, education, and capacity-building initiatives. In addition, it has allocated more than OMR6.3 million to corporate social responsibility programmes.

Currently, about 80 percent of the master plan has been completed. Work is underway on the final waterfront residential developments, as well as new commercial, community, entertainment, and retail facilities.

Al Mouj Muscat now attracts approximately 4 million visitors annually, recording an annual visitor growth rate of 38.5 percent, reinforcing its position as one of Oman's leading tourism, lifestyle, and investment destinations.



REBRANDED CARD PORTFOLIO

Reinforcing its commitment to continuous innovation and customer-centric banking, Sohar International has unveiled its newly reimagined card portfolio, introducing a modern visual identity that reflects the bank's evolution as a progressive financial institution.

MARKET
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MSX RESUMES ITS RISE

The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange resumed its rise during the week, increasing by about 160 points and closing at 7,277 points. This was on the back of benefiting from the demand of individual investors to buy and the increase in purchases by local and Gulf investment funds and institutions.



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MCDC launches mechanism for regulating consolidated accounts

This step reflects national trends towards enhancing the openness of the capital market and attracting international capital, through organising the legislative and regulatory frameworks for consolidated accounts

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC) has launched a mechanism for regulating consolidated accounts, enabling investors to access investment opportunities in the Omani capital market for the benefit of more than one beneficial owner.

This step reflects national trends towards enhancing the openness of the capital market and attracting international capital, through organising the legislative and regulatory frameworks for consolidated accounts. The system of rules regulating clearing and de-

posit operations that were recently adopted and issued also supports the confidence of foreign investors and keeps pace with the best global practices in deposit systems.

This regulation comes in the context of developing the legislative structure of the Omani capital market, where consolidated accounts constitute a key tool used by global investment institutions to manage and safeguard their clients' assets with high efficiency, while maintaining governance and transparency requirements.

A consolidated account is defined as a securities account in which multiple securities belong-



ing to different clients are collected in a group account held by the consolidated account operator on behalf of some or all of its clients. The consolidated account operator is a licensed entity from the Financial Services Authority, or any

other entity, including a foreign entity. The account is opened with Muscat Clearing and Depository Company to manage the holdings of a group of investors within a unified account.

Mohammed bin Said Al Abri,

CEO of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, said that regulating consolidated accounts embodies the balance we are keen on between facilitating procedures for international investors and at the same time maintaining the

highest standards of compliance and protecting investors' rights.

He pointed out that the current regulatory framework is designed to ensure complete legal clarity, especially in exceptional cases such as the operator's default or restructuring, where investors' ownership remains defined and separable from the operator's assets, thus enhancing the level of protection and confidence.

He added in a statement to the Oman News Agency that the customer in the consolidated account has the right to transfer securities to any account in his name registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, or to transfer it to another consolidated account with another operator.

He emphasised the company's commitment to raising the efficiency of clearing and settlement operations and improving the investor experience. It will also contribute to increasing foreign investment flows, enhancing liquidity and supporting economic diversification goals, in line with Oman Vision 2040 for developing the financial sector and achieving sustainable growth.

DATA

Oman's natural gas production rises 6.7% to 29.54bn cubic metres

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's production of natural gas – including local production and imports – witnessed a growth of 6.7 percent until the end of June 2026, reaching 29.54 billion cubic metres, compared to 27.69 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that associated gas production increased by 5.6 percent reaching 6.60 billion cubic metres until the end of June 2026, compared to 6.25 billion cubic metres during the same period of the previous year.

Non-associated gas production, including imports, also increased by 7 percent, reaching 22.93 billion cubic metres by the end of June 2026, compared to 21.43 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

Regarding the consumption side, natural gas consumption in industrial projects increased by 7.5 percent, reaching 14.85 billion cubic metres by the end of June 2026, compared to 13.81 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.



Gas consumption in power generation plants also increased by 13.7 percent, reaching 8.28 billion cubic metres until the end of June 2026 compared to 7.28 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

In contrast, gas consumption in oil fields (including losses, meter differences and shrinkage factor) decreased by 2.3 percent, reaching 6.30 billion cubic metres until

the end of June 2026, compared to 6.45 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

Gas consumption in industrial areas (including industrial areas and the consumption of the Oman LNG Company) also declined by 29.6 percent, reaching 95.8 million cubic metres until the end of June 2026, compared to 136 million cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONALISATION

Real-time digital transfers begin between Maldives and India via Favara-UPI cross-border payment corridor

NEW DELHI: The Favara-UPI cross-border payment corridor went live on Thursday between the Maldives and India following the integration of the Maldives Instant Payment System, 'Favara', with India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

According to the Ministry of Finance, the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) announced the successful operationalisation of the integration on July 30. The initiative marks a transformative milestone in cross-border digital financial connectivity and bilater-

al economic cooperation between the two nations.

Under the new mechanism, individuals in the Maldives can transfer funds using Favara to transfer funds using Favara to individuals in India in real time. Transactions are initiated in Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR) and credited directly to recipients in Indian Rupees (INR) through the UPI network.

The service opened with a select group of financial institutions in the island nation. As detailed in the official announcement, "The service has commenced with the

participation of two local banks: Bank of Maldives Plc and Maldives Islamic Bank Plc."

The document noted that "customers of these banks can initiate person-to-person (P2P) transfers directly to UPI-enabled bank accounts in India using their mobile banking applications and the Favara payment rail."

Permitted remittance categories under the framework include family-maintenance-related remittances under both Foreign Inward and Foreign Outward Remittance regulations. -ANI

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LIFESTYLE

How conflict in Congo, Sudan and Yemen is fuelling disease

D'zirava Lety sums up the hopelessness of her situation in just a few words: "There is no water. In the entire camp, there is only one tap. Another challenge is the lack of toilets. Children relieve themselves anywhere. With the disease that has arrived, we are being told to wash our hands, but there are no hygiene kits. And when we go into town to sell our products, people push us away, saying that we are carrying diseases."

Lety lives with 20,000 other internally displaced people (IDPs) at the Kigonze camp on the outskirts of Bunia in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They fled the violence of the many rebel groups that have destabilized the region for decades. But now they face a new threat: Camp officials told DW that in June the Ebola virus had been detected for the first time amid people who had died. "Since Ebola arrived, we have been recording up to six deaths a day," said camp chairman Etienne Ndrutsi.

How conflicts speed up the spread of disease

The rare Bundibugyo strain of the virus has been circulating in the area since at least April, according to experts. Shortly after the outbreak was identified in May, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency. By mid-July, DRC had recorded 1,963 confirmed infections and 719 deaths, while neighbouring Uganda reported 20 cases and two deaths. The WHO estimates, however, that only one in two cases — and maybe as few as one in four — is being detected.

In eastern DRC, ongoing armed conflict is hampering efforts to contain the outbreak. At the same time, the virus is able to spread more easily because people such as D'zirava Lety are living in overcrowded displacement camps or are forced to move from place to place, accelerating transmission.

"Health workers, treatment centers, laboratories, ambulances, medical supply routes must always be protected from military interference and political competition," said Juste Codjo, a former officer in the Beninese army and a security researcher at Kean University in the US state of New Jersey.

"International humanitarian law protects access to health care during armed conflicts, but the reality is that these legal obligations must be reinforced through practical negotiations with every actor controlling territory in the conflict zone," Codjo told DW.

The overlap between conflict and disease is part of a larger global pattern. In war-torn Yemen, aid groups and authorities have spent the past decade battling recurring cholera outbreaks. Likewise, the cholera epidemic in Sudan, which has claimed more than 3,500 lives since 2024, has been linked to the country's ongoing civil war. This is partly due to warring parties severely restrict-

Whether fast-spreading cholera in Sudan and Yemen or the Ebola virus in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), outbreaks of disease tend to be especially deadly when they take hold amid armed conflict



ing humanitarian access to outbreak response efforts.

History also offers examples of approaches that can help halt the spread of disease. During the civil war in El Salvador (1980-92), the warring sides agreed on three one-day ceasefires to allow aid organizations to carry out safe vaccination campaigns against several childhood diseases.

In DRC, however, calls for ceasefires to help curtail the spread of Ebola have so far gone unanswered.

The pattern of past outbreaks: First attacks, then more infections

When eastern Congo was hit by another devastating Ebola outbreak in 2018, US researchers documented a clear correlation between violence and the spread

of the virus. Several cases showed the same pattern: Rebels attacked a location or health center. Contact tracing and vaccinations for people exposed to the virus then broke down. Following this, local case numbers rose significantly.

In the city of Beni, each infected person transmitted the virus to an average of 0.8 others after the vaccination campaign began, according to the study — meaning transmission gradually declined. After a rebel attack, however, the reproduction number (RO value) rose again to 1.9, meaning each infected person was temporarily infecting nearly two additional people. As the impact of the violence subsided, the ratio fell again, reaching 0.72 by November 2018.

The threat was exacerbated

by certain residents alarmed by conspiracy theories. In this remote region, access to health care is something many people rarely experience outside acute crises, which fuels skepticism about the health workers in protective gear. Against this backdrop, experts repeatedly call for trust-building measures, including efforts led by local community figures or faith leaders.

Ebola as a political tool for rebel groups

The epicenter of the current outbreak is Ituri province, where various militias and the Congolese army are fighting for control. But cases continue to be reported in neighboring areas — including farther south, where the rebel coalition AFC/M23 has seized large

territories since early 2025. The group appears to be pursuing a strategy of building its own institutions and strengthening its long-term leverage over the government in Kinshasa, the capital of DRC.

That includes Ebola response efforts. When the first cases were reported in areas under its control, the AFC/M23 rebels established an emergency zone and increased testing. Rwanda is also providing support, according to a Reuters report, although Kigali continues to officially deny widely documented allegations that it backs the rebels. The WHO, pragmatically, is cooperating with them.

The Health Ministry in Kinshasa has reportedly been largely sidelined, but it continues to re-

ceive data and test results from the areas concerned. While transmission continues to rise in Ituri, AFC/M23 said in late June that the local outbreak in the territories it controls had been contained.

Security expert Juste Codjo also does not rule out that the political standing of the rebels could be boosted because of their management of the epidemic, and warns that both they and the government could seek to monopolise aid. "They should not allow concerns about political optics to obstruct life-saving assistance. Public health cannot be held hostage to a legitimacy contest," he said. "Assistance must be carefully depoliticised, monitored and delivered through neutral intermediaries."

- dw

SPORTS

20-YEAR PLAYING CAREER

AC Milan and Italy legend Baresi dies aged 66

MILAN: AC Milan and Italian great Franco Baresi has died at the age of 66 on Friday, the club confirmed. The club said their former captain's "example and integrity will be forever etched into the club's DNA".

Baresi spent his entire 20-year playing career with the club from 1977 until he retired in 1997, winning six Serie A titles and three European Cups/Champions Leagues.

Regarded as one of the greatest defenders to play the game, Baresi captained Milan for 15 seasons, making 719 appearances and scoring 33 goals.

He was capped 81 times by Italy and was part of the squad which won the 1982 World Cup. He played and was captain in the 1994 final, which Italy lost to Brazil.

Baresi was made honorary president of Milan in 2020, and his No.6 shirt was retired when he finished his playing career.

In the 1993-94 season, Baresi

and AC Milan manager Fabio Capello lifted a third consecutive Serie A title, the Champions League and the Supercoppa Italiana. Baresi formed part of one of European football's most celebrated defences alongside Paolo Maldini, Alessandro Costacurta and Mauro Tassotti.

He also lifted four Supercoppa Italianas, two European Super Cups and the Intercontinental Cup twice. In the 1994 World Cup, he returned from a knee injury to play in the final and largely nullified the threat of Brazil's Romario and Bebeto in a 0-0 draw.

It was the first World Cup final to be decided by a shootout and Baresi missed the first penalty, with Brazil eventually winning it 3-2.

Baresi had surgery in August 2025 to remove a lung nodule, and his last public appearance was at the San Siro Stadium for the Winter Olympics opening ceremony in February.



In a statement on X, AC Milan wrote: "Milan is in tears following the passing of Franco Baresi. His example and integrity will be forever etched into the club's DNA, just as his iconic number 6 shirt is."

In a further post on the club's website, they added: "Announcing the loss of someone who embodied the heart and soul of AC Milan is

incredibly difficult. But everyone at the club and all the Milanisti must live up to Franco Baresi's memory.

"In memory of Franco, we stand united, knowing he'll guide and push us throughout our Rossoneri journey. Forever. Because Baresi is forever."

Maldini, 58, who also spent his

entire career at Milan, paid tribute to his former team-mate, writing on Instagram: "Today, I feel the same way I did whenever - for whatever reason - you couldn't take the field alongside us: how will we manage without our captain?"

"You taught me to fight until my very last breath, and showed me the meaning of devotion to the jersey and the true value of leadership. "You protected me when I was a child, guided me as a young man, and inspired me as an adult.

"You were the greatest footballer I ever had the honour of playing with."

Former Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon shared memories of his debut for Parma competing against Baresi as a 17-year-old in 1995. He wrote: "For a boy my age, finding myself on the field against champions like him was something incredible. From that day on, I had an even clearer understanding of what it meant to represent

football with class, leadership and respect."

Inter Milan said: "Farewell to Franco Baresi, protagonist of the great clashes in the Milan derby and one of the figures who most defined the history of the rivalry.

"Captain, team man and flag-bearer of AC Milan, he lived every match-up with Inter between competition and respect, within a challenge that wrote unforgettable pages of Italian soccer."

Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni said Baresi "was not only one of the greatest champions in (Italian) sports history, but also an example of loyalty, seriousness, and dedication".

The head of the Italian football federation (FIGC), Giovanni Malago, praised Baresi for the "romantic choice" of staying loyal to AC Milan throughout his career, "which rightfully made him enter the hearts of the fans and millions of Italians." -Agencies

ENGLAND CRICKET



England chief Key says Stokes return 'wouldn't surprise' him

LONDON: England director of men's cricket Rob Key said on Friday that he "wouldn't be surprised" if Ben Stokes came out of international retirement at some stage, adding "anything is possible".

Former captain Stokes, 35, announced his decision to retire from international cricket during England's third Test defeat by New Zealand in June.

Stokes missed the second Test of that 2-1 series loss while an investigation took place into an incident at a London nightclub after he breached the team's midnight curfew.

The all-rounder, who was subsequently found blameless for the incident, said the controversy had "added" to his thoughts about calling time on his illustrious England career.

Brendon McCullum has since been sacked as Test coach and replaced by former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming, with Joe Root succeeding Stokes as skipper.

Key said the door remains open for Stokes to return for next summer's home Ashes series against Australia - although he has received no indication that Stokes intends to reverse his decision.

"It would be a brilliant story if he does," Key told Sky Sports News. "Anything's possible with Ben."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan believes the appointment of Fleming and Root's return as Test skipper might tempt Stokes to return to the England set-up.

"Root's difficulty will be getting a structure in his team - getting a formula without an all-rounder like Ben Stokes," Vaughan told BBC Sport.

"And I'll keep saying it, I just wonder over the next few months if - I'm sure Ben won't be back in 2026 - but I just wonder if this appointment has given us a little bit of a glimmer that it may happen, that the dream may happen next year, that Ben might come back."

Fleming has never previously worked as the head coach of a national team, but led Chennai Super Kings to a record five Indian Premier League (IPL) titles during his 17-year tenure.

Key said England initially narrowed the shortlist for the vacant position down to "three or four different people" - none of whom was Andy Flower - before settling on Fleming.

Former England coach Flower ruled himself out of the running to replace McCullum this month.

According to Key, the appointment of Fleming sets the wheels in motion for England to develop a "world-class team" capable of challenging Australia, and that is able to "sustain" its success.

"English cricket has had periods where we have been really good for a bit and then it falls off," he told BBC Sport. "We beat the sides below us and we compete against the ones above us.

"We want to create a system to make sure that English cricket not only has success, but sustains it. Fleming will bring all of that."

Root led England in Stokes' absence during the second Test against New Zealand, having previously captained the team from 2017 to 2022.

Root is also the second-highest Test run-scorer of all time, behind India legend Sachin Tendulkar, who tops the list with 15,921.

Key said Root was one of several candidates to succeed Stokes as captain and, following Fleming's appointment, it was decided between the pair that the batter was "the best person to do it". -Agencies

TEST SERIES

Litton added to Bangladesh squad against Australia

DHAKA: Bangladesh's selectors have added Litton Das to the Test squad for the two-match series against Australia in Darwin and Mackay later in August.

Litton had injured his left calf during the home ODI series against Australia in June and had not been named in the original Test squad, which was further depleted by injuries to fast bowlers Nahind Rana and Shoriful Islam.

Litton also missed Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe in June and July but has recovered in time to make the trip to Australia.

The development is a boost for Bangladesh as Litton was the Player of the Match in his most recent Test for scoring 126 and 69 in a 72-run victory against Pakistan in Sylhet in June.

The Test series is a significant one for Bangladesh, their first tour to Australia in 23 years.



They play a warm-up game against a Cricket Australia XI in Darwin from August 6 to 8 before the first Test begins on August 13. The second Test begins in Mackay on August 22.

Bangladesh squad for Australia Tests: Najmul Hossain Shanto (capt), Soumya Sarkar, Shadman Islam, Tanzid Hasan, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Amite Hasan, Jaker Ali, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (vc), Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Khaled Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Musfik Hasan, Litton Das. -Agencies

NETHERLANDS CRICKET

Edwards steps down, de Leede named captain

UTRECHT: Scott Edwards has stepped down as captain of Netherlands after a stint of 56 ODIs that began in June 2022 and ended at the conclusion of the Utrecht leg of CWC League 2 games on Friday.

Bas de Leede will take charge of the team, starting with the remainder of the CWC League 2.

"Apologies for sort of springing this one on you guys. I'm actually stepping down from the captaincy from here," Edwards told his team-mates in a video released by KNCB (the Royal Dutch Cricket Association).

"I think, yeah, it's sort of something Cookie [Ryan Cook, the head coach till June 2025] and I have been speaking about and I've sort of been speaking to a few different people about it, and this is sort of the time that feels right for me, I think.

"I feel like I've got so much more to offer as a player and obviously



that's my goal sort of going forward with all you boys.

"I think this is such a special group. And yeah, I think the world's our oyster and I'm really looking forward to what's to come. But yeah, I didn't want to sort of get that in the way of the series, but that's it from me and I can't thank you guys enough for the efforts you've put in for me and for this team over the last four years.

It's been, yeah, a massive honour for me and I love wearing the orange and can't wait for many more years to come."

Edwards was put in charge of the team after the first ODI during England's tour of the Netherlands in June 2022, replacing Pieter Seelaar. Netherlands won 24 of the 56 matches Edwards led in, losing 29.

The most famous of the wins

were over South Africa in Dharmsala and over Bangladesh in Kolkata at the 2023 ODI World Cup.

There were some positive results in T20Is too, where Edwards led in 50 of the 86 games he has played, like T20 World Cup 2022 wins over Zimbabwe first and then South Africa - South Africa were knocked out of the tournament with that result.

Edwards, the 29-year-old wicketkeeper-batter, has now made way for de Leede, the 26-year-old fast-bowling all-rounder who is arguably Netherlands' best player.

Netherlands are currently second on the CWC League 2 table, behind USA.

The top-four teams at the end of the tournament get into the World Cup qualifiers. Netherlands' final series of matches are at the end of the year against Oman and UAE. -Agencies

IN PICTURES



Highlight of 2026 Fencing World Championships in Hong Kong
Shen Chenpeng (R) of China competes with Jean-Philippe Patrice of France during the team men's sabre quarterfinal match between China and France at the 2026 Fencing World Championships in Hong Kong. — Xinhua



Kenya stages inaugural national Wushu competition
A contestant performs barehand routine during the first Kenya National Wushu Competition in Nairobi, Kenya. Kenya's inaugural national Wushu competition was held in Nairobi on Thursday, bringing together contestants from eight counties to showcase their skills in Chinese martial arts. — Xinhua



Female ranger teams in Kenya safeguard wildlife: An aerial drone photo taken on July 22, 2026 shows members of Team Lioness patrolling at Ole Nariika conservancy in Kajiado County, in Kenya. World Ranger Day is observed annually to commemorate rangers killed or injured in the line of duty and to celebrate the work rangers do to protect the world's natural and cultural heritage. — Xinhua



Exhibition on Dazu Rock Carvings opens in New York
People visit an exhibition on China's Dazu Rock Carvings in New York, the United States. The "Harmony of the East - World Heritage: Dazu Rock Carvings" exhibition jointly held by US Memor Museum and China's Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings kicked off at the museum in New York. — Xinhua

Summer Lights fireworks event held at English Bay in Vancouver, Canada
Fireworks light up the sky during the Summer Lights fireworks event at English Bay in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The one-night waterfront celebration featured a choreographed fireworks display over English Bay. — Xinhua

Poland marks 82nd anniversary of Warsaw Uprising
Veterans attend an event marking the 82nd anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in Warsaw, Poland. Poland commemorated the 82nd anniversary of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising on Friday in the capital. — Xinhua



Sunset view in Korcula, Croatia
This photo shows the scenery at sunset seen on the island of Korcula, Croatia. — Xinhua

ROUND-UP

Kia EV9 redefines electric luxury for families in Sultanate of Oman



Built upon Kia’s advanced Electric Global Modular Platform (E-GMP), this ground breaking series delivers an exceptional electric driving experience that blends zero-emission freedom with ultra-fast charging capabilities, making long cross-country trips and daily urban commutes easier than ever

MUSCAT: Marking a futuristic milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s automotive landscape, the all-electric Kia EV9 flagship SUV is officially transforming how families and enthusiasts approach sustainable luxury.

Built upon Kia’s advanced Electric Global Modular Platform (E-GMP), this ground breaking series

delivers an exceptional electric driving experience that blends zero-emission freedom with ultra-fast charging capabilities, making long cross-country trips and daily urban commutes easier than ever. The EV9 showcases a distinctive, bold appearance that transcends aesthetics, providing large families of up to seven members with the absolute liberty to do more while ensuring minimal environmental impact.

Crafted with a pioneering approach to sustainability, the EV9 seamlessly merges eco-conscious engineering with first-class luxury and performance. The expansive cabin features premium vegan leather and recycled PET materials, reflecting an uncompromised commitment to the environment. The interior is designed to make every journey feel like a surreal ex-

perience, offering smart space optimization such as extra storage in the front trunk, ventilated relaxation seats paired with second-row comfort seating, and a high-end Meridian premium sound system that delivers rich, clear acoustics to instantly uplift the cabin’s mood.

Deeply woven Connectivity and convenience are deeply woven into every aspect of the EV9 experience, keeping all seven occupants perfectly synchronized on the move. The high-tech layout features seamless smartphone integration via Apple Car Play and Android Auto, supported by an advanced Bluetooth voice recognition system.

To keep everyone’s devices powered effortlessly throughout the journey, the front centre console houses a dedicated wireless charg-

ing tray, while third-row passengers enjoy their own integrated cup holder tray equipped with dedicated USB ports.

Beyond its luxurious space, the EV9 introduces a new level of parking confidence through its standout Remote Smart Parking Assist (RSPA) technology.

This intelligent feature gives drivers the ability to autonomously park or exit tight spaces while standing entirely outside the vehicle, using only the smart key. Utilizing a precise network of ultrasonic sensors, radar, and cameras, the EV9 independently manages steering, acceleration, and braking. RSPA effectively eliminates the stress of navigating narrow parking slots where door opening is restricted, automatically stopping the SUV if any nearby obstacle or pedestrian is detected.

This autonomous framework is backed by a comprehensive suite of Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) technologies to guarantee the ultimate in occupant and pedestrian safety. The EV9 comes heavily equipped with Highway Driving Assist, which actively assists during highway cruising and issues real-time alerts during risky lane changes. This protective envelope is fully reinforced by Forward Collision-Avoidance Assist, Blind-Spot Collision-Avoidance Assist, Safe Exit Assist, and Rear Cross-Traffic Collision-Avoidance Assist, establishing the flagship Kia EV9 as a highly secure, reassuring, and future-proof companion for Oman’s roads.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the official distributor for Kia in Oman, ensures a rewarding ownership experience.

SPECIAL OFFER

Over 5,000 winners to receive 5% cashback on international spends using Bank Muscat Visa credit cards

MUSCAT: In line with its ongoing commitment to delivering exceptional value to its customers especially during travel and shopping seasons, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of a special offer for Visa credit cardholders, giving over 5,000 customers the chance to receive 5% cashback on their international spends made from 1 July through to 31 August 2026.

The offer covers all successful international transactions made through POS terminals and e-commerce platforms, with customers receiving 5% cashback on their eligible international

spend once they reach the minimum spend threshold assigned to their card type: Asalah Signature Visa Credit Card, Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Card and Bank Muscat Oman Air Visa Platinum Credit Cardholders are required to spend a minimum of OMR 750 internationally to receive cashback of up to OMR 60. Bank Muscat Visa Classic Credit Card and Visa Gold Credit Cardholders can receive cashback of up to OMR 20 on a minimum spend of OMR 250, while holders of the Private Banking Visa Infinite Credit Card and Bank Muscat Visa Infinite Credit Card can receive cashback of up to OMR 300 on a minimum interna-

tional spend of OMR 4,000.

The current offer applies exclusively to successful international transactions made through POS terminals and e-commerce platforms, and does not extend to local transactions, cash withdrawals, reversed transactions, fees and interest charges, government payments, or cryptocurrency transactions.

Bank Muscat has launched this exclusive offer to enable customers to enjoy a premium experience with its comprehensive suite of credit cards that offer a wide range of travel and shopping privileges, including the opportunity to earn and redeem reward points on flight

and hotel bookings, shopping and e-vouchers through the Bank Muscat Rewards program that is accessible via the Mobile Banking app.

Customers can apply for Bank Muscat credit cards through Mobile Banking or at their nearest branch, with the card delivered free of charge via courier service. For more information about the offer, customers may visit the Bank’s website.

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