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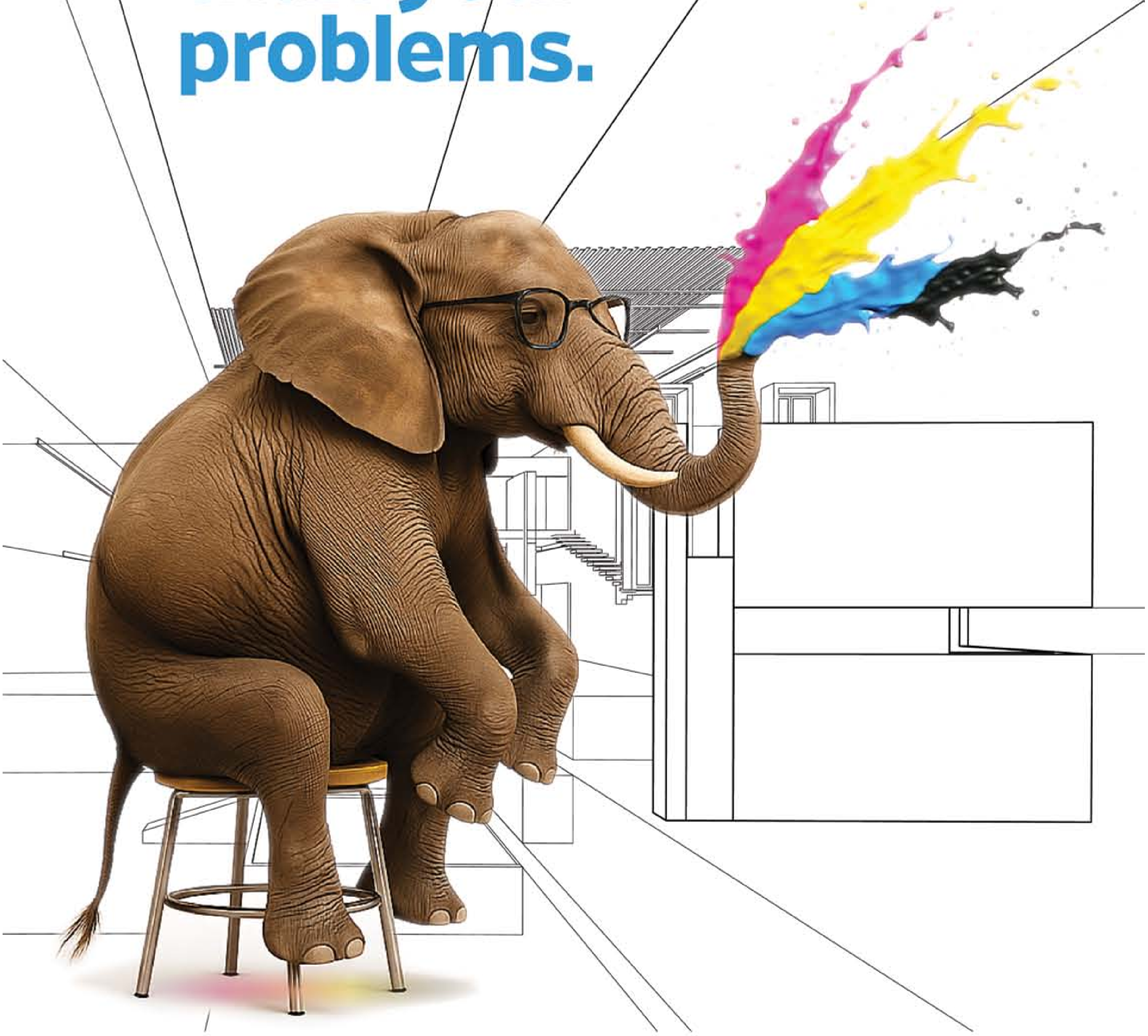

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Times of Oman

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Founded 1975 · Volume 51 No. 101 | 16 Pages · Baisas 200 · Subscription OMR63 | ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company | Chairman/Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali | Printed & Published by Muscat Media Group

TEMPORARY CLOSURE

Amerat–Bausher mountain road to close for two days

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), has announced the temporary closure of the Amerat–Bausher Mountain Road to facilitate essential maintenance works aimed at improving road safety.

The road will be completely closed from the evening of Thursday, July 23, until the evening of Saturday, July 25. During the closure, maintenance teams will remove loose and fallen rocks from the roadside protective barriers to reduce the risk of rockfalls and enhance the safety of motorists using the mountain route.

The municipality has advised motorists to use alternative roads during the closure and to follow directional signs placed in the area. Drivers are also encouraged to plan their journeys in advance and cooperate with traffic authorities to ensure smooth traffic movement.

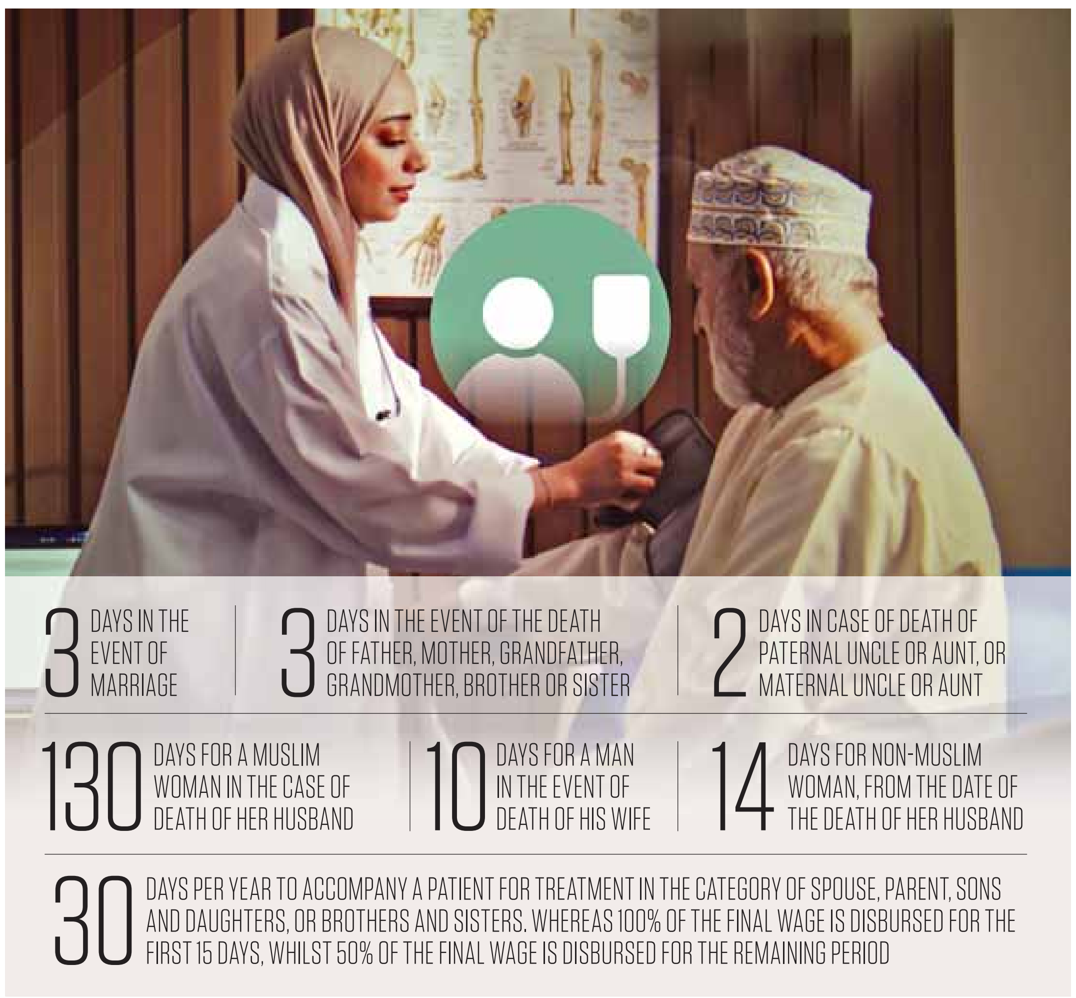
Many regular users of the road welcomed the maintenance work, saying the temporary inconvenience is justified by the long-term safety benefits.

"I use the Amerat–Bausher road every day to commute to work. While the closure may add a few extra minutes to my journey, removing loose rocks is essential to prevent accidents," said Sadiq, a resident of Al Amerat.

Another commuter praised the municipality's proactive approach, noting that planned maintenance is preferable to the risk of a serious incident caused by falling rocks. "I'm glad the work is being carried out over the weekend, when traffic is generally lighter," the commuter said.

NEW LEAVE INSURANCE FRAMEWORK TO RESHAPE WORKPLACE BENEFITS

Oman's Social Protection Fund sets out how employees and employers will access paid sick and extraordinary leave under Social Protection System



Times News Service

MUSCAT: A major reform in Oman's workplace social protection system is set to take effect this month as the Social Protection Fund (SPF) launches the operating framework for the new Sick Leave and Extraordinary Leave Insurance Branch, creating a unified mechanism to support employees during prolonged illness and major family emergencies while reducing the financial burden on employers.

The framework, which came into force on July 19, translates the provisions of the Social Protection Law into an operational system, setting out how employers and insured workers will contribute to, apply for and receive benefits under the new insurance branch.

Applications for compensation will be submitted through the SPF electronic services portal from August 1, with the first payments expected in early August after employers complete their monthly contribution settlements.

The new insurance branch is one of the key pillars of Oman's wider social protection reforms, aimed at providing income security to employees during periods of temporary incapacity while ensuring employers are compensated for eligible wage payments and insurance contributions made during approved leave periods.

According to the guideline issued by the SPF, the scheme is designed to strengthen employment stability, protect workers' rights and reduce the financial impact of illness-related and emergency-related absences.

Times Exclusive

Broad coverage for workers

The guideline confirms that the insurance branch will cover all Omanis employed in the civil, military, security and private sectors, regardless of their contract type.

The coverage includes permanent, temporary and training contracts, as well as retired persons who continue working.

The scheme will also cover eligible non-Omani workers employed in government administrative units and private-sector establishments governed by the Labour Law. >A3

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Oman expands youth development

1 Sayyid Saud bin Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has said that grooming the Omani citizen constitutes a pillar of comprehensive, sustainable development. A total of 1,000 students from different governorates are participating in this year's edition. >A2

OMAN

3 citizens convicted by Muscat court

2 Three Omani citizens have been convicted and sentenced to prison terms and fines in a case involving vote buying, election influence and online defamation, the PP said. The Primary Court of Muscat convicted them. >A3

WORLD

Jordan caught in US-Iran conflict

3 Air raid sirens again sounded in parts of Jordan as Iranian missiles targeted the kingdom. The air defence system intercepted and downed three missiles coming from Iranian territory. >B4

PANORAMIC VIEWS

Oman's tallest observation wheel, Salalah Eye set to welcome visitors

Photo by Ali Al-Shajibi

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Dhofar Governorate is set to unveil a major new tourism landmark, with the Salalah Eye observation wheel scheduled to officially open on August 15, 2026, at Al Haffa Beach during the peak Khareef season.

Standing 55 metres above the Arabian Sea, the attraction will become Oman's tallest observation wheel. It features 30 fully enclosed, air-conditioned cabins, each accommodating up to six passengers and offering 360-degree panoramic views of the coastline, mountains and the lush landscapes that define Dhofar's Khareef season.

A complete ride is expected to last between eight and 12 minutes.

The project is being positioned as a signature attraction for Salalah, complementing the city's expanding tourism offerings and supporting efforts to establish Dhofar as a year-round destination.

Located near the New Haffa Souq, the observation wheel is being developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Dhofar Municipality.

"The Arabian Khareef — a monsoon season found nowhere else on earth — transforms Salalah's mountains from desert to green in days. Mist rolls in from the sea. The air turns cool. And above it all, Salalah Eye turns," an official said.

Ticket prices have been set at OMR7 for a standard ride, while a private family cabin accommodating up to six people will cost OMR 28. An early booking option will also be available for OMR 5.

The attraction will operate daily from 10am to 11pm throughout the Khareef season.

The opening comes as Dhofar gears up for another busy tourism season, supported by increased domestic and international flights and a packed calendar of Khareef events aimed at attracting visitors from across Oman and the GCC.

The governorate welcomed more than one million visitors during last year's Khareef season. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 1,070,738 visitors travelled to Dhofar in 2025, up from 1,047,751 in 2024 and 962,196 in 2023.

Visitor spending has also continued to rise, reaching OMR125 million in 2025, compared with OMR121 million in 2024 and OMR 103 million in 2023, highlighting the growing economic contribution of the Khareef season to the hospitality, transport, retail, entertainment and small business sectors across the governorate.

OMAN

BILATERAL RELATIONS

HM sends written message to Armenia Prime Minister

YEREVAN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The message was handed over by Hamoud Salim Al Tuwaih, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and Oman's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia, when he was received by Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, at the headquarters of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Yerevan. -ONA

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

'Grooming citizens constitutes cornerstone of development'

MUSCAT: Sayyid Saud bin Hilal Al Busaidi, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has said that grooming the Omani citizen constitutes a pillar of comprehensive, sustainable development.

In a statement during the launch of the 3rd edition of the 2026 Military Discipline Programme, Sayyid Saud said, "The Programme embodies the Ministry's commitment to invest in the segment of young people as part of a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education. The programme seeks to consolidate the values of loyalty, the spirit of belonging to the nation and the principles of national responsibility, with the prime objective of achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

He explained that the programme offers an integrated system that combines military training, sports skills and the acquisition of general knowledge—with the aim of shaping the personalities of students, enhancing level of discipline, propagating the culture of resourcefulness and raising their sense of responsibility.

As many as 1,000 students from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman benefit from the programme this year, said the minister. -ONA

Healthcare expansion benefits 320,000 people

The health sector in North Al Sharqiyah recently made tangible progress in specialised services, including corneal transplants, shoulder joint replacement and eardrum repair

IBRA: The health sector in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah has undergone major growth in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The governorate's outstanding health system has become a basic pillar of sustainable development by improving the quality of life for more than 320,000 people in the Governorate's wilayats of Ibra, Al Mudhaibi, Bidiya, Al Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid, Dima W'Attayeen and Sinaw.

The development of the health sector deals with the governorate's extensive geographical area and the rapid growth in terms of population and urban expansion.

The health sector succeeded in three ways: Bringing the services closer to population through the establishment of new hospitals and health centres, offering new specialised services that had not been available in the wilayats before and making health service a factor in the stability of groups operating in economic sectors like farming and tourism.

The health sector in the governorate recently made tangible progress in specialised services, including corneal transplants, shoulder joint replacement and damaged eardrum repair.

Over 100 surgeries were conducted for the treatment of morbid obesity. This cut down waiting lists and diminished the rate of referral to hospitals outside the governorate.

The progress made in the health sector's infrastructure development included the opening of Al Jarda Health Centre, the expansion of Wadi Bani Khalid Hospital, the completion of construction tasks at the health centres of Ibra and Al Mudhaibi and the start of technical works at the two centres' medical wings. -ONA

IN WILAYAT OF MANAH

NRAA implements project to document customs, traditions

MANAH: A team from the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) recently completed a 4-day mission in the Wilayat of Manah where it documented basic elements of intangible cultural heritage.

The project included 8 documentary interviews with a number of elderly people and persons interested in the cultural heritage of the Wilayat of Manah.

The interviews covered various topics, most notably the history of mosques and Quranic schools, the tradition of endowments, women's cultural heritage, craft industries, aspects of Bedouin life, agriculture and irrigation systems and folklore.

The interviews also included the documentation of local vocabulary, names, customs, traditions and social norms that characterise the local community in the Wilayat of Manah.

The project constitutes part of national efforts aimed at enhancing cooperation between government departments and the local community in documenting cultural heritage that abounds in the Wilayat of Manah. -ONA

FROM SUMMER HEAT

Indian schools suspend outdoor activities to protect students

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Indian Schools across Oman have suspended all outdoor activities, including physical education classes, sports and morning assemblies, as part of a comprehensive heat safety protocol issued by the Board of Directors to ensure the well-being of students during the peak summer months.

The directive, which comes as schools reopen for the new academic session, places student safety, health and comfort at the centre of school operations. The Board said every decision and policy is guided by its commitment to providing a safe, secure and nurturing learning environment across all Indian Schools in Oman.

"As schools resumed classes in mid-July, we are seeing an attendance of around 85 per cent across all schools. The safety, health and well-being of our students remain our absolute highest priority," the Board said.

Under the new measures, all outdoor activities have been suspended and will only resume when weather conditions become safe and favourable.

Schools have also been instructed to incorporate regular hydration breaks throughout the day and ensure students have access to chilled, hygienic drinking water through properly maintained filtration systems.

The Board has directed all schools to conduct mandatory inspections of air-conditioning systems in classrooms, laboratories, common areas and school buses, with immediate repairs wherever required.

School transport operators have also been instructed to maintain optimal cooling inside buses and ensure that students are never made to wait inside parked vehicles during pick-up or drop-off.

Special attention has been mandated for younger children and students with pre-existing medical conditions. In addition, school clinics have been fully equipped to deal with heat-related illnesses, while teachers and staff have been trained to identify early symptoms of heat stress and respond promptly.

The Board said the measures reflect its child-first approach to education by embedding care, precaution and safety into the daily functioning of schools. "As we welcome children back to the classroom, we have taken immediate, proactive steps to shield them from adverse weather conditions so they can focus on what matters most—learning, growing and thriving," said Board Chairman Syed Ahmad Salman.

Reflecting on the Board's broader educational philosophy, Salman said recent disruptions to Board examinations had reinforced the importance of continuous learning over one-time assessments.

"Twice in the last six years, including this year, the world drifted beneath our feet as Board examinations could not be conducted. That emotional awakening taught us that education is not a cold, single moment of judgement, but an enduring labour of love—a continuous sanctuary of guided growth where every single day is a promise kept to our children," he said.

The Board reaffirmed its commitment to academic excellence and holistic development, stating that it will continue to work closely with school leadership teams to provide a safe, healthy and supportive environment for every student across its affiliated institutions.

SUSTAINABILITY OF WATER RESOURCES

Al Dhahirah Governorate completes 35% of falaj maintenance work to boost farm productivity

IBRI: Thirty-five percent of a project for the maintenance of the falaj system in Al Dhahirah Governorate has been completed.

The project constitutes part of efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to ensure the sustainability of water resources and consolidate their efficiency in serving the agriculture sector.

The project includes the maintenance and restoration of 15 falaj systems in different wilayats of the governorate.

The tasks include the removal of debris from the course of aflaj, the reconstruction of sidewalls and the implementation of technical and engineering tasks that contribute to the restoration of the irrigation channels in a manner that enhances the flow of water to crops and ensures the sustainable outcome of the farming sector.

Engineer Mubarak bin Salem Al Jabri, Director of the Water Resources Department in Al Dhahirah Governorate, said project teams are implementing the work at an accelerated pace while adhering to approved technical and engineering standards to ensure high-quality execution and achieve the project's objectives.

Al Jabri explained that the rehabilitation project was launched in response to the damage caused by the Al-Masarrat weather depression, which affected the Sultanate of Oman in March. The severe weather damaged sections of several aflaj channels, irrigation canals and associated infrastructure.

He said the maintenance works will restore the efficiency of the traditional irrigation systems, improve water flow and enhance the sustainability of water resources, while supporting agricultural activities across the governorate.

As part of its broader conservation efforts, the ministry completed maintenance and rehabilitation work on 39 falaj systems in the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank during 2025 under programmes aimed at preserving Oman's irrigation network. Al Dhahirah is home to 579 aflaj, including 315 active, 126 inactive and 138 extinct systems, highlighting the region's importance in preserving one of Oman's most significant cultural and water heritage assets. The aflaj network continues to play a vital role in supporting water security and sustaining the farm sector. -ONA

3 convicted in Oman over vote buying case

On July 7, 2026, the Supreme Court accepted the appeal in form but rejected it on its merits, making the convictions final

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Three Omani citizens have been convicted and sentenced to prison terms and fines in a case involving vote buying, election influence and online defamation, the Public Prosecution (PP) said.

The Primary Court of Muscat (Criminal Circle) convicted Abdullah Abdulrahman Mohammed, Yosef Ahmed Shaheen and Tarik Ibrahim Hassan.

Abdullah Abdulrahman Mohammed was found guilty of using information technology to insult another person, an offence punishable under Article 16 of the Law on Combating Cybercrime. He was sentenced to one year in prison and fined OMR1,000. The court suspended the remainder of the prison sentence, requiring him to serve one month in prison.

Yosef Ahmed Shaheen and Tarik Ibrahim Hassan were convicted of vote buying with the intent to influence the outcome of the 10th Shura Council elections. Both were sentenced to one year in prison and fined OMR5,000. The court partially suspended the sentence imposed on Tarik Ibrahim Hassan, who will serve six months in prison and pay a fine of OMR1,000.

The court ordered that the sentences against Yosef Ahmed Shaheen run concurrently, with only the most severe penalty to be served. It also ordered the publication of the court's ruling.

On February 16, 2026, the Muscat Court of Appeal upheld the convictions but suspended the prison sentences for all appellants. On July 7, 2026, the Supreme Court accepted the appeal in form but rejected it on its merits, making the convictions final.

According to the Public Prosecution, investigations found that Abdullah Abdulrahman Mohammed and Yosef Ahmed Shaheen published a video on social media containing insulting remarks about one of the candidates in the 10th Shura Council elections, questioning his eligibility and ability to serve as a council member in a manner that harmed his reputation. Investigators also uncovered messages exchanged between Yosef Ahmed Shaheen and Tarik Ibrahim Hassan that showed an agreement to buy votes in favour of the second defendant, undermining the integrity of the electoral process and the freedom of voting.

Following the completion of investigations, the suspects were referred to the competent court, which issued the convictions.

SPF

Full wages during first 7 days of sick leave

< FROM A1

However, self-employed Omanis, part-time workers, Omanis working abroad or in GCC countries, and categories excluded from the Labour Law, including domestic workers, will not fall under the new insurance branch.

Sick leave compensation

Under the new framework, employers will continue paying employees their full wages during the first seven days of sick leave.

From the eighth day onwards, the SPF will compensate insured employees according to a graduated payment structure linked to their final wage.

Employees will receive 100 per cent of their final wage from the eighth to the 21st day, 75 per cent from the 22nd to the 35th day, 50 per cent from the 36th to the 70th day, and 35 per cent from the 71st to the 182nd day.

The guideline limits sick leave compensation to a maximum of 182 days in a calendar year.

Employers may provide additional sick leave beyond this period under their own internal regulations, but such additional leave will not be reimbursed by the Fund. The guideline also states that employers cannot require employees to perform work while they are on sick leave.

Paid extraordinary leave introduced

The insurance branch also introduces a structured system for paid extraordinary leave covering major personal and family circumstances.

Employees will receive 100 per cent of their final wage for approved extraordinary leave categories, including:

Three days for marriage; Three days following the death of a parent, grandparent, sibling, son or daughter; Two days following the death of a paternal or maternal uncle or aunt; 130 days for a Muslim woman following the death of her husband; 14 days for a non-Muslim woman following the death of her husband; 10 days for a Muslim man following the death of his wife.

The framework also covers employees accompanying close family members for medical treatment.

Workers accompanying a spouse, parent, son, daughter, brother or sister for treatment will receive compensation at 100 per cent of the final wage for the first 15 days, followed by 50 per cent for the remaining approved period.

Employers to contribute 1%

The new insurance branch will be financed through a 1 per cent employer contribution calculated on employees' full wages without any salary ceiling.

The contribution applies to Omani and eligible non-Omani employees covered under the scheme.

The SPF will issue monthly contribution invoices, while employers will remain responsible for maintaining accurate employee records, updating wage information and paying contributions within the required deadlines.

The Fund said benefit calculations will depend on wage information submitted by employers, making accurate reporting an important requirement under the system.

Roles of employers and SPF

The guideline sets out clear responsibilities for employers and the Fund in managing applications.

Employers will continue approving leave requests after verifying the required supporting documents submitted by employees. The SPF, however, will have the authority to review claims, request additional information and recover payments made without entitlement.

Periods spent on approved sick leave or extraordinary leave will continue to count as actual service, ensuring employees retain their employment rights and continuity of service.

The guideline also clarifies that employers will continue paying statutory insurance contributions during sick leave after deducting the employee's share, with eligible amounts reimbursed or settled by the Fund according to approved procedures.

If an employee changes employers while receiving benefits, compensation will continue for the remaining approved leave period based on the employee's final wage before the transfer.

All applications for sick leave and extraordinary leave compensation will be processed through the SPF electronic services portal from August 1, 2026.

The Fund said the launch of the new insurance branch marks a significant step in strengthening Oman's social protection system by providing wider financial security for employees while creating a more balanced mechanism for employers managing extended leave periods.

MARINE ASSETS

Al Wusta tops in Oman's fish production

MUSCAT: Al Wusta Governorate continues to invest in blue economy activities, capitalising on its marine assets and the integration of fisheries, ports, logistics and tourism to boost the value of marine resources and advance economic diversification and sustainable development.

Isra Abdullah Al Hadi, a Fisheries Development Specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the governorate's extensive coastline, rich fish stocks and strategic location have made fisheries a key pillar of the blue economy.

In 2024, the governorate ranked first in Oman in fish production, with output reaching about 226,000 tonnes — 25 percent of the national total — valued at over OMR100 million.

More than 4,670 registered fishermen, along with 2,357 fishing boats and 124 artisanal vessels, underscore the sector's economic scale.

She added that modern ports and marine infrastructure, particularly the Port of Duqm and

the Duqm Multi-Purpose Fishing Port, have supported fish landing, handling and marketing, provided vessel maintenance and processing facilities, and strengthened logistics and supply chains connecting local production to domestic and international markets.

The economic impact of integrated investments in fisheries, ports, logistics and tourism lies in an interconnected system that maximises marine resource value and generates sustainable returns, Al Hadi said.

The system enhances investment appeal, raises product and service competitiveness, expands value chains, and creates direct and indirect jobs in fishing, processing, transport, marketing and support services.

She said that blue economy activities also boost local content by increasing reliance on national products and services and expanding marine-related value chains, including logistics, manufacturing and marine tourism.

She added that they offer broad opportunities for small and medium enterprises in support services such as vessel maintenance, storage, processing, marketing and marine tourism, strengthening local business growth and the contribution of national enterprises to sustainable development.

She explained that future plans focus on reinforcing Al Wusta's leadership in the blue economy through continued development of marine and logistics infrastructure, expansion of fisheries and aquaculture projects and related manufacturing, and upgrading landing, handling and marketing facilities.

She concluded that plans also include boosting investment linked to the Port of Duqm and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, developing supply chains and logistics, and encouraging innovation, research and modern technologies in marine activities — enhancing the governorate's investment appeal and consolidating its position as a national hub for the blue economy in line with Oman Vision 2040. -ONA

Misfat Al Abriyeen project reaches 39% completion rate

Misfat Al Abriyeen has emerged as one of the Sultanate's leading tourist attractions, renowned for its unique blend of heritage architecture, natural beauty and traditional farming terraces

MUSCAT: The Misfat Al Abriyeen neighbourhood development project in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has reached 39 per cent completion, marking a key milestone in efforts to enhance one of Oman's most celebrated heritage destinations.

The project, valued at more than OMR810,000, is aimed at improving public services, strengthening tourism infrastructure and enhancing the governorate's appeal as a premier tourist destination, while generating greater economic returns from the tourism sector.

Implemented by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the project features a range of tourism-focused upgrades, including the construction of a glass bridge linking the village entrance to the valley area, a pedestrian walkway with safety barriers, paved pathways and traditional-style lighting. Directional signage with visitor maps and designated parking areas are also being added.

Misfat Al Abriyeen has emerged as one of the Sultanate's leading tourist attractions, renowned for its unique blend of heritage architecture, natural beauty and traditional farming terraces.

His Excellency Sheikh Sulaiman bin Saeed Al Azri, Governor of Al Hamra, said the village's achievements reflect successful collaboration between government entities, the private sector and the local community in line with Oman's commitment to sustainable tourism.

He said work is continuing to improve infrastructure and tourism services to enhance the visitor experience and further strengthen Misfat Al Abriyeen's appeal among domestic and international travellers.

Al Azri added that the next phase of development will see closer coordination among stakeholders to support tourism and development initiatives, reinforcing the village's standing as a global model for sustainable tourism.

Abdulrahman bin Saleh Al Abri, a member of the Misfat Al Abriyeen Tourism Team, said the village offers visitors a comprehensive tourism experience through guided tours, cultural and agricultural experiences, and visits to attractions such as the Omani Honey House, the Misfat Al Abriyeen Museum and Bait Al Siraj.

He said the village is home to eight licensed tourist lodges offering a range of accommodation options, while mountain camping, outdoor adventures and other experiential tourism programmes continue to attract growing numbers of visitors.

Al Abri said the tourism team also promotes the destination through the "Visit Misfat" platform, which showcases the village's attractions and tourism experiences.

He attributed Misfat Al Abriyeen's growing popularity to its focus on cultural and environmental sustainability and the active involvement of the local community, with residents providing traditional meals, guiding visitors, organising tours and creating authentic experiences.

Misfat Al Abriyeen was recognised in 2021 as one of the World's Best Tourism Villages, further cementing its reputation as one of Oman's premier heritage destinations.

OMANI CULTURAL LEGACY

NRAA documents Omani presence in Mombasa

MOMBASA: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) continues the implementation of its project to document the oral narrative of the Omani presence in the city of Mombasa, Republic of Kenya.

This comes within the framework of its ongoing efforts to trace the paths of Omani history beyond the nation's borders and complete the documentation of the Omani cultural legacy in East Africa. Such efforts contribute to preserving historical memory and enhancing the sources of research and study regarding the historical relations that brought together the Sultanate of Oman and the countries of the African coast.

This project serves as an extension of the Authority's approach to collecting and documenting various historical sources. The oral narrative constitutes an important tributary that complements the thousands of documents and manuscripts related to the history of East Africa preserved by the Authority. The testimonies of narrators contribute to evoking the details of daily life and historical events that were not recorded in written sources, thereby remaining a living witness to the depth of the Omani presence in the region.

Through a series of field interviews, the team from the Oral History Department at the Authority is documenting the testimonies of several narrators among the residents of Mombasa. They recall what they experienced or inherited from their fathers and grandfathers regarding events, situations, and stories that embody the Omani presence in the city and the cities of the Kenyan coast, as well as the cultural impact it left on various aspects of political, economic, cultural, social, and urban life.

These interviews aim to document the oral memory of the Omani presence in Mombasa and highlight the historical role played by Omanis in East Africa across various historical stages. This enhances the documentation of the shared cultural legacy and provides authentic scientific material that supports historical and research studies.

In this context, Abdulaziz Humaid Al Mahdhouri, Director of the Oral History Department at the National Records and Archives Authority, stated that documenting the oral narrative in East Africa represents one of the main pillars of the Authority's projects aimed at completing the historical picture of the Omani presence outside the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that the accounts provided by the narrators constitute an authentic historical source that contributes to preserving details unavailable in written documents. It also enhances researchers' understanding of the nature of the human, social, and cultural relations that developed between Omanis and the peoples of East Africa over the centuries. -ONA

COMMENTARY

A Ban That Teaches Children to Hide

The Indian state of Karnataka took an important step in March this year when it announced during the state budget discussion that it was considering banning social media access for children under 16, a proposal that has drawn passionate supporters and critics worldwide. The truth, however, is that such a ban, even if it sounds great on paper, is rarely enforceable, and our teens have already found ways around it before the ink dries on any such order.

A friend's younger sister, now 16, has always had two Instagram accounts. The first is tidy, curated, and visible to her parents and extended family: birthday wishes, school trip photos, the odd motivational quote. The second is where she actually lives online, her real friendships, her unfiltered opinions, and a list of followers I am sure her parents would find deeply uncomfortable.

She set up the second account years ago, not out of fear of any ban, but simply because she is a teenager, and teenagers have always needed conversations their parents cannot hear. The ban, when it arrives with its rules and enforcement mechanisms, will change nothing about this. It will simply make her better at hiding.

This is the fundamental problem with such announcements. The intent is right. The execution is often impossible.

To be fair to the authorities, the problem is serious. India leads the world in reported cyberbullying. A McAfee survey found that 85% of Indian children reported being cyberbullied, the highest rate of any country surveyed, with extreme forms like racist harassment, sexual harassment, and threats of physical harm running significantly higher than the global average. In 2018, 37% of Indian teenagers reported being bullied online, a statistic that has since then surely gone up. The harm is real, documented, and in some cases severe enough to affect mental health, academic performance, and, in the worst cases, to end lives. A government responding with urgency is not wrong.

What is missing is the how. Details on enforcement are yet to be worked out. No rules have been published. No mechanism has been designed. Legal experts have questioned whether a state government even has constitutional authority to impose such a restriction, since digital regulation in India falls primarily under the central government's jurisdiction under the Information Technology Act.

Globally, similar measures have found support, and the results are instructive. Australia launched its ban on social media for under-16s in December 2025, with fines of up to AUD 49.5 million for platforms that failed to enforce age restrictions. It was the first country to attempt this at scale, and governments everywhere, including in India, pointed to it as the model to follow. By March 2026, a survey by the Molly Rose Foundation found that most Australian under-16s retained access to banned platforms not through clever workarounds, but because platforms had simply failed to remove their accounts in the first place. Others who faced restrictions said circumventing the ban was easy. This could be achieved by using a parent's Face ID, drawing moustaches to fool facial recognition, borrowing a sibling's account, or running a VPN. By June 2026, Australia proposed doubling its maximum penalty

> Banning social media access for children under 16, a proposal that has drawn passionate supporters and critics

to AUD 99 million after surveys showed children were still on the restricted platforms. The eSafety Commissioner is now investigating Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram for non-compliance. The restriction did not reduce access. It produced a generation fluent in privacy circumvention.

GCC authorities are watching this carefully and, to their credit, moving more thoughtfully. The UAE has gone furthest with actual legislation: a cabinet resolution bars children under 15 from social media entirely and restricts access for 15 to 16-year-olds through content controls, parental oversight tools, and usage limits. Bahrain has proposed a similar law. Qatar's Child Digital Safety framework makes platforms and caregivers legally responsible for compliance. Oman's telecom regulator has begun a formal review of children's social media use. Saudi Arabia's Shura Council has called for age verification requirements for users under 16. The region is not banning. It is building. That distinction matters.

This is where the teenager with two accounts becomes more than an anecdote. Her second account is the one most at risk for cyberbullying, precisely because it is invisible to the adults who might intervene. Online harm will not disappear once enforcement begins. It will migrate, as it already has for millions of children globally, to private accounts, encrypted apps, and unregulated corners of the internet where there is no platform accountability, no teacher who can see what is happening, no parent who knows to ask. A ban does not protect children from online harm. It simply ensures the harm happens out of sight. South Korea learned this when it imposed a shutdown policy on online gaming for minors: the effect on time spent online was practically insignificant, with sleep improving by an average of just 90 seconds a night.

What actually protects children is less dramatic and more demanding than a budget announcement.

It is digital literacy built into school curricula from an early age. It is platform design obligations that curb algorithmic aggression toward younger users: banning infinite scroll, restricting autoplay, and limiting content designed to provoke anxiety or outrage. It is parental tools with real transparency, not the theatrical controls platforms currently offer. And it is an honest conversation within families about what the internet actually contains, rather than the comfortable fiction that a rule on paper will keep it at a safe distance.

Karnataka was not wrong to act. The cyberbullying statistics alone demand a policy response. But raising an issue and solving it are not the same thing. Children who want to be online will be online. The only question policy can meaningfully answer is whether they will be online where adults can see them, guide them, and help them when something goes wrong, or in spaces designed to keep adults out.

(The views expressed by the author are personal)

BILATERAL TIES

Oman, Indonesia discuss means of enhancing ties

MUSCAT: Sheikh Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry, received on Wednesday Muhammad Anis Matta, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance co-operation in various fields. They also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of common interest.

The meeting was attended by a number of officials from both sides. -ONA

MUSCAT FINANCE
Enabling Dreams

MUSCAT FINANCE (S.A.O.G)

P.O.Box 888, PC 112 Sultanate of Oman

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present your Company's Directors' Report for the quarter ended 30th June 2026. In a quarter marked by regional conflict and sharp swings in energy markets, your Company delivered a 74% expansion in quarterly operating profit — 57% for the half-year — and pressed ahead with the strategic rebalancing of the portfolio toward retail and collateralised lending that the Board has pursued since 2021.

QUARTER AT A GLANCE

NET INTEREST INCOME (Q2)	OPERATING PROFIT (Q2)	NET PROFIT (Q2)
2.008Mn ▲ 25%	1.375Mn ▲ 74%	165K ▲ 62%
GROSS LOAN BOOK (Q2)	VEHICULAR FINANCE SHARE (Q2)	STAGE 3 COVERAGE (Q2)
147.8Mn ▲ 11%	82.8% (2025: 75.6%)	75.7% (2025: 73.2%)

MACRO ENVIRONMENT & POLICY BACKDROP

The second quarter was dominated by the course of the Middle East conflict and its imprint on energy markets. Brent crude, above USD 100 per barrel in early June, closed the quarter in the mid-USD 70s after the mid-June interim peace agreement reopened the Strait of Hormuz — though renewed hostilities after the period-end underline that conditions remain fluid. For Oman, the disruption has so far translated into a net fiscal tailwind: the IMF's June 2026 Article IV mission raised its growth projection for the Sultanate to around 3.7%, among the strongest in the GCC, with the fiscal surplus projected to widen to 4.5% of GDP and inflation contained at 2.8%. The Central Bank of Oman held its repo rate at 4.25% throughout the quarter and the US Federal Reserve stayed on hold, preserving funding-cost visibility, while firm hydrocarbon revenues and continued growth in private-sector Omani employment reinforce the Board's strategic focus on the retail segment.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

For the six months ended 30th June 2026, net interest income rose 23% to OMR 3.948 million and gross income 28% to OMR 4.607 million, cost-to-income ratio dropped to 41.8% (H1 2025: 52.5%) pending recruitment of key positions; operating profit consequently expanded 57% to OMR 2.680 million. After an impairment charge of OMR 2.130 million (H1 2025: OMR 1.186 million), directed predominantly at legacy non-performing exposures, profit before tax was OMR 0.550 million (H1 2025: OMR 0.520 million) and net profit after tax OMR 0.468 million — struck after a tax charge of OMR 0.082 million, the Company having returned to a tax-paying position on full utilisation of carried-forward losses, itself a marker of the earnings recovery. The slow loan book growth continues to be a concern, as a result,: operating profit of OMR 1.375 million was 74% higher year-on-year and net profit rose 62% to OMR 0.165 million, taking the quarterly run-rate past OMR 1.3 million, this means the path back to pre-pandemic operating-profit levels is slower than expected.

PORTFOLIO STRATEGY: RETAIL FOCUS, SELECTIVE CORPORATE

The Board's strategy has been consistent since 2021: quality growth in the retail segment, very selective property-collateralised corporate lending, optimal deployment in highly rated corporate bonds, diversified low-cost funding and digitally enabled customer delight. Its results are increasingly visible. The vechicular finance (which partly includes the retail segment) portfolio grew 20.6% year-on-year to OMR 88.9 million, lifting the vehicular finance share of the net financing book to 82.8% as at 30th June 2026 (30th June 2025: 75.6%), with vehicular segmental profit before tax up 64% to OMR 2.228 million. The company aims to have more Targeted sales campaigns and sustained dealership partnerships in order to improve the retail finance to the targeted level. NPA accretion rates remain a cause of concern.

The corporate portfolio moderated to OMR 18.5 million (30th June 2025: OMR 23.8 million) in line with the rebalancing strategy, while the bond portfolio — OMR 3.53 million after an opportunistic divestment of OMR 0.78 million executed at a negligible fair-value adjustment — continued to provide yield support and liquidity flexibility. Corporate deposits rose 47% year-on-year to OMR 37.9 million and now fund more than half of the Company's interest-bearing liabilities; the benefit is directly visible in a half-year interest expense that declined marginally even as total funding grew 21%. The Board will continue to time any bond issuance to secure the lowest sustainable blended cost of funds.

Digital Excellence for Unparalleled Customer Delight

Technology remains the foundational pillar of Your Company's ambition to become the first FLC to achieve instant loan disbursements through a fully digital process, with minimal human intervention and without compromising asset quality. Electronic KYC, Digital Application Signatures and fully automated direct-debit mandates — carrying legal enforceability at par with post-dated instruments at lower operational risk — are already embedded in the customer journey.

A milestone of the quarter was the launch of CRM 360, which consolidates the customer's complete relationship — exposures, repayment record and service history — onto a single screen. However, the company is yet to achieve the benefit from this achievement through sharpened cross-sell and retention conversations, with the aim of an increase in customer wallet share.

The Company's drive-through, self-service kiosk and round-the-clock digital payment channels sustained the strong adoption recorded earlier in the year, easing branch footfall at peak periods and extending the convenience of transacting at a time and place of the customer's choosing. The company aims to expand the services offered through these channels.

ASSET QUALITY, RECOVERY & PROVISIONING

The IFRS-9 Stage-3 loan coverage ratio (Stage 3 ECL plus interest in suspense as a ratio of cumulative Stage 3 assets) stood at 75.7% as at 30th June 2026 (30th June 2025: 73.2%), and rises to 80.2% inclusive of the regulatory impairment reserve of OMR 2.343 million maintained in accordance with CBO Circular 1149; the consolidated provision coverage ratio strengthened to 82.3% (Q1 2026: 79.8%). Of the half-year impairment charge, OMR 1.640 million was absorbed by the corporate segment — predominantly legacy exposures — while the expanding retail book required OMR 0.490 million, and the Board expects recovery momentum on legacy accounts to accelerate.

CAPITAL, DIVIDENDS & INVESTOR RELATIONS

Shareholders' equity stood at OMR 39.365 million as at 30th June 2026 — net assets of 128 baizas per share — with capital adequacy comfortably above regulatory minimum with gearing of 1.81x and leverage of 2.08x. During the period the Company paid the FY2025 cash dividend of 1.67 baizas per share (OMR 0.513 million), an increase over the prior year's distribution, with capital allocation continuing to prioritise Stage-3 coverage and retail-led organic growth.

OUTLOOK

The outlook for the remainder of 2026 is one of cautious optimism. Oman's upgraded growth trajectory, projected fiscal surplus and continued growth in private-sector Omani employment reinforce the structural case for retail-led financing, even as the regional geopolitical situation warrants continued vigilance. Your Company enters the second half with strengthened coverage, momentum in retail origination, a broader and lower-cost funding base and a refreshed Board, and the Board remains confident that the recovery trajectory will be sustained.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the Board and the Company, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq and extend our best wishes as he continues to lead the Sultanate of Oman with wisdom and vision towards prosperity.

I would like to thank His Majesty's Government, the Central Bank of Oman, the Financial Services Authority and other regulatory Authorities for their continued support and guidance. We are grateful to customers for their continued patronage and support, to our bankers for their unwavering trust and support, and to all the shareholders for the confidence reposed in its Board. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express our appreciation to the dedicated management and staff of the Company for their hard work, commitment, and support. I would like to particularly record and recognize the efforts put by the legal department as well as the finance staff who are contributing significantly to the results that are achieved today. I also would like to recognize the efforts put by the retail staff in growing the loan book to the level aspired by the Board and wish them all the best to reach the targeted level of the Board.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors

Faisal Mohamed Al Yousef
Chairman
Muscat Finance SAOG

Interim condensed statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026

	30 June 2026 000 Un-audited	30 June 2025 000 Un-audited	31 December 2025 000 Audited
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	**1,794**	259	2,460
Investments at FVOCI	**3,526**	776	4,298
Net investment in finance debtors	**107,404**	97,517	102,446
Other receivables and prepayments	**685**	501	492
Deferred tax asset	**-**	398	-
Property and equipment	**2,100**	2,195	2,150
Investment property	**638**	667	652
Statutory deposit	**250**	250	250
TOTAL ASSETS	**116,397**	102,563	112,748
EQUITY			
Share capital	**30,715**	30,715	30,715
Legal reserve	**3,295**	3,209	3,295
Impairment reserve	**2,343**	5,033	2,282
Fair value reserve	**-**	-	(4)
Retained earnings	**3,012**	118	3,118
Total equity	**39,365**	39,075	39,406
LIABILITIES			
Short-term borrowings	**29,299**	30,204	26,852
Other liabilities	**5,603**	4,878	4,572
Deferred tax liability	**230**	-	148
Corporate deposits	**37,883**	25,810	38,510
Long-term loans	**4,017**	2,596	3,260
Total liabilities	**77,032**	63,488	73,342
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	**116,397**	102,563	112,748
Net assets per share	**0.128**	0.127	0.128

Interim condensed statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30 June 2026

	3 months period ended		6 months period ended	
	30 June 2026 000 Un-audited	30 June 2025 000 Un-audited	30 June 2026 000 Un-audited	30 June 2025 000 Un-audited
Interest income	**3,011**	2,632	**5,957**	5,250
Interest expense	**(1,003)**	(1,028)	**(2,009)**	(2,031)
Net interest income	**2,008**	1,604	**3,948**	3,219
Other operating income	**312**	219	**659**	370
	2,320	1,823	**4,607**	3,589
Expenses				
Selling, general and administrative expenses	**(861)**	(969)	**1,678**	(1,710)
Depreciation and amortisation	**(60)**	(52)	**118**	(102)
Director's remuneration and sitting fees	**(24)**	(11)	**131**	(71)
	(945)	(1,032)	**1,927**	(1,883)
Profit before allowance for impairment	**1,375**	791	**2,680**	1,706
Allowance for impairment	**(1,181)**	(689)	**2,130**	(1,186)
Net profit before tax for the period	**194**	102	**550**	520
Income tax	**(29)**	-	**(82)**	-
Net profit after tax for the period	**165**	102	**468**	520
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss:				
Fair value loss on investments in debt instruments measured at FVOCI	**5**	-	**4**	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	**170**	102	**472**	520
Basic and diluted earnings per share	**0.0005**	0.0003	**0.0015**	0.0017

CABLE

HM greets President of Egypt

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Abdel Fattah El Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on the anniversary of the 23 July Revolution.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed best good wishes to President Abdel Fattah El Sisi and the Egyptian people on this glorious anniversary.

His Majesty lauded the depth of the mutual historical relations and areas of cooperation and partnership.

His Majesty wished Egypt prosperity and stability, as well as the realisation of further developmental, economic, and investment achievements. -ONA

Times OF OMAN

Printed and published by: Muscat Media Group Post Box: 770, Postal Code: 112

Founder: Essa bin Mohammed Al Zedjali
Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zadjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
Chief Executive Officer: Ahmed Essa Al Zedjali

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ADVERTISING: Telephone: 22009004, E-mail: amcoman@choueirigroup.com
CIRCULATION: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24818270, E-mail: circulation@timesofoman.com

شركة بركاء للمياه والطاقة ش.م.ع.ع

Barka

BARKA WATER AND POWER COMPANY S.A.O.G

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT (Q2 2026)

Overview

We are pleased to present Barka Water and Power Company SAOG (BWPC) operational performance and the unaudited financial statements for the period ended 30 June 2026.

The principal activities of Barka Water and Power Company SAOG (the 'Company') are to develop, finance, design, construct, operate, maintain, insure, and own power generating station and water desalination plants and other related infrastructure.

The Company's business is regulated by project agreements with various government entities and financing agreements with project lenders. These project agreements provide an assurance both over revenue and cost elements of the business.

The Company had entered into Power and Water Purchase Agreement (PWPA) with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) in 2024, which includes Power plant for 8 years and 9 months and multi-stage flash evaporator (MSFE) water plant for 3 years term with extension option at PWP's discretion for a further term of 3 years and another term of 2 years & 9 months (total 8 years and 9 months term).

The financial results of the period are summarized as under:

Figures in Thousands Riyal Omani

	Period Ended 30 June 2026
Gross Revenues	21,697
Gross Profit	3,058
Loss after tax	1,210

HSE

Safety continued to remain the highest priority for the Company during the reporting period. No safety incidents were recorded while the scheduled outage period was utilized to carry out critical maintenance activities. The workforce-maintained vigilance and adhered to the best international practices in safety management.

Regarding environmental performance, the Company achieved zero exceedances during the period, and all regulatory permits were fully complied with. This reflects the ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards of safety and environmental stewardship.

The recent regional developments have no impact on the operational performance of the Company, and the plant continues to operate normally. Additionally, as a precautionary measure, management has activated its internal emergency response protocols and actively monitoring the situation closely.

Operations

From an operational perspective, the reliability of the Power and MSFE Plants remained the focus

Power Generation

Power plant achieved a reliability factor of 97.6% and a load factor of 57.1% for the reporting period.

Period June 30	Electricity Delivered ((MMWH	Export Factor (%)	Reliability Factor (%)
2026	1.0	57.1	97.6
2025	0.5	25.8	98.7

Water production

MSFE plant achieved a reliability factor of 100% and a load factor of 0.8% for the reporting period.

Period June 30	Water delivered ((Mm3	Export Factor (%)	Reliability Factor (%)
2026	0.13	0.8	100
2025	1.7	10.9	96.3

Maintenance

The team believes in a risk-based approach towards maintenance to create a viable balance between predictive, proactive and scheduled maintenance. Accordingly, all required predictive, proactive, scheduled, and corrective maintenance activities were implemented in well manner to assure the operations and availability of power plant and MSFE.

Below are the maintenance activities undertaken by the Operator to ensure reliable operations of the plants during the period.

Power Block:

- GT2 combustion chamber inspection completed
- DCS updated graphics were deployed.
- ST mechanical repairs, electrical maintenance, and I&C inspections and calibration.

Water Block MSFE:

- Intake buoy repairs carried out.

Omanisation

The Company and its Operator take Omanisation as a responsibility rather than a contractual obligation.

The Company and its Operator continued to remain in compliance with their contractual obligations. The Operator continued the practice of recruiting newly qualified graduates and developing them through numerous in-house and external training programs.

This policy of the Company and its Operator has resulted in the recruitment of experienced local talent in senior leadership positions.

Social responsibility

The company promotes social responsibility through contributions to the Oman Charitable Organization and supports two government schools by supporting the Internet system contributing to academic and community development.

Financial Highlights

Figures in ⃁ '000

Income Statement	Period Ended 30-Jun-26	Period Ended 30-Jun-25
Total revenues	21,697	14,713
Operating costs	(18,639)	(12,832)
Gross profit	3,058	1,881
Other costs / Other Income	(1,646)	(1,210)
Taxation	(202)	(134)
Net profit after tax	1,210	303
Earnings per share	0.008	0.002

Revenue

The increase in revenue is due to higher load factor, slightly netted off with higher schedule outages.

Gross Profit

The gross profit increased mainly due to higher electricity costs and liquidated damages in prior period.

Cash Flow Statement ⃁ '000	Period Ended 30-Jun-26	Period Ended 30-Jun-25
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	3,494	4,502

Balance Sheet ⃁ '000	As at 30-Jun-26	As at 30-Jun-25
Total assets	72,371	73,918
Net shareholder's equity	28,059	27,573
Paid up capital	16,000	16,000
Current ratio	1.34:1	1.42:1
Gearing ratio	49%	52%
Net assets per share – ⃁	0.175	0.172

Interim dividend of Bzs 4.53 per share was distributed to the Company's shareholders during the period.

Outlook

The Company is striving to maintain its safety record in future without safety or environmental incident and to remain in compliance of local regulations.

The Company will continue its proactive and scheduled maintenance activities to assure uninterrupted operations and availability of Power plant and MSFE.

The Company will make efforts to maintain adequate cash reserves to settle its obligations and outstanding liabilities.

Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026 (Expressed in Omani Rial ⃁)

	30 June 2026 (Unaudited)	31 December 2025 (Audited)
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	54,540,765	56,126,755
Intangible Assets	157,069	178,012
Right-of-use assets	36,970	38,064
	54,734,804	56,342,831
Current assets		
Inventories	52,90,893	5,362,550
Trade and other receivables	88,58,420	4,881,394
Cash and cash equivalents	34,86,483	7,331,637
	17,635,796	17,575,581
Total assets	72,370,600	73,918,412
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	16,000,000	16,000,000
Legal reserve	5,333,333	5,333,333
Special reserve	85,555	85,555
Retained earnings	66,39,872	6,154,379
	28,058,760	27,573,267
Non-current liabilities		
Long-term loan	20,637,272	23,404,638
Deferred tax liability	48,56,348	5,056,475
Provision for site restoration	50,26,932	4,879,943
Employee benefit liabilities	18,807	17,424
Lease liabilities	630,045	609,160
	31,169,404	33,967,640
Current liabilities		
Long-term loan	55,10,764	5,245,727
Trade and other payables	65,08,760	3,428,437
Short term borrowing	-	2,700,000
Lease liabilities	58,405	68,848
Taxation	10,64,507	934,493
	13,142,436	12,377,505
Total liabilities	44,311,840	46,345,145
Total equity and liabilities	72,370,600	73,918,412
Net assets per share	0.175	0.172

These financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Board of Directors on 21st July 2026

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the three months period ended 30 June 2026 (Expressed in Omani Rial ⃁)

	6 months ended 30 June 2026 (Unaudited)	6 months ended 30 June 2025 (Audited)
Revenue	21,697,187	1,47,13,493
Direct costs	(18,638,715)	(1,28,32,109)
Gross profit	30,58,472	18,81,384
Other income	18,492	99,313
General and administrative expenses	(5,78,931)	(5,11,164)
Profit / (loss) from operations	24,98,033	14,69,533
Finance costs	(10,85,793)	(10,32,445)
Loss before tax	14,12,240	4,37,088
Income tax	(2,01,946)	(1,34,301)
Net loss after tax and total comprehensive loss for the period	12,10,294	3,02,787
Basic and diluted loss per share	0.008	0.002

ALLEGED INTIMIDATION

France summons Iranian envoy

PARIS: France has summoned the Iranian Charge d'Affaires on Tuesday over the alleged intimidation of French diplomats in Tehran by the security services of the Islamic Republic.

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement termed the Sunday incident "extremely serious act of intimidation."

"At the behest of Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot, the Quai d'Orsay's Secretary-General summoned the Islamic Republic of Iran's charge d'affaires today following the extremely serious act of intimidation targeting two French Embassy staffers in Iran on July 19," the statement read.

The Ministry stated that the Foreign Minister Barrot expressed stern condemnation of the incident to the Iran's charge d'affaires, recognising it as a "flagrant violation" of international law and the Vienna Convention and warned of "repercussions." "He was informed that we condemned this premeditated, deliberate attack in the strongest possible terms. It was a flagrant violation of international law and the Vienna Conventions, signed by Iran, which guarantee the protection of diplomatic personnel and form the basis of relations between countries. He was also reminded that this very serious, unacceptable incident will have repercussions." – ANI

Iran media reports US strike on Larak island in Hormuz

According to Iranian news agency Tasnim, the strike occurred on Wednesday afternoon, with local residents reporting a powerful blast. However, Washington has not yet issued an official confirmation regarding the reported strike

TEHRAN: The United States has reportedly executed a missile strike against Iran's Larak Island in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, marking a fresh escalation in the expanding military confrontation between Washington and Tehran across critical Middle Eastern shipping lanes.

According to Iranian news agency Tasnim, the strike occurred on Wednesday afternoon, with local residents reporting a powerful blast. "At 2:48 pm, the island of Larak was targeted by an American missile," Tasnim reported. "The competent authorities are currently carrying out an investigation to determine the scale of the attack, the exact point of impact and the extent of the potential damage".

Washington has not yet issued an official confirmation regarding the reported strike.

The incident follows an ongoing military push by American forces against Iranian assets. US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed on Tuesday that it had executed its 11th straight night of operations aimed at military targets inside Iran, seeking to weaken Tehran's capability to disrupt commercial maritime transit in the Strait of Hormuz.

The choke point, which handles approximately 20 per cent of global oil shipments, sits at the heart of the standoff. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that allowing Tehran to gain control over or disrupt the crucial waterway would establish a "very dangerous precedent" with widespread global ramifications.

Rubio asserted that allowing any nation to dictate terms on international shipping channels, levy tolls, or strike vessels carries far-reaching consequences. While reiterating that Washington remains open to diplomatic engagement, he noted that Tehran was not "serious" about reaching a negotiated solution.

The friction has increasingly spilt into adjacent regional areas. US President Donald Trump cautioned that Washington would react if Tehran-aligned Houthi forces execute threats to block access to Saudi maritime ports.

"If something like that happens, we take care of it," Trump told journalists following discussions with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun at the White House.

Signalling that the American military action remains active, Trump added that the US was "not finished at all" with Iran, remarking that Tehran could require two decades or more to bounce back from the impact of the strikes. – ANI

MEDIA REPORT

Trump approves Saudi nuclear deal with minimal safety mechanisms

WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump has cleared a nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia featuring minimal safety mechanisms, marking a significant triumph for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, according to a media report.

The nuclear deal has generated widespread anxiety over whether the framework possesses sufficient checks to prevent uranium processed in the kingdom from being weaponised. Observers contend that Washington's campaign to dismantle Iran's nuclear programme could be severely undermined by granting domestic enrichment technology to its regional competitor.

Although the nuclear deal would block Beijing and Moscow from capturing a massive commercial market, deep unease remains over the absent regulatory guards, according to Robert Einhorn, a former senior State Department official who counselled both Republican and Democratic administrations on non-proliferation issues. "The agreement could help revitalise the US nuclear industry, strengthen US-Saudi ties and deny Russia and China a strategically important role in the Saudi nuclear program. But unless it contains adequate constraints, including on enrichment, it could increase nuclear proliferation risks in the Middle East and beyond," Einhorn told WSJ.

The nuclear deal is projected to yield tens of billions of USD for American firms participating in constructing Saudi Arabia's energy infrastructure, though Riyadh's primary objective centres on obtaining the enrichment capabilities enabled by the arrangement, according to WSJ.

Under the nuclear deal, as reactor initiatives move forward, Washington and Riyadh will carry out a joint two-year assessment to determine if domestic uranium enrichment inside the kingdom is commercially viable compared to importing fuel. Should the study yield a positive evaluation, American entities will construct an enrichment site within Saudi territory, WSJ reported.

Riyadh has turned down the "gold standard" commitment to permanently forfeit domestic uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing, an obligation accepted by the neighbouring United Arab Emirates, according to WSJ.

Furthermore, Saudi officials have rejected the "Additional Protocol", an inspection arrangement established by the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), that mandates more stringent surveillance and verification measures.

Despite warnings that missing these guarantees could allow uranium diversion for non-civilian uses or spark a regional arms race, WSJ reported that Trump administration officials maintained that a separate bilateral pact negotiated with Riyadh would ensure effective monitoring of American-supplied atomic facilities, though critics remain sceptical of those assurances.

Foreign policy experts have also faulted the nuclear deal because diplomatic progress had previously been tied to Saudi Arabia establishing formal ties with Israel under former President Joe Biden. Analysts argue that Washington has conceded a nuclear deal to the Saudis without securing reciprocal strategic concessions, according to WSJ. – ANI

BILATERAL COMMITMENTS

India and US near interim trade pact

MANILA: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held talks in Manila on Wednesday, focusing on recent developments in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, while also reviewing progress on key defence and agreeing on the urgency of finalising an interim bilateral trade deal.

According to a US State Department office readout attributed to Spokesperson Tommy Pigott, the two leaders discussed advancing bilateral commitments made during talks between US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year.

"The Secretary and Minister Jaishankar discussed recent developments in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific," the readout said.

The discussions also centred on defence cooperation, with both sides reviewing progress on agreements stemming from the Trump-Modi commitments.

"The Secretary and Minister Jaishankar discussed finalising key defense agreements in fulfillment of commitments made between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi last year," the statement said.

Trade was another key area of discussion with Rubio and Jaishankar underscoring the need to conclude an interim bilateral trade arrangement.

"The Secretary and Minister Jaishankar agreed on the importance of finalizing the interim trade deal, which is almost complete," the readout added.

Meanwhile, as per Jaishankar, the minister on Wednesday met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Manila and discussed key areas of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership as the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) reconvened on the sidelines of the ASEAN-related meetings. Sharing details of the meeting, Jaishankar said in a post on X, "Pleased to meet Sec Rubio of the USA here in Manila. Our meeting focused on areas which are priority for the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, including trade & tariffs, energy, defence & security, critical minerals & artificial intelligence." – ANI

JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN

'America's armed forces need $1.5 trillion to meet military challenges of future'

WASHINGTON DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine on Tuesday urged the US Senate to approve President Donald Trump's $1.5 trillion defence budget request, saying America's armed forces require the funding to meet future military challenges, accelerate investments in critical technologies and stay ahead of adversaries.

Testifying alongside Secretary of War Pete Hegseth before the Senate Appropriations Committee on the administration's supplemental funding request for the Department of Defence, Caine said, "I've come today to ask for your help and your support. America's armed forces need $1.5 trillion to meet the military challenges of the future. This supplemental is a part of that."

He asked for the capital to be allowed to be used to pay for military personnel, operations and maintenance expenses, and accelerate investments in critical technologies.

"It is critical that we stay ahead of our adversaries and we must have the funds before we're out of time," he added.

Recalling remarks made by former US Army Chief of Staff General George C Marshall in 1940, Caine said, "On July 22nd, 1940, General George C Marshall said, 'For almost 20 years, we had all of the time and almost none of the money. Today we have all of the money and no time.' His words resonate powerfully with me today as we find ourselves in a somewhat similar situation."

"I've come to you today to request the necessary funds while in the window of opportunity, while time is still on our side," he added.

Highlighting the evolving security environment, Caine said the United States faces military challenges across multiple regions and domains.

"The United States of America faces a global list of military challenges in the Middle East, in Europe, in the Pacific, both nuclear and non-nuclear challenges and the continued threat of terrorism," he said.

"Our adversaries are aligning in their interests, creating simultaneous challenges across multiple domains. They are sharing intelligence, combat capabilities, and technology -- technology that is accelerating the speed of war," Caine added.

He stressed that advances in artificial intelligence and autonomous systems were transforming warfare.

"It is an imperative that Americans understand that the character of war is changing. Advances in technology are fundamentally and irreversibly changing the way we fight, which necessitates capital to properly arm America's military," he said.

"Rapid advancements in AI, autonomous systems deliver critical technological advantages to our national defence and simultaneously introduce unprecedented strategic vulnerabilities and uncertainty across the world, to include right here at home," Caine said.

"The low barrier to entry created by affordable, ubiquitous unmanned systems means our adversaries, rogue actors, state and non-state actors, and violent extremists have access to disruptive and potentially lethal technologies at scale. We've seen this in Ukraine and we must adopt elements of this fight for our future fights," he added.

Backing the funding request, Hegseth described it as "a peace through strength package."

"This is a peace through strength package. That is what $1.5 trillion has always been about. This is about a generational investment," Hegseth said.

He said the funding would enable the United States to operate "at speed, scale, with autonomy and artificial intelligence" to sustain operations in the Strait of Hormuz and "deter adversaries like Russia and China from getting involved in future contingencies."

"We live in a dangerous world that requires bold and swift action, hence this supplemental request for Fiscal Year 2026. This request is an urgent, necessary injection of resources to address the immediate needs of our department," Hegseth said.

Defending the administration's approach, Hegseth said, "President Trump's following a simple logic, the military requires a generational investment to deliver on peace through strength. We know the best way to create peace is to prepare for war, to deter it." – ANI

SPORTS

Hetmyer, Rutherford power WI home in tense chase against NZ

The visitors clinched the five-match ODI series 3-2 despite the defeat in the fifth match

BRIDGETOWN: Shimron Hetmyer held his nerve late in the run chase to make an unbeaten 69 and steer West Indies to a two-wicket win over New Zealand on Tuesday in the fifth and final ODI match.

New Zealand took the series 3-2, clinching it in Game 4 after winning Game 2 by five wickets and Game 3 by six wickets in a comeback following West Indies' seven-wicket victory in the opening game.

Hetmyer's fifth ODI half-century and his partnership of 95 with Sherfane Rutherford (61) allowed the West Indies to reach 269-8 in reply to New Zealand's 268-9 with 15 balls remaining. All five matches in the series were won by the team batting second.

When Hetmyer and Rutherford were together in a fifth-wicket partnership that built on the foundation set by Shai Hope (39) and Keacy Carty (20) — who put on 59 for the third wicket — West Indies looked like winning with ease.

But the match was a seesawing encounter. Rutherford was out when West Indies was 218-5, needing 41 to win with almost 10 overs remaining, and then Gudakesh Motie fell at 239-6.

When Jacob Duffy dismissed Matthew Forde and Alzarri Joseph with consecutive deliveries in the 45th over, and with 21 runs still needed for a West Indies win, the complexion of the match changed again. New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner made the unusual decision to take left-arm spinner Jayden Lennox out of the attack after he had taken 3-35 from nine overs. Hetmyer hit two sixes off Duffy in the 47th over and West Indies got home with more than two overs to spare.

Lennox took 14 wickets at an average of 13.6 and was voted player of the series. "I wasn't really thinking about getting a half-century to be honest, I was just thinking about how ... I can make sure the team crosses the line," Hetmyer said. "I'm just happy that I could be there to make sure we crossed the line."

New Zealand appeared to be heading for a much bigger total when they were 181-3 in the 35th over and 230-5 with five overs to go. Will Young made 56, Tom Latham made 69 and Nick Kelly scored 64 to drive the innings. But the finish was missing against tight bowling, especially from Alzarri Joseph, who took 2-38 from his 10 overs. West Indies' innings began at more than eight runs per over through the first five overs.

Then, in a double setback, they lost openers Ackeem Auguste and Justin Greaves in the space of five deliveries. Still, the home team was scoring at more seven runs per over after 10 overs as Hope and Carty kept up the pace.

New Zealand began to apply pressure through the spinners, Carty faced a series of dot balls and after reaching 118-2, both he and Hope fell inside three overs.

Hope fell to a poor ball from Lennox which he tried to hoist over the leg side field but pulled to Kristian Clarke at midwicket. Keacy was frustrated to be pinned down and finally slashed across the line at a straight ball from Lennox which hit middle stump. Rutherford stepped up first to revive the innings and found a like-minded partner in Hetmyer, who was determined to be in at the finish.

Brief scores: West Indies 269/8 (Hetmyer 69*, Rutherford 61, Lennox 3-35, Duffy 3-67) beat New Zealand 268/9 (Latham 69, Kelly 64, Young 56, Joseph 2-38, Lawes 2-63) by two wickets. - Agencies

ICC

Root back in top ten, Mitchell remains No.1 in ODI rankings

DUBAI: England's Joe Root returned to the top ten of the ICC's ODI batting rankings after dominating the three-match series against India.

He produced scores of 76, 99 and 74 without being dismissed even once, and has climbed four places to No.8. India's Rohit Sharma remained at No.4, but closed the gap with the top three with his 138 in the third ODI at Lord's.

It is the first time since 2020 that Root has entered the top ten in ODI batting rankings. Last week, Root scored 249 runs at a strike rate of 96.88 to finish as the series' top-scorer and was crowned Player of the Series. England opener Ben Duckett (joint-19th) also climbed 11 places after smashing 141 at Lord's - the highest individual score at the venue in men's ODIs.

New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell remains No.1 among ODI batters, with the Indian trio of Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli and Rohit following. Gill is just one rating point behind Mitchell after finishing as the second-highest run-getter of the ODI series with 188. Kohli hit 144 runs with two fifties while Rohit's ton in the third ODI papered over a sluggish start to the series. Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran rounds up the top five.

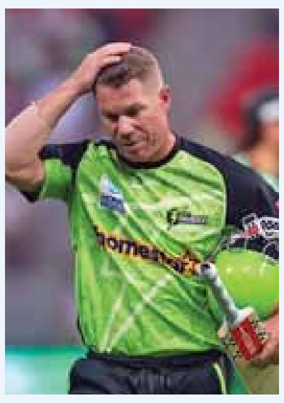
Over in the Caribbean, where West Indies and New Zealand faced off in a five-match ODI series full of twists and turns that ended with the visitors winning 3-2, left-arm spinners Mitchell Santner and Gudakesh Motie consolidated their positions in the top ten among bowlers.

Santner's double-wicket spells in New Zealand's victories in the third and fourth ODIs saw him surge up to joint-fourth, up three places. Motie's 5 for 49 in the fourth ODI lifted him seven spots to joint-ninth.

Spinners dominate the top five of the ODI bowling rankings with Rashid Khan of Afghanistan staying atop and Pakistan's Abrar Ahmed at No.2. Jofra Archer is third while Santner and South Africa's Keshav Maharaj are joint-fourth.

Michael Bracewell also climbed to third among ODI all-rounders, going past Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi (fourth) and Sikandar Raza (fifth). Bracewell scored 86 runs in four innings and took eight wickets. Ahead of him are first-placed Azmatullah Omarzai of Afghanistan and No.2 Mehidy Hasan Miraz of Bangladesh. - Agencies

Former Australian opener Warner pleads guilty



SYDNEY: Australia cricket great David Warner pleaded guilty on Wednesday to drink driving and will be sentenced later this year, court documents showed.

Warner, one of Australia's best-known sportsmen, was accused of being at the wheel of a van and stopping short of a random testing site before being breath-tested, arrested and taken to a police station.

His lawyer appeared at a Sydney court to enter a guilty plea on one count of "middle range" drink-driving.

Former opening batsman Warner, who captains Sydney Thunder in the domestic T20 Big Bash League, did not appear in court.

"So many of us make those poor decisions. I think what's important is accepting and being accountable for those poor decisions," lawyer Bobby Hill told a hearing earlier this year.

"It doesn't matter if you're a tradesman, a doctor or one of the best opening batsmen in the world, that danger exists for every one of us." Warner will be sentenced on August 18. - Agencies

AGAINST INDIA

Zimbabwe name squad for T20I series

HARARE: Zimbabwe has included uncapped wicketkeeper-batter Tafadzwa Tsiga in its squad for the T20I series against India that starts at the Harare Sports Club on Thursday.

Tsiga, 32, has played 10 Tests for Zimbabwe but never before featured in limited-overs international cricket.

All-rounder Wessly Madhevere has earned a recall along with fast bowler Newman Nyamhuri after the latter recovered from injury, while the selection is captained by Pakistan-born Sikandar Raza.

The three fixtures will all take place at the Harare Sports Club on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday in a whistle-stop tour.

Squad: Sikandar Raza (captain), Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Tanaka Chivanga, Ben Curran, Brad Evans, Wessly Madhevere, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Newman Nyamhuri, Milton Shumba, Tafadzwa Tsiga. - Agencies

OMAN OIL PRICE RISES

The price of Oman crude oil has increased, with prices for delivery by September 2026 reaching $89.51. The price of Oman crude oil rose by $7.72 from the price of Tuesday, which was $81.79. -ONA

MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 7,111.42 points, up by 0.28% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.22% at 572.67 points. Sohar Power, up 9.96%, was the top gainer while, Muscat Gases, down 5.71%, was the top loser.

Workshop reviews investment opportunities in industrial field

The workshop comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the GCC Secretariat General to enhance joint Gulf action

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in cooperation with the Secretariat General of GCC and the Federation of GCC Chambers, organised a workshop on Wednesday to review joint Gulf industrial investment opportunities in priority industrial activities.

The workshop comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the GCC Secretariat General to enhance joint Gulf action. It also serves as an implementation of the decision issued by the Ministers of Industry of the GCC states during their 56th meeting held last April, regarding the approval of the outputs of a study on preparing and promoting five joint Gulf industrial investment opportunities in priority industrial activities to the Gulf private sector.

The workshop aimed to introduce the private sector to promising investment opportunities in priority industrial activities and encourage it to benefit from them. This contributes to enhancing joint Gulf industrial investment, supporting industrial integration among the GCC states, and achieving the targets of sustainable economic development.

Yousuf Ali Al Sunaidi, Director of the Industry and Mineral Resources Department at the GCC Secretariat General, explained that the private sector represents a key partner in achieving economic development and enhancing integration among the GCC states. This is particularly evident in light of the economic transformations witnessed by the GCC states, which aim to diversify the production base, increase the industrial sector's contribution to the economy, and enhance its competitiveness and sustainability.

He stated that the unified strategy for industrial development of the GCC states was established to set an integrated framework for supporting industrial development. It included a number of initiatives, most notably the preparation of joint Gulf industrial investment opportunities in priority activities.

For her part, Lamia Al Shunaifi from the GCC Secretariat General delivered a visual presentation to introduce the office of the Economic and Development Affairs Authority at the Council. She reviewed the role of the Authority, which was established in 2016 to enhance economic integration among member states by discussing economic and developmental issues, addressing challenges facing the implementation of Gulf agreements and decisions, and proposing initiatives and projects that contribute to achieving Gulf economic unity.

During the presentation, she touched upon the project of preparing joint Gulf industrial investment opportunities, which aims to enhance industrial integration, reduce reliance on imports, raise the competitiveness of Gulf industries, and create quality job opportunities.

She also reviewed the stages of preparing the project, which included analyzing 26 investment opportunities and selecting 15 promising ones, ultimately leading to the identification of five priority investment opportunities. These were approved in preparation for their promotion to the Gulf private sector.

Dr. Mohammed Al Buraiki from the Gulf Organisation for Industrial Consulting (GOIC) presented a working paper titled "Promoting Joint Gulf Industrial Investment Opportunities." He reviewed the project prepared by the organisation, which aims to enhance industrial integration among the GCC states by developing joint investment opportunities in priority industrial sectors. This contributes to diversifying the economic base, enhancing industrial security, reducing reliance on imports, and increasing the value-added of Gulf industries.

He explained that the project is based on utilizing the comparative advantages of each Gulf state and building integrated regional value chains. It also focuses on attracting qualitative investments, localizing strategic industries, supporting Gulf exports, and raising the competitiveness of the industrial sector. -ONA

BILATERAL RELATIONS

Oman, South Africa discuss developing economic, investment partnership

Times News Service

PRETORIA: Sheikh Khalid Hashil Al Muselhi, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, met with Anna Thandi Moraka, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance these relations. They also explored prospects for developing joint cooperation in economic, commercial, and investment fields to serve mutual interests. The meeting was attended by Ali Said Al Kathiri, Head of the Mission of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of South Africa, and a number of officials from both sides.

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Sohar Power, up 9.96%, was the top gainer while, Muscat Gases, down 5.71%, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 7,111.42 points, up by 0.28% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.22% at 572.67 points. Sohar Power, up 9.96%, was the top gainer while, Muscat Gases, down 5.71%, was the top loser. Shares of Sohar International Bank were the most active in terms of number of shares traded while Bank Muscat were the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 7029 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of RO 40.9 million, with more than 164.25 million shares changing hands. Out of 67 traded securities, 24 advanced, 21 declined, and 22 remained unchanged. At the session close, foreign investors were net sellers for RO 11816K while domestic investors were net buyers for RO 9804K, followed by GCC & Arab investors for RO 2011K worth of shares closed at 12,707.67 points, up 0.61%.

Prices of Bank Dhofar, Oman United Insurance, Sohar International Bank, Global Financial Investments, Bank Muscat were up by 2.27%, 2.26%, 1.85%, 1.75%, 1.34% respectively. Prices of Al Madina Investments, Oman & Emirates Investment, DIDIC, Bank Nizwa, National Bank Oman were down by 6.25%, 1.71%, 1.52%, 1.46%, 1.03% respectively closed at 9,329.33 points, up 0.62%.

Prices of Galfar Engineering, Gulf International Chemicals, Oman Cement, Gulf Mushroom Products, Jazeera Steel Products were up by 5.10%, 1.47%, 0.70%, 0.48%, 0.24% respectively. Prices of A'Saffa Foods, Al Maha Ceramics were down by 0.80%, 0.40% respectively. s Index was down by -0.07% before closing at 2,843.73 points.

Prices of Sohar Power, SMN Power Holding, Abraj Energy, Sembcorp Salalah were up by 9.96%, 7.45%, 1.39%, 1.39%, 1.19% respectively. Prices of Majan College, Oman National Engineering, Dhofar Generating, National Gas, Oman Telecom were down by 3.03%, 2.69%, 2.50%, 1.94%, 1.04% respectively.— United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev . Value	Diff	Diff %
MSX 30 INDEX	7,112.12	7,076.30	7,111.42	7,091.30	20.12	0.28 %
FINANCIAL INDEX	12,724.29	12,574.52	12,707.67	12,631.08	76.59	0.61 %
Industry Index	9,329.33	9,233.55	9,329.33	9,271.62	57.72	0.62 %
Services Index	2,849.59	2,832.83	2,843.73	2,845.70	-1.97	-0.07 %
MSX Shariah Index	573.06	569.02	572.67	571.40	1.27	0.22 %
MSX TR INDEX	11,003.27	10,947.86	11,002.18	10,971.05	31.13	0.28 %
FINANCIAL TR IDX	15,643.85	15,459.71	15,623.42	15,529.25	94.16	0.61 %
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	11,948.51	11,825.83	11,948.51	11,874.59	73.92	0.62 %
SERVICES TR IDX	3,817.91	3,795.45	3,810.06	3,812.70	-2.64	-0.07 %
FIXED INCOME INDEX	1,253.83	1,253.83	1,253.83	1,253.83	0.00	0.00 %

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
164,254,361	40,895,909	7,029	37,126,274,448	24	21	22	67

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

REGULAR MARKET

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	200	41	2	0.203	0.203	0.202	0.202	0.188	0.014	7.447	0.202	0.183	0.200	0.100	40,326,391
OM0000002226	ALJAZEERA SERVICES	6,400	1,679	3	0.270	0.270	0.260	0.260	0.250	0.010	4.000	0.260	0.260	0.270	0.100	11,139,178
OM0000002549	BANK DHOFAR	2,323,300	522,308	91	0.220	0.226	0.219	0.225	0.220	0.005	2.273	0.225	0.220	0.225	0.100	683,954,670
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	29,647	9,391	12	0.320	0.320	0.315	0.317	0.310	0.007	2.258	0.317	0.310	0.317	0.100	33,285,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	43,448,051	7,126,066	1,145	0.161	0.167	0.161	0.165	0.162	0.003	1.852	0.165	0.167	0.165	0.100	1,266,540,936
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.	104,053	29,530	16	0.280	0.292	0.260	0.290	0.285	0.005	1.754	0.290	0.260	0.290	0.100	58,000,000
OM0000008934	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	6,009,962	2,159,347	185	0.360	0.365	0.358	0.365	0.360	0.005	1.389	0.365	0.365	0.362	0.100	281,123,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	29,861,764	11,147,719	1,076	0.373	0.379	0.372	0.379	0.374	0.005	1.337	0.379	0.379	0.379	0.100	2,844,924,486
OM0000004735	SEMBCORP SALALAH	25,111	6,398	5	0.255	0.255	0.254	0.255	0.252	0.003	1.190	0.255	0.255	0.254	0.100	243,415,847
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIYA INVESTMENT HO.	8,434	843	4	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.001	1.010	0.100	0.097	0.100	0.100	9,000,000
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	113,755	12,966	18	0.114	0.116	0.113	0.113	0.112	0.001	0.893	0.113	0.113	0.115	0.100	19,775,000
OM0000009908	OQ BASE INDUSTRIES (SFZ)	22,657,883	5,065,656	1,254	0.225	0.227	0.223	0.227	0.225	0.002	0.889	0.227	0.228	0.227	0.040	785,304,423
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	200	115	1	0.574	0.574	0.574	0.574	0.570	0.004	0.702	0.574	0.555	0.627	0.100	189,920,936
OM0000009072	OQ GAS NETWORKS	13,083,281	2,522,776	942	0.193	0.195	0.192	0.195	0.194	0.001	0.515	0.195	0.175	0.195	0.100	844,471,664
OM0000002267	GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	31,826	13,335	19	0.420	0.420	0.417	0.419	0.417	0.002	0.480	0.419	0.419	0.419	0.100	21,093,456
OM0000009759	OQ EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	9,726,172	4,301,887	387	0.442	0.445	0.441	0.444	0.442	0.002	0.452	0.444	0.441	0.444	0.010	3,552,000,000
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	1,778,160	670,368	2	0.377	0.380	0.377	0.380	0.379	0.001	0.264	0.380	0.377	0.377	0.100	426,684,488
OM0000002176	JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS	6,650	5,516	7	0.830	0.830	0.828	0.830	0.828	0.002	0.242	0.830	0.826	0.830	0.100	103,665,307
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	4,764	15,719	5	3.295	3.300	3.295	3.300	3.295	0.005	0.152	3.300	3.290	3.300	0.100	296,010,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	15,000	2,445	3	0.160	0.169	0.160	0.169	0.169	0.000	0.000	0.169	0.161	0.180	0.100	51,969,109
OM0000003000	Al MAHA PETROLEUM PRODS MRKTNG	1,500	1,688	2	1.125	1.125	1.125	1.125	1.125	0.000	0.000	1.125	1.125	1.150	0.100	77,625,000
OM0000003141	BARKA WATER AND POWER	24,170	3,867	6	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.155	0.165	0.100	25,600,000
OM0000003661	VOLTAMP ENERGY	2,408,108	404,274	46	0.165	0.168	0.163	0.165	0.165	0.000	0.000	0.165	0.157	0.165	0.010	165,000,000
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	117,178	37,846	22	0.323	0.323	0.322	0.323	0.323	0.000	0.000	0.323	0.322	0.323	0.100	210,254,986
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	242,227	38,745	19	0.160	0.160	0.158	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.100	107,981,989
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	61,381	9,821	10	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.160	0.000	0.000	0.160	0.152	0.160	0.100	114,305,014
OM0000008710	BARKA DESALINATION	1,000	165	1	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.157	0.157	0.000	0.000	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.100	11,856,954
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	87,620	25,185	21	0.290	0.290	0.287	0.290	0.291	-0.001	-0.344	0.290	0.287	0.290	0.100	68,558,900
OM0000002804	ASAFFA FOODS	200	150	1	0.749	0.749	0.749	0.749	0.755	-0.006	-0.795	0.749	0.700	0.749	0.100	89,880,000
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	560,906	135,193	51	0.242	0.243	0.239	0.240	0.242	-0.002	-0.826	0.239	0.238	0.239	0.100	351,024,350
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	13,000	6,316	6	0.488	0.488	0.483	0.483	0.488	-0.005	-1.025	0.483	0.481	0.486	0.100	785,332,089
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	2,182,759	2,930,194	75	1.349	1.349	1.336	1.336	1.350	-0.014	-1.037	1.336	1.485	1.336	0.100	1,002,000,000
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	1,261,552	171,307	58	0.137	0.137	0.135	0.135	0.137	-0.002	-1.460	0.135	0.134	0.135	0.100	301,988,659
OM0000001509	DHOFAR INTL DEVELOPMENT & INVEST	66,279	17,267	18	0.265	0.265	0.260	0.260	0.264	-0.004	-1.515	0.260	0.259	0.260	0.100	128,974,597
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	146,737	16,152	15	0.110	0.117	0.110	0.115	0.117	-0.002	-1.709	0.115	0.110	0.115	0.100	14,716,406
OM0000001152	OMAN NATL ENGINEERING & INVEST	25,000	3,625	2	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.149	-0.004	-2.685	0.145	0.145	0.148	0.100	21,750,000
OM0000010120	ASYAD SHIPPING	4,097,007	995,413	282	0.250	0.253	0.240	0.240	0.250	-0.010	-4.000	0.240	0.240	0.240	0.000	1,250,098,627
Total	37	140,531,237	38,411,314	5,812												

Parallel Market

ISIN	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RO)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST BID	LAST OFFER	PAR VALUE	MARKET CAP
OM0000003711	SOHAR POWER	100	24	1	0.243	0.243	0.243	0.243	0.221	0.022	9.955	0.243	0.215	0.242	0.100	4,860,000
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING	98,712	15,333	20	0.157	0.165	0.153	0.165	0.157	0.008	5.096	0.165	0.154	0.165	0.100	33,492,764
OM0000002028	GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS	189,554	12,966	17	0.068	0.069	0.068	0.069	0.068	0.001	1.471	0.069	0.069	0.071	0.100	1,449,000
OM0000011151	OMIFCO	11,671,727	2,181,992	794	0.185	0.188	0.185	0.187	0.185	0.002	1.081	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.000	1,250,913,125
OM0000002036	MUSCAT THREAD MILLS	4,189	922	3	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.220	0.000	0.000	0.220	0.215	0.220	0.100	4,071,066
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	39,635	5,127	6	0.130	0.130	0.128	0.130	0.130	0.000	0.000	0.130	0.130	0.130	0.100	28,600,000
OM0000002648	NATIONAL FINANCE	26,111	5,536	4	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.000	0.000	0.212	0.212	0.216	0.100	137,947,424
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	120,000	28,560	58	0.238	0.238	0.238	0.238	0.238	0.000	0.000	0.238	0.216	0.238	0.100	476,652,913
OM0000007910	AMAN REAL ESTATE	23,800	1,720	7	0.072	0.073	0.072	0.073	0.073	0.000	0.000	0.072	0.072	0.073	0.100	14,600,000
OM0000008868	THE PEARL REIF	16,782	2,959	7	0.177	0.177	0.175	0.177	0.177	0.000	0.000	0.177	0.175	0.180	0.100	104,684,328
OM0000010823	OMAN GATEWAY FUND	700	699	2	1.000	1.000	0.993	0.993	0.993	0.000	0.000	0.993	0.993	1.000	0.000	27,153,832
OM0000002275	SHELL OMAN MARKETING	528	407	1	0.770	0.770	0.770	0.770	0.771	-0.001	-0.130	0.770	0.770	0.800	0.100	73,150,000
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	3,000	752	3	0.251	0.251	0.250	0.250	0.251	-0.001	-0.398	0.250	0.229	0.276	0.100	13,750,000
OM0000008447	OMAN REIT FUND	65,925	7,023	18	0.109	0.109	0.106	0.107	0.108	-0.001	-0.926	0.107	0.106	0.107	0.100	69,800,623
OM0000009569	JABAL REIF	77,430	8,002	4	0.104	0.104	0.103	0.103	0.104	-0.001	-0.962	0.103	0.103	0.104	0.100	17,922,000
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	99,102	10,081	18	0.101	0.104	0.101	0.101	0.103	-0.002	-1.942	0.101	0.101	0.102	0.100	8,585,000
OM0000007407	DHOFAR GENERATING	100	8	1	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.080	-0.002	-2.500	0.078	0.073	0.078	0.100	17,334,720
OM0000001897	MAJAN COLLEGE	14,325	1,846	5	0.136	0.136	0.128	0.128	0.132	-0.004	-3.030	0.128	0.128	0.132	0.100	12,672,000
OM0000001178	MUSCAT GASES	5,000	660	2	0.132	0.132	0.132	0.132	0.140	-0.008	-5.714	0.132	0.132	0.138	0.100	3,960,000
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	37,777	1,147	6	0.031	0.031	0.029	0.030	0.032	-0.002	-6.250	0.030	0.029	0.034	0.100	2,550,000
Total	20	12,494,497	2,285,761	977												

STRATEGIC COLLABORATION

Sohar Islamic signs MoU with Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia to strengthen cooperation on waqf investment and financing solutions

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to advancing the Awqaf sector, Sohar Islamic - the Islamic banking window of Sohar International, signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, in cooperation with Bousher Endowment Foundation. The MoU marks the beginning of a strategic collaboration designed to strengthen institutional cooperation between Oman and Malaysia in the Awqaf sector.

Commenting on the signing, Fahad Al Zadjali, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar Islamic said, "Waqf has historically served as a durable mechanism for channelling endowed wealth towards enduring social benefit. Fulfilling that purpose depends on preserving endowed assets and managing them responsibly so that their intended benefit can be sustained over time. This places effective stewardship at the heart of Awqaf development and highlights the contribution Islamic financial institutions can make to that process. The MoU reflects this direction by establishing a shared framework for action between Sohar Islamic and Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia, with the cooperation of Bousher Endowment Foundation. For Sohar Islamic, the partnership provides an opportunity to apply its Islamic banking capabilities to practical initiatives that can strengthen the Awqaf ecosystem and create lasting value."

Dr. Ridzwan bin Bakar, Chief Executive Officer of Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia, added: "The bilateral relations between Malaysia and Oman date back more than a thousand years, holding a deep-rooted strategic and diplomatic significance for both nations. Our collaboration with a leading banking institution like Sohar Islamic, in cooperation by the Bousher Endowment Foundation, will pave the way for exploring promising diverse investment opportunities, as well as designing innovative waqf models that align with modern economic demands. This memorandum of understanding embodies an extension of our longstanding Malaysian-Omani ties, especially after our meeting with the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Malaysia. We are highly optimistic about the value this partnership with Sohar Islamic will generate in supporting the global Islamic waqf ecosystem as Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia is a Malaysia government agency under the Prime Minister Department (Religious Affairs) Putrajaya".

Under the MoU, Sohar Islamic and Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia will cooperate on waqf investment and financing initiatives based on equality and mutual benefit. The parties will explore investment opportunities in both countries while also considering innovative waqf financing models. They will also exchange expertise and experience in the field of waqf, with a focus on property development and investment in Oman and Malaysia. Activities pursued under the MoU will be structured in accordance with the applicable laws, regulations, and policies of the respective jurisdictions and within the mandates and available resources of each institution.

The memorandum of understanding also provides for the exchange of experience relating to waqf laws, regulations, research, and studies, alongside established practices in governance, management, and administration. Cooperation may extend to joint research, publications, and other knowledge-sharing activities, allowing the parties to compare institutional approaches, identify practices that may be adapted across jurisdictions, and build a stronger evidence base for future programs.

To support implementation, Sohar Islamic and Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia will establish a Joint Committee to guide areas of cooperation and oversee jointly identified activities. The committee may form specialized subcommittees or working groups where required, while designated focal points from both institutions will facilitate coordination and monitor progress. The framework additionally provides for capacity-building programs, seminars, conferences, workshops, and training activities, helping translate institutional knowledge into stronger capabilities across the Awqaf sector.

The collaboration also reflects Sohar Islamic's commitment to building purposeful international relationships through which specialized knowledge and institutional cooperation can support sector development. The MoU gives that commitment practical direction and provides a clear basis for sustained engagement in the Awqaf sector.

BORN TO PLAY IN THE CITY

iCAUR 03T now available with summer rewards

MUSCAT: Redefining the spirit of city exploration, the highly anticipated iCAUR 03T is moving into the spotlight across the Sultanate with a competitive edge through the brand's ongoing summer rewards campaign. Designed to inject a bold "Born to Play" energy into daily commuting and weekend getaways, the all-electric lifestyle SUV is currently available with high-value seasonal advantages. Running through July 31, 2026, the ongoing initiative features a comprehensive premium ownership package, delivering 1-year comprehensive insurance, free registration, and a complimentary service package for 2 years or 30,000 km (whichever comes first), ensuring complete peace of mind with zero initial maintenance costs during the peak summer months.

The iCAUR 03T breaks traditional automotive molds with its distinctive "J-Style" design philosophy, sporting a rugged, boxy silhouette crafted precisely for youthful, style-conscious drivers who view every journey as an experience. Perfectly striking a balance between daily urban utility and trend-setting aesthetics, the 03T eliminates the boundaries of classic electric vehicles through its advanced Range Extended Electric Vehicle (REEV) technology. By utilizing a high-efficiency onboard engine purely as a generator to feed the electric motors, it achieves a total driving range of over 750 km.

On the road, the 03T pairs its youthful charm with breathtaking mechanical capability. It pushes out an extraordinary 429 HP and 505 Nm of torque, enabling the vehicle to rocket from 0 to 100 km/h in a mere 4.8 seconds for sports-car-level responsiveness. This rapid electric acceleration is paired with an intelligent i-AWD system that continuously monitors driving conditions, instantly reallocating power across the axles to optimize traction and structural stability whether threading through tight Muscat city traffic or cruising open coastal highways.

Uncompromising occupant safety forms the bedrock of the 03T's architecture. Built around a pioneering all-aluminium multi-cavity cage body, the framework provides 30% greater rigidity than standard steel structures. It features a segment-exclusive, one-piece die-cast aluminium tower top structure that acts as a reinforced safety shield. Combined with armor-style battery protection and a sophisticated multi-point airbag system, the SUV is purpose-built to exceed rigorous global safety standards, ensuring total passenger security.

Inside, the cabin transforms into a highly connected tech-haven that simplifies the modern driving experience. Front and center is the advanced L2+ Intelligent Driving Assistance System, which leverages a grid of over 20 smart sensors, millimeter-wave radars, and high-definition cameras to run full-speed range adaptive cruise control and traffic jam avoidance. Adding to this futuristic intelligence is an adaptable DNA layout, offering standardized interfaces for more than 100 plug-and-play accessories and LEGO-inspired custom components, giving owners the unique flexibility to personalize their vehicle for any upcoming urban adventure.

iCAUR is an all-new brand developed by Chery Group, born for the global market.

WTO TRADE POLICY REVIEW

India reaffirms commitment to rules-based global trade

NEW DELHI: India reaffirmed its commitment to a rules-based, transparent and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system during its eighth Trade Policy Review at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), highlighting the country's growing role in global trade.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal emphasised India's engagement with the global trading system and its efforts to strengthen trade ties through an expanding network of trade agreements, a liberalised foreign direct investment regime and continued support for cooperation among developing countries.

The Department of Commerce, in a post on social media platform X, said India remains a "trusted and reliable partner" in advancing inclusive global growth.

The Trade Policy Review is a mechanism through which WTO member countries examine the trade and related policies of individual members, providing an opportunity to assess developments in their trade regimes and discuss their impact on the global trading system.

India's latest review comes at a time when global trade is witnessing significant shifts amid geopolitical uncertainties, evolving supply chains and changing trade policies across major economies.

The government highlighted India's growing role in international commerce and reiterated its support for a multilateral trading framework based on transparency and non-discrimination.

India has also been expanding its network of trade agreements as part of efforts to improve market access for domestic businesses and strengthen integration with global value chains. -ANI

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Diploma holder, experienced MEP engineer with 12yrs of expertise in electrical, mechanical and plumbing works, possesses a valid D/L. Looking for a suitable opportunity in Oman.

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ENGINEER

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B.Tech with 14 yrs of Oman experience as an Estimation Engineer, specializing in steel sheet metal fabrication. Currently in India, available for immediate joining.

WA/Call: +968 95945230, +91 7356745478

Email: arungopalakrishnan85@yahoo.com

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An Indian CA with over 25 years of experience in manufacturing, retail and construction industry in accounting, banking arrangements, Tax, VAT, budgeting and cash flow management seeks managerial position.

CONTACT : 75156709

JOB VACANCY

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2) Plastering
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4) Painting works
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6) Electrical works
7) Plumbing works
8) Landscaping works
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Procurement Specialist - [Mob.: +968 9986 1679]

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Accountant in Oman seeks job. Contact 77336141

Accountant in Oman seeks a job. Contact : 92106856

Chief Accountant, finance manager Indian male with 19 yrs experience in Oman. Accounts up to finalization. MIS, audit, tax, VAT. Contact 78543201 E-mail : kramct2021@gmail.com

ARCHITECT

Indian male, B.Arch (5 yrs) graduate, 1 yr experience in Architectural planning, conceptual & interior design, exterior facade design, drafting, and 3D visualization. Software certified,seeking suitable employment. Contact: 98503696.

DESIGNER/AUTOCAD D/MAN

Experienced Indian male, 23 yrs old, seeks job in Interior designing. Skilled in AutoCAD and 3D design software. Contact: 95863868.

DRIVER

Driver with 13 yrs experience looking for job in Muscat Contact 93381270, 79737474

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TESOL /TEFL certified Montessori, kindergarten teacher seeking a position in a reputed school/ kindergarten. Currently in Oman on a family visa with a valid Oman D/L. Contact: 76963122. Email: sajiresmi@gmail.com

ENGINEER

Electrical Engineer (B.Tech) with more than 2 yrs of experience in Oman, seeking an opportunity in the Electrical or MEP field, valid Oman D/L and available to join immediately. Contact: 75220047 Email: harikrishnanmini@gmail.com

ENGINEER

Mechanical Engineer having piping experience & completed Masters in supply chain management & logistics from UK, seeking Job opportunities, having 6 yrs of experience. Contact : 91251757. Email: jighilthooprath@gmail.com

IT

Indian male, MCA, experience in network admin, IT support, website and Odoo ERP. Contact : 79701775

AI & ML Engineer specializing in Data analysis seeks suitable employment in Oman. Available in Muscat. Contact: +968 98241468.

LOGISTICS

Business Administration finalist specializing in Transportation & Operations, with 2+ years of experience in logistics holding valid Oman D/L. Contact: +968 90102466 Email: thejasak18@gmail.com

MBA Logistics & supply chain professional with 1+ yr GCC-region logistics experience seeking opportunities in logistics, supply chain, operations or warehouse. Available immediately in Oman. Contact: +968 93185044.

MANAGER

Business development & project management professional with 20+ yrs of experience in oil & gas trading, tendering, business systemization, planning, procurement and ISO QMS. possesses managerial and team lead skills. Contact: 91799438

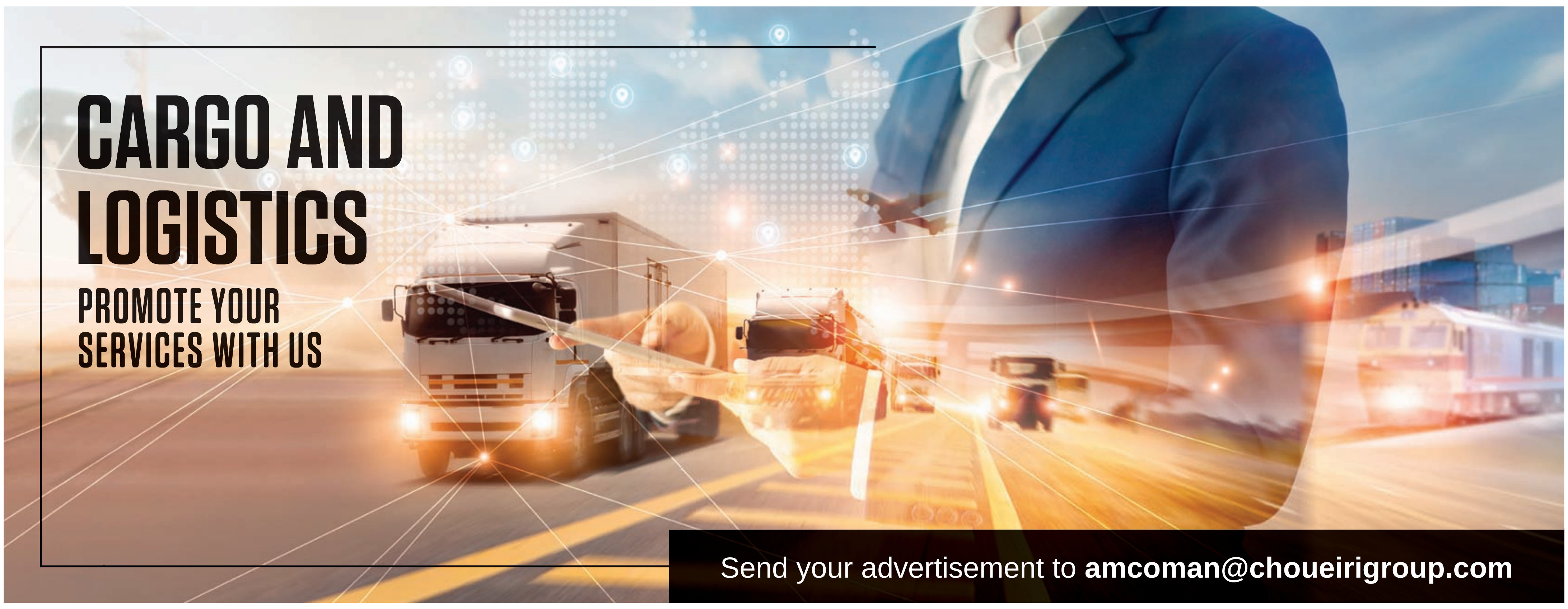
SALES/MARKETING

Sales Exe. 17+yrs GCC retail, outdoor exp. Any sales. Arabic, hindi, malayalam. Omani license. Contact: +96898353365

Indian male, BBA, 3 yrs gulf experience in Sales & logistics. Currently in Oman with valid D/L, seeks suitable position. Contact: +968 75103313. Email : Basimismail008@gmail.com

Indian M(36) MBA with Oman 10 yrs exp in FMCG industry in Oman Contact: 79755795

Indian male, BBA, 20 yrs experience in Sales & marketing in Oman,holding valid Oman D/L seeks suitable placement. Contact: 93011232. Email: jitinjoshua920@gmail.com



WORLD

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy replaces army chief after protests

The move comes as Zelenskyy has been facing mounting criticism over the dismissal of Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov last week. Following his sacking, Fedorov, 35, went public with his conflict with Syrskyi. Their dispute was mainly over a disagreement about the direction of Ukraine's war effort against Russia's ongoing invasion

Kyiv: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on Tuesday that he was removing Oleksandr Syrskyi, the army's commander-in-chief, from his post.

"I have decided that the new Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will be Mykhailo Drapatyi... I am grateful to Oleksandr Syrskyi and to each of our warriors for Ukraine's strong front-line positions," Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram.

"Our shared wish is one — victory over the enemy and conditions at the front and in pressure on Russia that would force Russia toward peace," Zelenskyy said. "A significant path has been traveled, the defense of Ukraine continues, and every warrior deserves dignified treatment."

Why did Zelenskyy sack his commander-in-chief?

The move comes as Zelenskyy has been facing mounting criticism over the dismissal of Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov last week.

Following his sacking, Fedorov, 35, went public with his conflict with Syrskyi. Their dispute was mainly over a disagreement about the direction of Ukraine's war effort against Russia's ongoing invasion.

Fedorov had accused Syrskyi of blocking his attempts at reforming and modernising the army.

Fedorov's removal triggered massive, nationwide protests that saw several thousand, mostly young people demonstrate in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv and other cities. They demanded that Syrskyi be removed and that Fedorov be reinstated.

Zelenskyy, who had initially sided with Syrskyi, eventually bowed to public pressure on Tuesday, after days of meetings with dozens of Ukraine's top military figures.

Who is sacked Ukrainian general Oleksandr Syrskyi?

Syrskyi, 60, was born in Russia and was trained in Moscow during the Soviet era.

He had led some of Ukraine's most decisive campaigns, including halting Russia's initial advance towards Kyiv in 2022 and leading Ukraine's incursion into Kursk, Russia in 2024.

"It is a fact that Oleksandr Syrskyi ensured Ukraine's successes in the defense of Kyiv, in the Kharkiv offensive operation, and in the Kursk operation," Ukraine's president said on Tuesday when announcing the change.

But the military veteran had clashed with reformers over a range of issues, including the use of drones and technology.

His dismissal caps a dramatic week in Ukrainian politics, which has seen Zelenskyy botch a leadership reshuffle that has triggered some of the largest protests the country has seen since Russia's full-scale invasion began in 2022.

How has ex-Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov reacted?

Fedorov, a reformist, was associated with Ukraine's drone strikes against targets in Russia, which have helped turn the tide of the war and garnered wide praise in the West.

Fedorov said Syrskyi's replacement as Ukraine's commander-in-chief by Drapatyi brings "fresh hope" to the country.

"This is a breath of fresh air and a new hope in the struggle of free people for freedom and justice," Fedorov said on social media.

Ukraine renews strikes on Russia's largest online retailer

Wildberries, Russia's largest online retailer, on Wednesday said that several people were injured in Ukrainian attacks on the company's warehouses.

Vladimir Kondratyev, the governor of southern Krasnodar said one person was killed in Wednesday's Ukraine strikes, but did not clarify whether that was the strikes at Wildberries or elsewhere.

Wildberries co-founder and CEO Tatyana Kim said facilities in Krasnodar and Nevinnomyssk were targeted in Wednesday's attacks.

Social media footage showed smoke billowing above the Krasnodar logistics site, which Kim said had been evacuated along with a facility in Nevinnomyssk.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the attacks on X, without naming Wildberries.

"Today, Ukraine's long-range sanctions successfully struck important targets in Russia's Krasnodar and Stavropol regions – logistics hubs involved in supplying the Russian army with drone components, navigation equipment, and other gear – as well as another oil depot," Zelenskyy wrote.

Wednesday's attacks follow the deaths of eight employees in strikes that destroyed Wildberries facilities on Saturday.

"There are no words to describe all the feelings and emotions caused by the attacks on ordinary people, on our employees, on all of us who are simply doing our jobs," Kim said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.

Wildberries, often called the Amazon of Russia, is a key component of the country's civilian economy. Kyiv also accuses it of providing military logistics and shipping for the country's military.

Online sales in Russia totaled 11.5 trillion roubles ($147 billion, €129 billion) in 2025 according to the country's Association of Internet Trade Companies, a 28% increase over 2024.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said sales of goods and services on digital platforms equated to around 8.5% of GDP.

Wednesday's strikes represent a widening trend of Ukrainian attacks deep within Russia as Moscow continues to target civilian infrastructure in the invasion it launched against neighboring Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Beyond its expanded attacks on Russia's civilian economy, the commander of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces announced that Kyiv's military had also struck 13 Russian vessels in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov over the past 48 hours.

— Agencies

FLOODS IN NURISTAN

India sends relief material to Afghanistan

NEW DELHI: As part of its humanitarian support to Afghanistan, India delivered relief materials, including food items and family tents, to Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority due to devastating floods in Nuristan.

"In the wake of the devastating floods in Nuristan, India delivers relief materials, including food items and family tents, to Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority to support affected communities," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

"India stands with the Afghan people at this difficult time," he added.

The assistance comes after catastrophic flash floods in Parun, the provincial capital of Afghanistan's northeastern Nuristan province, have left at least 20 people dead, nearly 80 injured, and more than 100 missing, news agency Khaama Press reported, citing Taliban authorities.

The deluge, triggered by heavy rainfall across the mountainous region, swept through Parun and adjacent districts, inflicting heavy casualties and widespread structural damage, according to a statement from the Taliban-administered National Disaster Management Authority.

Hafiz Mohammad Yousuf Hamad, spokesperson and head of information for the authority, stated that specialised emergency units were dispatched to conduct search-and-rescue operations, locate unaccounted individuals, and evaluate the full scale of the destruction, the agency reported.

Authorities warned that casualty figures are expected to rise as rescue crews navigate thick mud and debris to establish contact with remote communities cut off by floodwaters.

The floodwaters destroyed numerous homes, commercial storefronts, and agricultural land, resulting in severe economic losses for local residents.

— ANI

US MILITARY ASSETS

Jordan caught in widening US-Iran conflict

AMMAN: Air raid sirens again sounded in parts of Jordan early on Tuesday as Iranian missiles targeted the kingdom.

"The air defence system intercepted and downed tonight three missiles coming from Iranian territory that entered Jordanian airspace and targeted the kingdom's territory," the army said in a statement.

No injuries were reported, but the latest strikes follow a series of attacks that have raised the stakes for one of the United States' closest Arab allies in the past days: Two US service members were killed and around 30 others injured by an Iranian missile strike on a US base in Jordan last week.

Jordan is one of the eight Arab countries that host permanent US military facilities. Some of the other host countries — particularly the Gulf states — have been the targets of Iranian attacks since the United States and Israel launched joint attacks on Iran in late February.

Though Iran launched missiles toward Jordan shortly thereafter, there has since been a lull in direct attacks on the kingdom, which has helped to intercept Iranian missiles launched toward Israel, arguing that it is acting in defense of its own airspace.

"Iran has reserved itself the right to return fire on any state in the region that hosts US military assets or bases, and Jordan is one of them," Erwin van Veen, a senior research fellow at the Clingendael Institute in The Hague, told DW. "Only the options of Jordan's King Abdullah II are quite limited as Jordan is in a very precarious balance with respect to military and economic dependence on the Americans."

On Sunday, in a first diplomatic escalation, Jordan summoned Iran's top diplomat in Amman to demand an immediate end to what the foreign ministry called "unjustified and blatant Iranian attacks."

Jordan's political and economic tightrope walk

The US is Jordan's largest single foreign supporter. Under a seven-year Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2022, Washington agreed to provide $1.45 billion (€1.27bn) annually in economic and military assistance. In 2025, Congress increased this to $1.65 billion, which was triple the amount from 2010.

Furthermore, a Defense Cooperation Agreement signed in January 2021 grants US forces formalized access to Jordanian military facilities. According to a recent report, there are currently 4,000 US troops, more than in previous years, stationed in Jordan.

In March, however, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi insisted that there were no foreign military bases in the country. Kelly Petillo, programme manager for Middle East and North Africa at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said one reason for downplaying foreign military presence in Jordan could be anti-US sentiment.

"Despite Jordan's efforts to remain neutral in this war, existing alliances such as the one with the US not only affect Jordan's fragile security but also cause public discontent," she told DW.

She speculated that Jordan, like its Gulf allies in the region, might be beginning to question whether the alliance with the US was beneficial to the country's stability or actually a cause of instability.

A 2026 poll by Arab Barometer, a nonpartisan public opinion research network, concluded that only 12% of Jordanians view US President Donald Trump's foreign policy favorably.

— DW

BILATERAL MEETING

Japan, US discuss Indo-Pacific stability in Manila

MANILA: On the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meetings in Manila, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Motegi Toshimitsu met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday to align strategies on pressing Middle Eastern tensions and Indo-Pacific security.

During their exchange, Minister Motegi underscored the urgency of de-escalating tensions surrounding Iran. He specifically emphasised the critical need to safeguard free and safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial maritime corridor for global energy supplies, without incurring additional transit or security costs.

"Minister MOTEGI and Secretary Rubio exchanged views on the situation surrounding Iran. Minister MOTEGI emphasaised the importance of de-escalating the situation as soon as possible and ensuring free and safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz without additional costs," read the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan press release.

The two foreign policy chiefs also engaged in broad discussions regarding security and strategic cooperation across the Indo-Pacific region.

Concluding their meeting, Minister Motegi and Secretary Rubio reaffirmed that Tokyo and Washington will maintain tight communication and coordinate closely in response to unfolding international developments in both the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.

"They also exchanged views on issues related to the Indo-Pacific. They confirmed that they would maintain close communication in responding to developments in the international situations surrounding Iran and the Indo-Pacific," added the release.

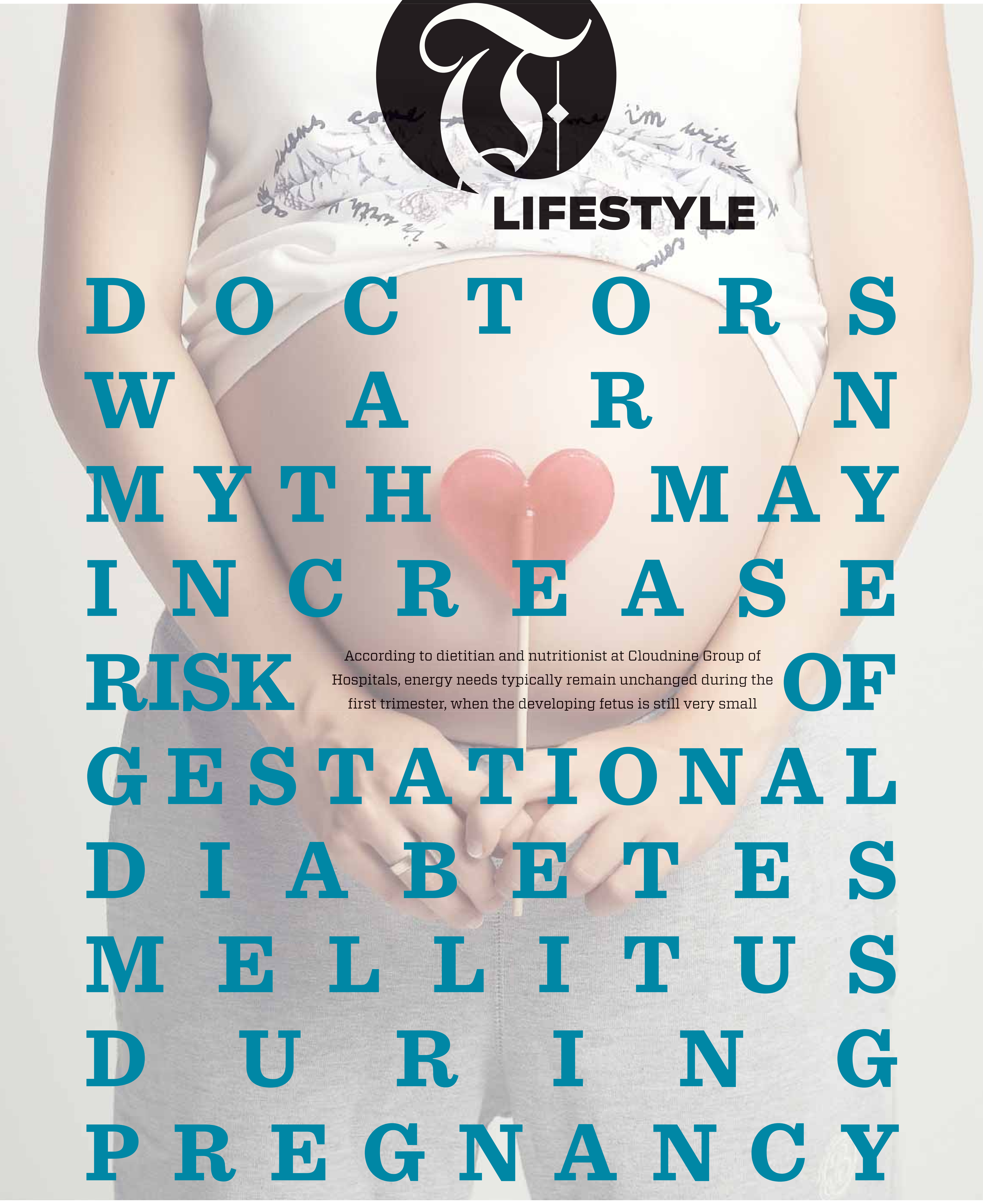
Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused Iran of failing to honour commitments in negotiations reached with Washington last month and said Tehran was "not serious about talks," while warning that allowing it to control the Strait of Hormuz would set a "very dangerous precedent" for international trade and freedom of navigation.

Speaking at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference with the United States in Manila, Rubio said Washington remained committed to diplomacy and was willing to pursue a negotiated resolution with Iran.

Reiterating the US position, Rubio said Washington remained open to diplomacy but warned that there would be consequences if agreements were not honoured.

— ANI

LIFESTYLE



DOCTORS WARN MYTH MAY INCREASE RISK OF GESTATIONAL DIABETES MELLITUS DURING PREGNANCY

According to dietitian and nutritionist at Cloudnine Group of Hospitals, energy needs typically remain unchanged during the first trimester, when the developing fetus is still very small

For generations, pregnant women have been told, "You're eating for two now." It is often repeated lovingly by family members and friends, accompanied by extra servings at the dinner table and encouragement to indulge cravings.

However, modern medical science warns that this well-intentioned advice may be one of the most persistent myths surrounding pregnancy nutrition.

Health experts warn that interpreting the advice literally can lead to excessive calorie intake, unhealthy weight gain and a higher risk of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM), a condition that affects blood sugar levels during pregnancy.

In reality, specialists say pregnancy requires better nutrition, not more food.

"The idea of 'eating for two' is misleading," said Dr. Tripti Raheja, Director of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the CK Birla Hospital in Delhi, while speaking to ANI.

"In the first trimester, there is no significant increase in calorie requirements. Most women do not need additional calories at this stage. In the second and third trimesters, an extra 300 to 450 kilocalories per day is sufficient, roughly equal to one healthy snack, not double meals," she added.

Nutrition experts note that calorie requirements increase only gradually as the pregnancy progresses.

According to Garima Chaudhary, dietitian and nutritionist at Cloudnine Group of Hospitals, energy needs typically remain unchanged during the first trimester, when the developing fetus is still very small. "Calorie needs increase gradually, not dramatically," Chaudhary explained, adding, "For women with a normal body mass index, there is usually no need for additional calories in the first trimester. In the second trimester, around 340 extra calories per day may be required, and in the third trimester, about 450. The key is nutrient-dense foods, not larger portions."

These requirements can vary depending on factors such as pre-pregnancy weight, activity levels, and whether the pregnancy involves twins. However, the overarching principle remains the same: the focus should be on nutrient-dense foods rather than larger portions.

"Most Indian women already consume over 2,000 calories per day," Dr. Tripti Raheja further said.

"So the focus should be on improving the quality of food, more protein and fibre, fewer refined carbohydrates, rather than increasing quantity," she added.

The concern with excessive eating during pregnancy, especially early on, lies in its link to gestational diabetes.

The condition develops when pregnancy hormones interfere with the body's ability to use insulin effectively, causing blood sugar levels to rise.

Dr. Raheja explained that hormones such as human placental lactogen, progesterone and cortisol naturally increase insulin resistance during pregnancy.

When excessive calorie intake, particularly from refined carbohydrates and sugary foods, occurs alongside this hormonal shift, the body's metabolic balance can be disrupted.

"If a woman gains weight rapidly in early pregnancy, especially central fat, insulin resistance worsens further," Dr. Raheja said.

"This puts stress on the pancreas, which must produce higher levels of insulin to keep blood sugar under control," she added.

On the other hand, Chaudhary noted that excess fat tissue increases inflammatory signals in the body, compounding the problem. "More fat tissue leads to more insulin resistance. If the pancreas cannot compensate adequately, blood sugar levels begin to rise," she said.

Research and clinical observation suggest that rapid weight gain before 20 weeks of pregnancy can increase the risk of gestational diabetes by as much as 20 to 50 per cent. It may also raise the likelihood of having a larger-than-average baby, a condition known as macrosomia, which can complicate delivery and increase the chances of cesarean section (C-section).

Another challenge is that gestational diabetes often develops quietly. Many women do not experience noticeable symptoms, making early detection dependent on medical screening and careful observation of diet and weight patterns.

"Gestational diabetes is frequently silent," said Dr. Swati Kanodia, consultant pediatric endocrinologist at Rainbow Children's Hospital.

"However, certain red flags should prompt earlier glucose testing rather than waiting until the routine screening at 24 to 28 weeks," she added.

Doctors commonly look for warning signs such as rapid weight gain in the first trimester, particularly more than two to three kilograms, high intake of sugary foods and refined carbohydrates, frequent consumption of fruit juices or processed snacks, low protein intake, and a sedentary lifestyle.

Medical history also plays an important role. Women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), previous gestational diabetes, obesity, or a family history of Type 2 diabetes may require earlier monitoring.

"In India especially, baseline insulin resistance rates are already high, so early screening becomes particularly important," Dr. Raheja said.

Although gestational diabetes often resolves after childbirth, its implications can extend far beyond pregnancy. Doctors stress that it should be viewed as a warning sign of future metabolic risk rather than a temporary condition.

"Women who experience gestational diabetes have a seven to ten times higher lifetime risk of developing Type 2 diabetes," Dr. Kanodia said, adding, "The risk can persist for years, which is why postpartum monitoring and lifestyle changes are essential."

Chaudhary added that nearly half of these women may develop Type 2 diabetes within five to ten years if preventive steps are not taken.

The effects may also extend to the next generation. Exposure to high blood sugar levels in the womb can influence how a child's metabolism develops, increasing the likelihood of obesity, insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes later in life.

"This phenomenon is known as fetal metabolic programming," explained Dr. Sushma Dikhit, senior consultant gynaecologist at Cloudnine Group of Hospitals in East Delhi.

"Gestational diabetes isn't just a pregnancy condition; it has long-term metabolic consequences for both mother and child," she added, in a conversation with ANI.

For this reason, doctors emphasise balanced nutrition rather than larger portions during pregnancy.

Experts often recommend a simple "plate model" for daily meals: half the plate filled with fibre-rich vegetables, one quarter with protein sources such as dal, paneer, eggs, fish or chicken, and the remaining quarter with complex carbohydrates like multigrain roti, brown rice, oats or millets. Small portions of healthy fats such as nuts, seeds or ghee can also support satiety and nutrient absorption.

"Combining carbohydrates with protein and healthy fats slows glucose absorption and helps maintain stable blood sugar levels," Chaudhary said, adding that refined sugars, sugary beverages and fruit juices should be limited.

Meals spaced throughout the day, rather than large, heavy servings, can also help maintain steady energy levels during pregnancy.

Still, navigating cultural expectations around pregnancy and eating habits can be challenging.

In many Indian households, women are strongly encouraged to eat more "for the baby," making portion control difficult.

Experts suggest addressing these pressures through education and communication.

"A helpful approach is to explain that the doctor has advised focusing on nutritious, balanced meals rather than eating double," Dr. Raheja said, adding, "Families are usually more receptive when this message is framed as medical advice."

Chaudhary agrees, noting that the emphasis should be placed on quality rather than quantity. "The baby needs nutrients, not excess sugar," she said.

Meanwhile, Dr. Dikhit added that involving family members in prenatal consultations can help dispel myths and reduce guilt around eating less than expected.

"When families understand that overeating can increase the risk of gestational diabetes, a very large baby, difficult delivery or future diabetes risk, they often become supportive of healthier eating habits," she said.

Pregnancy, doctors say, is a period of remarkable physiological change, but also an opportunity to build a foundation for lifelong health.

"Pregnancy is a state of controlled metabolic stress," Dr. Dikhit said, adding, "The goal is not maximum weight gain but optimal metabolic health."

In that sense, the message for expectant mothers may be simple but powerful: pregnancy is not about eating twice as much, it is about "eating twice as wisely".

- ANI

Infantino's 'time is up' with FIFA, says La Liga president

The world football governing body president should resign for 'destroying the football industry', said Javier Tebas

MADRID: Gianni Infantino should resign as head of FIFA for "destroying the football industry" by expanding international competitions, La Liga president Javier Tebas said on Tuesday.

It is not the first time he has lashed out at Infantino over fixture congestion and for considering a proposal to expand the 2030 men's World Cup from 48 teams to 64.

"Increasing the number of national teams makes no sense. The football industry isn't just the World Cup, which is the most important event. But not everything can revolve around the World Cup," Tebas told *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

"In my opinion, yes, I think his time is up," he said of Infantino.

"However, he has the support of the system and the federations, so there's not much more to add, is there? There's no opposition candidate, nobody wants to stand just to lose. This is the system and it's rotten at its core.

"He shouldn't stay, but he won't leave. I've heard many people who are against Infantino. They say it, but then they do nothing. I don't know what's worse, the silence or the complicity, because those who stay silent are perfectly aware of the damage football is suffering."

South American football's ruling body CONMEBOL has made an official proposal to expand the 2030 World Cup to 64 teams. The competition is already set to be the most sprawling edition with six host nations spread across three continents.

"It's national competition that sustains this sport," Tebas added. "They are destroying the football industry, which generates tens of thousands of jobs, for an event that lasts 40 days and involves a minority of players."

He also criticised world football's governing body FIFA over the new hydration breaks implemented at the World Cup which ended on Sunday, as well as the extended 27-minute halftime interval — rather than the standard 15 — during the final that saw Spain defeat Argentina 1-0.

The hydration breaks midway through each half were introduced to help players deal with the summer heat in the United States, Canada and Mexico. But critics say they had unintended consequences, ruining the flow of the game and giving coaches a chance to tactically shift momentum in their team's favour.

"FIFA arranges things as it pleases, for what it wants, for its own interests — certainly not for football," Tebas said. "Hydration breaks are a lie. We have them in La Liga, but only when it's genuinely hot. Here, the pitches in Dallas, Los Angeles, and Atlanta had air conditioning. It was a lie — and just a break for advertising."

Infantino announced in April that he would run for re-election for a fourth term as president. The vote for the 2027–2031 period is scheduled for March 18 in Morocco. The Football Supporters Europe group also called on the wider football community to hold FIFA to account.

In a statement on its website headlined "A World Cup that failed supporters", the FSE demanded "structural governance reforms to hand decision-making power back to the FIFA Council and Congress and ensure full consultation with clubs, leagues, players and supporters."

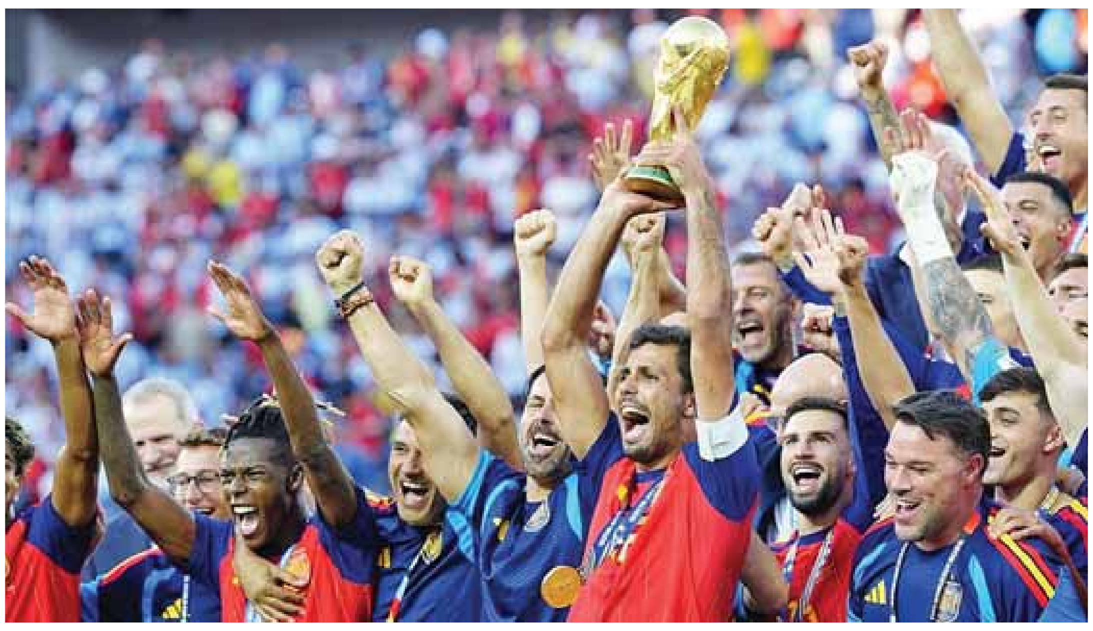
It added: "The 2026 World Cup should have been a celebration of the game and the supporters who give it life. Instead, it has too often become a case study in what is so deeply wrong with football today.

"From the outset, supporters were asked to place their trust in FIFA and "chill", but it prioritised spectacle and commercialisation over the match-going experience with key elements of football's identity being messed with. Over the last month, we've seen football contorted to the whim of Gianni Infantino and the Trump administration."

The FSE, accepted by European football's governing body UEFA as the recognized group representing fans in the region, then went on to attack "historically high ticket prices" and "skyrocketing transportation costs, bending of rules and procedures, exclusion of swathes of the global population and a lack of transparent communication. "All this created an environment of confusion and distrust that has severely damaged the reputation of FIFA, the World Cup, and the integrity of football itself." — Agencies

FIFA RANKINGS

Spain overtake Argentina to reclaim world No.1 spot



GENEVA: Spain returned to the top of the FIFA rankings on Monday after going unbeaten at the 2026 World Cup, where they won seven matches and drew one en route to their second world title.

FIFA said Spain collected 1,995.88 points to reclaim the No.1 position, replacing Argentina, who dropped to second after losing 1-0 to Spain in the final after extra time.

Spain had previously held the top ranking before April.

France and England remained third and fourth, respectively, despite England defeating France 6-4 in the third-place playoff at the World Cup. There was significant movement elsewhere in the top 10 following the tournament.

Brazil climbed one place to fifth, while Morocco moved up one spot to sixth. Both benefited from Portugal's fall to seventh after the European side failed to reach the quarter-finals. Belgium moved above the Netherlands into eighth, while Mexico returned to the top 10 for the first time since March 2022.

Germany dropped out of the top 10 to 12th, with Colombia moving up to 11th. Switzerland made the biggest jump among the leading teams, rising five places to 14th, while Japan remained Asia's highest-ranked team at 17th.

A total of 105 matches were played during the latest ranking period, with 104 coming at the 2026 World Cup. — Xinhua

Messi returns to Argentina for rest

ROSARIO: Lionel Messi arrived back in Argentina on Tuesday for a few days of rest following the World Cup final loss to Spain.

Messi's private jet landed near his hometown of Rosario from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at 6:27 am. Although many fans were waiting with signs and flags, he did not make a public appearance.

Supporters only caught a brief glimpse of the SUV that met Messi on the tarmac to transport him and his family to the private neighbourhood of Funes, roughly 300 kilometres (185 miles) north of Buenos Aires.

The Argentina captain reportedly travelled with his wife, Antonela Roccuzzo, and their three children, all of whom had accompanied him throughout the tournament in North America. Waiting for him in Rosario was his 68-year-old father, Jorge, whose ongoing medical treatment for an undisclosed illness had been revealed by the family during the World Cup.

Fans had gathered at the airport as early as 3:30 am hoping to catch a sight of the star. Among them were two young girls in Albiceleste jerseys holding welcome signs, one of which read: "Messi: You're a legend. Thank you for bringing joy to our hearts. A whole country loves you!"

Messi is expected to rejoin Inter Miami in late July or early August for the ongoing MLS season

Fifteen members of Argentina's 26-player World Cup roster, led by head coach Lionel Scaloni, landed at Buenos Aires' Ezeiza Airport on Monday on a chartered flight.

Scaloni's arrival at his family home in Pujato — a small town in the province of Santa Fe — on Tuesday and it was quite an event as his neighbours gathered to welcome him.

After a few minutes, he stepped out of the house and began signing Argentina jerseys handed to him by the crowd, as well as posing for photos.

"We didn't win, but we can be satisfied. It hurts not to have been able to bring that joy," Scaloni told reporters. "We lost because they were better ... perhaps we were running on fumes. It's good to acknowledge that — it will make us better."

Scaloni said he would honour his contract with the Argentine Football Association (AFA) through December 31, though he stopped short of confirming whether he would continue beyond that date. "I'm here until December, guys ... let's not make a fuss," he added. - Agencies

WORLD CUP WINNER

Spain's Ruiz targets home comeback at Real Betis

MADRID: Spain midfielder Fabian Ruiz has admitted he would like to return to his hometown region to play for Real Betis before ending his career. The 30-year-old, who currently plays for Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), began his professional career at Betis and said he hopes to one day wear the club's colours again.

Ruiz made his comments at an event in Los Palacios, near Seville, where he and fellow Spain international Gavi were honoured by the local city government on Monday. Both players were born in the town and received a warm reception from residents. While Gavi remains at FC Barcelona, Ruiz is coming off a remarkable season, winning the Champions League, Ligue 1, FIFA Intercontinental Cup and UEFA Super Cup with PSG, and lifting the FIFA World Cup with Spain after La Roja beat Argentina 1-0 in Sunday's final.

Despite being less prominent in the spotlight than some of his teammates, Ruiz is considered a contender for this year's Ballon d'Or after his success at club and international level. "Who wouldn't be happy with a season where I have won the Champions League and World Cup? I can't ask for more," Ruiz said.

"Everyone would like to win the Ballon d'Or, and it is an honour to be a candidate," he added.

Ruiz was also asked about a possible return to Betis, where he made his senior debut before leaving for Napoli in 2018.

"The truth is yes. I have always said that and never hidden it. I would like to come back, and that day is getting closer," Ruiz said. "I am a Betis fan and one day, I hope to return to Betis." - Xinhua

22-YEAR PRO CAREER

Mexico goalkeeper Ochoa retires at 41

MEXICO CITY: Guillermo Ochoa — widely considered among the greatest Mexican goalkeepers in history—announced his retirement from elite football on Tuesday, bringing an end to a distinguished 22-year professional career.

Ochoa, who turned 41 last week, had previously stated that the 2026 World Cup would be his last tournament, though speculation had swirled about whether he might sign with a new club to extend his playing days.

He put those rumours to rest.

"I gave it my all; I left everything on the field for my clubs and the national team, and today I hang up my gloves," Ochoa posted on social media.

"Being a goalkeeper means knowing you might wait 90 minutes for a single moment when everything depends on you. And when that moment arrives, you cannot hesitate."

Ochoa was selected on Mexico's roster for six World Cups — a number shared only by icons Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. He served as Mexico's starting

goalkeeper in three of them: Brazil 2014, Russia 2018, and Qatar 2022. Ochoa made his top-flight debut with Club América in February 2004. He spent his first seven seasons there before transferring to French club Ajaccio in 2011, becoming the first Mexico-born goalkeeper to play in Europe. His European career also included stints with Málaga, Granada, Standard Liège, Salernitana, AVS Futebol, and AEL Limassol, punctuated by a three-year return to América from 2019 to 2022.

"I never imagined how far a dream could take me. Today, I can only look back with pride and say: Thank you," Ochoa wrote. "I take with me the affection of millions and the peace of mind that comes with knowing I gave everything for Mexico."

Though he served primarily as a backup to Raúl Rangel in the recent World Cup, manager Javier Aguirre brought Ochoa on for the final 13 minutes against the Czech Republic in Mexico's last group-stage match. Following the final whistle, an emotional Ochoa kissed the goalposts at the Estadio Azteca — the venue where his career began — before kneeling to accept an embrace from his teammates. Long after the stands had cleared, Ochoa walked out to the centre circle one last time to take in his final farewell.

At the club level, Ochoa captured a league title with América during the 2005 Clausura tournament and won the Belgian Cup with Standard Liège. On the international stage, he led Mexico to six CONCACAF Gold Cup titles and earned a bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. - Agencies

Volkswagen Oman launches summer offers across its most popular models

From city drives to coastal escapes and family adventures, Volkswagen brings together versatile vehicles and ownership benefits designed for modern life in Oman

MUSCAT: Summer in Oman is made for the road. It's family visits across the Sultanate, weekends by the coast, mountain escapes and the freedom to head somewhere new at a moment's notice.

This season, Volkswagen Oman, represented by Premium Motors, is celebrating the spirit of summer with the launch of its new seasonal campaign, Designed for Summer Journeys, bringing exclusive offers across some of its most popular models.

Running from 10 June to 10 August, the campaign includes the T-Roc, Tiguan, Teramont, Jetta and Passat, combining flexible ownership with the practicality, comfort and German engineering that have made Volkswagen a trusted companion for generations of drivers.

The launch comes as customers across Oman increasingly look for vehicles that can adapt to every aspect of modern life. Whether it's navigating busy city streets, embarking on family adventures or enjoying long drives across the country, Volkswagen's diverse range offers a vehicle for every journey and every stage of life.

From the sporty and compact T-Roc to the spacious Teramont, and from the dependable Jetta to the refined Passat, each model has been designed with the same philosophy in mind: to make driving simpler, safer and more enjoyable. Together, they represent a lineup that is versatile enough for everyday life and capable enough for wherever summer leads next.

Beyond attractive pricing, Volkswagen Oman is reinforcing its commitment to worry-free ownership. Customers purchasing the T-Roc, Tiguan, Jetta or Passat will receive seven years of roadside assistance, a five years or 150,000 km of warranty, three years or 45,000 km of service, free registration, a premium tint bundle and lifestyle accessories.

Teramont customers benefit from seven years of roadside assistance, a three-year unlimited kilometre warranty, an extended service package of seven years or 105,000 km, free registration, a premium tint bundle and lifestyle accessories.

Muhammad Faisal Nawaz, Strategy Manager Volkswagen Oman at Premium Motors, said:"Summer is when Oman gets moving. It's a season of discovery, time with family and making memories on the road. Our Volkswagen range is built for exactly that. Whether customers are looking for their first car, a family SUV or something for their next adventure, we're proud to offer vehicles that combine trusted German engineering with ownership benefits that deliver confidence long after they leave the showroom."

With German engineering at its core and a range designed around the needs of modern drivers, Volkswagen Oman continues to create vehicles that are built not just for the destination, but for every moment along the way. Volkswagen Oman also offer the option of leasing short term, long term or lease to own.

RECOGNITION

Dhofar Islamic crowned Oman's Best Islamic Retail Bank for 2026

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic has been named Oman's Best Islamic Retail Bank at the MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2026 – Retail, Digital & SME Banking, in recognition of its leadership in customer-centric Islamic banking, digital innovation and product excellence.

The prestigious award, organised by Middle East Economic Digest (MEED) in collaboration with GlobalData, honours leading financial institutions from across 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa that are setting new benchmarks in retail, digital and SME banking.

According to the organisers, the overall standard of entries was exceptionally high, with Dhofar Islamic distinguished by the quality, relevance and measurable impact of its initiatives in advancing banking excellence across the region.

The inaugural awards programme celebrates financial institutions that are redefining retail banking through digital transformation, personalised customer experiences, financial inclusion and innovative banking solutions. Winners were selected through an independent judging process involving senior banking executives and industry specialists, with strategic vision, innovation and commitment to customer excellence among the key evaluation criteria.

The latest recognition reinforces Dhofar Islamic's position as the leading Islamic banking institution in the Sultanate of Oman. Since commencing operations following the introduction of Islamic banking in the country in 2012, the bank has built one of Oman's largest Sharia-compliant banking franchises, offering a comprehensive portfolio of retail, corporate, SME and wealth management solutions.

Its continued success has been driven by a broad range of Sharia-compliant products and services covering personal finance, home finance, vehicle finance, business banking, and investment solutions. At the same time, Dhofar Islamic has made substantial investments in digital banking, enabling customers to access secure and convenient banking services through advanced mobile and online platforms while maintaining one of the country's most extensive Islamic banking branch networks.

Today, Dhofar Islamic operates 31 dedicated branches across all governorates of Oman, serving a diverse customer base that includes children, youth, women, entrepreneurs and high-net-worth clients through specialised banking propositions such as Al Rafaa and Al Riadah.

Beyond retail banking, Dhofar Islamic continues to play a significant role in supporting Oman's economic development by financing strategic infrastructure projects, empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, and contributing to sustainable growth initiatives aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The MENA Banking Excellence Award adds to a growing list of regional and international accolades recognising Dhofar Islamic's achievements in Islamic banking, digital transformation, customer service and innovation. The latest honour underscores the bank's commitment to delivering world-class Sharia-compliant financial solutions while continuing to raise industry standards and shape the future of Islamic banking in Oman and the wider region.

LANDMARK PROJECT

Joyalukkas Lifestyle Developers unveils Gold Tower Thrissur - Kerala's tallest residential tower sets new benchmark for luxury living

THRISSUR, KERALA: Joyalukkas Lifestyle Developers officially unveiled Gold Tower Thrissur, Kerala's tallest residential tower, at an exclusive launch event held on 16 July at Hyatt Regency, Thrissur.

The landmark project, which will rise 50 storeys and approximately 190 metres above road level, marks a defining milestone in Kerala's luxury real estate landscape and reinforces the company's vision of creating iconic residential destinations that rival the world's finest developments.

The invitation-only event was attended by distinguished guests, business leaders, industry professionals, patrons, and members of the media, who were introduced to the project's architectural vision and thoughtfully curated lifestyle experience.

A new icon for Thrissur

Strategically located in the heart of Thrissur city, Gold Tower Thrissur is set across 2.2 acres and has been designed to combine world-class engineering, contemporary architecture, and exceptional liveability.

With more than 50 world-class amenities and over 77% landscaped open spaces, the development offers an elevated lifestyle unlike anything currently available in Kerala. Residents will enjoy a 25-metre infinity swimming pool, wellness and fitness facilities, co-working spaces, private theatre, landscaped gardens, sports and recreation facilities, children's play areas, and an exclusive Sky Deck offering panoramic views of the city.

Designed to international standards and built with premium specifications, the project reflects Joyalukkas Lifestyle Developers' commitment to delivering residences that seamlessly blend luxury, innovation, and enduring value.

Vision for the future of luxury living

Addressing guests at the launch, Joy Alukkas, Chairman and Managing Director of the Joyalukkas Group, shared the vision behind the landmark development.

"Gold Tower Thrissur represents our belief that Kerala deserves homes that stand alongside the finest luxury residences anywhere in the world. Every detail has been thoughtfully planned, from the scale of the architecture and the quality of construction to the lifestyle experiences within the development. We wanted to create a landmark that future generations would identify with the city, while giving residents an address they would be proud to call home. This project reflects our unwavering commitment to quality, trust and excellence, values that have guided the Joyalukkas Group for more than five decades."

Redefining the city skyline

As Kerala's tallest residential tower, Gold Tower Thrissur is poised to become a defining feature of the city's skyline while introducing a new benchmark for premium urban living.

The project combines expansive residences, globally inspired amenities, landscaped open spaces, and cutting-edge engineering to create an environment that balances luxury with functionality. Every aspect of the development has been envisioned to offer residents an elevated lifestyle while strengthening Thrissur's position as one of Kerala's most desirable destinations for luxury real estate.

Building on a legacy

Gold Tower Thrissur follows the success of Gold Tower Kochi, further strengthening Joyalukkas Lifestyle Developers' growing portfolio of landmark residential developments across Kerala.

Backed by the trust and legacy of the Joyalukkas Group, the company continues to create thoughtfully designed communities that combine architectural excellence, premium construction standards, and customer-centric living experiences.

ROUND-UP

Audi Oman launches summer offers across its acclaimed Q range

Running from 10 June to 10 August, the campaign features the Audi Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7 and Q8, bringing together a range of ownership benefits designed to provide long-term confidence alongside the sophistication and performance that define the Audi brand

MUSCAT: Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has launched its 2026 Summer Campaign, introducing exclusive offers across its acclaimed Q range and reinforcing its commitment to progressive design, intelligent technology and exceptional ownership experiences in Oman.

Running from 10 June to 10 August, the campaign features the Audi Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7 and Q8, bringing together a range of ownership benefits designed to provide long-term confidence alongside the sophistication and performance that define the Audi brand.

The launch comes as customers across Oman increasingly seek vehicles that combine versatility with refined design and advanced technology. Whether navigating the city, escaping to the mountains or embarking on long journeys across the Sultanate, Audi's Q range offers a model to suit every stage of life and every style of driving.

From the agile and urban-focused Q2 to the striking flagship Q8, the collection is united by Audi's signature approach to design: clean lines, intuitive technology and a driving experience engineered to feel effortless.

Customers purchasing selected models as part of the campaign will benefit from a 5-year or 1 million kilometre manufacturer warranty, a 5-year or 75,000 km service package, 5 years of roadside assistance and complimentary first-year registration.

Muhammad Faisal Nawaz, Strategy Manager of Audi Oman at Premium Motors, said: "Audi has always been about progress that you can feel — in the way a car looks, drives and fits into your life. This summer, we're making it easier for customers to experience our Q range. It's a simple promise: outstanding design, intelligent technology and confidence that lasts long after you leave the showroom."

The Audi Summer Promotion reflects the brand's ongoing commitment to delivering premium mobility solutions that are as sophisticated as they are practical, while making ownership more accessible to customers across the Sultanate. Audi Oman also offer the option of leasing short term, long term or lease to own.

ATTRACTIVE

Bank Muscat launches exclusive eco-friendly auto loan offer to celebrate Khareef Dhofar 2026 season

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to delivering innovative banking solutions that meet customers' evolving aspirations while supporting national sustainability initiatives, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched a special eco-friendly auto loan offer to celebrate the Khareef Dhofar 2026 season. The offer will run until the 15 September.

The exclusive offer has been designed to make owning an environmentally friendly vehicle more rewarding by providing attractive loan benefits for customers purchasing electric, hybrid, and hydrogen-powered vehicles. Through this initiative, Bank Muscat continues to encourage the adoption of sustainable mobility solutions in Oman in line with Oman vision 2040 and the Sultanate's environmental sustainability objectives.

Commenting on the campaign, Abdullah bin Tamman Al Maashani, General Manager Products, Bank Muscat, said: "we continue to witness growing interest in environmentally friendly vehicles as customers increasingly seek smarter and more sustainable transportation options. At Bank Muscat, we remain committed to offering innovation loan solutions that provide exceptional value through competitive rates, flexible repayment options, and exclusive benefits that enhance our customers ownership experience. We invite our valued customers to take advantage of this time limited Khareef offer an enjoy its attractive benefits."

Customers can benefit from a competitive interest rate starting from 4.50% per annum on eco-friendly car loans. In addition, the all-eligible customers will receive a complimentary special edition Khareef vehicle plate number and also enjoy a waiver of the first year's annual fee on selected Bank Muscat credit cards, including the Al Jawhar Credit Card, Lulu Bank Muscat Credit Card, and the Bank Muscat Oman Air Gold Credit Card (Basic).

The offer is available to Omani nationals and expatriates and applies exclusively to environmentally friendly vehicles, including electric, hybrid and hydrogen-powered vehicles. Customers can conveniently apply for the loan through any Bank Muscat branch across the Sultanate, or at the Bank's Sayyarati Sales Centres in Wattayah and Salalah. Applications can also be submitted directly through participating vehicle dealerships, ensuring a seamless and convenient financing experience.

Through this seasonal initiative, Bank Muscat continues to strengthen its commitment to supporting national sustainability efforts and promoting environmentally responsible transportation solutions. The Bank also remains dedicated to introducing value-added banking products and exclusive seasonal offers that cater to the diverse needs of customers, particularly during major occasions such as the Khareef Dhofar season, one of the Sultanate's most prominent tourism seasons.

10:38
Times OF OMAN
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LEGACY
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The 'Workable' Peace — Diplomacy or a Tactical Trap?
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