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HH Sayyid Bilarab Honours Outstanding GED Students in Muscat

A3



CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS

'All eligible Indians entitled to passports for 10-year validity'

Times News Service

MUSCAT: All eligible Indian nationals are entitled to full validity, 10-year passports, irrespective of their occupation or status, Indian Ambassador to Oman H E Prashant Pise has said, effectively ending the earlier distinction under which some workers were issued shorter-validity passports.

In an exclusive interview with the Times of Oman, Pise said the Indian mission's current position was clear: Indian nationals who



TIMES OF OMAN EXCLUSIVE

meet the passport requirements should receive a full-term passport, regardless of whether they fall under the Emigration Check Required or Emigration Check Not Required category.

"All Indian nationals are eligible for full validity," he said, emphasising that passport validity should not be linked to a person's occupation. There are certain exceptions if they do not have valid documentation or if the police verification is not clear," Pise said, adding that short-term validity would be considered only in such cases.

The Ambassador explained that shorter-validity passports had previously been issued in certain cases, as a measure intended to protect vulnerable workers.

NATIONAL E-COMMERCE PLAN REACHES 86.7% COMPLETION

These initiatives form Oman's efforts to develop digital business environment



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), has reinforced its e-commerce ecosystem via the implementation of a comprehensive package of legislative, regulatory and technical initiatives.

These efforts increased the completion rate of the National E-Commerce Plan 2022-2027 to 86.7% by 2025, following the completion of 26 out of 30 initiatives.

The achievements form part of the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to develop the digital business environment, establish key enablers for the growth of e-commerce and enhance the competitiveness of the country's economy in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The integrated e-commerce ecosystem is built on updating legislation, advancing digital services, improving the efficiency of electronic payment systems, enhancing logistics services and raising awareness of e-commerce. These efforts provide a business environment that is better prepared to embrace digital transformation while supporting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs and investments linked to the digital economy. >A6

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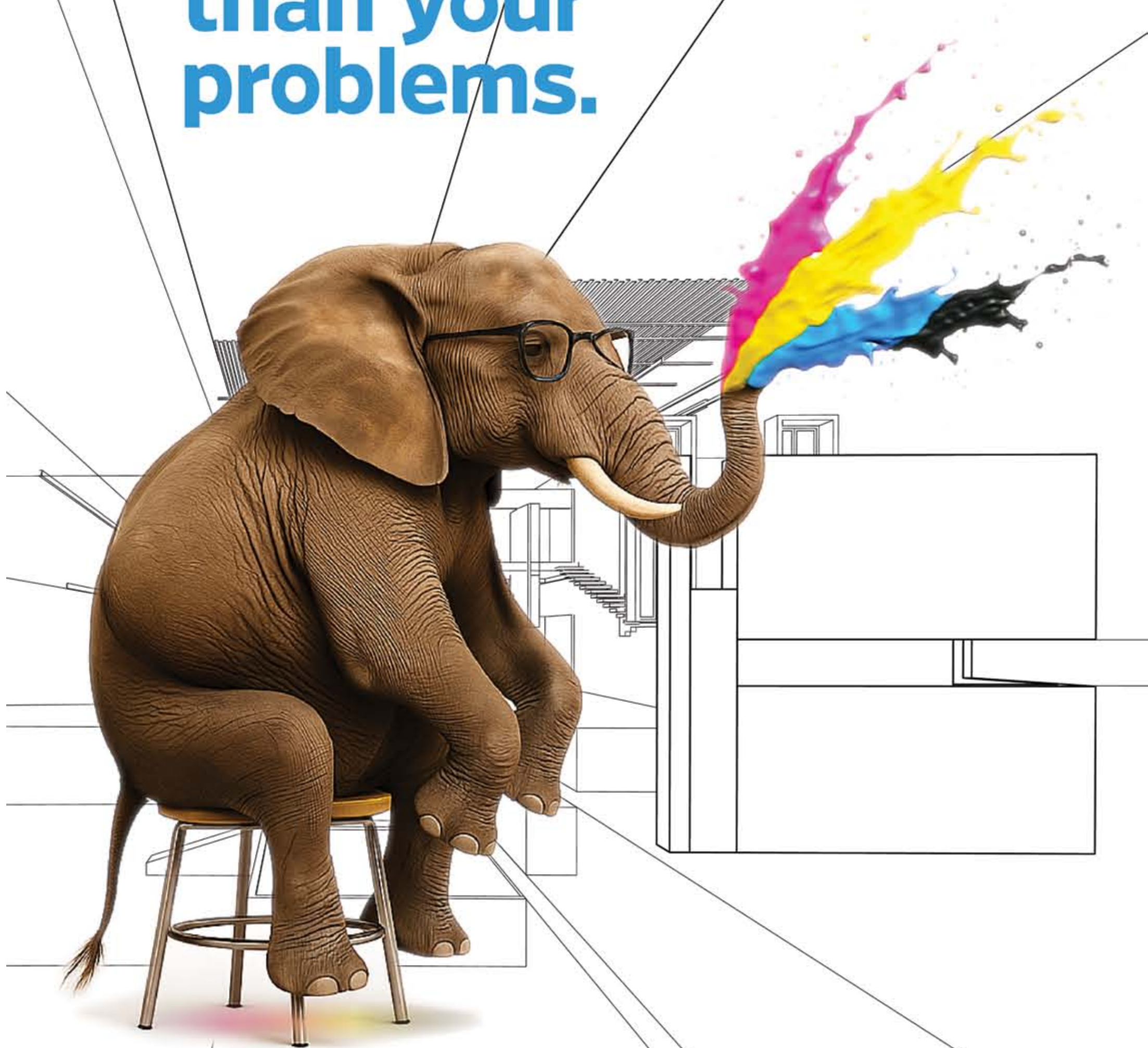








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COMMENTARY

Child Custody under Oman’s Personal Status Law: Explained

Oman’s Personal Status Law, issued under Royal Decree 32/97, establishes a legal framework for child custody, governing custodianship conditions, order of entitlement, duration, forfeiture, and visitation rights.

Speaking exclusively to the Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Chairman of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, explained that “custody is the preservation, upbringing, and care of a child in a manner that does not conflict with the guardian’s right of guardianship over the child. Every custodian must be of sound mind, an adult, trustworthy, capable of raising, maintaining, and caring for the ward, and free from serious communicable diseases.”



“The law further prescribes gender-specific conditions. A female custodian who is married to a man unrelated to the ward,



with whom she has consummated the marriage, loses her right to custody, unless the court determines otherwise in the ward’s

interest. Where she professes a different religion from the ward’s father, her custody is forfeited upon the ward completing the age of seven, unless the judge determines otherwise in the ward’s interest. A male custodian must have a woman fit for custodianship and must be a mahram to a female ward,” he noted.

“Custody is a joint parental duty during marriage; upon separation, entitlement passes first to the mother, then the father, then the maternal grandmother, followed by other relatives in a prescribed order.

Male ward custody continues until age of seven, and female ward custody until puberty, unless the court determines otherwise in the ward’s interest. The guardian, distinct from the

custodian, retains responsibility for the ward’s affairs, discipline, guidance, and education,” he said.

He added that “custody is forfeited if the general or gender-specific conditions prescribed by the law are breached, if the custodian settles in a country that makes it difficult for the guardian to carry out his duties, or if the right is left unclaimed for one year without excuse.

The new female custodian additionally loses custody by residing with a woman whose custody was previously forfeited for a reason other than physical disability. Custody is restored once the cause of forfeiture ceases.”

“The law guarantees the non-custodial parent the right to visit,

host, and accompany the child as determined by the judge,” he concluded.

(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).

Food Security Forum and Exhibition to support Oman Vision 2040 goals

The accompanying exhibition will be held at the Atin Plain from August 11 to 15, featuring around 100 exhibitors representing companies, institutions and projects working in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, food industries

Times News Service

SALALAH: The Food Security Forum and Exhibition 2026 will be held in the Wilayat of Salalah on Monday, August 10, as part of Oman’s efforts to strengthen food security, attract investment and



promote sustainable growth in the agricultural and food sectors.

Organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Dhofar Governorate, in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Dhofar and the Ministry of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources, the forum will be held under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki Al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The event aims to support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly economic diversification and sustainability,



while bringing together decision-makers, investors, entrepreneurs, specialists and representatives of public and private sector institutions.

The accompanying exhibition



will be held at the Atin Plain from August 11 to 15, featuring around 100 exhibitors representing companies, institutions and projects working in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, food industries, modern agricultural technologies, logistics, finance and investment.

The forum’s programme includes specialised working papers addressing food security indicators and achievements, usufruct laws, investment-support services through the “Tatweer” platform and investment opportunities under the “Invest in Oman” initiative.

Other sessions will focus on the development of Najd, financing solutions for agricultural projects, the proposed Najd Agricultural City and the role of modern tech-

nologies in sustainable food supply chains, transportation and food security.

The forum will focus on promoting investment across food security sectors, developing economic diversification enablers and increasing local content by attracting and localising quality projects based on innovation and modern agricultural and food technologies.

Naif bin Hamed Fadel, Chairman of the OCCI branch in Dhofar, said the event represents a strategic step towards strengthening public-private sector partnerships and enabling private-sector institutions to contribute to Oman’s economic diversification goals.

He stressed that achieving food sustainability requires integrated national efforts and an attractive investment environment capable of transforming Oman’s resources into productive, value-added projects.

The forum will also witness the signing of usufruct contracts in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to support agricultural and food investments and facilitate value-added projects.

The event will conclude with an open dialogue bringing together specialists and decision-makers to discuss key challenges and future opportunities in Oman’s food security sector.

DHOFAR GOVERNORATE



Summer camp for guides concludes

SALALAH: The 25th Summer Camp for Guides and Senior Guides was concluded on Thursday at the permanent scout camp in the plains of Jabal Ashur in Dhofar Governorate.

The camp was organised by the Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate General of Scouting, Guiding and Student Activities, under the theme “Our Future Lies in Our Values,” with the participation of more than 350 leaders and guides from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The camp, which spanned several days, aimed to refine the personal and physical skills of the guides, develop their leadership capabilities, stimulate innovation and teamwork, foster a spirit of adventure and challenge, and prepare them for active participation in community service.

The camp programme included training workshops, scientific and

touristic visits, and sporting and cultural activities comprising competitions and group games, in addition to organising the “National Day.. My Heritage is My Identity” event, which contributed to enriching the participants’ experiences and reinforcing the values of national identity and voluntary work.

The closing ceremony featured a speech delivered by the participants, a visit to the accompanying exhibition, and a visual presentation highlighting the camp’s key milestones, programs, and activities.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Dr. Intisar Abdullah Ambusaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Supportive Educational Programmes and patron of the event, honoured the participants as well as the supporting entities that contributed to the success of the camp’s activities.

— ONA

TRIBUTE

Oman participates in memorial service for climbers killed on Broad Peak

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman participated in a memorial ceremony held by the Consulate General of Nepal in New York to honor mountaineers who lost their lives while climbing Broad Peak in Pakistan.

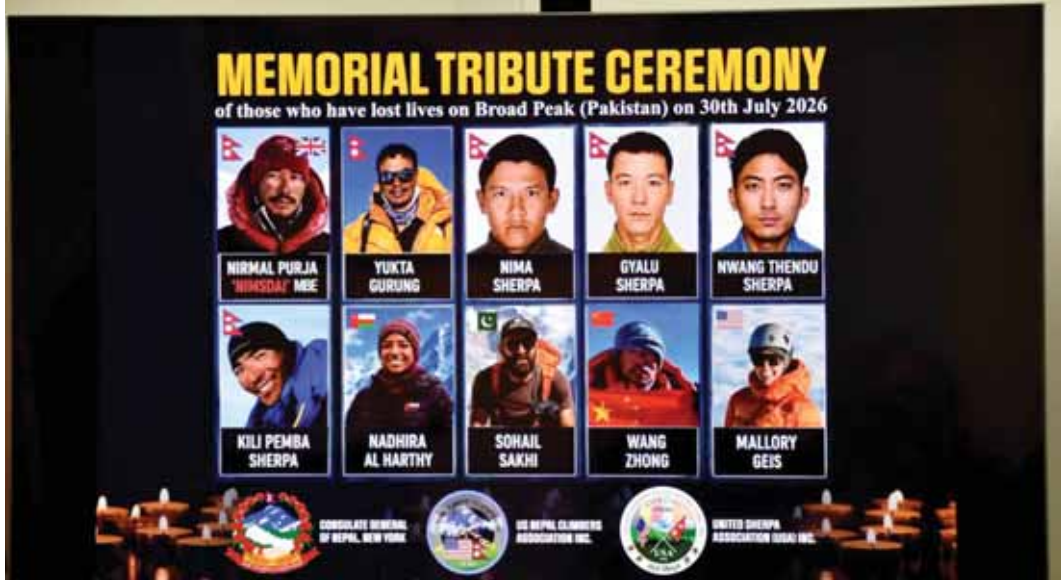
Speaking at the ceremony, Oman’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Omar bin Said Al Kathiri, expressed Oman’s appreciation to Nepal for organizing the humanitarian event, which reflected the values of friendship and solidarity.

He also thanked Pakistan for its cooperation and the efforts of its authorities and search-and-rescue teams in recovering and transporting the victims under extremely difficult conditions.

Ambassador Al Kathiri paid tribute to the late Omani climber Nadhira Al Harthy, describing her as a symbol of determination and ambition. Al Harthy became the first Omani woman to summit Mount Everest in 2019 and the first Arab woman to climb Ama Dablam in Nepal.

She also climbed several other major peaks and contributed to strengthening ties between Oman and Nepal through her leadership of the Omani-Nepalese Friendship Association and her role as a Goodwill Ambassador for the Muscat Free Walking Team.

The ambassador also remembered all the climbers who lost their lives, highlighting how their passion for mountaineering reflected values of mutual respect, trust and cooperation among peo-



ples, and extended condolences to their families and loved ones.

The Sultanate of Oman mourned the loss of pioneering Omani mountaineer, who was among ten people found dead after an avalanche struck a high-altitude climbing expedition on Broad Peak in northern Pakistan’s

Karakoram mountain range.

Nadhira is remembered for inspiring generations through her courage, resilience, and pioneering achievements in mountaineering.

According to the Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP), the avalanche hit an expedition team led by

renowned Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja on the 8,047-meter mountain.

The club reported that the team could not be reached following the incident and has been out of communication. The ten-person expedition comprises five Nepalese climbers, a Pakistani, an Omani, an American, a Chinese climber, and one other foreigner.

Purja, a 43-year-old former member of Britain’s Brigade of Gurkhas and the Royal Marines’ Special Boat Squadron, holds multiple world climbing records. Prior to the ascent, Purja shared on social media platform X that he was seeking to become the first person to climb all fourteen 8,000-meter “super peaks” twice without supplemental oxygen.

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Sayyid Bilarab honours outstanding GED students in Muscat Governorate

His Highness Sayyid Bilarab said, “This great achievement calls for pride and honour. The excellence achieved by our students is not merely an academic success; rather, it is a testament to sincere determination and an ambition that knows no impossibility

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, graced a ceremony held on Thursday to honour outstanding General Education Diploma (GED) students in Muscat Governorate for the 2025/2026 school year. The cer-



emony was organised by the Governorate of Muscat. In his address, HH Sayyid Bilarab said, “We celebrate an outstanding group of General Education Diploma graduates in the Muscat Governorate, and we celebrate the result of their efforts, determination, and persistence. Today, they are honoured in appreciation for the effort and dedication they have shown.” His Highness added, “This great

achievement calls for pride and honour. The excellence achieved by our students is not merely an academic success; rather, it is a testament to sincere determination and an ambition that knows no impossibility. Furthermore, success does not stop at this moment, but rather grants its achiever a greater responsibility toward themselves, their family, their community, and their nation. Congratulations to you on this

excellence and distinction.” He pointed out that science and knowledge are a light that illuminates paths, noting, “Carry the banner of knowledge with pride and proceed with confident steps toward the horizons of the future. Behind every such achievement stands a system that believed in science, made education a priority, and placed the human being at the center of development. This attention comes as an extension of the



wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who accords special care to education and human development, believing that investing in human capital is an investment whose impact extends to future generations and contributes to building the nation.” HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat stated, “On this occasion, my dear students, my message to you as you turn a page in your lives, is to invite you to be like a beacon overflowing with the light of knowledge, science, and good morals. Remain rooted in your authentic Omani values, standing firm like the mountains of Oman in a rapidly changing

world. Let your principles be a scale, and your minds insightful. Never forsake the noble morals, love for the homeland, and devotion to it upon which you were raised. Each one of you carries a dream, and the gathering of these dreams is what shapes the nation's future. Be the best representatives of Oman wherever the paths of life take you, make your knowledge beneficial, your contributions continuous, and your success an addition to this dear homeland.” Concluding his speech, HH Sayyid Bilarab expressed his thanks and appreciation to the esteemed parents and teachers, and to everyone who contributed to and supported instilling the love of learning and believed in the students' capabilities until they reached this moment of which we are all proud. “You have a large share in this achievement, and may Allah bless your efforts and endeavours.” This ceremony, held at W Muscat, comes in appreciation of the outstanding students' efforts during their educational journey, and in pride of their efforts and the excellence they achieved, which embodies their high capabilities and ambitions; considering youth as the fundamental pillar in the march of sustainable development, given the knowledge, science, and promising national energy they carry. — **ONA**

FIRST HALF OF 2026

Oman ranks third globally in Numbeo Quality of Life Index

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has achieved a new international milestone, advancing to third place globally in the Quality of Life Index for the first half of 2026, as issued by the Numbeo Index, while simultaneously maintaining its top position at both the Asian and Arab levels. This follows its fourth-place global ranking during the same period in 2025, marking further confirmation of the continued improvement in quality of life and the enhancement of the Sultanate of Oman's appeal as a destination for living, investment, and stability. This progress reflects the growing standing that the Sultanate of Oman has attained on the map of the most livable countries, owing to an integrated system combining security and stability, quality services, sustainable urban planning, and the provision of a balanced living environment that places human beings at the heart of the development process. Although many international indices base their assessments on economic performance or gross domestic product, the Quality of Life Index adopts a different perspective, measuring the daily quality of life of residents through a set of factors directly related to living details, such as safety levels, purchasing power, healthcare, cost of living, property price-to-income ratio, average daily commuting time, pollution levels, and climate suitability. Through these criteria, the Sultanate of Oman recorded advanced performance across a number of key areas, particularly in safety levels, purchasing power, a low property price-to-income ratio, relatively low pollution levels, and short average commuting times—factors that contributed to the Sultanate of

Oman attaining third place globally in this classification. This achievement is consistent with the approach adopted by the Sultanate of Oman in developing cities and urban centers through the preparation of comprehensive structural plans and the development of future cities aimed at building more efficient, sustainable, and higher-quality urban environments. This is achieved by providing integrated service communities, enhancing mobility, increasing green and open spaces, improving the quality of the urban environment, and raising the efficiency of infrastructure—all of which positively impact the daily lives of residents. The launch of the Greater Muscat Project represents a strategic milestone in reshaping the capital's urban landscape, through an integrated planning vision aimed at building a more connected, vibrant, and sustainable city, improving the efficiency of the transport and mobility network, bringing services and facilities closer to residential neighborhoods, and enhancing urban environmental quality, in line with global best practices in modern city planning. The Sultan Haitham City continues to make notable progress in its construction works, alongside the ongoing development of a range of future cities and urban projects, including A' Thuraya City, the Future Salalah City, Al Jabal Al Aali (High Mountain) Project and the Al Khuwair Downtown. These are part of an integrated urban vision aimed at building more sustainable and higher-quality cities through integrated services, enhanced mobility, increased green spaces and improved infrastructure efficiency. — **ONA**

DUQM SUMMER SERIES

Forum to focus on changing business world

Times News Service

DUQM: The 2026 Duqm Summer Series (DSS) centres on the people who will turn investment in Duqm into lasting economic value. Hosted by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm 23 - 25 August at the Crowne Plaza Duqm, the three-day event examines developments changing how companies operate and grow. Held over three evenings, DSS opens with Intelligent Machines examining how AI and robotics are changing today's workplace. The following evening, Leading Without a Playbook considers how executives make decisions when tariffs, geopolitical tensions and incomplete information leave little precedent. The Business of Culture closes the three-day series by examining how a company's culture shapes the customer experience and, in turn, how the business is remembered. Women made up 61% of graduates from higher education institutions in Oman in 2025. Many will enter the job market where AI is taking on work once handled by experienced teams and where skills are losing value faster than qualifications can be updated. They are also entering an economy creating new kinds of work. Oman's non-oil activities generated OMR29.1



billion (\$75.4 billion) in 2025, including OMR4 billion (\$10.4 billion) from manufacturing. Non-oil activity increased 5.9% in Q1 2026. Growth is widening career choices available to graduates, although it will also expose them to industries changing faster than many employers expected. Hanan Al Siyabi, Section Head, Tourism & Lifestyle at SEZAD said the consequences are reaching well beyond IT departments. “AI is changing who does the work and what employers value. Effects are being felt in recruitment and career progression. Women starting work today will face choices many established leaders didn't meet at the same stage of their careers. We want the DSS to be a place where those experiences are discussed

honestly and openly, including the occasions when there was no ready-made answer.” Worldwide spending on AI is forecast to hit \$2.5 trillion this year, up 44% on 2025. Much of that expenditure is going into infrastructure, although its impact will reach ordinary workplaces. Tasks once handled by teams can already be completed by one person using these systems. The resulting decisions will not be confined to headcount. Employers will need to decide which experience remains valuable and who carries responsibility when automated tools influence the outcome. Technology is only one source of pressure. Trade tariffs can alter the dynamics of an export market almost overnight while geopoliti-

cal tensions can interrupt supply chains and raise shipping costs. Executives still have to act before they know how long the disruption will last or whether a decision will look sensible six months later. The Business of Culture examines the role culture plays in how a company operates, not only how it presents itself. It shapes what customers receive and how they are treated. Marketing may attract the public's attention but the experience of dealing with the business is what people remember. The DSS speakers bring a wealth of experience from academia and business. Sultan Qaboos University and the Royal Academy of Management will take part, alongside Development Bank and Sohar International Bank. SalamAir and OQ8 are also represented, as are OPAZ and the Ministry of Economy. Founders working in technology and design complete the three-day line-up. SEZAD sees the development of Duqm's workforce as critical to its continued growth and success. Large scale investment is creating new opportunities. SEZAD also wants to ensure the people already contributing to Duqm can continue to grow with it. DSS participation is open to women from Duqm and elsewhere in Oman.

DHOFAR KHAREEF SEASON

100km endurance race held in Salalah

SALALAH: A 100-kilometre endurance race was held this evening on the beach of Khor Al-Dahariz in the Wilayat of Salalah as part of the activities of the Dhofar Khareef Season 2026. **25 riders** Organised by the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Dhofar and Dhofar Municipality, the race brought to-

gether 25 riders, who competed across four stages. Rider Hafeez bin Ahmed Muqbil secured first place, followed by Malik bin Kamel Qatan in second and Tamim bin Hamad Al-Maliki in third. At the conclusion of the event, prizes were presented to the top finishers, while supporting entities that contributed to the successful organisation of the race were also honoured. — **ONA**



FROM FRANKINCENSE TO FILM: HOW OMAN IS CAPTIVATING ITALY THIS SUMMER



From Milan to Palermo, an Italian cultural tour is bringing Oman's stories, heritage and historic connections with Europe to audiences across the country

RAHUL DAS
rahuldas@timesofoman.com

MUSCAT: This summer, the scent of Oman is travelling across Italy.

It is present in stories of ancient frankincense routes, in memories of encounters with Omani people, in a film that traces centuries-old links between Venice and the Arabian Peninsula, and now in a book that is taking audiences from Milan to Sicily on a journey of discovery.

At the heart of this cultural journey is *Avventurevolissimamente* (With Utmost Adventurousness), a new book by Italian authors, artists and cultural promoters Luca Moretti and Lucia Oliva.

Drawing on more than 25 years of international cultural work, the book is a collection of personal adventures, encounters and behind-the-scenes stories from their careers around the world – with Oman occupying a special place in their journey.

For Moretti and Oliva, Oman is more than a destination remembered from their travels. It is a second home, a place of cultural encounters, artistic inspiration and stories that continue to connect people across borders.

The book's foreword was written by Mr. Ioannis Maronitis, president of the European and North American Federation of UNESCO Clubs and Associations, and the events are being held under the federation's patronage.

From Milan with Oman at the heart

The tour opened in Milan on July 23, 2026 at the ADI Design Museum, bringing the authors face-to-face with an audience eager to hear about their experiences in the Sultanate.

Among the stories were those connected to Oman's famed frankincense and perfume heritage – a legacy that has linked the country to distant civilisations and trading centres for thousands of years.

The presentation also featured a screening of *The Faerie Tale of Venice and the Incense Trade Route*, a docu-drama exploring the real historic relationship between ancient Italian landmarks and the iconic incense trade, through a philosophical story enriched by fantasy.

The film was presented at the Venice Biennale of Arts in 2024 as part of the Omani Pavilion and has since received widespread appreciation.

The Milan stop carried another important Oman connection.

The ADI Museum has established a collaboration with the National Museum in Muscat and is currently hosting *One to a Million. Italian Design Stories*, an exhibition that will run until September 2026.

The city is also hosting an exhibition exploring the longstanding cultural relationship between Oman and Italy, curated by Jamal Al Moosawi, Secretary General of the National Museum.

Together, the exhibitions and the book tour are creating an unusual cultural dialogue – one in which Oman is being explored not simply through its landscapes and tourism appeal, but through de-



sign, history, art, trade and human encounters.

From a historic villa to a medieval library

After Milan, the tour moved to Sestri Levante, one of Italy's picturesque coastal destinations.

The presentation took place at

Villa L'Esedra di Santo Stefano, an elegant 18th-century baroque mansion, before a select audience that included prominent members of the local community and noble families.

The location itself carried a cinematic connection to Oman.

Several scenes from *The Faerie*



Tale of Venice and the Incense Trade Route were filmed at the villa, making the event a meeting point between Italian heritage and an Omani story that had already travelled across continents.

On July 31, the tour reached Gubbio, another setting steeped in history.

The authors presented their work at the Biblioteca Sperelliana, housed in a remarkable building dating back to the 10th century. The library's Sala del Refettorio hosts precious frescoes and an ancient book collection that has developed over four centuries.

Gubbio, with its medieval streets and deep cultural traditions, is also famously associated with St Francis of Assisi and the legend of the wolf.

In each location, the response has been enthusiastic, with audiences drawn to stories that offer a personal window into a country that many Italians may know through its landscapes and history but have yet to experience first-hand.



Oman through Italian eyes

What makes the project particularly interesting is its personal perspective.

Rather than presenting Oman through conventional travel narratives, Moretti and Oliva tell stories of people, places and unexpected encounters – the moments behind the performances, journeys and cultural projects that have shaped their careers.

Through those memories, Oman emerges as a country of hospitality and tradition, but also as a crossroads of cultures.

Its historic role in the incense trade provides the backdrop, but the human connections are at the centre of the story.

And that may explain why the subject has travelled so well across Italy.

From Alicudi to Palermo The journey is not over.

In August, the tour will move to Alicudi, a tiny Mediterranean island known for its UNESCO heritage status and its appeal to an international cultural community during the summer.

It is also a deeply personal destination for the authors, who have a summer home there – an artistic retreat perched on the rocks

and surrounded by wild nature overlooking the sea.

The tour will reach its high point in Palermo at Palazzo Branciforte, a prestigious cultural landmark dating back to the 17th century.

Oman's own history

The event is being organised by the Settimana delle Culture Foundation and will take place at a venue that houses a library of more than 40,000 books.

From the design halls of Milan to the medieval atmosphere of Gubbio, from a historic Ligurian villa to a Mediterranean island and finally Palermo, the journey has taken Oman into some of Italy's most distinctive cultural spaces.

It is, in many ways, a journey that mirrors Oman's own history.

For centuries, the Sultanate has stood at the crossroads of peoples, cultures and trade routes. This summer, through a book, a film and the memories of two Italian cultural travellers, those connections are being retold – not along an ancient caravan route, but across the cultural landscape of modern Italy.

And everywhere the story travels, Oman is part of the conversation.

FIRST HALF OF THIS YEAR

Sohar Industrial City signs 39 contracts worth over OMR 214mn

MUSCAT: Sohar Industrial City, part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), received approximately 49 investment applications during the first half of this year. It successfully signed 39 contracts, including 22 new contracts, 12 expansion contracts, 4 replacement contracts, and one renewal contract.

The total investment value of these contracts exceeds OMR214 million for projects covering a total area of over 1.1 million square metres.

Engineer Abdullah bin Ahmed Al-Mayasi, Director General of Sohar Industrial City, stated that the total cumulative investment in the industrial city currently exceeds OMR2.3 billion.

He added that the total leased area is 16,285,914 square metres out of a total developed area of 19,856,507 square metres. The total area of Sohar Industrial City (developed and undeveloped) exceeds 30.4 million square metres.

Al-Mayasi also noted that the total number of companies operating in the city has risen to 497, employing approximately 12,671 workers.

He added that among the most prominent projects signed during the first half of this year is the establishment of a ceramics factory, valued at OMR25 million. The project will be built on an area of 241,000 square metres and will include three production lines, each with a daily production capacity of 30,000 square metres, bringing the total daily production capacity to 90,000 square metres upon completion of all production lines. The factory will begin operations with an initial production capacity of 60,000 square metres per day.

The Director General of Sohar Industrial City explained that it is planned to allocate 25 percent of the factory's production to the local market, while 75 percent will be exported to the markets of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and



neighbouring countries.

He emphasised that the project will contribute to adding value to the national economy by providing between 500 and 600 job opportunities, including more than 150 for Omanis, in addition to transferring expertise and promoting industrial development.

Al-Mayasi pointed out that the renewable energy project currently under construction in Sohar Industrial City represents a significant strategic step towards enhancing the clean energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman. With a projected production capacity of 93 megawatts, the project is part

of a strategic partnership aimed at efficiently operating and managing the clean energy distribution network. This includes developing an integrated system for billing governance and providing energy services to investors in the industrial city, adhering to best international practices.

He explained that the project aims to deliver direct added value to investors by providing clean energy at a competitive cost and contributing to reduced electricity bills during solar power generation hours. It also ensures a continuous electricity supply and uninterrupted access to power



during off-peak hours.

Al-Mayasi noted that the project site, located in Phase 7 of Sohar Industrial City, has been carefully planned to ensure a comprehensive infrastructure that supports renewable energy generation and distribution solutions. The project is expected to have a tangible environmental impact on the Sultanate of Oman by contributing to the avoidance of significant annual carbon dioxide emissions and achieving natural gas savings. This will bolster Oman's efforts to reduce carbon emissions and achieve energy security.

The Director General of Sohar Industrial City added that the factory will enhance the competitiveness of factories operating in the city in global markets by supporting their commitment to environmental standards and international emissions reduction requirements. This, in turn, will positively impact export opportunities and sustainable industrial growth.

Madayn is currently working on several projects in Sohar Industrial City, most notably a consultancy study on rehabilitating the existing infrastructure and support services for phases 1-6, and the completion of the infrastructure project for phase 7, in addition to a package of strategic projects within the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026-2030).

— ONA

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Oman condemns attacks on ships in Strait of Hormuz

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has condemned the repeated attacks on vessels while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, which constitute a violation of international law and the sovereignty of territorial waters, and pose a threat to the safety of maritime navigation and the security and stability of the region.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, Oman affirmed that the ongoing negotiations regarding arrangements related to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz are proceeding in a posi-



itive and constructive atmosphere. It emphasised the importance of avoiding any actions that could impact these negotiations and the progress achieved, which takes into account the interests of all parties. — ONA



PAKISTAN SCHOOL SALALAH
ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS

ANNUAL CONTRACT FOR THE YEAR 2026–2027

Pakistan School Salalah invites experienced and eligible contractors to participate in the tendering process for the following service:

Tender No.	Service Description	Tender Collection Period	Submission Deadline
2026/001	Supply & Installation of Fire Safety System	Sunday, 09 August to Thursday, 13 August 2026 (09:00 AM – 01:00 PM, working days only)	Monday, 17 August 2026, by 01:00 PM

Eligibility Criteria:

- Interested contractors must have a minimum of 3 years of relevant experience in similar services, preferably within Oman.

Tender Collection:
Tender documents can be collected from the Admin Office upon payment of **OMR 20.000 (non-refundable)** through POS payment only.

Submission Requirements:

- Tender documents must be submitted in original form, fully completed, and accompanied by all relevant supporting documents.
- Non-compliant submissions will be disqualified.
- Sealed envelopes must clearly state the Tender Number, Service Name, Company Name, and Point of Contact (Name & Number).
- Envelopes must be dropped in the **Tender Box** at the Admin Office **before or by the deadline** mentioned above.

Address for Submission: Admin Office
Pakistan School Salalah - P.O. Box 935, P.C. 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 23235640, For queries: +968 95424274
Email: muhammadjunaidd@pakistanschool.edu.om

Note: Pakistan School Salalah reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason and is not bound to accept the lowest bid.

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Wins Best Brand in Customer Experience Award in Fuel Marketing Category



Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing was felicitated with the 'Times of Oman Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Award in Fuel Marketing 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.

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to customer experience by delivering high-quality fuel products, reliable energy solutions, and convenient retail services across its extensive network of service stations in Oman. With a focus on operational excellence, innovation, and customer convenience, the company continues to meet the evolving mobility and energy needs of individuals, businesses, and industries throughout the Sultanate.

With a customer-centric approach built around acces-

sibility, quality, and service excellence, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing offers a seamless experience through modern service stations, value-added retail offerings, lubricants, aviation fuel, commercial fuel solutions, and responsive customer support. Its commitment to safety, efficiency, and continuous improvement has earned the trust and loyalty of customers across the country.

By continuously investing in infrastructure, digital innovation, sustainable energy initiatives, and enhanced customer services, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing continues to set benchmarks in customer experience within the fuel marketing sector. Its dedication to delivering reliable products, exceptional service, and operational excellence reinforces its position as one of Oman's leading energy and fuel marketing companies.

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

Co-located with:

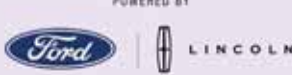


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meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The winners are selected based on an extensive consumer survey conducted by the Times of Oman.

Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG (Al Madina Takaful) Wins Best General Takaful Provider in the Middle East Region 2026 by Global Banking & Finance Review London

Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG has been honoured with the prestigious Best General Takaful Provider in the Middle East Region 2026 award by Global Banking & Finance

Review, recognising the company's outstanding contribution to the development and delivery of Shariah-compliant insurance solutions to its policyholders. Global Banking & Finance Review officially presented Al Madina Takaful with its award at a dedicated event held at the London Stock Exchange, UK. The Global Banking team conducted an exclusive interview with the Executive Management team of Al Madina at the state-of-the-art London Stock Exchange Studio. The high-level session explored the key milestones behind Al Madina Takaful's rise to regional prominence, its rich growth history, and its forward-looking strategic objectives in the Takaful sector. Full interview session is available on official social media channels of both Al Madina Takaful and Global Banking and Finance Review. This award highlights its continued commitment to innovation, customer-centric services, and operational excellence within the Takaful industry. Over the years, Al Madina Insurance has strengthened its position as a trusted provider of Shariah-compliant insurance products by offering a comprehensive range of Takaful solutions,



including Motor, Property, Engineering, liability, Energy, Aviation, Marine, General Accident, Life and Medical class of Insurance. Varan Sash, CEO & Editor-in-Chief of Global Banking & Finance Review, commented: "We are pleased to recognise Al Madina Insurance Company SAOG with the award for Best General Takaful Provider Middle East 2026. The company has demonstrated a strong commitment to delivering high-quality, Shariah-compliant insurance solutions while maintaining a clear focus on innovation, customer service, and operational excellence. Its continued growth and dedication to ethical financial practices have positioned it as a trusted provider within the region's Takaful landscape." Commenting on the achievement, Mr. Usama Al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer of Al Madina Takaful, said: "We are honoured to receive the Best General Takaful Provider Middle East 2026 award from Global Banking & Finance Review". This achievement reinforces our commitment to delivering innovative, customer-focused and Sharia-compliant insurance solutions that meet the evolving needs of our policyholders. As we

look ahead, we remain focused on creating sustainable value for our policyholders, shareholders and all our stakeholders." Mr. Shakaib Mahmood, Deputy CEO, added: "This award is a huge achievement, not in the country, but in the entire Middle East Region and is a testament to the collective efforts of our Board, management and employees. At Al Madina Takaful, we believe lasting trust is built through transparency, disciplined underwriting and an empathetic approach to claims. These principles remain at the heart of how we serve our customers and conduct our business." Mr. Aneesh Varghese, General Manager and Head of Insurance Operations, said: "We are profoundly grateful to accept this prestigious accolade at the historic London Stock Exchange. This prestigious recognition is a testament to our team's unwavering dedication to innovation, customer trust, and financial excellence. It validates our commitment to set new benchmarks in the regional insurance sector and inspires us to continue delivering our commitment to all our stakeholders." With this latest accolade, Al Madina Takaful further reinforces its reputation as a leading Takaful provider in the Middle East Region, continuing to drive industry standards while delivering sustainable and responsible insurance solutions to its policyholders.



AL JAZEIRA SERVICES CO. SAOG

P.O. Box 2865, Ruwi, P.C 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: 24706499, Fax: 24703653

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Al Jazeera Services Co. SAOG ("the Company"), I am pleased to present the unaudited financial statements for the half year ended on 30 June 2026.

Profits and assets
The revenue from catering and allied services business for the half year ended on 30 June 2026 was up by 21% to **₹6,669,201** compared to revenue of **₹5,526,864** for the corresponding half year in 2025. The operating loss for the period was **₹97,248** compared to operating profit of **₹334,968** for the same period in 2025 due to competitive pressure and associated impact of geopolitical situation in the region.

The net gains from investments for the period was 418,196 against loss of **₹121,081** for the corresponding period in 2025.

The share of profit from associate company, Al Anwar Ceramics Tiles Co. SAOG for the half year ended on 30 June 2026 was **₹190,753** compared to profit of **₹195,925** for the half year ended on 30 June 2025. During the period, the company has reduced its shareholding in associate company by 8.36% to 28.63% and realized profit of **₹1,010,673**.

The net profit after tax for the half year ended on 30 June 2026 was **₹1,454,412** up by 159% compared to profit of **₹562,455** for the half year ended on 30 June 2025.

The shareholders' equity as on 30 June 2026 was **₹15,098,539** against **₹14,822,575** as on 30 June 2025. The net assets per share as on 30 June 2026 was up by 2% to 193 baisa as against 190 baisa as on 30 June 2025.

Future outlook
We remain focused on our core business of catering and allied services and our outlook for the future remains stable.

I am pleased to report that your company has adhered to all the applicable regulations covering corporate governance in Sultanate of Oman.

Acknowledgements
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I express our sincere gratitude to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik** for his visionary leadership and wise guidance, Oman continues its steadfast march towards sustainable economic growth and social development. We also extend our sincere thanks to our Customers, Shareholders, Muscat Stock Exchange and Capital Market Authority for their continued support. I would also like to thank the management and staff for their commitment and hard work.

Abdulredha Mustafa Sultan
Deputy Chairman

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (UNAUDITED)
AS AT 30 JUNE 2026

	(Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	Group 30 June 2026	Parent Company 30 June 2026	Group 30 June 2025	Parent Company 30 June 2025
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Furniture and equipment	39,332	2,366	55,716	4,040
Goodwill	90,000	—	90,000	—
Investments in subsidiaries	—	320,444	—	320,444
Investments in associates	8,463,858	8,463,858	10,886,625	10,886,625
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	9,897	9,897	9,897	9,897
Deferred tax asset	131,160	102,197	178,791	158,853
Total non-current assets	8,734,246	8,898,761	11,221,029	11,379,859
Current assets				
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,253,632	1,253,632	2,066,642	2,066,642
Inventories	471,667	—	373,493	—
Trade receivable and other financial assets	5,387,978	158,065	4,502,997	145,377
Due from related parties	4,063	2,049,462	3,691	1,835,989
Cash and bank balances	3,083,107	2,777,065	563,509	78,918
Total current assets	10,200,447	6,238,224	7,510,332	4,126,926
Total assets	18,934,693	15,136,985	18,731,361	15,506,785
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Shareholders' capital and reserves				
Share capital	7,820,202	7,820,202	7,820,202	7,820,202
Legal reserve	2,635,348	2,606,734	2,635,348	2,606,734
Other reserves	49,387	49,387	49,387	49,387
Retained earnings	4,707,726	4,548,185	4,530,357	4,371,509
Investment fair value reserve	(114,124)	(114,124)	(212,719)	(212,719)
Total shareholders' capital and reserve	15,098,539	14,910,384	14,822,575	14,635,113
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' terminal benefits	616,811	58,097	536,194	55,037
Total non-current liabilities	616,811	58,097	536,194	55,037
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	2,722,136	16,772	2,068,753	14,997
Due to related parties	454,182	130,845	556,646	129,583
Dividend payable	—	—	651,188	651,188
Provision for Taxation	43,026	20,887	96,025	20,887
Total current liabilities	3,219,343	168,504	3,372,592	816,635
Total liabilities	3,836,154	226,601	3,908,786	871,672
Total Shareholders' capital and reserves and liabilities	18,934,693	15,136,985	18,731,361	15,506,785
Net assets per share	0.193	0.191	0.190	0.187

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR SIX MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	(Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	Group 31 March 2026	Parent Company 31 March 2026	Group 31 March 2025	Parent Company 31 March 2025
Revenue from contract with customers	6,669,201	--	5,526,864	--
Cost of providing services	(6,064,170)	--	(4,592,438)	--
Gross profit	605,031	--	934,426	--
Other income	2,685	--	3,478	--
	607,716	--	937,904	--
Expenses				
Employees' salaries and other costs	(265,861)	(90,982)	(282,858)	(91,566)
General and administrative expenses	(422,078)	(37,737)	(293,941)	(29,375)
Depreciation	(17,025)	(1,219)	(26,137)	(1,202)
	(704,964)	(129,938)	(602,936)	(122,143)
Profit/(loss) from operations	(97,248)	(129,938)	334,968	(122,143)
Net Gain from Investments	418,196	418,196	121,081	121,081
Net realized gain on sale of 8.36% shareholding in associate	1,010,673	1,010,673	--	--
Share of profit from investment in an associates	190,753	190,753	195,925	195,925
Dividend from a subsidiary	--	22,446	--	383,196
Finance costs	(13,363)	(7,220)	(17,845)	(16,948)
Profit before tax	1,509,011	1,504,910	634,129	561,111
Income tax expenses	(54,599)	(50,693)	(71,674)	(2,460)
Net profit after tax	1,454,412	1,454,217	562,455	558,651
Other comprehensive income				
Share of fair value reserve in an associate	29,634	29,634	(7,590)	(7,590)
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to the parent co.	1,484,046	1,483,851	554,865	551,061
Basic earnings per share	0.019	0.019	0.007	0.007

AL DAKHILIYAH
Joint inspection

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Department in Al Dakhiliyah, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has identified violations at a fuel station during a joint inspection campaign aimed at ensuring compliance with approved standards and regulations.

DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS

National E-Commerce Plan

< FROM A1 Implementation of the National E-Commerce Plan accelerated during H2 2025 with the completion of four key initiatives. These included awareness campaigns promoting the use of electronic payment methods, approval of the review of electronic payment transaction fees, implementation of e-commerce awareness programmes and the integration of e-commerce concepts into school curricula and educational programmes.

As a result, the count of completed initiatives increased from 22 in mid-2025 to 26 by the end of the year.

The Ministry continued to strengthen the legislative framework governing e-commerce, building on the Governance Regulation for Electronic Commerce issued under Ministerial Decision No. 499/2023.

The regulation governs the practice of e-commerce, safeguards the rights of consumers and merchants, enhances the reliability of electronic transactions and provides a regulatory environment that supports the expansion of SMEs in digital commercial activities.

In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the Ministry also completed the review and approval of fees for electronic payment systems and services, alongside the implementation of programmes to promote the use

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of electronic payment methods. These measures support the efficiency of digital transactions and provide more suitable payment solutions for e-commerce activities.

The Ministry's efforts also extended to implementing awareness programmes across various media platforms and incorporating e-commerce concepts into school curricula and educational programmes. These initiatives support the development of national capabilities, raise awareness of digital transactions, and enhance the readiness of the national workforce to meet the requirements of the digital economy.

Nasra Sultan Al Habsi, Director General of Commerce at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that the National E-Commerce Plan serves as a strategic roadmap to strengthen Oman's capabilities in e-commerce, enhance its competitiveness at both the regional and international levels and support the growth of e-commerce by addressing supply and demand challenges while raising awareness among businesses and consumers.

She added that 2025 has seen significant progress in implementing the plan, with the count of completed initiatives increasing to 26 out of 30, affirming that the ministry will continue implementing the remaining initiatives

in cooperation with government entities, in line with the approved timelines through to 2027.

She Al Habsi explained that the current phase focuses on completing the transformational and technical initiatives, including the Makin National Digital Skills Programme, the National Addressing System and the electronic Know Your Customer (eKYC) system, alongside other initiatives aimed at completing the regulatory and technical enablers supporting the e-commerce ecosystem.

She said that the count of licensed e-commerce activities has reached 19,260, while the count of verified online stores on the Maroof Oman platform stood at 412 during the period from February 2024 to 1 August 2026.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion continues to implement the remaining phase of the National E-Commerce Plan, in cooperation with government entities, to complete the development of an integrated national ecosystem built on modern legislation, advanced digital, financial and logistics services and qualified national talent. These efforts aims at strengthening the business environment, supporting the growth of the digital economy and enhancing Oman's regional and international competitiveness in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — **DNA**

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US passes bill imposing 100% tariffs on purchase of Russian oil and gas

The US Senate passed a sanctions bill that could result in tariffs on India as a major consumer of Russian oil.



NEW YORK: The US Senate has passed a bill that would allow the Trump administration to impose tariffs of up to 100% on goods from countries that purchase Russian oil and gas, including India and China.

The bill, according to US lawmakers, is aimed at curtailing Russia's funding for its war in Ukraine.

The Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 was passed with an overwhelming vote of 86-11.

Why is the bill troublesome for India?

India is among the world's top importers of Russian oil and gas, and its purchase of discounted Russian crudes has gone up since the Russia-Ukraine war began in 2022.

With the conflict in the Middle East disrupting energy markets, Russian crude has become an important alternative source for Indian refiners.

If 100% tariffs are imposed on Indian goods exported to the US, it will make them significantly more expensive, which could force US importers to look for alternative suppliers.

The bill does not automatically impose tariffs, but rather allows US President Donald Trump the discretion to impose them, with the implementation depending on the final law and subsequent executive decisions.

India needs to start de-risking from US: Foreign affairs experts

Foreign Affairs experts have suggested that India begin strategic de-risking from the United States, asserting that mounting economic tensions in the wake of the US Senate passing the Russia sanctions bill could signal a permanent shift in bilateral relations rather than a temporary hurdle. Experts also criticised the legislation as a stark example of the extraterritorial application of US laws.

Foreign affairs expert Sushant Sareen noted that while Donald Trump previously imposed a 25%

However, Sareen questioned whether Washington would apply such severe punitive measures universally, specifically asking, "Will the Americans impose the same law on China of a 100% tariff?" He added, "And chances are that they will not because the Chinese will retaliate..."

Emphasising the long-term implications for New Delhi, Sareen urged policymakers to abandon the mindset that current friction is fleeting.

"I think India needs to get over that sense that this is a temporary phenomenon, it's a temporary kind of a problem which has come between India and the United States," he said. "I think this is signalling a much more permanent kind of a breach."

While clarifying that economic ties would not vanish entirely, Sareen warned that implementing aggressive measures like a 100% tariff would effectively mean "the economic relationship does not exist anymore."

Consequently, he concluded that India must adapt its foreign policy framework: "The question is, what does India do about it? I think just as India has thought about de-risking itself from China, I think India now needs to start moving towards de-risking from the United States as well. Because very clearly, the

US under Trump, and maybe even after Trump, will remain a hostile power..."

Former diplomat Mahesh Sachdev criticised the legislation as a stark example of the extraterritorial application of US laws, arguing that Washington is exceeding its authority by attempting to penalise third-party nations.

"This bill is a clear example of extraterritoriality of US laws, which has been lately evident in multiple ways," Sachdev said. "It is clearly beyond the United States' remit to impose such duties on a second country and a third country. It is a clear violation of rule-based international trade order and could even vitiate the energy markets worldwide."

Sachdev highlighted the potential shockwaves for major energy consumers, particularly China and India. He warned that forcing these nations off Russian and Iranian energy would distort global supply chains.

"If these countries are forced to stop buying oil from Russia and resort to open market purchases, it will cause a great disruption in the market," Sachdev explained. "While crude from Iran and Russia would be cheaper because there are no buyers, the rest of the world's crude would rise in prices because there are too many buyers." -ANI

CRITICISED THE RULING

Trump to challenge court ruling blocking White House ballroom construction

WASHINGTON DC: US President Donald Trump described a federal appeals court ruling blocking the construction of a new White House ballroom as a "National Security Threat" and a "National disgrace", saying his administration would immediately challenge the decision before the US Supreme Court.

In a post on Truth Social on Friday, Trump criticised the ruling delivered by a divided federal appeals court, which held that construction of the proposed ballroom requires congressional approval.

"Two Judges, one appointed by Barack Hussein Obama, the other by Sleepy Joe Biden, said in a ruling on the desperately needed SECURE Ballroom/Military Complex, including a major DronePort on the roof, that 'Each President is a temporary tenant... of the White House.' We are not tenants... we are PRESIDENTS, elected by the people of the United States of America, and have many rights, including the right to fix, renovate, secure, protect, and beautify the White House grounds," Trump wrote.



Describing the ruling as a threat to national security, he added, "This decision, made after much of the work has been done and paid for, is a National Security Threat at the highest level. It is also a National Disgrace."

According to CNN, a divided US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled 2-1 that

the Trump administration could not proceed with the massive ballroom project without congressional approval.

"Whether or not a massive ballroom should be constructed is for Congress to decide and is not a matter for Executive self-help," the appeals court said, according to CNN.

The court stayed implementation of its ruling for two weeks, giving Trump time to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Trump confirmed that his administration would challenge the ruling.

"We will be immediately appealing to the United States Supreme Court," he wrote on Truth Social, calling on the nation's highest court to overturn the decision "in its entirety."

According to CNN, the majority held that Congress had not granted the Executive Branch unrestricted authority to redesign and reconstruct the White House. Judges Patricia Millett and Brad Garcia formed the majority, while Judge Naomi Rao dissented.

The case stems from Trump's decision to replace the East Wing with an approximately 89,000-square-foot ballroom. According to CNN, the appeals court ruled that while work on the underground security bunker may continue, above-ground ballroom construction cannot proceed without congressional authorisation. -ANI

22 OTHERS INJURED

Thailand school shooting death toll mounts to 8

BANGKOK : The death toll in the school shooting at Debsirin Nonthaburi School in Thailand's Nonthaburi province rose to eight on Friday with 22 others injured, while the grandparents of the suspected teenage shooter were later found dead at their residence.

According to the Bangkok Post, the suspected shooter, a Grade 8 student at the school, was found dead inside the campus after the attack. Authorities later searched the suspect's home in Bang Bua Thong district and discovered the bodies of the teenager's 73-year-old grandfather and 74-year-old grandmother, both with fatal gunshot wounds to the head.

Investigators believe the grandparents were killed before the school shooting, though the exact sequence of events remains under investigation.

According to Thailand's Public Health Minister Pattana Promphat, the eight fatalities include five teachers, the suspected shooter and the two grandparents.

Twenty-two people sustained injuries, including nine who were seriously hurt and taken to hospitals for treatment, the Bangkok Post reported.

Police said the teenager entered the school armed with a 9mm handgun believed to belong to the grandfather. Authorities recovered the firearm along with additional ammunition from the scene. Officials said the suspected shooter had barricaded himself inside a school building before being found dead from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, according to the Bangkok Post.

Videos verified by CNN showed terrified students taking cover beneath classroom desks as gunshots echoed through the school, while other footage captured students being evacuated by school staff.

One student told CNN that classmates quickly barricaded their classroom by pushing desks and chairs against the door before switching off the lights and waiting for help. -ANI

BORDER MEASURES

Spain sets up border controls on travellers from Italy

BARCELONA: Spain's government on Friday moved to impose reciprocal entry checks on people travelling from Italy. The Spanish government had warned that it would do so unless Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government lifted the border measures it has implemented against Spain.

Italy's right-wing government announced the checks at the height of the social media panic as tens of thousands of people gained entry to the Spanish exclave of Ceuta bordering Morocco last week.

The checks are essentially symbolic, given that Ceuta is not on the European mainland and Italy and Spain do not share a land border, meaning that the vast majority of people potentially affected are tourists on planes.

Nevertheless, the issue has turned into a point of dispute between two governments of different ideological persuasions with contrasting messaging priorities on migration policy.

The border controls on Italy will go into effect from midnight on Saturday until September 7, the Spanish government said. Border agents will check passport, nationality and visas for Italian passengers and visitors from other countries arriving from Italy.



Spain had called Italy's decision to impose checks on people arriving from Spain "unjustified, contrary to the interests of the European Union and discriminatory against the Spanish population."

Madrid said there was no real risk of people who overwhelmed Ceuta's border controls reaching the European mainland, let alone Italy. It pointed to the vast majority of the estimated 72,000 people returning to Morocco within days. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez also drew attention to the higher numbers of irregular migrants

reaching Italian than Spanish territory in recent years.

"If [Italy] fails to [remove the entry checks] before Sunday, August 9, Spain will be forced to adopt proportionate measures to protect the interests and dignity of its citizens," the government said.

Italy replied later Friday that it would not accept "ultimatums or impositions" from Madrid, and that it would maintain the suspension of Schengen rules for non-EU nationals arriving from Spain until at least August 15.

Despite Spain's objections, an

array of European countries, including Germany, and the European Commission all made comments about the importance of border security to the open-border Schengen Zone amid the public uproar. Italy was among comparatively few to go so far as to frame the issue as "suspending" Spain's Schengen status, however.

What do we know about Italy's checks on travellers from Spain?

Details on precisely what checks, if any, Italy has actually implement-

ed over the past week have been thin on the ground.

Migration analyst Gerald Knaus told DW earlier this week that the move was "pure populism" and a "completely bizarre" measure.

"They don't have a border, so it's only for a few flights," Knaus said. "It makes no sense in the high tourist season. And as Giorgia Meloni indicated, it shouldn't inconvenience travelers."

Knaus said the decision could only be understood in the context of domestic political appearances, not foreign policy realities.

"I think to understand it, you must understand that on [Meloni's] right, there is a radical right party in Italy that puts pressure on her. And so politicians everywhere in Europe, when they see these images which create fear, are looking for something to say — something to do that makes them look tough."

Meloni and Sanchez: A clash of styles on migration

At least in terms of their stated positions and approaches, Italy and Spain have quite different stances on the issue of migration.

Meloni came to power in 2022 in Italy, after several years of much higher irregular migration rates and asylum applications

caused in large part by the wars in Syria and Ukraine.

She promised a tougher line on migration into one of the most common landing points in southern Europe.

Sanchez, meanwhile, has championed a more pro-migration stance during his two terms in office.

He argues that Spain's economy needs migration and offered an amnesty and temporary residency permit process earlier this year to irregular migrants already in the country. Sanchez said it was better to grant residency and start collecting taxes than to keep people out of the formal labor market.

Migration expert Knaus, however, warned against overstating the practical differences between the two countries, saying Meloni faced similar economic requirements and was actually pursuing comparable policies — only with much less public fanfare.

"Italy is doing something very similar. Hundreds of thousands of people are brought in or are already in the country and are regularised for the Italian labour market under Giorgia Meloni," Knaus said. "And 1.6 million people were regularized under various Italian governments in the last 20 years." -DW

SPORTS

Oman head coach Kulkarni eyes ‘checklist’ series against Goa side

Vinayak Shukla-led national cricket team gears up for two upcoming major international challenges



MUSCAT: Oman head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni believes the five-match white-ball series against the visiting India's Goa Ranji Trophy squad will provide the perfect platform to assess his players and fine-tune combinations ahead of two major international assignments. The Goa state team will arrive in Oman for a five-match tour from August 10 to 17, featuring two T20 matches and three 50-over contests against the Oman national team. The series will serve as an important preparation phase for Oman ahead of the ACC Premier Cup 2026 in August-September in Malaysia and the remaining two legs of the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2, beginning with a tri-series at home in October and concluding with a tri-series in the UAE in December.

Describing the series as a vital “checklist” and exposure opportunity, Kulkarni said the matches would help the team management identify the players who fit into Oman's plans for the upcoming challenges. “This is the checklist and exposure series for us, so we will try to check the players whom we're looking for,” Kulkarni said. “This will help us build the team for the upcoming ACC Premier Cup and the remaining two League 2 series. Goa is a good team and did well in white-ball cricket in India. They have quite a few experienced players and I'm sure it will be a great series.” The series will also mark the first major assignment for Vinayak Shukla as Oman captain after

succeeding long-serving skipper Jatinder Singh, who continues to remain an important part of the national setup. Shukla's leadership will be closely watched as Oman look to build momentum before resuming their World Cup qualification campaign and competing for honours in the ACC Premier Cup. The inclusion of both T20 and 50-over matches in the tour will allow Oman to test their squad depth across formats. Oman, currently fourth in the eight-nation ICC Cricket World Cup League 2, need to finish among the top four to advance to the final round qualifier of the 2027 ODI World Cup. Kulkarni's men have 31 points from 28 games and have eight more

games to play. USA top the table with 43 points (32 games) and are followed by Scotland (39 pts from 33 games) and the Netherlands (38 from 32 games). Namibia are fifth (28 from 31 games) and are followed by Canada (25 from 31 games), Nepal (24 from 32 games) and the UAE (16 from 26 games). The series against Oman will also provide valuable match practice for the visitors ahead of the 2026-27 Indian domestic season in October. This will be Goa's first overseas exposure tour in 14 years, with their previous international trip coming in 2012 when the senior men's team travelled to South Africa. Former India all-rounder Dinesh Mongia will guide Goa as

head coach. He brings considerable international experience to the role, having represented India in 57 ODIs and was part of the Indian squad that reached the final of the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup. He had earlier coached Goa during the 2024-25 season, when the side topped the Plate Division and secured promotion to the Elite Group. The five matches will be played at Oman Cricket Academy, with all games streamed live on the Oman Cricket YouTube channel. **Series schedule:** **T20 matches: August 10 and 11: (6.30pm start).** **50-over matches (2.30pm start): August 13, 15, 17.** **Oman T20 squad:** Vinayak Shukla (captain), Jatinder Singh, Hassnain

Wahab, Hammad Mirza, Wasim Ali (vice-captain), Jiten Ramanandi, Zikria Islam, Karan Sonawale, Shakeel Ahmad, Nadeem Khan, Shah Faisal, Hassnain Ali Shah, Muzahir Raza, Sanju Sajeev, Siddharth **Oman 50-over squad:** Shukla (captain/wicketkeeper), Jatinder, Wahab, Mirza, Ramanandi, Wasim, Shakeel, Nadeem, Muhammed Imran, Shah Faisal, Hassnain Ali Shah, Siddharth, Jay Odedara, Raza, Sajeev, Saishiv Narayan, Aryan Bisht, Mohammed Eisa, Samay Shrivastava, Jeet Shah. **Goa squad:** Manthan Khutkar, Darshan Misal, Mohit Redkar, Deepraj Gaonkar, Heramb Parab, Vikash, Chigurupati Venkata, Abhinav Tejrana, Snehal Kauthankar, Yash Kasvankar, Shivendra Bhujbal, Suyash Prabhudesai, Sanath Nevagi, Chittem Jeevankumar, Felix Alemao, Kaushik V.

PASSED AWAY IN ROSARIO

Messi's father Jorge dies after illness at the age of 68

ROSARIO: Lionel Messi's father Jorge died at the age of 68 following a long illness on Saturday. Jorge, who had also been the Argentina forward's agent since he was 14, passed away in a hospital in his hometown of Rosario, Argentina, in the early hours of Saturday morning.

After speculation about his health during this summer's World Cup, the Messi family issued a statement saying he was dealing with a “health-related situation” but did not disclose the nature of his condition. Jorge helped his son become arguably the best player of all time

and was in Qatar to see Lionel end his quest to lead Argentina to their third World Cup triumph in 2022. The Inter Miami forward, 39, also became an eight-time Ballon d'Or winner and won the Champions League four times with Barcelona, plus 10 La Liga titles in 17 seasons in their first team.

Jorge supported his local team Newell's Old Boys and Lionel joined the club when he was seven years old. The family relocated to Spain in February 2001 after Lionel was signed by Barcelona aged just 13, and although Messi's mother and three siblings soon moved back to

Rosario, his father stayed with him in Barcelona. “Jorge was the pillar and the person who supported with vision, rigor and affection the career of the greatest player of all time alongside his wife, Celia Cuccittini,” Newell's Old Boys posted on X. - Agencies



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TRADE MINISTERS MEET
Indian Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday held separate meetings with his counterparts from the UAE and Indonesia on the sidelines of the BRICS Trade and Industry Ministers' Meeting in Jaipur, discussing ways to strengthen trade, investment and economic cooperation. **>B2**

MARKET

BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX-LISTED FINANCE FIRMS
The financial results for the first half of this year indicated that the net profits of finance companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose to OMR13.3 million, compared to OMR13.1 million in the same period last year, registering a growth of 1.6 percent. **>B2**

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Refinery products output in Oman reaches 108.8mn barrels

NCSI statistics showed that production of regular petrol fell by 4.7% by the end of June 2026 to 8,251,000 barrels, compared with 8,659,100 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025

MUSCAT: The total output of refinery products in the Sultanate of Oman declined by 5.1% by the end of June 2026 to reach 108,849,200 barrels, compared with 114,662,900 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Total motor fuel production also decreased by 1.5% by the end of June 2026, according to the latest preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The statistics showed that production of regular (91 octane) petrol fell by 4.7% by the end of June 2026 to 8,251,000 barrels, compared with 8,659,100 barrels during the corresponding period

in 2025. Sales of regular (91 octane) petrol decreased by 13.3% to 7,857,300 barrels, compared with 9,065,500 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports, however, increased by 4.2% to 1,883,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 1,808,000 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

In contrast, production of premium (95 octane) petrol rose by 2.6% by the end of June 2026 to 6,889,600 barrels, compared with 6,717,600 barrels during the corresponding period last year. However, its sales declined by 13.6% to 7,371,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 8,535,000



barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports also fell by 3.5% to 362,900 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 376,000 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Diesel production declined by 7.5% by the end of June 2026 to 36,527,600 barrels, compared with 39,491,100 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Diesel sales also fell by 6.1% to 9,927,500 barrels, compared with 10,576,700 barrels during the corresponding period last year, while exports dropped by 12.9% to 27,912,300 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 32,053,400 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Meanwhile, jet fuel production increased by 9.2% by the end

of June 2026 to 14,062,100 barrels, compared with 12,874,400 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Its sales declined by 14.3% to 2,116,600 barrels, compared with 2,470,200 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Exports, however, rose by 20.9% to 11,710,000 barrels, compared with 9,687,300 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) production declined by 4.6% by the end of June 2026 to 5,447,100 barrels, compared with 5,712,600 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. LPG sales also decreased by 22.2% to 1,519,600 barrels, compared with 1,954,200 barrels during the correspond-

ing period last year. Its exports, meanwhile, increased by 1.7% to 1,713,600 barrels, compared with 1,685,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

Naphtha production rose by 3.5% by the end of June 2026 to 19,006,400 barrels, compared with 18,372,300 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Naphtha sales increased by 4.5% to 7,095,800 barrels, compared with 6,787,600 barrels during the corresponding period last year. Its exports also edged up by 0.8% to 12,043,500 barrels, compared with 11,945,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

On the other hand, production of other refinery products declined by 18.3% to 18,665,400 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 22,835,800 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025. Sales of other refinery products fell by 27.1% to 14,894,100 barrels, compared with 20,436,900 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025, while exports rose by 9.1% to 5,170,200 barrels by the end of June 2026, compared with 4,737,200 barrels during the corresponding period in 2025.

In the petrochemicals sector,

the statistics showed that benzene production increased by 12.9% by the end of June 2026 to 97,100 metric tonnes, compared with 86,000 metric tonnes during the corresponding period in 2025. Benzene exports also rose by 16.6% to 95,500 metric tonnes, compared with 81,900 metric tonnes during the same period last year.

Paraxylene production grew by 14% to 322,600 metric tonnes by the end of June 2026, compared with 283,000 metric tonnes during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports increased by 6.1% to 331,700 metric tonnes, compared with 312,700 metric tonnes during the corresponding period last year.

Polypropylene production, however, declined by 29.4% to 124,600 metric tonnes, compared with 176,600 metric tonnes during the corresponding period last year. Despite the decline in production, polypropylene sales rose by 32.6% to 20,500 metric tonnes, compared with 15,400 metric tonnes during the corresponding period in 2025. Its exports, meanwhile, fell by 26% to 97,000 metric tonnes, compared with 131,200 metric tonnes during the corresponding period in 2025.

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MARKET

Net profits of MSX-listed finance companies exceed OMR 13 million

Most finance companies recorded strong performance, benefiting from the active business environment in Oman and the high demand for financing products at a time when many economic sectors witnessed remarkable growth

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The financial results for the first half of this year indicated that the net profits of finance companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose to OMR13.3 million, compared to OMR13.1 million in the same period last year, registering a growth of 1.6 percent. Finance companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX)



confirmed that the government's directions to develop non-oil sectors and increase their contribution to economic diversification, and the high demand for financing products by individuals, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and many private sector companies, have boosted the performance of

the finance sector and driven revenues and net profits to rise. Most finance companies recorded strong performance, benefiting from the active business environment in the Sultanate of Oman and the high demand for financing products at a time when many economic sectors witnessed remark-

able growth. The National Finance Company achieved a growth of 15.2 percent in net profits, which rose to about OMR8.1 million compared to OMR7 million in the same period last year. United Finance recorded the highest growth with net profits rising from OMR1.211 million to

OMR1.628 million, achieving a growth of 34.4 percent, while the net profits of the Oman Finance Services Company rose from OMR1.689 million to OMR1.761 million, recording a growth of 4.2 percent. The sector's performance was affected by the decline in profits of Taajeer Finance and Muscat Finance, as both companies increased provisions in the face of rising non-performing loans. Taajeer Finance's net profits fell from about OMR2.7 million to OMR1.4 million and Muscat Finance's profits dropped from OMR520,000 to OMR468,000. The financial results reflect the continued success of finance companies in achieving stable profits and maintaining the growth of their businesses. The sector is expected to benefit in the coming period from the expansion of economic activity, increased demand for financing, and improved quality of credit portfolios, which will support achieving better growth rates. Finance companies expressed optimism about their ability to maintain a positive performance during the current year, noting that expansion in non-oil sectors, continued government spending on infrastructure, and efforts to enhance business sector confidence would increase demand for the financing products offered by finance companies. The companies affirmed their commitment to strengthening their financial positions, improving asset quality, reducing non-

performing loans, building high-quality financing portfolios and strong liquidity levels, while working to expand the financing base and provide financing products that meet the aspirations of individual and corporate customers. The market value of finance companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rose in the first half of this year to OMR274.2 million, recording gains of about OMR56.9 million compared to their levels in December 2025. National Finance accounts for 50.3 percent of the total market value of finance companies listed on the stock exchange, after its market value rose to OMR137.9 million at the end of June, compared to OMR24.2 million in December 2025. The company's share rose to 212 baisa at the end of June, compared to 68 baisa in December. Oman Finance Services came in second with a market value of about OMR48.9 million, and the company's share rose from 143 baisa to 155 baisa. Taajeer Finance came in third with a market value of OMR34 million. The company's stock witnessed a decline in the first half of this year, closing at 120 baisa at the end of June, compared to 130 baisa in December 2025. United Finance ranked fourth with a market value of OMR33.1 million, and the stock recorded a decline from 157 baisa to 93 baisa. Muscat Finance came in fifth place with a market value of OMR20.2 million, and the stock recorded an increase from 53 baisa to 66 baisa.

TRADE, INVESTMENT TIES DISCUSSED



India, UAE, Indonesia trade ministers meet

JAIPUR: Indian Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday held separate meetings with his counterparts from the UAE and Indonesia on the sidelines of the BRICS Trade and Industry Ministers' Meeting in Jaipur, discussing ways to strengthen trade, investment and economic cooperation. Goyal met UAE Minister of Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi and discussed further strengthening bilateral trade and investment ties under the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). "Discussed ways to further strengthen the momentum of our trade & investment ties under the India-UAE CEPA, and explored avenues for collaboration across diverse sectors," Goyal said in a post on X. The UAE is one of India's largest trading partners, while the CEPA between the two countries

has provided a major push to bilateral trade since it came into effect in May 2022. In a separate meeting, Goyal met Indonesian Trade Minister Budi Santoso and reviewed progress in negotiations related to the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA). "We reviewed the progress of the AITIGA negotiations and discussed ways to further deepen our bilateral economic engagement and strengthen resilient supply chains," Goyal said. He added that the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to advancing trade-led growth and strengthening India-Indonesia economic cooperation. India and ASEAN have been reviewing AITIGA with the aim of making the agreement more effective and addressing concerns around the existing trade arrangement.

— ANI

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

MSX index extends gains, rising for the second consecutive week

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange strengthened its gains during the week, rising for the second week in a row, benefiting from the rise of many leading stocks in various sectors listed on the exchange. The index rose 90 points after rising 160 points the previous week, concluding weekly trading at 7,367 points, supported by shares of Al Anqa Energy, OQ Gas Networks, Al Anwar Investments, Voltamp Energy, Omantel, Bank Muscat, Bank Sohar International, Bank Nizwa, and many other shares in the sectors included in the main index sample. The week saw the prices of 43 securities rise, which pushed the stock exchange index upwards, while the prices of 25 securities remained unchanged and 27 securities recorded a decline. The services sector index recorded the highest rise among the sector indices, rising by 2.1 percent or the equivalent of 61 points and closing at 2,951 points. The financial sector index rose by 42 points, and the Sharia index rose by about 8 points, while the industrial sector index recorded a decline of 24 points with the decline of shares of OQ Basic Industries, Al Maha Ceramics, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, Salalah Mills and a number of other industrial companies.



The Muscat Stock Exchange recorded gains in its market capitalisation estimated at OMR246.5 million, rising to OMR37.82 billion at the close of trading. The Muscat Stock Exchange also recorded a rise of 3.3 percent in trading value also, which increased to OMR264.5 million compared to OMR255.9 million in the week before, and the number of transactions executed exceeded 44,000. The week saw an increase in the value of trading in bank stocks, with Bank Muscat accounting for 19.3 percent of the total trading value with trades amounting to OMR51.3 million, Bank Sohar International accounting for 14.7 percent of the total trading value with trades exceeding OMR39 mil-

lion, OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) in third place with trades amounting to OMR32.8 million, OQ Basic Industries in fourth place with trades worth OMR29.3 million, and Omantel in fifth place with trades exceeding OMR28 million, representing 10.6 percent of the total trading value. Al Batinah Development and Investment shares led the gainers, rising by 25 percent and closing at 75 baisa. Al Anqa Energy shares rose to 270 baisa, recording a rise of 7.5 percent. OQ Gas Networks shares rose by 6 percent and closed at 212 baisa. National Finance shares rose to 224 baisa, increasing by 5.6 percent. Oman Qatar Insurance shares rose by 5.2 percent and closed at 180 baisa. National Aluminum Products

shares led the decliners, falling by 50 percent to close at 149 baisa. Building Materials Industries shares fell by 13.3 percent to close at 65 baisa. National Detergents shares dropped by 10 percent to close at 621 baisa. Salalah Mills shares declined by 9.9 percent to close at 604 baisa, and Muscat Gases shares fell by 7.9 percent to close at 139 baisa. In company news, the Muscat Stock Exchange during the week listed the shares of Bank Sohar International's capital increase, which the bank offered to exercise its right of preference, through which it aimed to increase its capital from OMR702.5 million to OMR849.6 million. The stock closed at the end of the week's trading at 182 baisa, up by 4 baisa during the week. Asyad Shipping announced the delivery of the tanker 'Manah', the first of two medium-class chemical tankers built in a shipyard in China. The company expects to receive the second tanker, named 'Mirbat', next month. The company stated that the two tankers will be operated under a 3-year charter agreement with a Tier 1 customer. The company's stock settled at its previous level of 235 baisa at the end of last week's trading, despite rising to 244 baisa during the sessions. 4,660 transactions were executed with a value of OMR10.1 million.

BUREAU OF LABOUR STATISTICS

US nonfarm payroll employment drops by 23,000 in July

WASHINGTON, DC: Total nonfarm payroll employment in the United States declined by 23,000 in July while the overall unemployment rate showed little change at 4.1 per cent, according to figures released by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics. The latest figures indicated a shift following a period of modest growth in the national job market in July. "Total nonfarm payroll employment changed little in July (-23,000), following an average monthly gain of 34,000 over the prior 12 months," the US Bureau of Labour Statistics stated in its report. Employment declines were concentrated in specific sectors dur-

ing the month. Local government education experienced a drop of 50,000 jobs after showing minimal net change over the previous year. Retail trade recorded a reduction of 19,000 positions, driven by losses in warehouse clubs, super centres, and general merchandise retailers, which cut 21,000 positions, alongside gasoline stations and fuel dealers losing 5,000 jobs. Financial activities also maintained a downward trend, shedding 14,000 jobs due to reductions in credit intermediation and insurance carriers. "Financial activities employment is down by 121,000 since a recent peak in May 2025," the report noted. Conversely, health care main-

tained job creation, adding 22,000 positions, though at a slower rate than its 12-month average gain of 36,000. Ambulatory health care services contributed 18,000 of those additions. The total number of unemployed individuals stood at 6.9 million, remaining essentially unchanged both over the month and over the year. Among demographic groups, unemployment rates decreased for teenagers to 12.1 per cent and Hispanic workers to 4.6 per cent, while rates for adult men, adult women, White, Black, and Asian workers remained largely steady. "Among the unemployed, the number of people on temporary layoff increased by 153,000 to 921,000 in July," the US Bureau of

Labour Statistics stated. The long-term unemployed, representing individuals out of work for 27 weeks or more, numbered 1.8 million and accounted for 25.5 per cent of all unemployed persons. The labour force participation rate remained stable at 61.4 per cent, while the employment-population ratio was recorded at 58.9 per cent. Both metrics decreased slightly since January. Average hourly earnings for private nonfarm employees edged up by two cents to USD 37.62, representing a 3.2 per cent increase over the year. Average weekly hours for private-sector employees remained unchanged at 34.3 hours.

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‘Putin may plan hybrid attacks on NATO region’

The assessments highlight a shift in Putin’s risk calculus compared to just a few months ago, according to US officials



WASHINGTON, DC: US intelligence assessments indicate that Russian President Vladimir Putin may be increasingly willing to authorise provocative actions that could spill onto NATO territory.

CBS, citing US officials briefed on the matter, reported that these actions could include hybrid operations, cyberattacks, and other deniable measures that fall short of a full-scale conventional military campaign.

Putin’s risk calculus
The assessments highlight a shift in Putin’s risk calculus compared to just a few months ago, according to US officials.

These officials noted that the primary goal is likely not to trigger a broader war, but rather to test NATO’s cohesion and evaluate the Trump administration’s willingness to respond if a NATO ally comes under attack, CBS reported.

Earlier last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Western countries of applying “double standards” by selectively invoking the UN Charter while ignoring the principle of national “self-determination” when it did

not suit their interests. Claiming that Western sanctions had failed to achieve their objectives, Putin said that since 2022, “the West has set its Russophobic machine running at full speed,” imposing a record number of sanctions that he described as ineffective.

The Russian President further alleged that Russia’s opponents, having failed to defeat the country “on the battlefield,” had resorted to “outright terrorist methods” against the Russian people.

“But the people of Russia can never be broken. They never have been - and they never will be,” he said.

He also declared that Russia would achieve its objectives in the “special military operation” in Ukraine, while accusing the West of pursuing a campaign of “Russophobia” and attempting to undermine the country, according to a statement released by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Putin said the past five years had been “difficult and exceptionally consequential” for Russia, describing the period as one in which “the fate and future of our people” had been at stake.

In his remarks, Putin asserted that Russia had historically responded to external threats with

national unity and said the same spirit was evident today.

On the other hand, NATO Chief Mark Rutte, earlier in April, highlighted the immediate and multi-theatre threat Russia poses to Europe and North America and emphasised that the Western alliance’s defense network is actively intercepting Russian incursions while protecting both sides of the Atlantic.

The NATO chief detailed recent operational responses along NATO’s eastern flank to demonstrate how European allies are stepping up to defend collective airspace.

“When Russian MIG-31s crossed into Estonian airspace last fall, it was European aircraft - Italians in the lead, backed up by Finns and Swedes - that turned them back,” Rutte stated.

“When a flock of Russian drones wandered recklessly into Poland around the same time, I’m proud to say that it was a Dutch F-35 that fired the shot that took down the danger.”

He noted that mutual defense remains the central rationale for NATO’s existence, warning that Russian threats cannot be isolated from broader global coordination among adversary nations.

-ANI

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Tributes continue to pour for Broad Peak climbers

KATHMANDU: Tributes have continued to pour in for the Nepali climbers who died in the Broad Peak avalanche.

On Saturday morning, hundreds of people took part in the “Tribute Run 5K”, paying tribute to the climbers who perished in the avalanche that struck the world’s 12th-highest peak at the end of July.

The runners, upon reaching the Bouddhanath Stupa, the finish line of the marathon, held vigil, lighting the butter-fed-lamp in front of the photo of the climbers. Portraits of British-Nepali climber Nirmal Purja, Nima Sherpa, Nawang Thindu Sherpa, Pur Bahadur Gurung, Kili Pemba Sherpa and Gyalu Sherpa were kept facing the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bouddhanath Stupa, and paid the vigil.

“Nepal Marathon has paid tribute to all the climbers by organising a ‘tribute run.’ It started from the Baluwakhani Community Park and ended in Bouddha (nath Stupa), where the vigil was held along with a commemoration ceremony. All the runners, along with the volunteers, paid tribute to the climbers by holding two minutes of silence. We will be remembering all our heroes throughout our lives,” Ayush Tamang, organising committee member of the Tribute Run 5K in honour of the climbers, told ANI.

Rescuers had retrieved four of the bodies of the climbers on August 2, 2026. A total of 7 bodies have been recovered from the peak, with three still on the slopes of one of the technical peaks.

The body of one Nepali climber is yet to be retrieved, while three other bodies have been brought to Skardu in Pakistan-occupied Gilgit-Baltistan, where procedures are being completed for the retrieval back home.

Only the body of Pur Bahadur Gurung, the ten-time Everest summiteer, has been retrieved back home, and a funeral was held on Friday.

“All those who died in the Broad Peak avalanche are our national heroes. They have contributed a lot



in terms of tourism as well as made Nepal and Nepali proud. They will live in our lives forever; we’ll remember them and (may they) rest in peace,” Tamang said.

British-Nepali climber Nirmal Purja, commonly known as “Nims Dai” had led a team of 10 climbers, including himself, from multiple nations. 5 of the climbers were from Nepal, including Kili Pemba Sherpa, Nima Sherpa, Gyalu Sherpa, Nawang Thindu Sherpa and Pur Bahadur Gurung of Nepal. The group also included Pakistani climber Sohail Sakhi, Chinese climber Wang Zhong, Nadhira Ahmed Abdullah Al Harthy of Oman and Mallory Geis and Sarah Mallory of the United States.

The avalanche struck Broad Peak on 30th July, killing former British Gurkha soldier and celebrated mountaineer Purja along with his guide teammates, Pur Bahadur Gurung (Yukta) and Nima Sherpa. Purja’s company, Elite Exped, confirmed the incident through a social media statement and expressed profound grief over the loss.

Nirmal joined the British Gurkha Regiment in 2003 at the age of 18. In 2009, he joined the British Special Boat Service (SBS), an elite special forces unit. During his 16 years of service in the British military, his interest in mountaineering continued to grow. In 2018, Purja was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

In 2012, Nirmal reached Everest

Base Camp. To learn mountaineering, he climbed 6,119-metre Lobuche East, which became his first mountain ascent. In 2019, Purja launched an expedition called “Project Possible”, through which he climbed all 14 of the world’s mountains above 8,000 metres in six months and six days. At the time, the previous record had stood at around eight years. His record was later broken in 2023 by Norwegian mountaineer Kristin Harila, who climbed all 14 peaks in three months and one day.

Nirmal’s “Project Possible” journey, which began with Annapurna in his birthplace, was documented in the film “14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible”, which received worldwide attention.

To finance his expedition to climb all 14 peaks, he raised funds by mortgaging his own house again. After “Project Possible,” he became internationally renowned. Although Norwegian climber Kristin Harila surpassed the record in 2023 by completing the challenge in three months and one day, Purja’s achievement remained one of the most celebrated milestones in modern mountaineering.

His remarkable journey was featured in the popular Netflix documentary 14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible. Purja also sparked global debate in May 2019 after sharing a widely circulated photograph showing a long queue of climbers near the summit of Mount Everest, drawing attention to overcrowding and safety concerns on the world’s highest peak.-ANI

ACCESSION TALKS

Iceland’s EU vote: A nation divided over Europe

BERLIN: The white church stands alone in the Icelandic countryside. Wind sweeps across the Hvalfjörð. Kristján Ingólfsson, a retired bishop, lives here beside Hallgrímskirkja church in Saubær, surrounded by silence and vast open landscapes.

But far from this quiet corner of western Iceland, the debate over Europe is heating up. At the end of August, voters will decide whether to reopen accession talks with the European Union. The referendum is not about joining the EU immediately, but about restarting negotiations that were suspended more than a decade ago.

“[Icelandic] people are a bit different to the mainland folks, who always have to think about borders. We have no border, just the sea all around,” Kristján Ingólfsson says.

“That gives a specific feeling of freedom. And I believe that’s also part of the whole discussion, that people want to be free.”

Whether campaigning for or against closer ties with Brussels, many Icelanders frame the debate around the same ideas: freedom, independence, and sovereignty.

The ‘Yes’ campaign

At the headquarters of the pro-European group in the capital, Reykjavík, supporters are celebrating the official launch of the campaign. The small office is packed, with volunteers spilling onto the pavement in the afternoon sun. Young people mingle with pensioners. A DJ provides music while beer and soft drinks are kept chilled in ice buckets.

At the centre of it all is Snaeros Sindradóttir, executive director of the ‘Yes’ campaign. The 34-year-old mother normally runs an art gallery, but that work is now on hold. Instead, she spends her days campaigning for a closer relationship with Europe.

The referendum is taking place at a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty. US President Donald Trump’s threats toward neighboring Greenland have become part of Iceland’s debate over Europe, says Snaeros Sindradóttir.



“And it’s not a very comforting fact that Trump has mispronounced Greenland as Iceland on several occasions.”

Iceland, with its population of about 400,000, has no standing army. Protection is provided through NATO, of which Iceland is a founding member. The country also has a bilateral defense agreement with Washington. During the Cold War, the US maintained an important military base near Reykjavík, although its permanent troop presence ended in 2006.

“I think security would definitely be increased if we enter the EU,” says Snaeros Sindradóttir.

“Given the situation in the United States, it would be wiser to lean [on] our true allies and friends in Europe.”

Iceland is already closely tied to Europe. The country belongs to the European Economic Area (EEA), allowing free movement of goods, services, capital and people between Iceland and most EU countries, even though the island nation is not an EU member. It is also part of the passport-free Schengen zone.

Pawel Bartoszek, chairman of parliament’s foreign affairs committee, points to Iceland’s small and relatively volatile currency.

“It has cost us much higher inflation and interest rates compared to

continental Europe,” he says.

Bartoszek argues that joining the euro in the future could lower borrowing costs for households and businesses. Mortgage rates of 8 to 9% are common in Iceland, while borrowers elsewhere in Europe often pay roughly half as much.

The ‘No’ campaign

In downtown Reykjavík, campaigners from the anti-EU movement are making the opposite case. They have set up a small table where they hand out leaflets and “No” campaign badges. Haraldur Olafsson, a physics professor, currently spends up to 12 hours a day campaigning against membership.

“We are basically here to explain to the people that being members of the European Union is a huge step away from democracy.”

“We are giving power to someone else who will make rules that we cannot control,” he adds. For years, Haraldur Olafsson has campaigned against joining the EU. He is the president of the Heimssyn organization, which belongs to the ‘No’ camp.

The ‘No’ campaign’s stand is quiet today. Tourists crowd the square opposite parliament, every now and then Olafsson is approached by acquaintances. This is Iceland. People know each other here.

“I do not know anybody in Iceland who fears either the Russians or the Americans,” Haraldur Olafsson says.

“Really, I don’t think these international matters matter a lot when it comes to local politics. The only threat comes from the European Union. The European Union is the only big power in the world that wants to govern Iceland, that wants to set the laws in Iceland and wants to pass judgment.”

Supporters of EU membership reject this argument, saying that as an EU member Iceland would participate in decision-making rather than simply follow rules set elsewhere.

Rich fishing industry

Iceland’s thriving fishing industry is one of the foundations of the country’s prosperity. That is why the debate over possible EU membership has become highly emotional, with both sides arguing over whether the European Union would gain control over Iceland’s valuable marine resources.

“The European Union has nothing to say about the natural resources in Iceland — the sea, the fish,” Haraldur Olafsson says.

“The European Union doesn’t have the final word on energy, which is a very important natural resource for Iceland.”

“The economy of Iceland is very different from the economy of Europe. The main disadvantage is that the EU would take over the administration of [our] natural resources,” he argues.

Haraldur Olafsson heads down to Reykjavík’s harbor. Here he meets former fisherman Agust Österby, who is standing on his wooden boat, fixing an old window frame. Österby first went to sea with his father when he was six years old. Today, he restores wooden boats.

Icelanders, he says, are stubborn and independent by nature.

“It is somehow in our genes to deal with [things] ourselves — to deal with life, the sea and the weather.”

He adds: “We will never give our freedom to the European Union. We know exactly how to do things in Iceland. We don’t need help from abroad.”

The former fisherman says he does not think Icelanders feel threatened by anyone — not even Donald Trump.

Referendum to break the deadlock

The belief that Iceland can simply keep a low profile and avoid international pressure is something political scientist Audunn Arnorsson disagrees with. He fears the strategy “might backfire.”

If Iceland were ever to face pressure similar to that experienced by Greenland from its “big brother in the West,” having the possibility of EU accession could prove valuable, including access to the bloc’s common customs protection.

Iceland had already begun accession negotiations once before, in 2010, following the banking and economic crisis. They were later suspended after a change in government and never resumed. Audunn Arnorsson argues that holding a referendum became the only way to break the political deadlock over whether Iceland should reopen negotiations.

Debate dividing Iceland

Members of Iceland’s parliament

are also divided over whether the country should resume accession talks with the European Union. The debate cuts across traditional party lines.

Gudrun Hafsteinsdóttir, leader of the opposition Independence Party, believes that a small nation like Iceland may have a bigger voice outside the European Union than inside.

“In the European Parliament, we would have approximately six seats out of 726. We are afraid that we will just disappear in this mass that the European Union is.”

Smaller EU member states such as Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus also hold the minimum allocation of six seats in the European Parliament.

For Gudrun Hafsteinsdóttir, joining the EU is not the solution for strengthening Iceland’s security. “Our strength lies in NATO and our bilateral agreement with the United States of America. And we have not had any discussion from [the] American side that they want to change that agreement that we have had here in Iceland for decades.”

But something else concerns the opposition leader deeply: the divisions the debate has created within families and friendships.

“We are building a wound that won’t heal [for] years. We can’t survive in this harsh country if we don’t have solidarity between us, so that we can fight Mother Nature.”

Opinion polls predict a tight race, with support for and opposition to closer EU integration running neck and neck. Both camps are now fighting for the same group: the many undecided voters who are likely to determine the result on August 29.

A ‘yes’ vote would not mean EU membership. It would only open accession talks — with a second referendum required before Iceland could ultimately join the bloc.

But former bishop Kristján Ingólfsson is confident: “No matter how it turns out — we will remain one people and [it will] not build walls between us.” -DW



LIFESTYLE

RESEARCH FINDS WHY POOR SLEEP MAY HARM SOME BRAINS MORE

A gene involved in the brain's overnight cleaning system may change how heimer's-related brain changes. The findings point toward more personalised prevention strategies based on both genetics and sleep habits.

New research from Edith Cowan University (ECU) suggests that sleep habits and genetics may interact to influence subtle brain and cognitive changes associated with Alzheimer's disease years before noticeable symptoms develop.

The study, conducted by ECU's Centre for Precision Health (CPH), examined the aquaporin-4 (AQP4) gene. This gene helps control the movement of fluid through the brain, a function that supports the organ's natural waste-clearing system.

The brain's overnight waste removal system

The brain's waste-removal process becomes especially active during sleep. Scientists believe it helps clear potentially harmful proteins, including those associated with Alzheimer's disease. Researchers found that the effects of sleep appeared to vary depending on which version of the AQP4 gene a person carried.

"Our study shows that individuals carrying certain AQP4 variants showed faster grey matter loss when they reported shorter sleep," researcher Dr. Ayeisha Milligan Armstrong said.

"It's not just which genes you carry -- it's how those genes interact with the world around you. The same variant can look protective or detrimental depending on how someone is sleeping. That's important, because sleep is one of the few modifiable factors people can actually act on."

Grey matter contains many of the brain cells involved in memory, decision-making, movement, and other essential functions. A decline in grey matter volume can be a sign of structural changes in the brain.

Sleep effects differed by genetic variant

The researchers analysed 13 common AQP4 gene variants, along with participants' self-reported

sleep patterns, brain scans, and cognitive test results.

Among some participants, sleeping for fewer hours was associated with a faster decline in grey matter. In others, taking longer to fall asleep was linked to structural brain changes involving lower brain volume.

Cognitive performance also changed differently over time among people who experienced sleep disturbances. Whether the effect appeared beneficial or harmful depended on the specific AQP4 variant each person carried.

"We've known for a while that poor sleep and Alzheimer's risk are linked," researcher Dr. Telle Porter said.

"What this shows is that rather than assuming everyone at risk follows the same pathway, a more targeted and personalised approach to Alzheimer's prevention may be needed. But we're not at the point of recommending genetic testing; our findings need replication in larger and more diverse cohorts."

Toward personalised Alzheimer's prevention

The findings suggest that two people with similar overall Alzheimer's risk may not respond to poor sleep in the same way. Genetic differences could help explain why brain decline progresses more quickly in some individuals than in others.

The researchers recommended conducting clinical trials that incorporate genetic information. Such studies could test whether improving sleep habits can reduce inherited vulnerability and change long-term brain outcomes associated with Alzheimer's disease.

"This moves us closer to understanding why some people decline faster than others, even when they have similar risk on paper," CPH Director Professor Simon Laws said.

"Identifying who is most vulnerable, and who is most likely to benefit from a particular lifestyle intervention, is where prevention health needs to go rather than treating everyone at risk of Alzheimer's the same way."

The study, "Evidence for Distinct Relationships between Aquaporin-4 Genetic Variants and Alzheimer's Disease Phenotypes" is published online in Alzheimer's & Dementia, the Journal of the Alzheimer's Association. - ANI

New research suggests that sleep habits and genetics may interact to influence subtle changes associated with Alzheimer's disease years before noticeable symptoms develop

SPORTS

Shelton beats Bergs to enter fourth round in Montreal



The fifth seed is the highest-ranked man remaining in a severely depleted field, improved his chance for a second straight title in Canada with the rout in 65 minutes

MONTREAL: Ben Shelton threw down eight aces and produced three love games in the second set in dominating Zizou Bergs 6-3, 6-2

on Friday to reach the fourth round of the ATP Montreal Masters. Fifth seed Shelton, the highest-ranked man remaining in a se-

verely depleted field, improving his chance for a second straight title in Canada with the rout in 65 minutes. The American profited from foot faults and double-faults from his Belgian opponent in advancing to the Round of 16 for the first time this season. "It was a good day for me; I managed the match well. He came out serving extremely well. I had to make some adjustments. I found a way to break his serve and kept the foot on the gas when I got the lead," said 23-year-old Shelton. Shelton will play for a repeat spot in the last eight when he faces

Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca, who defeated ninth seed Casper Ruud 7-6 (8/6), 6-3. Fonseca recovered after a slow start, trailing the Norwegian 4-2 before fighting his way back into contention. The youngster finished off the win after leading 5-2, claiming victory on a second match point winner into the empty court. Tallon Griekspoor followed up his defeat of top-seeded Roland Garros champion Alexander Zverev with the Dutchman gaining late momentum and getting through a rough patch for a 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 defeat of Matteo Arnaldi.

The Italian French Open semi-finalist took early command before Griekspoor took motivation through player box instructions from Swedish coach Thomas Hogstedt and turned the match around. World No.66 Griekspoor went up two breaks in the deciding set against the 2024 Canadian semi-finalist, lost one of them but broke back for victory on his third match point after more than two hours. "Tennis is such a tricky sport. It's never over until the last ball is hit. I tried to stay focused; I'm happy with how I managed," Griekspoor said. "I've had a good level in prac-

tice but was not able to convert it to the match court. Today was not easy, but I'm pleased after a win like this. I was far from my best but I'm happy I played myself into the match to win it," he added. Griekspoor will bid for a quarter-final place when he takes on Spaniard Daniel Merida, who put out Alex Michelsen 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1, saving two match points in the second set for the American. Merida, who had never won a tour-level hardcourt match prior to this week, arrived in Canada after winning the Umag title on clay in Croatia last month. - Agencies

TORONTO OPEN



Rybakina advances, Andreeva exits

TORONTO: Reigning Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina advanced to the fourth round of the WTA Toronto Masters on Friday while French Open winner Mirra Andreeva was eliminated by Canada's Leylah Fernandez. World No.2 Rybakina from Kazakhstan defeated American 28th seed Ann Li 6-2, 7-5 in 90 minutes, winning five of six break chances while saving two of four against her. Rybakina, who also won the 2022 Wimbledon title, advanced to a last-16 meeting with Russia's Liudmila Samsonova, who outlasted Australian Maya Joint 7-5, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2. Samsonova leads the career rivalry with Rybakina 4-2, but Rybakina has won their past two

WTA meetings, most recently in last year's Strasbourg final. Fernandez, the 30th seed, dispatched 19-year-old fifth-ranked Russian Andreeva 6-1, 6-4 in 80 minutes, snapping a seven-match losing streak against top-10 opponents. Fernandez last beat a player ranked so high when she downed fourth-rated Jessica Pegula on her way to last year's WTA Washington title. The Canadian won 24 of 27 points on her first serve and captured 17 of 23 points on Andreeva's second serves to advance. Andreeva made 34 unforced errors to 17 winners. Fernandez will next face four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka, the 11th seed from Japan who defeated Belgium's 20th-

seeded Elise Mertens 6-1, 6-2 in 71 minutes. Osaka fired seven aces and took four of eight break points while denying Mertens on her three break chances. Fernandez and Osaka have split two career meetings, the Canadian won at the 2021 US Open on the way to a runner-up finish. Osaka won last year at Wuhan. US fourth seed Coco Gauff, a two-time Grand Slam winner, advanced by defeating Greece's Maria Sakkari 6-1, 6-4 in 76 minutes. Gauff cruised to a 5-1 lead in the second set before Sakkari rallied within two points of pulling level, winning five of the last six points, taking the match on a backhand volley winner and service winner. Gauff will next face 19-year-

old Russian Alina Korneeva, who ousted US 13th seed Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-4. Korneeva won seven of eight break points to reach the last 16 after 82 minutes. Alexandra Eala, the 21-year-old Filipino left-hander who won her first WTA title Monday at Washington, reached the fourth round by defeating American Caty McNally 6-3, 5-7, 6-4. Eala had her right ankle taped by a trainer, leading 3-2 in the second set, was broken at love in the sixth game, and was pushed to a third set before taking the victory after two hours and 39 minutes. World No.20 Eala next faces Swiss 12th seed Belinda Bencic, who outlasted American Taylor Townsend 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 after three hours and 24 minutes.

FORMER STRIKER

Forlan named Uruguay coach on interim basis

MONTVIDEO: Former striker Diego Forlan has been appointed head coach of the Uruguay national team following their disastrous World Cup campaign, the country's football association (AUF) announced. Forlan will take over, reportedly on an interim basis, from Marcelo Bielsa who stepped down following Uruguay's group-stage exit from the World Cup. "Diego Forlan is coming home (to take charge of) the Under-20 national team and the senior national team," the AUF said in a short statement. The agreement with Forlan, who won the Golden Ball award for player of the tournament at the 2010 World Cup, was finalised after weeks of negotiations. The 47-year-old will take over as interim coach but his contract keeps the door open for an extension, AUF sources said. He will be in charge of the team for friendlies in September, October and March. Two-time world champion Uruguay are reeling after failing to get out of its group for a second successive World Cup. Back-to-back draws with Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde put them in unexpected danger of crashing out before their elimination was confirmed by a loss to eventual champions Spain. Forlan has little coaching experience despite enjoying a stellar



playing career. He made his coaching debut during the 2020 season with former club Penarol but left the post after just 11 matches due to poor results. Forlan's only other managerial stint came in 2021, when he spent 12 games in charge of Atenas in the Uruguayan second division. He is highly regarded, though, in Uruguay after scoring 36 international goals, including five during its run to the 2010 World Cup semi-finals, in 112 appearances. Forlan, alongside strike partner Luis Suarez, was also a key member of Uruguay's 2011 Copa America-winning side. He enjoyed prolific spells at both Villarreal and Atletico Madrid in Spain, winning the European Golden Shoe award with both clubs. Forlan endured a difficult stint at Manchester United between 2001 and 2004, despite winning the Premier League in 2002/03. - Agencies

PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY

Luis Diaz inspires Bayern Munich to win over Aston Villa

HONG KONG: A wonder-goal from Luis Diaz powered a youthful Bayern Munich to a 2-1 win over Aston Villa in a pre-season friendly in Hong Kong on Friday. Diaz starred in Colombia's run to the World Cup last-16 and the winger lit up a sometimes scrappy game between last season's German double-winners and the Europa League champions. Bayern hit the front in the 37th minute when South Korean defender Kim Min-jae ghosted in to glance a free-kick into the far corner from the edge of the six-yard box. The Bavarian club brought some of its big guns off the bench in the

second half and started turning the screw, Diaz had a shot cleared off the line. He stretched the lead in trademark style in the 73rd minute, picking up the ball on the left, jinking inside and cracking a dipping shot in off the crossbar. It was a superb strike that delighted the majority of the 38,000 fans inside Kai Tak stadium who were mostly cheering for Bayern. Aston Villa pulled one back in the 83rd minute when new signing Joao Gomes took aim from the edge of the area and left Manuel Neuer with no chance. It nearly equalised moments later but the legendary German



stopper reacted quickly to block Tammy Abraham's point-blank header, and Bayern Munich closed out the game. **Impressed: Kompany** Several World Cup stars, including Bayern Munich's Michael Olise and Harry Kane, did not travel to Hong Kong. "I told the players honestly that I was impressed (with the performance) because you know who's there and you know who's not there," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said. "It's difficult to go into these games... and still look the same, still look (like) the Bayern Munich that we can be.

"The last 10 or 15 minutes were a little bit a reflection of what pre-season is -- a lot of changes... it's (more) difficult to control in that sense, as a coach." Aston Villa is adjusting to life without Morgan Rogers after the England midfielder moved to Chelsea last month for a reported British record fee of 117 million pounds. The team will face Paris Saint-Germain in the European Super Cup on Wednesday before travelling to Brighton for its opening Premier League fixture on August 23. Bayern kick off the new Bundesliga season at home to Stuttgart on August 28. - Agencies

‘Harmony between team-mates Norris and Piastri is strong’



McLaren team principal Andrea Stella praised the strengthened relationship between Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri as the team looks to recover ground in the 2026 F1 season

SILVERSTONE: McLaren boss Andrea Stella is proud of the way Formula One world champion Lando Norris and team-mate Oscar Piastri have conducted themselves following last season’s battle

for the drivers’ championship. The British driver eventually overcame the Australian in a three-way fight, also involving Red Bull’s Max Verstappen, to clinch his maiden world title, even though Piastri had held a 34-point lead with nine races remaining. There were several occasions where McLaren’s wish to ensure both Norris and Piastri raced on even terms was put to the test but relations between the pair remained cordial. McLaren have been off the pace so far under new regulations for the 2026 season, with Mercedes leading the way from Ferrari. But Stella has been pleased by the professionalism of his drivers.

Intact
“It wasn’t a given that, after last year -- when they found themselves battling for the world title right up to the final race - the harmony they’d built would remain intact: yet not only has this not changed, but the relationship between them and with the team has actually become even stronger,” team principal Stella

said in a McLaren Q&A. “And whilst this might, in a sense, have been expected of Lando - given that he was ultimately the one to become champion -- it was not quite so predictable for Oscar, who, instead, has relied even more heavily on the team to accelerate his development, both on and off the track.” Mercedes’ teenage rising star Kimi Antonelli is 50 points clear of Ferrari’s seven-time former world champion Lewis Hamilton at the top of the 2026 drivers’ standings, with fifth-placed Norris a huge 91 points off the lead. Norris, however, did win his first race of the season in Hungary before the current summer break and an optimistic Stella added: “If we can continue the season as we did in Budapest, I think we can still achieve a great deal. “To do so, we must keep pushing with the development and ensure we outpace our rivals - who certainly aren’t standing still. “There are still 12 races left on the calendar, so there are plenty of opportunities given that 546 points are up for grabs.” - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City reject Barcelona bid for World Cup winner Rodri

LONDON: Manchester City have rejected an opening offer of £38.5m from Barcelona for midfielder Rodri. City are open to selling the Spaniard, but would demand more than £60m. The 30-year-old enters the final year of his contract at Etihad Stadium and is yet to sign a new deal, with speculation rife about his future this summer. It looked like Real Madrid would be his next destination but La Liga rivals Barcelona are now leading the race after sources told BBC Sport on Thursday that the club had the player’s approval to open negotiations with City. The offer was made on Friday. Barca sources had initially told there were no guarantees any deal would be made but the situation now looks to be developing. The club said on Friday they are in ongoing conversations with the player’s representatives and later



made their opening offer. Sources say talks with Real have now ended. Rodri missed much of the 2024-25 campaign after sustaining a serious knee injury, and parts of last

season were disrupted by a hamstring issue. However, the 2024 Ballon d’Or winner was back to his best at the World Cup in the summer, leading Spain to their second title and being named player of the tournament. He is currently out of action after undergoing back surgery last month and is scheduled to link back up with his City team-mates in Manchester early next week. Approaching the second week of August in the transfer window, City will be aiming to resolve Rodri’s future swiftly in order to sign a replacement. Talks are ongoing to sign 18-year-old Morocco midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi from Lille, but the French club’s £86m asking price appears to be a sticking point. According to Spanish radio network Cadena Ser, who have spoken directly to Rodri’s agent Pablo Barquero, Real Madrid made Rodri an “irresistible” offer shortly after Spain’s

World Cup triumph. Talks began just days after the tournament, with Rodri’s camp praising the courtesy, class and respect shown by the club throughout the negotiations. According to the report, everyone at Real Madrid, from president Florentino Perez to chief executive Jose Angel Sanchez, worked to make the deal happen and made it clear they were serious about signing the midfielder. They had put everything on the table to get the deal over the line but despite positive discussions over the past two weeks, Rodri has made the personal decision to accept another offer, says the radio network. Cadena Ser add that Real Madrid were informed of Rodri’s decision on Friday and chose to end the process in order to avoid prolonging uncertainty, while thanking the player for the respectful way the negotiations were conducted. - Agencies

SPANISH LA LIGA

Atletico hold talks with Spurs captain Romero

MADRID: Spanish giants Atletico Madrid have held talks over a move for Tottenham captain Cristian Romero. The Argentina international, who signed a new four-year deal at Spurs last August, is expected to leave the club this summer. There has also been interest from Inter Milan in signing the 28-year-old, who played all seven matches in Argentina’s run to the World Cup final last month, where they lost to Spain. But Romero is a long-term target for Atletico manager Diego Simeone, with the Spanish side believed to be pressing ahead with another attempt to sign the centre-back. Spurs are aware of Atletico’s interest and an agreement on personal terms for the player will not be an issue. Spurs boss Roberto de Zerbi recently said he would “respect the will” of players if they wanted to leave. Romero missed the end of last season with a knee injury as Spurs avoided relegation on the last day. He was sent off twice last season



as Spurs finished 17th. Meanwhile, fellow centre-back Micky van de Ven is close to agreeing a new five-year deal with Tottenham. - Agencies



Barca cancel friendly in Morocco on Aug 15 after Ceuta border crisis

BARCELONA: Barcelona have cancelled a pre-season friendly in Morocco because of the ongoing border crisis in Ceuta. The Spanish champions were set to face local side Ittihad Riadi Tangier in north-western Morocco on August 15 as part of their preparations for the new campaign. “In light of the current uncertainty and circumstances, FC Barcelona considers playing the match would be inappropriate,” said the club in a statement. While the club did not specify the reason for the cancellation, BBC Sport understands the decision is linked to the situation in Ceuta, the Spanish enclave that borders Morocco on the North African coast. About 78,000 migrants crossed into the Spanish territory from Morocco by sea last week, resulting in 100 deaths and sparking tensions among EU nations who share open borders. While a large majority of the migrants have since returned to Morocco, between 3,000 and 5,000 still remain in Ceuta. Italy had suspended its Schengen arrangement with Spain, backed by Finland and Denmark, while the Czech Republic called for Spain’s membership to be temporarily suspended. Barca also had a friendly with Preston North End cancelled after a pre-season training camp in the UK, where they played Birmingham City. They are scheduled to face Nottingham Forest on Saturday in the Italian city of Udine and will also host Egypt’s Al Ahly on August 19. Hansi Flick’s side will begin their La Liga title defence against Elche on August 23.

FIFA PRESIDENT UNDER PRESSURE

Norway’s federation calls on Infantino to resign over failed World Cup plan

MANCHESTER: Norway’s football federation wants Gianni Infantino to step down immediately, piling more pressure on FIFA’s embattled president on Friday. Infantino is facing a revolt after his failed plan to sell stakes in the World Cup. The Norwegian federation held a meeting on Thursday and president Lise Klaveness said the decision had been made to ask Infantino to resign. “When trust is gone, leadership must also be assessed. We therefore believe that Gianni Infantino’s time as FIFA President should be over, and ask him to resign,” Klaveness said via translation. The announcement is the latest blow for Infantino as the fallout continues over his controversial plan to sell profits in the World Cup through a commercial subsidiary called the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE). European football’s governing body UEFA said on Thursday its threat to boycott the World Cup and other FIFA competitions remained in place despite FIFA abandoning and apologising for its failed plan. It reiterated its stance that it had lost confidence in Infantino. Earlier this week Infantino appeared to have held off the potential of an internal revolt during a summit meeting with top staff in Rabat, Morocco. But UEFA’s response, followed by Norway’s direct call for him to resign shows the sense of anger from Europe, in particular, remains strong. The English Football Association has also withdrawn its support for Infantino’s re-election next March. He did, however, receive backing from Mexico’s federation. The Norwegian federation said it would raise concerns with FIFA regarding FFE, the peace prize awarded to Donald Trump and the suspension of Polarin Balogun’s one-match ban at the World Cup. “FIFA needs new leadership to rebuild trust, strengthen good governance and ensure that the organisation’s own reforms are actually implemented,” Klaveness said. Meanwhile, earlier on Friday the Mexican Football Federation broke ranks with its regional governing body CONCACAF to come out in support of Infantino. CONCACAF, which runs football in North and Central America and the Caribbean, called for a “comprehensive reckoning” of his presidency after he aborted his controversial proposals. Infantino had offered all associations \$40m (£30m) if they backed a proposal for private investment in its tournaments, including the men’s and women’s World Cups, through the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) subsidiary. However, 2026 World Cup co-hosts Mexico have backed his leadership amid widespread calls for him to resign. “The FMF [Mexican FA] supports president Infantino’s leadership in continuing to promote the development of football through institutional strengthening,” a statement read. It echoed a statement from CONMEBOL - South America’s governing body - in saying it would reject any attempt to remove Infantino without a vote involving all 211 FIFA members. CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez accompanied Infantino at the inauguration of Colombia’s new president Abelardo de la Escriella on Friday. He praised both Infantino’s record and the “enormously successful” 2026 World Cup, saying “we stand with Gianni”. - Agencies



ROUND-UP

Meethaq Islamic Banking participating as main sponsor of ‘Refill’ event at Samharam Village during Khareef Dhofar 2026

Through its interactive stall, Meethaq is showcasing its latest Sharia-compliant banking products and services while engaging directly with visitors and introducing them to its comprehensive Islamic financial solutions

SALALAH: As part of its commitment towards supporting various local initiatives and strengthening the community engagement Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is participating as the main sponsor in the “Refill” event at Samharam Village in Dhofar Governorate, one of the region’s leading family and entertainment destinations during Khareef Dhofar 2026. Through its interactive stall, Meethaq is showcasing its latest Sharia-compliant banking products and services while engaging directly with visitors and introducing them to its comprehensive Islamic financial solutions.

The “Refill” event will be welcoming large numbers of visitors with its diverse selection of restaurants and cafés, children’s entertainment, consumer exhibition, daily stage performances, competitions and cultural activities, in addition to dedicated family zones and community spaces. The vibrant atmosphere provides Meethaq with an ideal platform to engage with the visitors and raise awareness of its comprehensive range of Islamic



banking solutions.

Commenting on the occasion, Ali bin Ahmed Al Lawati, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Corporate Banking, said: “Meethaq’s participation in this event reflects our commitment to bringing our services closer to the community and strengthening our presence among visitors travelling to Dhofar during the Khareef season. Events such as these provide valuable opportunities to engage directly with customers, introduce them to our latest banking products and services, and showcase innovative Sharia’a compliant financial solutions that continue to evolve in line with customers’ changing

Meethaq reaffirms its commitment to supporting national initiatives that contribute to economic activities and promoting tourism in Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef season

needs and expectations.”

At the Meethaq stall, visitors can explore a comprehensive range of Islamic banking products and services, including personal, home and vehicle finance solutions, as well as savings accounts designed to help individuals and families achieve their long-term financial goals in accordance with Sharia principles. Visitors can also learn about Meethaq’s first-year annual fee cashback offer on credit cards. The stall also showcases the Meethaq Mobile Banking app, which offers customers a fully integrated digital banking experience. Through the application, customers can manage their accounts, transfer funds, pay bills

and access a wide range of banking services securely, conveniently and anytime, anywhere, reflecting Meethaq’s continued focus on its digital offerings and enhancing the customer experience.

Throughout the events, Meethaq representatives will be available to answer visitors’ enquiries, provide personalised financial guidance and help customers identify banking solutions that best suit their financial needs.

Meethaq Islamic Banking continues to strengthen its position as one of Oman’s leading Islamic service providers delivering innovative Sharia-compliant financial solutions that combine tradition with innovation while

maintaining high standards of quality, convenience and reliability across its branch network and digital channels.

Through its participation in the “Refill” event, Meethaq reaffirms its commitment to supporting national initiatives that contribute to economic activities and promoting tourism in Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef season. The participation reflects Meethaq’s dedication to creating added value for customers, supporting sustainable development and increasing awareness of modern Islamic banking by showcasing practical, Sharia’a compliant financial solutions that support customers at every stage of life.

COMMANDING PERFORMANCE

Chery Tiggo 8 Pro Max: Flagship Luxury, Redefined

MUSCAT: The Chery Tiggo 8 Pro Max stands as the brand’s flagship seven-seater SUV, transforming the landscape of premium family travel across the Sultanate. Built to command attention on every road, it delivers elite luxury, cutting-edge technology and commanding performance in a single, sophisticated package.

Executive design & commanding presence

The visual presence of the Tiggo 8 Pro Max reflects executive sophistication, featuring an aerodynamic profile and an elegant posture on Omani roads. Its signature design is instantly recognisable by the illuminated logo set against a distinct diamond-shaped radiator grille, beautifully flanked by dynamic LED headlights and anchored by striking R19 sporty alloy wheels. This exterior layout provides a powerful structural frame that flawlessly balances a high-end business appearance with the rugged underpinnings necessary to tackle diverse topographies across the country.

An intelligent, high-tech sanctuary

Inside, the cabin opens into an intelligent, high-tech sanctuary meticulously engineered to accommodate up to seven occupants in absolute luxury. The immersive interior experience is highlighted by a futuristic 24.6-inch integrated dual-screen display and an intuitive 12.3-inch digital driver instrument cluster that simplifies media control and navigation. The refined, spacious environment treats passengers to a panoramic sunroof, customisable ambient mood lighting, and a tri-zone automatic climate control system that ensures customized cabin cooling regardless of exterior regional



summer temperatures.

Mechanical excellence: 2.0 TGDI Kunpeng Power

Delivering mechanical excellence to match its prestigious design, the flagship SUV is driven by the celebrated 2.0 TGDI Kunpeng Power engine. Pushing out an impressive 254 horsepower and a massive 390 Nm of torque, this robust powerplant is paired with a highly responsive 7-speed Dual-Clutch Transmission (DCT) and an intelligent All-Wheel Drive (AWD) framework. The resulting driving dynamics guarantee a smooth, agile, and fuel-efficient performance, giving driving enthusiasts total

The immersive interior experience is highlighted by a futuristic 24.6-inch integrated dual-screen display and an intuitive 12.3-inch digital driver instrument cluster that simplifies media control and navigation.

stability and confidence whether navigating busy urban corridors in Muscat or exploring open highways across the Sultanate.

With its commanding design, intelligent cabin technology and powerful, refined performance, the Tiggo 8 Pro Max is engineered to be the ultimate flagship choice for families and driving enthusiasts across Oman who expect nothing less than premium quality in every detail.

Global recognition

Chery’s global reputation continues to grow, as reflected in recent accolades. Ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in

cars and 14th overall in the 2023 Kantar & Google Chinese Global Brand Builders report. Secured first place among all Chinese automotive brands in the J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM (IQS). For more details please visit (<https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS>). Ranked 233rd on the 2025 Fortune Global 500 list, demonstrating Chery’s exceptional global momentum, substantial year-on-year growth, and rapidly strengthening position among the world’s largest and most influential companies.

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