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51

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OMAN, UK REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO COOPERATION, ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

The leaders agreed to build an ambitious and forward-looking partnership for future

MUSCAT: The United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman commit to strengthen and deepen our relationship, monitor progress against agreed priorities, and ensure that cooperation remains focused on mutual benefit, Oman's Vision 2040, the UK's growth agenda, and the shared goal of building a more secure, prosperous and resilient world.

This was stated in the joint statement issued on the occasion of the state visit undertaken by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the United Kingdom, the full text of which reads as follows:

"During the State Visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, to the United Kingdom as the guest of His Majesty The King on 20-22 October 2026, the United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman reaffirmed the enduring friendship between their two countries, reflected in the close relationship between His Majesty The King and His Majesty the Sultan, and agreed to build an ambitious, forward-looking partnership for the future.

At 10 Downing Street on 21 October, the Prime Minister Andy Burnham and His Majesty Sul-



tan Haitham bin Tarik welcomed the depth, warmth and longevity of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman and agreed a set of priorities to shape cooperation in the years ahead.

These priorities include modernising security, defence and national resilience cooperation; expanding trade and investment in green and advanced industries;

working together on regional stability and global challenges; and strengthening ties between people and institutions.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales and His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said welcomed their roles in supporting the next generation of the relationship, including through joint patronage of the British Omani Society. **>A4**

HM the Sultan returns home

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Thursday, having concluded a state visit to the United Kingdom.

May the Almighty Allah safeguard His Majesty the Sultan and guide his steps along the path of goodness and progress. — **ONA**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN 'Tajawob' achieves 83% response rate

1 The Ministry of Labour achieved 83% response rate to proposals submitted via the "Tajawob" platform during the second half of 2026, receiving 154 proposals and responding to 128, as part of its efforts to enhance beneficiary participation. **>A2**

OMAN Number of jobseekers in Musandam drops



2 The number of jobseekers in Musandam Governorate declined by 9.7% by the end of September 2026, reaching 1,115 compared with 1,235 in 2025. The decline reflects improving employment indicators in the governorate, alongside ongoing efforts to develop national talent. **>A3**

MARKET Oman's import price index rises by 11.7%

3 The general index of import prices in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 11.7 percent in the second quarter (Q2) of 2026, compared to the same quarter of 2025, according to latest data issued by the NCSI. **>B1**

MINISTER OF INFORMATION

'Media Excellence Competition a driver for promoting distinction and developing professional practice'

MUSCAT: Dr. Abdullah bin Nasser Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, has affirmed that the Media Excellence Competition represents a national platform for entrenching a culture of excellence and innovation in media work and for motivating talent to deliver quality works that contribute to raising the quality of Omani media content and enhancing its capacity to keep pace with the rapid transformations in the media industry.



In a press statement on the occasion of the award ceremony for the 2026 Media Excellence Competition, to be held at the Theatre of the Ministry of Information on Monday, the minister said that the competition, whose first edition was launched in 2004, has consolidated its standing among national initiatives supporting positive competition in the media sector and has contributed to showcasing national talent and recognising its achieve-

ments in journalism, radio, television and electronic media.

He added that digital transformations and the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence applications necessitate continued modernisation of work tools and production methods and the enhancement of media practitioners' capabilities to employ new technologies in producing innovative, value-driven content, while adhering to accuracy, credibility and professional responsibility. **>A2**



British Omani Society ushers new chapter with joint honorary patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin and Prince William

A4

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COMMENTARY

Oman Sets New Regulatory Framework for Recruiting Non-Omani Manpower

Oman's Ministry of Labour has newly promulgated Ministerial Decision No. 390/2026, issuing the Regulation Governing the Practice of the Activity of Recruiting Non-Omani Manpower. Based on the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree 53/2023, the Regulation sets licensing requirements and obligations for recruitment offices and employers. The Decision repeals the Regulation issued by Ministerial Decision No. 1/2011 and takes effect on 1 January 2027.

Speaking to the Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Chairman of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, said "the Regulation makes a licence from the Ministry of Labour mandatory for recruitment offices. Eligibility conditions include that the owner, partners



and authorised signatories are Omani, registration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and a financial guarantee of OMR 5,000. Recruitment offices must meet prescribed requirements for their premises and workers'



accommodation." "Licensed offices must use prescribed forms for job offers and service contracts. They must give employers workers' personal details, skills and experience, conduct pre-entry medical examinations, and

provide insurance coverage for each service contract. They must use external agencies accredited by the relevant diplomatic mission in Oman and attested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; recruitment from countries without a diplomatic mission in Oman requires coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Oman Police. They must not collect any amounts or fees from recruited workers for recruitment or employment, and must not retain workers' passports or official documents except with their written consent," he said.

He added that "recruitment offices must recruit workers within 45 days of the service contract, unless a shorter period is agreed. In specified circumstances, offices must refund employers or, if agreed

in writing, provide replacement workers, although the right to a refund is forfeited in certain cases, such as fraud by the employer about the conditions of work, non-payment of wages for more than two consecutive months or three non-consecutive months in a year, or harassment or violence against the worker."

He further noted that "under the prescribed contract forms, the service guarantee period is two years for domestic workers and their equivalents, and 90 days for workers recruited for establishments, calculated from the commencement of work. Temporary labour authorisations are valid for 180 days and are non-renewable."

"Non-compliance may result in a warning, administrative fines, suspension or cancellation

of a licence, without prejudice to criminal penalties under the Labour Law. Existing licences remain valid until expiry, provided that they are renewed in accordance with the Regulation," he concluded.

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

'Tajawob' achieves 83% response rate to key proposals submitted

According to an analytical report prepared by the Department of Institutional Excellence at the Ministry, the proposals covered diverse topics reflecting beneficiaries' needs



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour achieved 83% response rate to proposals submitted via the "Tajawob" platform during the second half of 2026, receiving 154 proposals and responding to 128, as part of its efforts to enhance beneficiary participation in developing government services and improving institutional performance.

According to an analytical report prepared by the Department of Institutional Excellence at the Ministry, the proposals covered diverse topics reflecting beneficiaries' needs. Employment and

jobseekers topped the list with 76 proposals, followed by labour and labour complaints with 25 proposals, promotions and salaries with 15, training and qualification with eight, and restructuring with five, while the remaining proposals covered empowerment, rights of persons with disabilities, retirement and other topics.

Samira bint Said Al-Siyabiyah, Director of the Department of Institutional Excellence at the Ministry of Labour, said the results embody the Ministry's keenness to establish an institutional approach based on effective communication with beneficiaries, treating their

proposals as an important input for continuous development and improvement.

Competent organisational divisions

She explained that proposals received via "Tajawob" are referred to the competent organisational divisions for study and evaluation to determine their applicability, ensuring they are handled according to their nature and field.

Al-Siyabiyah noted that employment topics accounted for the largest share, with key demands focused on increasing employment opportunities and creating

new vacancies, expanding Omanization across professions and sectors, reviewing age requirements in job advertisements, simplifying application and testing procedures, distributing test centers across governorates, and enhancing training and support programs for jobseekers.

Proposals also included boosting employment of Omanis in sectors such as commercial centres, airports, private hospitals, exchange and travel offices, as well as procurement, accounting, customer service and delivery jobs.

Regarding promotions, salaries and job systems, proposals

addressed reviewing promotion, salary and allowance systems, addressing disparities in salaries and entitlements, reviewing employment conditions for employees with disabilities, and studying topics such as functional retirement, early retirement, reducing working hours and applying flexible work.

Proposals related to restructuring focused on developing system features and ease of use, enhancing transparency in evaluation, developing mechanisms for reviewing results, and linking individual goals to job descriptions.

She stressed that the analyti-

cal report is an important tool for monitoring interaction with proposals, analyzing their content, identifying the most frequent topics, following up on actions taken, and measuring the level of responsiveness by the concerned divisions. Al-Siyabiyah added that proposals related to developing services and procedures focused on organising and simplifying transactions, reviewing some fees and fines, raising transparency, accelerating e-services, and developing procedures for domestic workers and permits.

Improvement opportunities

She emphasised that turning proposals into practical improvement opportunities requires integration of efforts between various organisational divisions, through studying ideas, assessing their feasibility, determining appropriate actions, and following up on implementation and measuring their impact on service quality.

The Director called on beneficiaries to continue interacting with the "Tajawob" platform and submitting their ideas, developmental proposals and observations, noting that their participation is a key element in supporting the Ministry's efforts towards continuous improvement.

These efforts come within the Ministry of Labour's drive to develop the government services system, promote a culture of institutional excellence, and leverage data analysis and beneficiary feedback to determine development priorities.

MINISTER OF INFORMATION

'Media Excellence Competition a driver for promoting distinction and developing professional practice'

< FROM A1 The minister noted that the significance of the competition extends beyond honouring the winning works to encouraging creative experiences and highlighting outstanding professional practices, thereby enabling lessons to be drawn from successful models and stimulating continuous development. He emphasised that advancing media requires combining innovation, quality of performance and commitment to professional standards.

The Minister of Information explained that the Ministry of Information looks forward to the competition contributing to enhancing the competitiveness of Omani media, expanding the horizons of creativity in local content and consolidating practices that respond to the requirements of the current stage and the aspirations of society, thereby strengthening the presence and influence of Omani media and supporting its development process. — OMA

NCSI DATA

Spiny lobster production falls by 7.2% in 2025

MUSCAT: Oman's spiny lobster production declined by 7.2% to 802 tonnes in 2025, compared with 864 tonnes in 2024, according to the 2026 Statistical Yearbook issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Al Wusta Governorate accounted for the largest share of production at 356 tonnes, representing 44.4% of the national total. Dhofar ranked second with 265 tonnes, or 33%, followed by South Al Sharqiyah with 169 tonnes, accounting for 21.1%.

Muscat recorded five tonnes, while North and South Al Batinah together produced four tonnes. Musandam recorded no spiny lobster production in 2025.

Production trends varied across the main producing governorates. South Al Sharqiyah recorded a 47% increase, from 115 tonnes in 2024 to 169 tonnes in 2025, while Dhofar's production rose by 12.8% from 235 tonnes to 265 tonnes.

In contrast, Al Wusta recorded a 28.2% decline, with production falling from 496 tonnes in 2024 to 356 tonnes in 2025.



In foreign trade, Oman's spiny lobster exports reached approximately OMR2.97 million, with shipments weighing more than 474 tonnes, by the end of July 2026.

Saudi Arabia was the leading destination, accounting for exports worth approximately OMR2.57 million. Egypt ranked second with around OMR306,000, followed by the United Arab Emirates at approximately OMR87,700.

Meanwhile, Oman's spiny lobster imports stood at around OMR755,400, weighing 160.3 tonnes, by the end of July 2026.

Re-exports during the same period were valued at approximately OMR442,800, with a total weight exceeding 70 tonnes. — OMA

THREE-DAY PROGRAMME

Oman exporters to explore opportunities in Kazakhstan

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Exports, under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will organise bilateral business meetings between Omani exporting companies and their Kazakh counterparts in Almaty next Tuesday to expand non-oil exports and strengthen trade ties with Central Asia.

The three-day programme aims to connect Omani exporters with importers, distributors and businesspeople in Kazakhstan, explore new market opportunities and establish partnerships that support the international expansion of Omani products in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The meetings will feature pre-arranged business matchmaking sessions involving the Omani delegation and around 100 to 150 Kazakh companies and businesspeople, alongside market briefings and field visits to relevant institutions.

Participating companies will also explore opportunities to sign memoranda of understanding and establish long-term commercial partnerships.

Lubna bint Mohammed Al Harthi, Director of the Export Development Department at the ministry, said the initiative would provide a direct platform



for Omani companies to engage with Kazakh importers and business leaders, understand market requirements and explore opportunities for long-term contracts.

She said Oman Exports seeks to help national companies turn business interest into concrete commercial deals, adding that Kazakhstan offers a promising gateway to neighbouring Central Asian markets due to its strategic logistics position.

Priority sectors include phar-

maceuticals and medical supplies, food and fish products, marble and building materials, aluminium, metals and petrochemicals.

Al Harthi noted that growth in bilateral trade during the first half of 2026 highlighted the potential for further expanding economic cooperation between Oman and Kazakhstan.

The initiative forms part of Oman Exports' plans to promote national products in priority international markets during 2026 and 2027, strengthen export channels and leverage Oman's ports and logistics infrastructure to facilitate trade.

The programme is also expected to help export-ready small and medium enterprises access new business networks and distribution channels, enhancing the reach and competitiveness of Omani non-oil products in regional and international markets.



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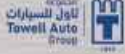
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Number of jobseekers in Musandam Governorate declines by 9.7 percent

These figures reflect improvements in employment indicators and the efforts undertaken to provide job opportunities for Omani citizens

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The number of jobseekers in Musandam Governorate declined by 9.7% by the end of September 2026, reaching 1,115 compared with 1,235 in 2025. The decline reflects improving employment indicators in the governorate, alongside ongoing efforts to develop national talent and align workforce skills with labour market requirements.

Hussein bin Khamis bin Hamdan Al Naqbi, Director of the Labour Department in Musandam Governorate, said employment initiatives and coordination with the public and private sectors had resulted in the employment of 741 jobseekers from the governorate between the beginning of 2026 and the end of September.

He noted that the number of jobseekers had fallen to 1,115, compared with 1,235 in 2025 and 1,770 in 2024, representing decreases of 9.7% and 37%, respectively. These figures reflect improvements in employment indicators and the efforts undertaken to provide job opportunities for Omani citizens.

Al Naqbi affirmed that efforts are continuing to match jobseekers with available employment opportunities according to their qualifications, specialisations and the requirements of employers.

He added that the Department relies on the electronic nomination system available through the Ministry of Labour's platforms to match jobseekers' skills with the requirements of advertised vacancies.



Regarding training and qualification programmes, he said the Department had implemented a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing the readiness of jobseekers and improving their opportunities to enter the labour market.

Among the most prominent is the employment-linked training initiative, which has benefited approximately 50 jobseekers in technical, technological and electrical fields. A further 40 jobseekers benefited from the on-the-job training initiative, while the part-time employment initiative reached 573 male and female jobseekers.

He explained that these programmes aim to equip participants with practical skills and professional experience aligned with employers' needs, enhancing their ability to secure and retain employment.

He noted that vocational training contributes to developing the capabilities and productivity of the national workforce, supporting job stability and creating broader opportunities for career advancement in the private sector.

Regarding efforts to strengthen Omanisation, Al Naqbi explained that the Department monitors private-sector establishments' compliance with national workforce employment targets by reviewing expatriate labour permits and implementing decisions reserving certain occupations for Omani citizens.

The Department also provides facilities and support to establishments that comply with Omanisation programmes, contributing to expanding employment opportunities for citizens across various

economic activities.

He highlighted tourism and hospitality, logistics and maritime transport associated with port operations, fisheries, service activities and major investment projects as the principal sectors contributing to current and future employment opportunities, given Musandam's tourism and maritime assets and diverse investment potential.

The Director of the Labour Department in Musandam Governorate explained that the Department is focusing on intensifying monitoring and field inspections to ensure establishments comply with the provisions of the Labour Law, particularly those relating to employment conditions and safe working environments.

These efforts also aim to improve working conditions and monitor the implementation of regulatory decisions that respond to economic development requirements and the expansion of various activities across the governorate.

Al Naqbi said coordination with private-sector institutions is an important means of identifying labour market requirements for qualified national talent.

The Department holds regular meetings with company representatives to discuss expansion plans, identify actual vacancies and announce available positions according to approved timelines, ensuring transparency and equal opportunities for jobseekers.

He affirmed that the Department works in continuous coordination with the Office of the Governor of Musandam and relevant government entities to link investment and development projects

with employment opportunities for the governorate's residents.

This includes incorporating Omanisation and employment targets into the terms and specifications of new projects, enabling qualified Omani citizens to benefit from opportunities generated by economic expansion.

He noted that the expansion of tourism, service and productive projects creates opportunities for sustainable, specialised employment for citizens, while also strengthening the participation of local small and medium enterprises in supply chains and supporting contracts associated with these projects.

This, in turn, contributes to broadening the economic base and increasing local added value.

Looking ahead, Al Naqbi explained that the plans of the Ministry of Labour and the Labour Department in Musandam Governorate aim to build on the results achieved and continue advancing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

These plans include expanding targeted Omanisation programmes, improving working conditions, strengthening partnerships with the private sector and developing training and qualification programmes aligned with the needs of economic sectors, ensuring sustainable employment levels and expanding job opportunities for qualified national talent in the governorate.

For her part, Fatima bint Ali Al Shehhi, Supervisor of the Employment and Labour Market Programme at the Office of the Governor of Musandam, said the



Governor's Office places particular importance on employment and the provision of job opportunities for the governorate's residents.

She explained that a dedicated employment and labour market programme has been established within the Governor's Office in partnership with relevant authorities and private-sector institutions, contributing to the creation of diverse employment opportunities that match jobseekers' qualifications and specialisations with labour market requirements.

She added that these efforts fall within the responsibilities assigned to governorates under the System of Governorates promulgated by Royal Decree No. 36/2022, which emphasises the importance of developing and investing in economic resources to achieve sustainable development and create employment opportunities for citizens.

The legislation also provides for monitoring economic activities and supporting their growth in ways that contribute to local development.

Al Shehhi explained that Musandam Governorate is working to strengthen coordination and integration among relevant entities to monitor employment opportunities associated with existing and future development and investment projects.

These efforts include encouraging private-sector establishments to recruit qualified Omani citizens and benefit from their capabilities, thereby expanding employment opportunities and maximising the contribution of economic and investment activity to the creation of sustainable jobs for the governorate's residents.

She said the governorate's plans for the next phase include expand-

ing the implementation of employment-linked training programmes in cooperation with private-sector companies and institutions.

These programmes aim to qualify jobseekers and equip them with practical and professional skills that meet employers' requirements, enhancing their readiness to enter the labour market and ensuring that training and qualification outcomes are connected to actual employment opportunities.

She noted that the governorate, in cooperation with its partners, is seeking to develop coordination and follow-up mechanisms by identifying the workforce requirements of private-sector establishments, determining the specialisations and skills needed, and matching them with jobseekers' qualifications and appropriate training programmes.

This approach will enable greater utilisation of employment opportunities generated by the governorate's various economic sectors.

Al Shehhi affirmed that these efforts reflect Musandam Governorate's commitment to establishing effective and sustainable partnerships with the private sector, based on the integration of roles and responsibilities among the relevant entities and the transformation of economic and investment opportunities into actual jobs.

She stressed that this approach supports Omanisation efforts and the development of national talent, while contributing to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to build a productive and competitive labour market capable of absorbing national talent and strengthening its participation in economic and social development.

2026-2030

National Programme for Digital Economy phase II launched

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology launched today the second phase of the National Programme for Digital Economy for the period (2026-2030).

The programme aims to achieve a digital economy contribution of OMR1.5 billion to the GDP, attract technological investments worth OMR300 million, and create 3,000 direct jobs annually through digital economy initiatives.

The launch of the programme was held under the auspices of Sultan Salim Al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

The ceremony witnessed the announcement of the digital economy's contribution rate to the GDP, which reached 9 percent based on the results of a survey measuring the digital economy's contribution to the GDP, conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology during this year. — OMA

MUSCAT MARITIME RESILIENCE FORUM 2026

Challenges facing global trade to be discussed

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Muscat Maritime Resilience Forum 2026 will begin next Tuesday, bringing together international maritime industry leaders, academics and experts to discuss challenges facing global trade and explore ways to strengthen the resilience of maritime networks.

The forum is organised by ASYAD Group in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the Oman Investment Authority.

It aims to provide a platform for professional dialogue, exchange of industry experience and discussion of practical solutions to strengthen maritime connectivity, improve supply chain resilience and ensure the continuity of international trade.

The forum will bring together representatives from maritime transport, ports, logistics, technology, insurance and other sectors associated with global trade, with a focus on operational chal-



lenges and solutions driven by private-sector expertise.

Engineer Abdulrahman bin Salim Al Hatmi, CEO of ASYAD Group, said the resilience of global trade depended on maritime networks' ability to maintain connectivity between markets and adapt to changes affecting the movement of goods and supply chains.

He said the forum would bring industry leaders and experts

to Muscat to exchange practical experiences, address shared challenges and explore solutions to improve the readiness of the global maritime system. ASYAD Group would contribute its commercial and operational expertise to the discussions, reflecting the shared responsibility of stakeholders in strengthening maritime resilience.

Al Hatmi added that hosting the

forum reflected Oman's approach of leveraging economic diplomacy and international relations built on trust, dialogue and cooperation to address issues affecting the global economy.

He noted that Muscat's strategic location along international maritime trade routes, together with the Sultanate's ports, infrastructure, maritime services and logistics capabilities, posi-



tioned the country as a key link between regional and international markets.

The forum is expected to strengthen cooperation among maritime and logistics leaders from different markets and support efforts to improve the resilience of maritime networks and safeguard the continuity of global trade.

It will also contribute to developing recommendations and perspectives for the proposed Muscat Maritime Resilience Framework, aimed at supporting cooperation and preparedness across the maritime sector.

His Majesty the Sultan visits Here East Campus in London



His Majesty was received by Gavin Poole, Chief Executive of Here East and Saj Huq Chief Executive Officer of Plexal

LONDON: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited the Here East Campus in London. Upon His Majesty's arrival at the campus, he was received by Gavin Poole, Chief Executive of Here East and Saj Huq Chief Executive Officer of Plexal. His Majesty the Sultan began his visit by viewing the exhibition

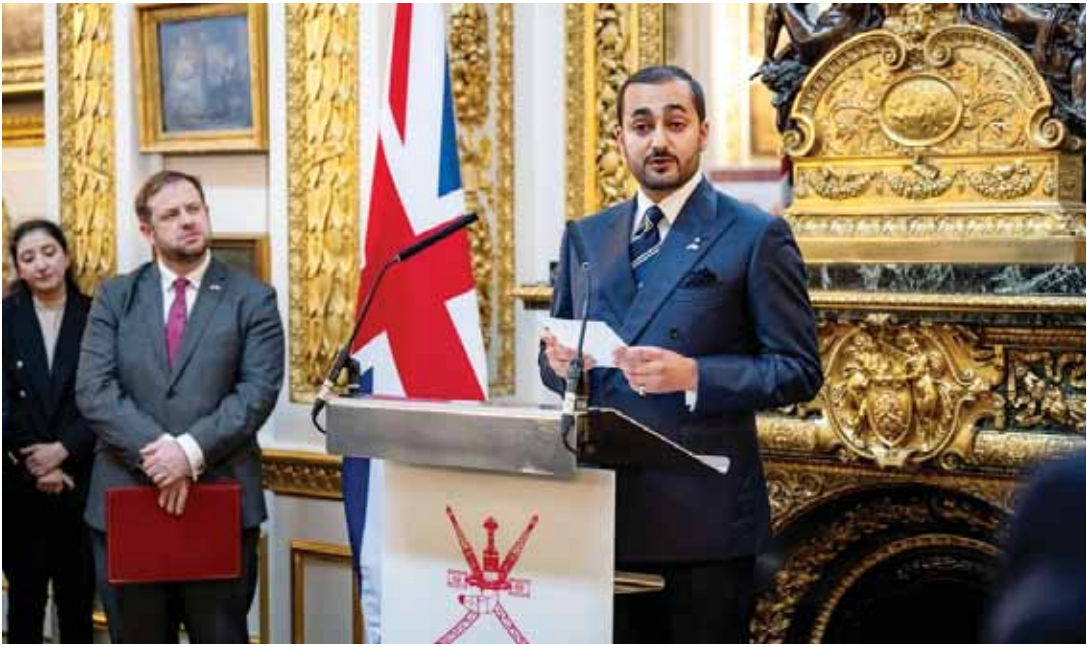
of innovative companies and projects, which showcases a range of advanced technologies and solutions in the fields of renewable energy, space, defence, and technology. His Majesty also inspected the most prominent innovations and the promising opportunities they represent for advancing modern technologies and enhancing their

applications across various sectors. His Majesty the Sultan also undertook an interactive tour of the conference hall, during which he met with chief executives of specialized companies and institutions. His Majesty was briefed on their fields of work and innovative projects, showcasing leading expertise and experiences in future technology and industrial sectors. The visit comes within the context of strengthening cooperation and exchanging expertise in the fields of technology, innovation, and advanced industries, and exploring the opportunities these sectors offer to support economic and investment partnerships between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. -ONA



AT LANCASTER HOUSE

British Omani Society ushers new chapter with joint honorary patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin and Prince William



LONDON: The British Omani Society ushered in a new chapter in its journey spanning over fifty years with the joint honorary patronage of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, and His

Royal Highness Prince William, Prince of Wales. The British Omani Society held a reception on Wednesday, at Lancaster House in the capital, London, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Society's founding (the Golden Jubilee).

The Society continues its diligent efforts in supporting the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, and enhancing the deeply rooted relations of friendship between the two countries. -ONA

BILATERAL RELATIONS

UK Minister: His Majesty's visit evokes depth of relations, opens new horizons

LONDON: Stephen Doughty, UK Minister of State for the Middle East has affirmed that the Royal visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the United Kingdom constitutes a celebration of the deeply rooted ties that have bound the two friendly countries for many centuries. He noted that the official reception ceremony and the state banquet, which brought His Majesty the Sultan together with King Charles III of the United Kingdom, reflected the depth of these historic relations. In an interview with Oman News Agency (ONA), the minister explained that one of the key pillars of this Royal visit is the economic dimension, noting that His Majesty the Sultan has set an ambitious agenda for the Sultanate of Oman that aligns with the United Kingdom's equally ambitious agenda in the fields of economy and modern technologies. He emphasised that the visit focuses in particular on areas such as strategic minerals, renewable energy, and emerging technologies including artificial intelligence and space technology. He indicated that new partnerships are being forged between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom across all these domains, describing the Royal Visit as "exceptional" in that it honours the past while simultaneously focusing on the future. He noted that the United Kingdom is likewise looking to the future with regard to people-to-people ties between the two friendly nations in the field of education, expressing his pleasure at announcing the resumption of the Chevening Scholarship programme between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. The minister touched upon the discussions held during the Royal Visit concerning the enhancement of cooperation between universities in the Sul-



tanate of Oman and the United Kingdom in future technologies across the fields of renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and space technology. He affirmed that these are the very technologies in which the world needs leadership, and that the United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman can achieve this together. The UK Minister of State for the Middle East added: "It is important to focus on the future, as there are clearly areas in which we work closely together with respect to defence and regional security," emphasising that the Sultanate of Oman plays a diplomatically vital role at a time when the region is experiencing tensions and security disruptions. He stated that the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom have stood side by side for decades during times of similar turbulence, and that there is intensive cooperation in the defence and security domains of both countries, as well as joint diplomatic efforts to find solutions to the challenges facing the region, the Middle East, and the wider world. The British Minister commended the Sultanate of Oman's endeavours along these diplomatic tracks and the role it plays in keeping channels of communication open among various nations, affirming that this is the role the two countries will pursue together, particularly in responding to certain current challenges. He noted that they also work together on issues such as

maritime security and enhanced information-sharing between the two countries to ensure the free flow of trade, with a focus on the security of both nations and global security as a whole. The minister affirmed that the United Kingdom will continue to work closely with the Sultanate of Oman, including within international institutions such as the United Nations, to find diplomatic solutions to the challenges confronting both countries and the region, noting that Oman has undertaken this vital role for many decades. He added that his country also works closely with the Sultanate of Oman on how to respond to regional challenges, and stands consistently with all its partners in the region. He underscored the importance of upholding the principles of freedom of navigation and maritime security, noting that the two friendly countries will continue to work diplomatically to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts and challenges the region has experienced, particularly during the current year. He indicated that the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom are working to identify pathways that serve their shared security interests, those of the wider region, and the global economy, noting that the ramifications of current events are not confined to Middle Eastern economies but extend to the United Kingdom and numerous other countries. The UK Minister of State for the Middle East concluded his remarks by noting that economic relations are being expanded on a broader scale through the Free Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom and the GCC states, emphasising the importance of bringing it to its final stages and of sustaining efforts to understand the new partnerships that will be essential for responding to regional challenges. -ONA



4TH EDITION

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GUEST OF HONOUR
His Excellency Dr. Ali Qassim Al Lawati
President
The Royal Academy of Management

PANEL DISCUSSION : OMAN AT THE CROSSROADS Turning Geopolitical Change into Business Opportunity

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Oman leads \$500mn fund for Central Asia and the Caucasus

The initiative seeks to build long-term investment partnerships, capitalise on the region's economic growth and expand the geographical reach of OIA's investments and those of its subsidiaries

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has led an alliance of sovereign wealth funds and investment institutions to establish a \$500 million (approximately OMR192.2 million) fund targeting investment opportunities in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The fund's establishment agreement is scheduled to be signed in early November.

The Central Asia and Caucasus Fund aims to attract capital from sovereign wealth funds, investment institutions and strategic investors worldwide to finance promising opportunities in logistics, renewable energy, mining, food and agriculture, healthcare and other sectors.

The initiative seeks to build long-term investment partnerships, capitalise on the region's economic growth and expand the geographical reach of OIA's investments and those of its subsidiaries. It is also expected to support Oman's economic diversification, knowledge transfer and international investment cooperation.

Mulham bin Bashir Al-Jarf, Vice Chairman of OIA for Investment, said the authority's leadership of



the alliance reflected the confidence of sovereign wealth funds and international investment institutions in its ability to build strategic partnerships and mobilise capital for promising markets.

He said the fund would strengthen economic and investment ties between Oman and the region, creating broader opportunities for cooperation and joint investment. He added that OIA aimed to use international partnerships to expand cross-border investments and establish sustainable economic relationships that deliver mutual benefits.

The fund will be managed by an Omani company led by national talent, focusing on the economic and investment potential of Central Asian and Caucasus markets.

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have a combined population of more than 86 million. Foreign direct investment inflows into these

countries rose by 16.6% to approximately OMR1.78 billion (\$4.64 billion) by the end of 2025, according to the figures cited by OIA. The region also recorded around 37.36 million inbound tourists during the year, creating opportunities in logistics, infrastructure and related services.

The region's natural resources include oil, gas, gold, copper, uranium and hydroelectric power, offering investment potential across several industries. Its average GDP growth rate reached approximately 7% in 2025, compared with global growth of 3.5%, according to the International Monetary Fund.

OIA subsidiaries, including ASYAD Group, Oman Mining Development Company and OQ Group, are studying investment opportunities in logistics, mining and energy in Central Asian markets. Their participation could facilitate the expansion of Omani businesses and leverage their ex-

pertise in sectors that support economic diversification and development. The initiative also reflects OIA's approach to economic diplomacy, turning international relationships into investment opportunities while strengthening Oman's links with Central Asia. It is intended to provide regional partners with access to Gulf and African markets through Oman and attract international investors to the Sultanate.

The new fund builds on OIA's existing investment partnerships in the region. These include the Omani-Uzbek Investment Company, established in partnership with Uzbekistan's Reconstruction and Development Fund in 2009; a partnership with Azerbaijan Investment Holding in 2025; and an investment partnership with Kazakhstan's sovereign wealth fund, Samruk-Kazyna, in 2026.

OIA continues to diversify its investments through three main portfolios, with total assets exceeding OMR23 billion. Around two-thirds of its investments are directed towards Oman through the National Development Portfolio and the Oman Future Fund, supporting domestic economic growth and diversification.

The remaining third is invested internationally through the Generations Portfolio, which focuses on sustainable long-term returns, risk diversification and the transfer of technology and knowledge to domestic sectors.



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Oman surveys citizens' satisfaction with governorates' services

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) is conducting a survey to measure citizens' satisfaction with services provided by governorates' offices, with the aim of assessing service quality, identifying areas for improvement and supporting data-driven development efforts.

The survey, scheduled from October 11 to November 5, 2026, seeks to gather citizens' opinions and experiences regarding the quality and efficiency of services provided across the governorates.

It focuses on five key areas: hygiene and public health; oversight, inspection and management of public markets; public parks and gardens; governorate development efforts; and e-services and municipal permits.

The findings will help identify service gaps and development priorities, enabling the relevant authorities to respond more effectively to beneficiaries' needs and expectations.

Mahfouz bin Salem Al-Musharfi, Director of the Public Opinion Measurement Department at NCSI, said the survey serves as a statistical tool for assessing citi-

zens' satisfaction with services that affect their daily lives.

He explained that citizens' feedback would be analysed using approved statistical methodologies to generate indicators that help authorities identify strengths, address shortcomings and direct development efforts according to public needs.

Al-Musharfi emphasised that public participation and responsiveness reflecting actual experiences were essential to ensuring accurate and meaningful results.

He also reaffirmed the centre's commitment to protecting participants' privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of their data in accordance with the Statistics and Information Law issued under Royal Decree No. 55/2019. The law prohibits the use of individual data for purposes other than statistical ones and restricts publication to aggregate information, safeguarding participants' identities.

The survey forms part of NCSI's efforts to generate reliable statistical indicators to evaluate service performance, improve efficiency and support development across Oman's governorates, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

FROM SUNDAY

IMF mission in Oman to conduct consultations

MUSCAT: Oman, represented by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), will host an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission from October 25 to November 8 for periodic Article IV consultations. The visit aims to review the Sultanate's latest economic and financial developments and discuss economic policies and future prospects, including fiscal and monetary policies, financial stability, external sector developments and structural reforms to support sustainable economic growth.

The IMF mission will meet representatives of relevant government entities, the private sector, the banking sector and civil society organisations to assess Oman's economic and financial performance and exchange views on key developments, challenges and opportunities. Article IV consultations are a key component of the IMF's economic sur-



veillance of member countries. They involve assessments of economic conditions and policies, along with discussions on growth prospects and potential risks, helping strengthen policy dialogue and promote economic and financial stability.

Oman reaffirmed its commitment to transparency in economic performance and enhanced international cooperation, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the government's efforts to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development.

— ONA

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY 2040

Oman enhances its smart industry transformation through GCC Centres

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to develop a modern and competitive industrial sector based on technology and knowledge, and to enhance the ability of Omani factories to adopt advanced technologies, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion continues to implement a range of programmes and initiatives supporting digital transformation and smart industry, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Industrial Strategy 2040.

The Industrial Strategy 2040 aims to develop a modern and more competitive manufacturing base, upgrade national industries towards the use of modern and advanced technologies, raise productivity and efficiency, and promote industrial innovation, contributing to increased added value and diversification of the national economy.

Stemming from these directions, Oman's participation in the GCC Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution comes as an extension of existing national efforts and initiatives in the field of industrial transformation, and enhances integration between national programmes and the GCC system supporting the adoption of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.

The GCC Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its digital platform were officially launched during the 57th meeting of the GCC Industrial Cooperation Committee, held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in a step aimed at supporting the shift towards advanced industries, raising the level of digital maturity of GCC factories, and enhancing their ability to benefit



from modern technologies.

The utilisation of the GCC Centre complements Oman's experience in the Smart Production Factories project, implemented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to help industrial establishments assess their level of digital readiness and set practical paths for transformation towards smart manufacturing.

Previous phases of the project included raising awareness of advanced industrial technologies, preparing a guide for smart production factories, implementing awareness programmes and workshops, as well as evaluating a number of Omani factories and preparing transformation plans for them, in addition to building national capacities and qualifying Omani assessors in the field of assessing factories' digital maturity.

The GCC Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution represents an additional phase that supports these efforts, by providing a common regional platform linking factories, national centres, assessors,

solution and technology providers, training programs and industrial expertise in GCC countries.

The Ministry affirmed that the Centre enables Omani factories to access an integrated set of services that help them move from determining readiness level to implementing industrial transformation projects, foremost among them assessing digital and industrial maturity and preparing a transformation roadmap, access to specialised assessors, identifying providers of industrial solutions and technologies, in addition to participating in training programmes and benefiting from applied experiences and success stories in GCC factories.

The Centre's digital platform also provides a wider opportunity for Omani companies operating in the fields of technology, automation, artificial intelligence, digital transformation and industrial services to showcase their capabilities and solutions to a wider network of factories in GCC countries, enhancing opportunities for building partnerships, exchanging expertise and developing an

integrated system of industrial solution providers.

Eng. Khalid bin Salim Al-Qasabi, Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that Oman attaches great importance to accelerating the transformation of the industrial sector towards the use of modern and advanced technologies, as one of the main drivers for raising productivity, enhancing competitiveness and improving the efficiency of industrial operations, in line with the objectives of the Industrial Strategy 2040 aimed at building a modern industrial sector based on technology, knowledge and innovation.

He added that the Ministry has worked in recent years to develop a number of practical initiatives in this field, foremost among them the Smart Production Factories project, which contributed to raising awareness among factories, assessing their readiness and building specialised national capacities, noting that the GCC Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution represents an opportunity to enhance these efforts and link Omani factories to a broader GCC system of expertise, solutions and industrial experiences.

He pointed out that the Centre contributes to enhancing the role of qualified Omani competencies in the field of factory evaluation and industrial transformation, linking them to the GCC system of assessors and experts, and benefiting from the expertise developed by Oman during the implementation of the Smart Production Factories programme.

Full story @ timesofoman.com/business

IMF AWARDS

Ministry of Health receives recognition

SEOUL: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, received an honorary commendation certificate in the Excellence in Leadership and Management Award, within the framework of the 2026 International Hospital Federation (IHF) Awards.

This recognition was for the Ministry's participation with the "Patient Experience" project

during the 49th World Hospital Congress, hosted this year by the Korean capital, Seoul, in appreciation of the Ministry's efforts in improving patient experience and elevating the quality of health services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The certificate was received by Dr. Abeer Abdullah Al Maamari, Head of the Patient Experience Project Team. — ONA

UN chief Guterres says ‘we need to stop the widening of war’

Guterres’ visit comes amid continuing conflicts in the West Asia, Ukraine and Sudan, with the UN chief warning that the consequences of wars are extending beyond battle zones through energy markets, shipping routes

CAIRO: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for an end to the widening of conflicts, protection of civilians and greater space for diplomacy, saying wars are deepening global inequalities and intensifying economic pressures, as he arrived in Egypt on Saturday.

In a post on X, Guterres said, “I just arrived in Egypt. Amid intensifying conflicts, I carry a message with me: We need to stop the



widening of war, protect civilians & create the political space for diplomacy & peace.”

“We must tackle the inequalities that divide societies – & stop the conflicts that are multiplying human suffering & pushing an already unequal world further apart,” he added.

Guterres’ visit comes amid continuing conflicts in the West Asia, Ukraine and Sudan, with the UN chief warning that the consequences of wars are extending beyond battle zones through energy markets, shipping routes, supply

chains and financial systems.

In a media stakeout on October 22, Guterres described the interconnected effects of global conflicts as an “El Nino of war”, saying that “conflict is feeding conflict, and the consequences are traveling farther and faster.”

He stressed that alleged “attacks” directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure were prohibited under international law and said that “they must stop”.

“The distance from the Strait of Hormuz to a family home or village market is shorter than what we

think,” Guterres said, warning that disruptions were affecting global energy and food security and worsening the cost-of-living pressures faced by vulnerable communities.

He also highlighted the growing economic inequalities exacerbated by conflicts, noting that some countries could borrow more cheaply to protect their populations, while others had to choose between servicing debt and investing in healthcare, education and their future.

“The answer cannot be an ever-widening circle of confrontation, in-

cluding in the Middle East,” he said.

On Yemen, Guterres expressed concern over escalating hostilities around Taiz and elsewhere, as well as Houthi attacks against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia, which he emphasised as “totally unacceptable”. He called for restraint and said Yemen needed a political horizon, adding that his special envoy was engaging with all parties to preserve dialogue.

Turning to the occupied Palestinian territory, the UN chief said essential aid in Gaza remained severely restricted ahead of winter and raised concerns over difficulties in implementing the comprehensive plan to end the Gaza conflict endorsed by the UN Security Council.

He also highlighted alleged continued “attacks” by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, saying that “the clear goal is to drive communities off their land”. Guterres urged donors to step up funding, noting that the World Food Programme urgently required USD 450 million to feed people in Gaza and the West Bank over the next six months.

He reiterated the need for a credible political path towards lasting peace, ending the occupation and realising a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Explaining the significance of his Egypt visit, Guterres said the country was vital to efforts to re-

solve the West Asia crisis, particularly in defending the rights of the Palestinian people.

“Egypt is a country that is vital in any perspective of solution of the Middle East crisis, and in particular, in the defense of the rights of the Palestinian people,” he said during the October 22 media stakeout.

He also noted Egypt’s role as a mediator in the conflict between the United States and Iran, adding that discussions with Egyptian officials on neighbouring Sudan and Libya would be important.

“I’m confident that this will be a very fruitful visit,” Guterres said.

On Sudan, he called on countries to stop supplying weapons to those responsible for killing civilians.

“It’s absolutely essential that, especially countries that are around Sudan, closer or further afield, stop supplying with weapons those that are killing civilians in an absolutely devastating way,” he said.

Guterres also emphasised that the impact of conflicts extended beyond the United Nations to ordinary people facing rising prices, higher interest rates and difficulties in meeting basic needs, particularly in developing countries and vulnerable communities.

“The problem is for the people that is suffering dramatically everywhere,” he said, adding that his concern was with people affected by conflicts and the economic pressures they generate. **-ANI**

US MIDTERMS

Elon Musk becomes largest political donor, spends over \$442 million

WASHINGTON DC: Billionaire and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has emerged as the largest individual political donor in United States’ history, spending more than USD 442 million on Republican campaigns and political groups ahead of the November 3 US midterm elections.

The latest campaign finance filings show that Musk, the chief executive of Tesla and SpaceX, contributed an additional USD 76.8 million to his America PAC over the past month, taking his total spending on the upcoming elections beyond USD 442 million, The Hill reported.

America PAC, which Musk established during the 2024 election cycle, received the latest funds over approximately a week in October. The additional contribution came on top of the USD 366 million he had already spent supporting Republican candidates and affiliated political groups.

According to The Washington Post, Musk has directed much of his political spending towards helping Republicans retain control of Congress.

A significant portion of his recent contributions has focused on the closely contested Texas Senate race, where Republican candidate



and state Attorney General Ken Paxton is facing Democratic challenger James Talarico.

According to campaign finance filings cited by CBS News, Musk donated USD 158 million to the Senate Leadership Fund, the principal super PAC supporting Republican Senate candidates, through two contributions in September. The group subsequently transferred corresponding amounts to a Texas-based political action committee supporting Paxton.

Musk contributed USD 75 million on September 9 and another USD 83 million approximately

two weeks later. The donations accounted for more than half of the Senate Leadership Fund’s total receipts during the third quarter, CBS News reported.

Musk also donated USD 10 million to the pro-Paxton Lone Star Liberty PAC through his trust. In addition, he contributed USD 20 million to the Congressional Leadership Fund, a major super PAC supporting House Republicans, USD 10 million to the Republican Governors Association and USD 2 million to the Republican Attorneys General Association.

His America PAC has also sup-

ported Republican candidates in competitive congressional races.

The latest spending marks a significant return to large-scale political contributions by Musk, who spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars supporting US President Donald Trump and other Republican candidates during the 2024 election cycle.

The renewed financial backing comes after concerns among Republicans that Musk might reduce his political involvement following his public feud with Trump last year.

Meanwhile, the November 3 midterm elections are shaping up as a crucial contest for control of both chambers of Congress. The outcome will have significant implications for Trump’s legislative agenda and the balance of political power in Washington.

The political contest comes amid broader challenges for the administration, including economic concerns and declining approval ratings.

The Wall Street Journal reported in September that Trump’s approval rating had fallen to 37 per cent in its polling, a low for a president heading into midterm elections in the publication’s polling history dating back to 1990. **-ANI**

IN TAIWAN

Typhoon Champi leaves 1 dead, over 500 injured

BERLIN: Typhoon Champi killed at least one person and left more than 500 people with injuries as it passed through Taiwan on Saturday.

Taiwan’s fire department said the death toll remained at 1, after a man was swept away by waves from the island of Liugu. At least 527 others were injured during the heavy wind and torrential rain.

Several parts in Taiwan received heavy rain and strong winds that prompted authorities to cut off power, leaving thousands of people without power supply.

Some 280,000 households were knocked out of power, according to United Daily News, a local Taiwanese newspaper. By Saturday morning, the power supply was restored to 80% of the households.

Champi also led to 259 flights cancellations, an improvement from Friday, when the number was almost 1,000, the Transport Ministry said.

Several trees were downed amid

strong gusts In the capital Taipei.

Authorities in several districts of northern and central Taiwan, including Taipei, declared a second day of office and school closures on Saturday.

Champi headed to China

The typhoon continued to weaken as it moved north towards the Chinese coast though it was not expected to make landfall there.

Chinese authorities have sent a team to the eastern province of Zhejiang as Champi approached, warning of strong winds and heavy rain through Sunday.

It said it had readied 400 rescue workers and 600 pieces of equipment, while more than 41,000 firefighters were on emergency duty.

Typhoon Champi started out as a super typhoon and one of the strongest storms in the Pacific this year. While it is weakening, Champi is still packing gusts of around 78 km/h (126 mph) near its center, according to Taiwan’s Central Weather Administration (CWA). **-DW**

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India condemns attack on church in Jordan’s Karak

NEW DELHI: India has strongly condemned the deadly attack on a church in Karak, Jordan, on Friday, which claimed seven lives and left 34 others injured

In an official statement released by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), New Delhi termed the strike a “heinous” and “cowardly” act. The ministry extended heartfelt condolences to the victims’ families and offered prayers for the speedy recovery of those injured.

Expressing solidarity with the Middle Eastern nation, the statement emphasised that India stands firmly alongside the government and the people of Jordan. Furthermore, New Delhi reiterated its unwavering commitment to combating terrorism globally.

“India unequivocally condemns the heinous attack at a Church in Karak, Jordan, on October 23, 2026, which resulted in the tragic loss of several innocent lives and injuries to many others. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and wish a swift recovery to those injured in this cowardly attack,” the statement



read. “India stands firmly with the government and the friendly people of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in this difficult hour. We also reaffirm our strong commitment to the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations,” it added.

Voicing similar sentiments,

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also penned his heartfelt condolences over the tragic incident, while wishing for speedy recovery of those injured.

“Deeply shocked at the heinous attack at a Church in Karak, Jordan yesterday, which resulted in the tragic loss of several innocent

lives and injuries to many others. Our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and wish a swift recovery to those injured. India stands firmly with the Government and the friendly people of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in this difficult hour. We also reaffirm our strong commitment

to the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations,” he wrote in a post on X.

This comes after seven people were killed, while 34 were left injured in an attack in Jordan’s Karak, where gunmen opened fire during a funeral at a church, Al Jazeera reported.

The assault happened on a Greek Orthodox Church in the village of Hamoud. King of Jordan, Abdullah bin Hussein II expressed grief over the incident and said the attack against Karak will be met with the harshest retaliation.

“Those who delude themselves into thinking that they can divide Jordanians with their bullets have no chance in the face of our unity. All Jordanians, from north to south, are partners in land and fate, and nothing stands between them. Our deepest condolences to the families of the martyrs, and we wish a speedy recovery to those injured. Every Jordanian life is precious, and we will strike with an iron fist against those who dare to threaten our nation,” he said.

Canada’s Prime Minister Mark Carney also expressed grief over the attack.

“Today, mourners attending a funeral at a Greek Orthodox church in Karak, Jordan, were targeted in a despicable act of terror. This attack violated the sanctity of a place of worship and struck families at a moment of profound sorrow. Canada condemns this violence in the strongest possible terms. My deepest condolences to the families of those killed, those who have been injured, the Greek Orthodox community, and all who are grieving this loss,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the attack and said attacks against civilians & places of worship are unacceptable.

“I strongly condemn the terrorist attack on a funeral service in a church in Hmoud in Jordan. Places of worship must be places of peace & safe for all. Attacks against civilians & places of worship are unacceptable. The @UN stands with the Jordanian people & government,” he said. **-ANI**

SPORTS

Tilak, Dhir shine as India clinch thriller against NZ to go 2-0 up

The visitors recovered from 70 for 5 to chase 181 with one ball to spare, punishing the hosts' costly fielding lapses

CHRISTCHURCH: India produced a remarkable late recovery to defeat New Zealand by four wickets on Saturday, chasing down 181 with one ball remaining to take a 2-0 lead in the series. Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir and Nitish Kumar Reddy turned the contest around after Mitchell Santner's four-wicket burst had reduced India to 70 for 5.

Tilak remained unbeaten on 51 off 26 balls, while Dhir contributed 31 and Reddy provided crucial support as India capitalised on New Zealand's sloppy fielding. Four Indian specialist batters received reprieves, with Dhir's dropped catch proving particularly costly as the visitors reignited their chase.

Phillips powers competitive total

On the same used pitch as the opening match, scoring boundaries proved considerably harder. India's seamers exploited the con-



ditions early, with Arshdeep Singh dismissing Tim Seifert before Bhuvneshwar Kumar removed Daryl Mitchell with a deceptive knuckle ball. Prince Yadav then bowled Finn Allen with a full inswinger, leaving New Zealand struggling at

41 for 3 in 5.2 overs. India's bowlers and part-time options maintained the pressure, restricting New Zealand to 66 for 3 at halfway. Phillips, however, changed the momentum with an outstanding 70 off 43 balls. Initially cautious, he accelerated

against Axar Patel and dominated a 116-run fourth-wicket partnership with Bevan Jacobs, who scored 58. Phillips made 61 of those partnership runs before Arshdeep dismissed him with two overs remaining. Michael Bracewell's late

contribution of 10 off two balls helped New Zealand finish at 180 for 5. Arshdeep claimed his 38th wicket of the calendar year, having earlier reached his 37th.

Santner strikes, India respond

New Zealand began their de-

fence strongly on the sluggish surface. Santner dropped Sanju Samson at long-off, but Jacob Duffy soon dismissed the opener with a back-of-the-hand slower ball. Jacobs reprieved Vaibhav Sooryavanshi before Nathan Smith removed him.

Santner then dismantled India's middle order, dismissing Shreyas Iyer, Abhishek Sharma and Axar Patel to leave the visitors in serious trouble. With 95 needed off 43 balls, New Zealand appeared firmly in control.

Dhir changed the equation, smashing Santner for a six before attacking Bracewell for another six and a four. His 31, alongside Reddy's aggressive support, kept India in contention despite Santner finishing with 4 for 21.

Tilak finishes the job

India needed 48 off the final three overs when Duffy conceded crucial runs to Reddy and Tilak. The latter then took charge, finding boundaries against Duffy and Smith, including a decisive six over cover to reduce the equation to 11 off seven balls.

With Matt Henry unavailable to complete his quota after bowling only two overs, New Zealand lacked their preferred death-bowling option. Duffy conceded the remaining runs as Tilak guided India home with one ball to spare.

Briefscores: India 181 for 6 (Tilak 51, Dhir 31, Santner 4-21) beat New Zealand 180 for 5 (Phillips 70, Jacobs 58, Arshdeep 2-33) by four wickets. - Agencies

REPLACED JAYAWARDENE



Mumbai Indians elevate Pollard to head coach ahead of IPL 2027

MUMBAI: Kieron Pollard has been "elevated" to the position of head coach at Mumbai Indians (MI), replacing Mahela Jayawardene, who the franchise parted ways with earlier this month.

"It is a honour to take on the role of head coach of Mumbai Indians. MI has been a huge part of my life and career, and the bond I share with this team, the players and the Paltan means a great deal to me," Pollard, now 39, said in an MI statement.

MI is the only team Pollard played for in the IPL, from 2010 to 2022, during which he turned out in 189 games, scoring 3412 runs and picking up 69 wickets. He was part of the squad in each of the five IPL-winning seasons: 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020. After the 2022 season, when MI became the second team to successfully defend the IPL title, he took over as the team's batting coach.

"Having experienced this journey as a player and then as a coach, I understand what Mumbai Indians stands for and the

responsibility that comes with representing the Blue and Gold," Pollard said. "I look forward to working closely with the players and support staff, building on the team's legacy, helping our talent grow and giving the Paltan many more reasons to celebrate."

MI have not been as dominant over the past few seasons as they were when they became one of the winningest teams in the IPL, but still made the playoffs in 2023 and 2025. But in 2024 and 2026, they finished tenth and ninth, respectively.

"Pollard joined Mumbai Indians as a young 22-year-old and, over the past sixteen years, has become an integral part of our family," MI co-owner Nita Ambani said. "As a player, he gave us many unforgettable moments, and as a coach, he has continued to share his experience, passion and deep understanding of the game."

"We are delighted to see him take on this new responsibility as head coach. Polly knows what it means to wear the MI jersey and

what it takes to play for the Paltan. I am confident that he will bring the same commitment, belief and determination to this role. I wish him every success as he leads the team into its next chapter."

Pollard's first task in the new position will be to decide on the franchise's retention list by the November 15 deadline. The IPL 2027 auction is expected to take place around a month after that in Goa.

Pollard is part of the MI family in other T20 leagues too. He is the head coach of MI London in the Hundred and has played for MI New York in Major League Cricket (2023-2026), MI Cape Town in the SA20 (2024 and 2025-26) and MI Emirates in the ILT20 (2023 to 2025-26). However, in the upcoming season of the SA20, he will turn out for Joburg Super Kings, who picked up Pollard at the auction earlier this month with no rival bid from MI CT.

In the CPL, where MI don't have a team, Pollard has been turning out for his home team Trinbago Knight Riders since 2019. - Agencies

SECOND T20I

I have done what everyone believed: Tilak after victory

CHRISTCHURCH: Tilak Varma said he felt "really proud" after staying unbeaten to see India through a difficult chase of 181 in the second T20I against New Zealand in Christchurch.

He credited conversations with India head coach Gautam Gambhir and batting coach Sitanshu Kotak for giving him the belief to finish the game.

India were 70 for 5 in the 11th over, needing 111 runs off 55 balls, with spinners Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell finding assistance from the used surface. Tilak, however, was determined to bat through the innings. He has now remained unbeaten in 26 T20 chases, and his team has won every one of those matches.



"At that stage I was just thinking about playing till the end," Tilak said after winning the Player-of-the-Match award for his unbeaten 51 off 26 balls.

"Just before today's game, I was talking with coach Gautam sir and Sitanshu Kotak sir, and they said one thing that we all believe and the whole India believes in you. If you stay till the end, then you will win, you'll win the game for us."

"That was in my mind and I wanted to take the game as deep as possible. At the end of the day, I have done what everyone believed. So I'm really proud of myself."

Tilak first put on 42 off 25 balls for the sixth wicket with Naman Dhir, whose 17-ball 31 included three sixes and a four.

After Dhir's dismissal, Tilak and fellow "Hyderabadi boy" Nitish Kumar Reddy added an unbroken 69 off just 30 balls, India's highest seventh-wicket partnership in men's T20Is.

"I was telling Naman that we'll stay till the end and especially we can go slightly slower today com-

pared to last game," Tilak said.

"I was telling Naman that we'll push hard in running between the wickets when spinners were bowling. So that's what our plan was. We have pushed hard when they were bowling, and unfortunately Naman got out in the last over of Mitchell Santner. Otherwise, I think we would have finished the game in 18th over. So yeah, the credit goes to Naman as well, the way he batted."

"But after that, Hyderabad boys were in the play today, Nitish Reddy and myself, and we are really happy that we finished the game."

"Definitely there was a plan like that [to target the fast bowlers], but we thought that we'll put that intent. When they bowl in our arc, we'll go [for big shots]."

"Otherwise we wanted to just push it in the gaps and run hard. I think we got four to five twos against spinners, those eight-ten runs were really crucial. So I think that we played smartly there and later on we knew that we could

hit [against] the fast bowlers. "We needed that pace in this huge ground, so we were waiting for that, and we finished off in style."

India captain Shreyas Iyer praised Dhir's all-round contribution, particularly his batting under pressure and his work in the field.

"I feel that every individual in our team is a match-winner, and today we saw an example of that," Iyer said.

"Honestly speaking, when we lost consecutive wickets [in the 11th over], we thought that the game was going away from us, but Tilak and Reddy, they showed immense character and also a great cameo by Naman Dhir."

"We saw him in a couple of games back home against West Indies."

"He's a phenomenal bowler as well, and once you get both the parts covered in terms of batting and bowling, I think he brings in a lot of character. Also, when you see him move around in the field, he's a comprehensive player." - Agencies

SERIES LOCKED 1-1

SA's Nortje ruled out of Test series decider with injury

DURBAN: Anrich Nortje has been ruled out of South Africa's third and final Test against Australia after suffering a mild groin injury. No replacement has been named for the decider, with the series locked at 1-1.

Nortje left the field midway through in his fourth over on the fourth morning in the second Test at St George's Park and spent the rest of the match in the dressing room to put a premature end to his return to the longest format.

He had not played a red-ball match in more than three-and-a-half years before the first Test of the series in Durban, and bowled 40 overs in that match, picking up two wickets in either innings.

It was expected that he would be rested for the second Test in Gqeberha, but after he came through the first Test without a problem, South Africa decided to name him in the XI again. Captain Temba Bavuma later conceded that it had been a "risk", given



Nortje's injury history, which has previously seen him sidelined for long periods of time.

It is not yet clear how much time he will need to recover.

In the immediate term, South Africa will need to choose between Gerald Coetzee, who has not played a Test in nearly two years, all-rounder Corbin Bosch and Cape Town local Dane Paterson to complete their attack for the final Test. All three have been with the squad since the first match.

If they opt for a slower bowler instead, left-arm spin-bowling all-rounder Senuran Muthusamy could come into the conversation. The rest of the squad remains unchanged, with South Africa expected to field the same batting line-up as in Gqeberha.

South Africa are also waiting on the fitness of several other injured players, all of whom are in contention for a spot in a busy summer.

The third Test starts on Tuesday. - Agencies

FORD EXPEDITION OFFER
The Ford Expedition is now available in Oman with a comprehensive set of ownership benefits under the Ford Grand Summer Delights campaign running till 30 October 2026.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



CUSTOMER SERVICE UNIT
Sohar International has announced the soft launch of its new Customer Service Unit (CSU) at the Arrivals Hall of Muscat International Airport, extending its presence to one of the Sultanate's primary gateways.

DATA

Oman's import price index rises by 11.7% in second quarter

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The general index of import prices in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 11.7 percent in the second quarter (Q2) of 2026, compared to the same quarter of 2025. It increased by 2 percent compared to the first quarter of the same year.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that most commodity groups recorded an increase in import prices during the second quarter of 2026, compared to the same quarter of 2025. The mineral fuels and related materials group lead the list of increases at 45.5 percent, followed by the vegetable and animal oils, fats and waxes group at 16 percent, and the

chemicals and related materials group at 11.6 percent.

Prices also rose for the following categories: inedible raw materials (excluding fuels) by 8.3 percent, manufactured goods classified chiefly by material by 7.1 percent, beverages and tobacco by 6.5 percent, food and live animals by 1.1 percent, and machinery and transport equipment by 1 percent. In contrast, miscellaneous manufactured goods saw a decrease of 2.9 percent.

On a quarterly basis, the overall import price index rose by 2 percent in the second quarter of 2026, compared to the first quarter of the same year.

The data showed that the prices of a number of commodity groups rose during the second quarter of 2026, compared to the first quar-

ter, with the mineral fuels and related materials group recording the highest increase at 21.1 percent, followed by the beverages and tobacco group at 13.8 percent, then the chemicals and related materials group and the manufactured goods classified chiefly by material group at 12.5 percent each, followed by the vegetable and animal oils, fats and waxes group at 11.7 percent.

In contrast, the machinery and transport equipment group recorded a decrease of 12.8 percent, followed by the inedible raw materials group, excluding fuels, at 8.7 percent, and the miscellaneous manufactured articles group at 1 percent, while the food and live animals group recorded a decrease of 0.3 percent.



Net profits of MSX-listed banks rise by 8.1% to OMR455 million

The preliminary financial results announced by the banks on the Muscat Stock Exchange website indicated growth in most of the financial indicators of the seven banks listed on the exchange, benefiting from the expansion in financing development projects, private sector projects, small and medium enterprises, and loans provided to individuals, which led to an increase in revenues



private sector projects, small and medium enterprises, and loans provided to individuals, which led to an increase in revenues.

The efficiency of risk management, the decline in provisions, and the banks' trend towards developing electronic banking services and expanding the customer base also reflected positively on the performance of the banking sector and pushed profits upward.

Bank Muscat recorded the highest profits at OMR209.1 million, compared to OMR191.5 million in the same period last year. Bank Sohar International reported net profits of OMR77.6 million, compared to OMR 70.7 million in the same period last year.

National Bank of Oman (NBO) posted net profits of OMR57.5 million, compared to OMR 51.7 million in the same period last year. Bank Dhofar's net profits rose from OMR36 million to OMR38.8 million and Ahli Bank recorded growth of 12.5 percent, with its net profits rising from OMR32.4 million to OMR36.5 million.

Oman Arab Bank consolidated net profit rose from OMR23.3 million to OMR28.1 million. Bank Nizwa recorded a 52 percent decline in its net profit, falling to OMR7 million compared to OMR14.8 million in the same period last year, affected by an increase in provisions from about OMR6.2

million to OMR13.6 million, an increase in operating expenses from OMR20.8 million to OMR23.8 million, and a decline in operating profit from OMR23.3 million to OMR21.5 million.

In the first nine months of this year, the seven banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange took several steps to strengthen the banking sector through strategic partnerships, increasing capital and shareholders' equity, improving asset quality, and expanding locally and internationally. Bank Muscat's Extraordinary General Assembly approved increasing the bank's authorised capital from OMR800 million to OMR1.2 billion.

Sohar International offered more than one billion shares to exercise its pre-emptive right to increase the bank's capital from OMR702.5 million to approximately OMR850 million. Sohar International also opened a representative office in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as part of its strategy to expand into Asian markets, following the bank's expansion into GCC markets through the opening of its branch in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2023.

During the current year, Bank Nizwa submitted a non-binding letter of intent to the Board of Directors of Oman Arab Bank, including a proposal for a merger by

Oman's stock market drops on US-Iran uncertainty and maritime disruptions

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Omani stock market extended its decline during the week, with the MSX 30 index down by 3.89% to 7,379.41 points. The number of shares traded slipped by 17.71%, while the value of shares traded retreated by 24.40%. The total market cap inched lower by 0.46%.

Persistent maritime disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and regional unease kept the market in negative territory.

The absence of firm US-Iran negotiation timelines is likely to restrain risk-taking, particularly after reports that American troops and diplomats are being moved from posts in the Middle East, and that plans for new military operations are in place, which heightened concerns over the prospects of renewed escalations and reprisals.

Crude gained as a result, even though it had retreated from a five-month peak on Monday following Donald Trump's decision to lift sanctions and tariffs from Russia, said and industry analyst.

"Traders are likely to keep weighing energy-flow risks, leaving prices prone to swings. On the other hand, the MSX 30 index could find support from higher oil, especially as Oman



crude for December delivery rose \$3.35 to \$110.18/bbl from \$106.83/bbl," said Rania Gule, Senior Market Analyst at XS.com - MENA.

Attention has also remained on inflation, as firmer oil prices are strengthening the case for tighter US monetary policy. The Fed is broadly anticipated to leave rates unchanged next week, yet markets may keep an eye on potential hikes in December and early next year.

"The Fed's announcement will likely set the tone for global sentiment, with PCE inflation figures due afterwards," she further added.

At the stock market level, most sectors and stocks finished the week lower. The services index declined by 2.64%, closing at 2,938.98 points, led

by Asyad Shipping, OQ Exploration and Production, OQ Gas Networks, and AlJazeera Services, each recording losses of 7.49%, 6.09%, 3.13%, and 2.80%, respectively.

The financial index weakened by 2.38%, finishing at 13,469.17 points. Oman Emirates Holding fell by 10.83%, followed by Bank Muscat, Sohar International Bank, and Bank Nizwa, each declining by 7.73%, 6.38%, and 4.64%, respectively. Simultaneously, National Bank Oman rose by 1.81%.

Meanwhile, the industry index dipped by 1.84%, settling at 9,829.50 points. Voltamp Energy posted modest gains of 1.66%, while Oman Cement increased by 1.42%. On the other hand, OQ Base Industries lost ground by 10.38%. Oman Cables Industry and Jazeera Steel Products also recorded losses of 1.31% and 0.97%, respectively.

"Looking ahead, Oman's market may remain under pressure while regional tensions and energy-flow risks in crucial shipping lanes linger," said Rania Gule. "Investors will watch US-Iran diplomacy and next week's Fed decision, as any hawkish signal could weigh on sentiment. Stronger oil prices could still limit losses," she further added.

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The net profits of banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose in the first nine months of this year to OMR455 million, recording an increase of 8.1 percent compared to the same period last year, which amounted to OMR420.6 million.

The preliminary financial results announced by the banks on the Muscat Stock Exchange website indicated growth in most of the financial indicators of the seven banks listed on the exchange, benefiting from the expansion in financing development projects,

incorporating Aliziz Islamic Bank into Bank Nizwa. Bank Nizwa has obtained preliminary approval from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to commence a comprehensive due diligence process to assess the feasibility of the merger.

The consolidated financial data of the seven banks indicated that total assets at the end of last September rose to about OMR50.2 billion, compared to OMR44.1 billion

in September of 2025, registering an increase of 13.7 percent. Bank Muscat topped the seven banks in terms of asset size with about OMR16 billion, followed by Bank Sohar International with OMR10.2 billion, Bank Dhofar with OMR6.3 billion, and the National Bank of Oman with assets amounting to about OMR6.1 billion.

Shareholders' equity in the seven banks recorded a growth of 9.8

percent, rising to more than OMR7 billion by the end of last September, compared to OMR6.3 billion in September 2025, benefiting from the growth in profits, reserves and an increase in the size of capital. Bank Muscat topped the list with OMR2.7 billion, Bank Sohar next with OMR1.1 billion, the National Bank of Oman with OMR928 million, and Oman Arab Bank with OMR709.6 million.

COMPANY'S STRATEGY

Microsoft working to reduce AI costs, expand ecosystem as global adoption rises



NEW DELHI: Tech giant Microsoft is focusing on building a broader artificial intelligence (AI) ecosystem and reducing the cost of AI-powered services, Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said in his annual letter, highlighting the company's strategy as AI adoption accelerates globally.

Nadella noted that "Super Intelligence" is changing every organisation's inputs and outputs, while inference is making marginal cost a vital factor in software economics.

"As a result, customers will in-

creasingly measure the cost of tokens against the outcomes they produce," Nadella said, referring to this as the "cost-to-outcome" frontier and adding that Microsoft is focused on optimising it.

According to Nadella, Microsoft's focus in the emerging era of superintelligence is not just on the scale of opportunities presented by AI, but also on delivering real-world benefits to countries, communities and businesses worldwide.

Noting that the company has a broad tech stack, diverse business-

es and business models, and a platform- and partner-first approach, Nadella added, "...we are building a frontier ecosystem that enables others to build more value on top of and through the ecosystem than is captured inside."

As per the letter, the company is investing to serve a diverse set of customers while also creating the infrastructure to power its own differentiated and high-value first-party products, such as Copilot.

"Based on the demand we see and the efficiencies we are driv-

ing, I am confident in the long-term returns on my investments. That confidence starts with being disciplined about what we build and who we build it for. We are investing to serve a diverse set of customers, while also creating the infrastructure to power our own differentiated and high-value first-party products like Copilot," Nadella said.

Nadella further added that Microsoft is accelerating capacity deployment, improving efficiency and reducing costs across its tech-

nology infrastructure to support customer growth and deliver long-term shareholder value.

He also highlighted the company's financial performance, adding that Microsoft recorded revenue of USD 331.8 billion in FY2026, up 18 percent year-on-year, while Microsoft Cloud revenue rose 27 percent to USD 214.4 billion. Azure grew 41 percent, surpassing USD 100 billion for the first time, while Microsoft 365 Copilot crossed 30 million paid seats. Operating income increased 21 percent to USD 155.2 billion. **ANI**

MARKET

Sohar International announces soft launch of customer service unit at Muscat International Airport

Designed to serve tourists, investors, residents, citizens and business travellers, the unit brings banking support closer to customers while helping them explore travel, lifestyle and destination-related services primarily through Sohar International’s mobile app

MUSCAT: Sohar International has announced the soft launch of its new Customer Service Unit (CSU) at the Arrivals Hall of Muscat International Airport, extending its presence to one of the Sultanate of Oman’s primary gateways.



Designed to serve tourists, investors, residents, citizens and business travellers, the unit brings banking support closer to customers while helping them explore travel, lifestyle and destination-related services primarily through Sohar International’s mobile app. The soft launch marks the beginning of the CSU’s operations,

establishing a welcoming point of contact for people arriving in Oman. By combining in-person guidance with access to digital services, the unit reflects the Bank’s ambition to support customers beyond their financial needs and become part of their wider experience in the Sultanate. Commenting on the soft launch,

Abdulwahid Mohamed Al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: “For many people, arriving in Oman marks the beginning of a holiday, a business opportunity or a new chapter in their lives. Our presence at Muscat International Airport gives us an opportunity to support those journeys from the outset. Through

the Customer Service Unit, we are bringing personal guidance together with access to services through our mobile app, helping customers connect with solutions relevant to their time in Oman. This reflects our Beyond Banking philosophy and our commitment to supporting customers wherever their ambitions take them.”

Extending this proposition, the CSU will help customers explore and access a growing ecosystem of travel, lifestyle and destination services, available primarily through Sohar International’s mobile app and enabled by strategic partnerships. The unit will provide guidance at the airport, while the app will allow customers to continue accessing relevant offerings beyond their arrival. Additional propositions for Sohar International customers and airport employees are also being explored, subject to relevant approvals and partnerships. The CSU will also support eligible visitors seeking to establish a banking relationship in Oman, providing guidance on relevant banking solutions and access to selected welcome benefits. Whether customers are coming to the Sultanate to visit, live, work, invest or do business, the unit aims to help them navigate their needs through a convenient combination of personal support and digital access. The soft launch represents a further step in Sohar International’s Beyond Banking journey, strengthening its engagement with Oman’s tourism, business and investment ecosystem. Through its presence at Muscat International Airport, the Bank aims to contribute to a welcoming arrival experience and build customer relationships that continue throughout their time in Oman.

MAINTAIN CONTROL



Trump eases some Canada tariffs ahead of US midterms

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump has lifted some of the tariffs imposed on Canada amid an economic row with the US’ neighbour to the north, which peaked this summer. The White House on Friday said the easing of tariffs will apply to products including “plywood sheets, some paper products, certain machinery and refrigeration equipment.” The changes will take effect on October 30. While the latest move cuts some of the tariffs, it also imposes new levies on goods including carpets, certain valves and waste products, the White House said. **What do we know about the Canada tariffs relief?** The White House said the president was seeking to offset “the burden to US commerce while better serving the public interest.” The move comes less than two weeks ahead of the November midterm elections, where Republican candidate Susan Collins is locked in a tight race with Democratic challenger Troy Jackson in Maine. Collins said on Friday she had addressed the tariffs with Trump’s top trade negotiator, Jamieson Greer, and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. The senator said she was acting out of concern for “the toll tariffs are taking on Maine families, businesses, farmers, and growers.” “Many of our farmers and growers rely on specialized equipment, packaging materials, and other products from Canada that are either unavailable from American suppliers or cannot be replaced without incurring significant expense,” Collins said. She added that she had asked for tariff relief and vowed to “en

The White House said the easing of tariffs will apply to products including plywood sheets, some paper products, certain machinery and refrigeration equipment. While the latest move cuts some of the tariffs, it also imposes new levies on goods including carpets, certain valves and waste products

courage a broader trade agreement with Canada, our neighbor, ally, and largest trading partner.” Washington and Ottawa have been locked in a trade dispute since Trump returned to the White House last year. Trade tensions intensified when talks broke down in August, with Trump announcing a 50% levy on some Canadian goods and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announcing retaliatory tariffs. On Friday, Trump told reporters that “Canada is working very hard to make a deal with us.” **»**

PROMOTION

Ford Expedition delivers 5-year service, warranty and exclusive rewards with Ford Grand Summer Delights

MUSCAT: The Ford Expedition is now available in Oman with a comprehensive set of ownership benefits under the Ford Grand Summer Delights campaign running till 30 October. Customers who choose the full-size SUV during the campaign period will benefit from 5 years of service and warranty, complimentary registration and accessories, trade-in and loyalty bonuses and the chance to win exclusive rewards through an exclusive raffle draw. (Terms & Conditions Apply) At the heart of the offer is a 5-year or 100,000 km service package (whichever comes first), covering 10 services at 10,000 km intervals under normal operating conditions. This is backed by a matching 5-year or 100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty. Customers purchasing the Expedition for private use also receive complimentary one-year vehicle registration and every Expedition comes with a set of complimentary accessories. Expedition buyers can also take advantage of added savings. A trade-in bonus of up to OMR 400 is available for customers who trade in their existing vehicle through Best Cars, while existing Ford owners can receive a loyalty bonus of up to OMR 100. In addition



all customers who purchase the Expedition during the campaign period will be entered into the Buy and Win raffle draw with a chance to win a fuel card worth OMR 100, a dinner voucher for four, a one-night weekend hotel stay for a couple or an Amouage perfume gift voucher. The draw will take place at the end of the campaign with a total of 38 winners announced across the participating models. The Ford Expedition line-up in Oman is available in two variants both powered by a 3.5L V6 EcoBoost engine that delivers 413 horsepower.

The Expedition Active is designed for larger families with spacious and versatile seating for up to eight passengers. The Expedition Tremor is the most capable Expedition ever built equipped with 18-inch all-terrain tyres, Raptor-inspired running boards, front skid plates and a 6-mode Terrain Management System for challenging terrain. The Expedition’s exterior features redesigned body panels and the two-piece Ford Split Gate tailgate, which can also serve as an outdoor seat. Inside, the cabin offers a 24-inch panoramic display,

a 13.2-inch centre touchscreen and a 10-speaker B&O Unleashed Sound System by Bang & Olufsen. The SUV has a towing capacity of up to 4,354 kg and its safety features include the Blind Spot Information System and a three-row safety canopy system. Combining rugged capability, comfort and the benefits of Ford Grand Summer Delights, the Ford Expedition is a strong choice for family journeys across Oman. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co.

SAYS IEA CHIEF

China’s clean energy achievements accelerate global energy transition

BERLIN: China’s achievements in clean energy technologies are impressive and have accelerated the global energy transition, Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), told Xinhua in a recent interview. The global energy crisis is reshaping energy markets, prompting the adoption of renewable energy and electric vehicles (EVs) as countries seek to reduce their dependence on traditional energy sources, said Birol on the sidelines of the just-concluded Berlin Global Dialogue. Birol highlighted China’s important role in addressing current energy challenges and promoting

international energy cooperation, recalling that at the 16th APEC Energy Ministers’ Meeting held in Beijing in September, representatives discussed the current energy crisis and ways for Asia-Pacific economies to work together to address it. He said that since March this year, the world has faced an unprecedented energy security challenge following disruptions to the two major arteries that had long underpinned global energy flows: energy supplies from western Siberia, Russia, to Europe, and shipments through the Strait of Hormuz to Asia and beyond. To mitigate disruptions in global

oil markets, the IEA announced on March 11 that it would coordinate the release of 400 million barrels of oil reserves by its member countries. The move helped calm market concerns after oil prices initially surged, Birol said. However, he stressed that strategic stock releases could only cushion the impact of supply disruptions, rather than provide a lasting solution. Beyond their impact on oil and gas prices, supply disruptions are also reshaping global energy trade relations, with some longstanding partnerships giving way to new ones, Birol observed. He identified key trends emerg-

ing in the global energy sector since the outbreak of the war in the Middle East: rapid growth in renewable energy, rising EV sales, a modest increase in coal use, and renewed momentum behind nuclear power. He said that solar power is the leading source of growth, followed by wind, and that biofuel use was also rising strongly, partly due to higher diesel and gasoline prices. Birol pointed out that the rapid expansion of renewable energy was driven not only by climate and environmental concerns but also by energy security considerations and countries’ efforts to increase domestic energy production. **»**



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Kim Jong Un arrives in China via newly opened border bridge

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reportedly arrived in the Chinese border city of Dandong via a newly opened bridge linking the two countries, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has arrived in China's border city of Dandong via the newly opened New Yalu River Bridge linking the two countries, Yonhap News Agency reported on Saturday, citing a government source.

According to Yonhap, the gov-



ernment source confirmed that Kim arrived in Dandong through the bridge earlier in the day.

The development comes after China announced the opening of the new bridge across the Yalu River, which forms the border between China and the

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), also known as North Korea.

According to China's state-run Xinhua News Agency, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on October 14 that the bridge would facilitate

trade and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. "As agreed upon by China and the DPRK, the bridge will officially open to traffic on Thursday, with both sides jointly holding an opening ceremony on that day," Mao said at a regular press briefing.

Highlighting China and North Korea as "friendly neighbours connected by mountains and rivers," Mao said the new bridge was an important facility for connectivity between the two countries.

She added that the bridge was expected to boost bilateral trade and people-to-people exchanges and help improve the well-being of both peoples.

This comes as on Thursday, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's sister, Kim Yo-jong, warned that Pyongyang would deploy "new counter means" along its southern border and place propaganda loudspeakers targeting South Korea on standby within days.

"Our new counter means will get into the alert for duty at all the southern border line and the loudspeakers against the ROK will be on standby in a matter of days," Kim Yo-jong said in a statement carried by North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), according to Yonhap News Agency.

According to Yonhap News Agency, her remarks came a day after she warned that North Korea would resume propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts towards South Korea later this month, signalling a

further escalation in tensions between the two neighbours.

Kim also defended Pyongyang's ongoing efforts to fortify its southern border, saying the construction project would continue within North Korean territory.

"Within the territory where our sovereignty is exercised, the permanent project for the southern border will be surely and successfully continued according to our purposes," she said. She further claimed that the project would reduce the risk of military confrontation between the two countries.

"If the permanent project for the southern border is carried out, the danger of military conflict between the DPRK and the ROK will be considerably lowered and many complicated problems will be solved," she added.

Meanwhile, North Korea's state media, released photographs of Kim Jong-un inspecting footwear and women's clothing at an exhibition, according to the New York Post. The Korean Central News Agency reported that he visited the exhibition on Monday, although the images have not been independently authenticated.

-ANI

SECURITY DEPLOYMENT

France deploys 70,000 police personnel ahead of fresh protests

PARIS: Ahead of fresh protests scheduled for Saturday, France will deploy around 70,000 police personnel nationwide as authorities prepare to prevent a recurrence of widespread looting, arson and vandalism that erupted alongside demonstrations last week.

According to France24, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez announced the security deployment on Friday, warning that calls for violence and looting were circulating on social media as the government sought to maintain public order.

President Emmanuel Macron convened a meeting of his defence council, comprising senior ministers and officials, amid the escalating crisis. He was also scheduled to meet security forces as authorities stepped up preparations for the weekend demonstrations, according to France24.

The protests initially began among high school students over deteriorating learning conditions but have since spread nationwide, fuelled by wider public anger over the rising cost of living.

Macron also met representatives of secondary school students for the first time since the protests escalated. However, student representatives urged their peers to continue demonstrating, saying the government had yet to present



concrete proposals to address their demands.

Nathanael Combarry, president of the campaign group High School Renewal, said Macron had been attentive during their meeting but added that students were awaiting proposals during discussions with the prime minister scheduled for Monday.

"We are not satisfied," Combarry said, urging students to continue mobilising to maintain pressure on the government.

The French government has sought to distinguish legitimate public grievances and peaceful

demonstrations from the looting, arson and destruction reported during last Saturday's protests.

Justice Minister Gérald Darmanin said courts had already sentenced 217 people, around half of them first-time offenders, to prison in connection with the violence, France24 reported.

On Thursday, Macron called for the "utmost severity" against acts of delinquency, accusing far-left groups of attempting to undermine the republic during last weekend's unrest.

The demonstrations have also intensified political tensions

ahead of France's 2027 presidential election. A recent poll cited by France24 indicated that far-right candidate Marine Le Pen remained the frontrunner, with the latest developments reportedly strengthening her position.

Le Pen's National Rally party is scheduled to hold its congress in Orléans this weekend, where thousands of supporters are expected to gather. Local authorities are concerned about possible clashes as counter-protesters also plan to assemble in the city south of Paris. -aw

IN BAVARIA

Hitler's Eagle's Nest retreat catches fire



BERLIN: A fire broke out on Friday evening at the Kehlsteinhaus in Bavaria, more commonly known as the Eagle's Nest and used as a retreat by Adolf Hitler and Nazi officials.

The Kehlsteinhaus was engulfed in flames, a police statement read, adding that a suspect has been arrested and the incident was being criminally investigated.

What do we know so far about the Kehlsteinhaus fire?

A fire alarm went off at the Kehlsteinhaus on the Obersalzberg in Berchtesgaden at around 9:15 p.m. local time (1915 GMT) on Friday, the police said in a statement.

"The fire brigades, who were alerted immediately, could already see flames clearly visible at the Kehlsteinhaus as they approached," the police statement read.

Some 200 firefighters and emergency personnel were deployed to

the site. Firefighters struggled to reach the Kehlsteinhaus, which sits at some 1,834 meters (6,017 feet) above sea level, with their engines.

Police added that the building and its immediate vicinity could only be entered while wearing respiratory protective equipment (RPE).

Police said they were unaware of any injuries as of yet.

The site once housed Hitler's heavily fortified country residence, where he is believed to have partially written his book "Mein Kampf." It was built in 1938 as a guest house for Nazi officials.

It remains a symbol of the Nazi regime and is among only a few monuments of the Hitler era that survived the World War II bombing unscathed. Today, it is classified as a historical monument and is home to a popular restaurant. -aw

ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS

Albania's student protests are only getting bigger

TIRANA: The fallout from the October 13 protests was still visible when students and faculty from the University of Tirana gathered outside the Education Ministry in Albania's capital on Tuesday to express their continued discontent. Smashed windows have yet to be replaced; the walls are still black with soot from fires that broke out during the protests.

Albania has seen nearly five months of peaceful anti-government protests, sparked initially when plans were made public that Jared Kushner — a son-in-law of US President Donald Trump — and associates intended to build a luxury hotel complex within a nature reserve.

Since then, anti-government and anti-corruption protests have escalated. Now, college and high school students clash with police forces almost daily, with the fiercest clashes so far occurring last week.

Protesters denounce corruption, mismanaged universities and the rising cost of education in Albania — and call for the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama, who has been in office since 2013.



Wearing a black hooded jacket and a scarf across her face to conceal her identity, a woman who asked to be called Sara because she fears repercussions for speaking to the press told DW that protesters "communicate via text messages — that's the only way."

She cut the interview short as

some protesters began flinging stones at the Education Ministry. Police pushed demonstrators and journalists out of the way, using water cannons to disperse the crowd.

"Social media is the most important public space today — more so than physical spaces," Besmir

Semanaj, a prominent Albanian cybersecurity advocate told DW. "Young Albanians no longer organize through traditional structures such as political parties, associations or public appeals. Instead, they organize themselves where they spend much of their daily lives: on their cellphones."

"The most important communication channels include Instagram, WhatsApp groups for academic-year cohorts, departments and dormitories, Telegram channels for general announcements, and TikTok for sharing videos," Semanaj said. He added that people who are especially concerned with security use the Signal messaging app.

"This is a horizontal organizational structure, without individual 'leaders' and without a central command structure," Semanaj said. "That is exactly why the government is having such a hard time understanding and controlling the situation."

Semanaj said the Telegram messenger app had proven particularly useful for protesters. "Telegram channels allow you to reach tens of thousands of people at once," he said. "Notifications are sent out within seconds, and external control is more difficult to establish than on traditional platforms."

Rama: 'Hybrid war'

Rama has called the youth uprising a "hybrid war." He said protesters thought they could "make Albania

a better country through TikTok and without even being able to string together more than seven coherent words." Though not all are terrorists, he said, he believes that "they are hostages to a certain mindset, a new ideology that has only one goal: to destroy, to turn everything upside down, to raze everything to the ground."

Over nearly five months, Rama has accused various "true" masterminds of organizing the anti-government and anti-corruption protests. He has alleged that the governments of Greece, Russia and Iran are stirring up dissent.

Most recently, Rama said it was "antifa" — or a decentralized movement of global antifascists — that had stoked anti-government and anti-corruption sentiments in Albania.

"These are young people who have been radicalized and ideologically indoctrinated and who are acting under the pressure or influence of a new, dark force that has emerged in Europe and the United States, a force that the President of the United States has designated as a terrorist organisation: Antifa," Rama claimed. -aw



How a *homeless man* lives in front of a London *mega-mansion*

Anders Fernstedt lives in London without ever using any money. The Swedish native has built a most unusual home under the porch of a house worth over €200 million. How did that happen?

There's a lot of stop-ping and staring in Knightsbridge. This part of central London is within a stone's throw of Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park and Harrods, bringing inquisitive tourists in droves.

While it may not divert quite as many eyeballs as the seat of the British monarchy, a curious collection of plants, garden umbrellas, shopping bags and children's toys filling a building's entrance causes many a curious glance.

The peculiar arrangement on a grand portico is what Anders Fernstedt, a man from Sweden who fell on hard times, has been calling home for more than three years already.

That building hosting his makeshift setup was, just a few years ago, London's most expensive house.

The mega-mansion at 2-8A Rutland Gate sold in 2020 for a then-record £210 million (€244 million, \$278 million) to Hui Ka Yan, the founder of China's Evergrande group, who was sentenced to life in prison last month.

Hui never moved in and the house was registered under his wife's name. The freezing of her assets means it can't be seized by liquidators and the house is in a state of limbo.

So too was Fernstedt when he first stumbled across it. "I just thought, it would be a shelter for the night. I'm an avid camper,



like an amateur botanist. I'm not afraid of nature," he told DW.

'Camping on the balcony'

Fernstedt has never been inside the property, which appears to be in a state of disrepair. Instead, he gradually built his home in the portico, where grand columns guard the 45 rooms, indoor swimming pool and 116 windows. Year round he sleeps under the portico roof and a large umbrella which provides a hidden nook in which he's placed mattresses and bedding.

"I haven't had a bad night's sleep for as long as I can remember. And that goes for four seasons. It's not cold in the winter, and because I don't have walls, I get the breeze in the heat," he said.

"My conceit when I started was that sort of fake dream. Oh, I'm just a boy, my parents are in the house, everything's normal, I

just asked them for permission to camp on the balcony."

Fernstedt was raised by his mother in Sweden before embarking on a range of careers at home and in the US, building a name for himself in the tech world.

In 2016, he moved to England where he worked as a journalist and fact checker at publications including The Economist, before work dried up around the time of the COVID pandemic.

A share in a tech company from his days in the US gave Anders a nest egg he relied on. But it couldn't last forever and he found himself living in a tent and then temporary accommodation, where he experienced violence and brushed up against people with severe addictions.

"Perhaps in this contemporary world, the biggest curiosity about my lifestyle is I'm completely off money," he said.



Community support powers unusual lifestyle

Fernstedt has built relationships with bakeries, cafes and florists in which he gets unused food, flowers for his home and use of power. He also makes use of a homeless charity in nearby Victoria for showers, clothing donations and socialising. But he's also made himself a broadly accepted part of one of London's most affluent neighbourhoods. "This is a very sophisticated neighbourhood. I'd stayed for a few weeks and I knew everybody knew that I was here. And I thought, 'how can I sort of convey my presence without being present?' And I thought, my constituency has to be the neighbors' children and grandchildren. Because if they plead my case at the kitchen table, my prospects improve," he said, by way of explaining the toys that line his abode.

"It is, in a way, a squirrel's nut collection," he added, when asked if he's worried about leaving his possessions out in the open. "I have so many nuts that I won't notice when something disappears."

There are some neighbors who do object to his presence, but Anders does his best to keep his home neat and his life quiet. Indeed, many others feel his presence prevents the house being a target for thieves or vandals. Overall though, he's found the community welcoming. "Sometimes they introduce themselves asking, what might I want or need. And my stock answer being: 'well, what you just gave me, a little bit of normal time, right? And neighbourly banter,'" he said. "Sometimes I'll be given food and very elegant Italian dinner jackets and clothes have arrived on a few occasions."

Homelessness a growing concern in London

Not all homeless people in London have found such a stable lifestyle. Homeless charity Crisis estimates that there are over 200,000 people classified as homeless in England's capital, where "4392 people were recorded sleeping rough in London between April and June, up from 4% on the same time last year. This is up 58% compared to 10 years ago."

According to government figures, there were 105,138 empty homes in London in 2025, or 1 in every 37 homes. Andy Burnham, who became British Prime Minister in July, has since vowed to offer "every rough sleeper in England a route off the streets by Christmas."

With such an enormous price tag, even after six years of being abandoned, Fernstedt knows that the house he lives at could potentially become untenable at virtually any moment.

But over the last few years, it's given him something he craved when pitching up his tent or being moved from one scary temporary residence to the next.

"I'm no longer really worried that I'll cycle around the corner and everything will be gone. Because I've been here so long, I'm free of worrying now, and if we worry too much, we won't be happy." -DW

SPORTS

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Bayern coach Kompany hospitalised after training ground collapse

BERLIN: Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany was taken to hospital on Friday after collapsing while watching a training session involving the club's reserve team, the Bundesliga leaders confirmed.

The 40-year-old Belgian is undergoing medical examinations at a Munich hospital and will remain under medical supervision.

Kompany had been observing the Bayern reserves' afternoon training session when the incident occurred. An emergency helicopter subsequently landed at the club's training ground.

Bayern confirmed that Kompany would temporarily step away



from his coaching duties, with assistant coach Aaron Danks and the remaining staff taking charge of training and matches until further notice.

"The health of Vincent Kompany is our highest priority. We will do everything at FC Bayern to help him recover quickly," board member for sport Max Eberl said in a club statement.

"Vinnie will receive all the necessary medical care and support, and all the time he needs. We have complete confidence in his coaching staff, who will take over his responsibilities," Eberl added.

Kompany had been struggling

with a viral infection since last week, which had already disrupted his preparations and restricted his involvement on the touchline during Bayern's 6-1 Bundesliga victory over RB Leipzig.

He subsequently missed several training sessions, with Danks replacing him at the pre-match press conference ahead of Bayern's Champions League encounter with Arsenal.

Although Kompany returned to the touchline for the 2-2 draw against the London club, he acknowledged afterwards that he had pushed himself despite feeling unwell.

"As a coach, you always want to do everything. I caught quite a nasty virus last week and obviously didn't listen to my body," Kompany said.

The precise cause of Friday's collapse remains unclear. Bayern will therefore face Freiburg on Sunday without Kompany on the touchline.

Bayern lead the Bundesliga standings on goal difference ahead of Borussia Dortmund, with both clubs collecting 14 points from six matches. Freiburg sit third, just one point behind Bayern, setting up a meeting between two of the league's top three sides. — Xinhua

SHEIKH SALMAN OFFERS SUPPORT

AFC backs Infantino for re-election as FIFA chief

TOKYO: The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has endorsed Gianni Infantino for re-election as FIFA president, marking a turnaround from two months ago when it criticised him over a controversial World Cup investment plan.

AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa voiced his support at the confederation's extraordinary congress in Tokyo on Friday, embracing Infantino and pledging the region's backing for his bid for a fourth and final term.

"We affirm our full commitment to supporting you and your leadership as you seek a new mandate as the FIFA president," Sheikh Salman said.

In August, the AFC joined UEFA and CONCACAF in accusing Infantino of a "fundamental breach of trust" over his plan to open FIFA's premium competitions, including the World Cup, to private investors. The plan was subsequently scrapped, prompting several European football associations, including the English Football Association, to withdraw their support for Infantino's re-election.

"Gianni, yes, we had some issues we spoke about in the past. But let's not relate the two things together," Sheikh Salman said. "We need to move forward ... football is strongest when we work together."

He acknowledged that not all AFC member associations might follow his lead but expressed confidence

that most would support Infantino. "My feeling is, I'm sure, the feeling of most of my members," he said. Infantino, who has led FIFA since 2016, is seeking a fourth and final term in the election scheduled for March 2027 in Morocco. The deadline for candidates to register is November 18 this year, and no challenger has announced a bid so far.

Addressing AFC delegates, Infantino acknowledged his mistakes and stressed the importance of learning from them.

"When you do many things, you do -- hopefully, as we did, many good things -- you do some mistakes as well," Infantino said. "The important thing, however, is, as you said, to learn always from the experience, from the mistakes, to apologise, to move ahead, to come together, to unite, to build for our future, for your future."

Infantino has also received backing from the Confederation of African Football, while South America's governing body CONMEBOL is largely supportive.

The AFC has 47 member associations, 46 of which are FIFA members eligible to vote in the presidential election. While the endorsement does not guarantee unanimous support from its members, it significantly boosts Infantino's re-election bid.

FIFA's president is elected by its 211 member associations. — Xinhua

Barca host Real in first 'El Clasico' of season



Drama, tension and controversy await as the two Spanish giants meet at Camp Nou on Sunday



One potential change from Tuesday should be the return of Rodri in central midfield to provide additional control and protection in front of the back four.

Real Madrid will be without Vinicius Jr., who is serving the second match of a four-game domestic suspension.

That could mean Diomande returns to the starting line-up after the summer signing impressed with goals against Sevilla and Leipzig.

Elsewhere, Fede Valverde is expected to continue at right-back, with former Barcelona youngster Marc Cucurella on the left and two of Dean Huijsen, Ibrahima Konate and Antonio Rudiger in central defence.

Real Madrid have complained about refereeing decisions going against them this season, with Barcelona midfielder Fermin Lopez responding that the complaints "are becoming tiresome". Controversy is likely to surround the game, especially if Mourinho's men look to disrupt Barcelona's possession with tactical fouls.

That controversy will be another ingredient in what is always a footballing spectacle. — Xinhua

MADRID: FC Barcelona host Real Madrid in the first 'El Clasico' of the season at the Spotify Camp Nou on Sunday night, in what is the biggest game of the season to date in Spain.

The match is likely to be surrounded by controversy and could also go a long way towards deciding the title race.

Barcelona go into the game having won its first nine La Liga matches of the season.

Hansi Flick's side sits at the top of the standings with 27 points, six more than Real Madrid, who have won seven matches but suffered defeats away to Betis and Atletico Madrid.

Another defeat would leave Real Madrid nine points behind Barcelona, a significant deficit to make up even at this relatively early stage of the campaign.

The good news for Jose Mourinho's side is that they have bounced back strongly after the international break, beating Sevilla 4-1 at home last weekend before defeating RB Leipzig by the same scoreline in the Champions League on Wednesday night.

Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham, Arda Guler and Yan Diomande have been in excellent form, and their pace on the counter-attack could be a key factor on Sunday against a Barcelona side that likes to maintain possession and play with a high defensive line.

Barcelona lost 4-2 away to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on Tuesday, with the reigning European champions exploiting gaps in the Barcelona defence. Injuries to Eric Garcia, Andreas Christensen and Jules Kounde, who looks certain to miss out with an ankle injury, have also limited Flick's defensive options.

That is likely to mean Joao Cancelo continues at left-back, with 19-year-old Xavi Espot on the right and Pau Cubarsi and Gerard Martin in central defence.

BEAT STUTTGART

Mohya inspires Gladbach comeback to avoid Bundesliga record

BERLIN: Borussia Monchengladbach ended their disastrous Bundesliga start with a 3-2 comeback victory at VfB Stuttgart on Friday, as Wael Mohya inspired the visitors to their first points of the season and helped avert an unwanted league record.

Having lost their opening six matches, Gladbach faced becoming the first Bundesliga club to begin a campaign with seven consecutive defeats. Despite fielding a depleted side, Alexander Blessin's team overcame an early deficit to secure a deserved victory.

Stuttgart struck after just five minutes when Ermedin Demirovic fired from distance following Dzenan Pejcinovic's pass. Gladbach goalkeeper Moritz Nicolas reached the ball but could not prevent it from crossing the line.

The hosts initially controlled proceedings and threatened through Pejcinovic and Lorenz As-

signon before Gladbach gradually found their rhythm.

Joe Scally equalised in the 38th minute, cleverly redirecting Zento Uno's effort into the net with his heel.

The visitors nearly completed the turnaround before halftime, but Stuttgart goalkeeper Dennis Seimen denied Florian Neuhaus before Mohya struck the crossbar.

Gladbach maintained their momentum after the restart and took the lead in the 51st minute. Mohya dribbled past two defenders before finding Shutu Machino, who drove the ball into the top corner.

Triple substitution

Stuttgart coach Sebastian Hoernes responded with a triple substitution, introducing Deniz Undav, Jamie Leweling and Bilal El Khannouss, but the visitors extended their advantage in the 66th minute.

Seimen failed to gather Mohya's low effort, and although Ramon Hendriks cleared off the line, Scally recovered possession near the right post and lifted the ball back towards Mohya, who bundled it home from close range.

Demirovic reduced the deficit with a header from Leweling's cross in the 83rd minute, but Stuttgart could not find an equaliser despite late pressure.

"A lot of pressure has been lifted. The players have fully rewarded themselves today. We invested more in the game and showed greater passion," Gladbach sporting director Rouven Schroeder said. "The win is a relief for the entire club, but it can only be a starting point."

Despite the victory, Gladbach remain bottom with three points from seven matches, while Stuttgart sit 14th with six points after their fifth league defeat. — Xinhua



Marquez wins sprint as Martin crashes out



The Ducati rider opened up a 10-point championship lead after Martin crashed out at the Australian MotoGP

PHILLIP ISLAND: Marc Marquez stormed home first from pole in the Australian MotoGP sprint race on Saturday to seize control of the World Championship from Jorge Martin, who crashed out, challenging him for the lead. The reigning seven-time world champion, who dominated qualifying, had too much power in his Ducati to surge to the chequered flag ahead of his brother Alex in the 13-lap contest. The victory put him 10 points clear of fellow Spaniard Martin in the standings ahead of the final MotoGP ever around the waterfront Phillip Island circuit on Sunday.

Martin, who started from fourth under dark clouds with the rain staying away, took the lead on lap three in a ding-dong battle with his rival. But he lost control on lap eight while challenging for the lead once again, putting a massive dent in his Championship ambitions. "It was a tight battle," said Marquez. "Of course, I gave everything. I was aggressive, and he (Martin) was faster than me. "But I just tried to defend in the best way possible. Both of us are riding to the limit. Both of us deserve the victory because we are pushing a lot. "But, you know, racing is like it is."



His brother Alex, who started second, filled an all-Ducati podium with Fabio Di Giannantonio. Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi, who won the MotoGP last week in Indonesia, was fourth and remains third in the standings, 50 points behind Marquez.

Pedro Acosta (KTM) came fifth and Ai Ogura (Aprilia) sixth. Marc held the line to be first at the opening corner, with Martin up to second, and Johann Zarco third; this remained the order at the end of lap one. Martin was pressing hard and took the lead on lap three

Marquez brothers secure 1-2 in qualifying



PHILLIP ISLAND: World champion Marc Marquez beat brother Alex to clinch pole position on Saturday at the Australian MotoGP, but he needed some white-knuckle laps to do so after crashing early on. Under dark clouds and with spots of rain falling, the Spanish Ducati rider powered round the waterfront circuit at Phillip Island with a blistering lap of 1:34.203. It was enough to topple Alex, also on a Ducati, by a massive 1.494s, with Honda's Johann Zarco third to join them on the front row. Championship leader Jorge Martin, who is two points clear of Marc Marquez with five rounds of the season left, was fourth, but well off the pace. Home hero Jack Miller and last year's winner Raul Fernandez accompany him on

the second row. Marco Bezzecchi, who won last week in Indonesia and is third in the standings, 46 points behind Martin, will start in ninth. "You cannot crash in the first lap because it means that you don't have a lap time. So it was a big mistake," said Marc. "But the team was ready with the other bike, I kept focus and that last lap was a good lap." Marc, who dominated morning practice, slid off on his first flying lap at Turn 4 as he pushed too hard. Undeterred, he limped back to the pits and climbed onto his spare bike, immediately setting the new fastest time. It was surpassed by Zarco, but Marc came back out at the death to blitz a new quickest time and secure his 78th career pole. - Agencies

FORMULA ONE US GRAND PRIX

Ferrari's Leclerc tops both practice sessions in Austin



AUSTIN: Ferrari's Charles Leclerc led Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli in Friday practice at the United States Grand Prix - but Max Verstappen left the strongest impression in his Red Bull. Leclerc, who topped both sessions, was 0.042 seconds ahead of the Italian, who has a mathematical chance of tying up his first world title this weekend. Antonelli will win the championship in Austin only if he wins the race and team-mate George Russell finishes below eighth and Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton below fourth. Verstappen was third fastest, 0.189secs back, ahead of Hamilton, although the seven-time champion was 0.615secs off the pace. Russell was fifth ahead of Racing Bulls' Liam Lawson. Verstappen appeared fastest on the race-simulation runs later in the session, which often provide a more accurate read of overall competitiveness than the single laps. The Dutchman could be compared directly only with the Ferrari drivers, as all were running the soft-compound tyres on their long runs. Verstappen was marginally faster than Leclerc on average but the consistency of his pace sug-



gested he was in the best shape, at least on Friday. Hamilton appeared to be struggling for pace compared with Leclerc whether on short runs or long. Ferrari have an upgrade on their car this weekend, focused on a new floor, but Leclerc was downplaying expectations. "It felt good but it is not the gain I have seen or heard about," Leclerc said. "It is small gains but we could still see them on the car. It is a small step forward and we started the weekend on the right foot with a good balance and that is the outstanding thing with this Friday. "It has been a very clean Friday for me, but the others seem to be gaining more than us from Friday

to Saturday and seeing the little gap there is, it is not going to be so easy tomorrow." McLaren's Lando Norris was seventh fastest, although the world champion did not set a time on his qualifying simulation run on soft tyres after making a mistake at Turn 16. McLaren's Oscar Piastri was eighth quickest, ahead of Red Bull's Isack Hadjar and Haas driver Oliver Bearman. Three drivers have grid penalties for using more than the permitted number of engine parts - Racing Bulls' Arvid Lindblad will go back five places, Audi's Gabriel Bortoletto 20 and Alpine's Franco Colapinto 10. - Agencies

ALMATY OPEN

Bublik edges Khachanov to set up Medvedev semi-final clash

ALMATY: Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik battled past former champion Karen Khachanov in three sets on Friday to reach the semi-finals of the ATP Almaty Open, keeping alive his hopes of becoming the first home player to win the tournament. Third seed Bublik recovered from a set down to defeat fifth seed Khachanov 4-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5), firing 21 aces and winning two tie-breaks to set up a semi-final clash with defending champion Daniil Medvedev. No Kazakh player has won the tournament since its inception in 2020, when it was held in Astana. The event moved to Almaty in 2024, with Russian players claiming both titles since then. Bublik was playing his first match of the tournament after receiving a first-round bye and advancing through the second round without playing when Hungary's Fabian Marozsan withdrew because of illness. Khachanov, who won the title in 2024, took the opening set after securing a late break, but Bublik held his nerve in the second-set tie-break to force a decider. Neither player could establish a decisive advantage in the final set, which also went to a tiebreak, with Bublik prevailing to reach the last four.

Top seed Medvedev continued his title defence with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over France's Terence Atmane. The Russian, who is seeking to successfully defend an ATP singles title for the first time in his career, won 31 of 34 points on his first serve and did not face a break point throughout the contest. Medvedev has dominated his previous meetings with Bublik, although the Kazakh won their most recent encounter in the final of the Halle grass-court tournament in 2025. In the other half of the draw, seventh seed Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece defeated Australia's



James Duckworth 6-3, 6-4 to reach his first hard-court semi-final since February 2025. Tsitsipas controlled much of the contest against Duckworth, whose run in Almaty ended at the quarter-final stage after he had reached the semifinals of last year's tournament. The Greek will next face Georgian

qualifier Nikoloz Basilashvili, who continued his impressive run with a convincing 6-3, 6-1 victory over France's Adrian Mannarino. Basilashvili, ranked 128th in the world, needed just 69 minutes to dispatch Mannarino and secure his place in the last four. - Agencies

ROUND-UP

Lulu Hypermarket celebrates global cuisines with ‘World Food 2026’

The grand celebration was launched by Chef Masooma Al Balushi, Sheraton - Oman, in the presence of other dignitaries and Lulu officials. Masooma is recognised as one of the most high-profile Omani chefs in the hospitality industry

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket has launched season 2 of “World Food 2026”, a celebration of global cuisines and flavours.

The event, which runs from October 21 till November 3, is an extensive showcase of international flavours and culinary traditions that unite cultures around the world. The grand celebration was launched by Chef Masooma Al Balushi, Sheraton - Oman, in the presence of other dignitaries and Lulu officials. Masooma is recognised as one of the most high-profile Omani chefs in the hospitality industry.

The World Food Season 2 will feature a curated series of activities designed to keep shoppers entertained. The event invites home chefs and cooking enthusiasts to be part of the biggest ‘Super Chef’ Contest in



verse flavours, the event will also feature special offers and promotions on a wide range of food products. Customers can avail the best offers on more than 500 varieties of food products, as well as special deals on kitchenware and appliances. The event will also feature lively music, light entertainment, fun games and engaging activities during weekends at selected Lulu outlets, creating a vibrant and enjoyable atmosphere to attract shoppers and enhance their shopping experience.

Speaking at the event, Shabeer K.A, Director Lulu Oman stated, “We are happy to have brought “The World Food 2026 Season 2” to spotlight the diverse culinary landscapes under one roof. This unique celebration is more than a showcase of flavors; it is a global stage where diverse cultures connect through the universal language of food.”

“Moreover, through all our major promotions and deals, we aim to break down barriers to unlock exclusive shopping moments for our customers. We want to turn every visit into a memorable moment of discovery and celebration, making it easier than ever for customers to stock up on high-quality ingredients at affordable prices,” he added.

Along with World food season 2 celebrations, there will also be a limited-time Crazy Deals promotion, which will run from October 22 to October 26 at all Lulu branches. Additionally, there is a Sale promotion, where customers can get 20 to 50% discount on fashion categories, footwear, ladies’ bags, baby accessories and luggage. Happiness members can also receive added benefits during the entire promotional period.

the region and win amazing prizes. The cooking contest, which will be held in multiple locations, aims to unearth the hidden talents of culinarians who can successfully bridge traditional cooking with modern gastronomic techniques.

Visitors can look forward to an engaging culinary experience featuring live cooking demonstrations, exciting product tastings and interactive food showcases. These activities will provide a unique opportunity to discover new products, experience innovative food concepts and connect with the latest trends shaping the food industry, making the event a must-visit destination for food enthusiasts and industry professionals alike.

In addition to celebrating the di-

BRITISH SCHOOL MUSCAT STUDENT



Muscat student’s Rover-Drone Rescue System wins recognition in flood-hit Nepal

MUSCAT: When devastating flash floods swept through northern and central Nepal on 26 August, just five days had passed since a Muscat schoolboy presented a robotic search-and-rescue system to engineers at Nepal’s National Innovation Center (NIC) in Kathmandu.

The disaster showed exactly why such technology matters. Roads and bridges were washed away, leaving villages cut off and rescue teams searching blind through mud, debris and unstable ground. Fresh landslides in late September added to the toll. Reaching survivors when access routes are blocked or constantly changing is precisely the problem Kabir Goel, a Year 13 student at The British School Muscat, set out to solve.

Kabir’s system splits the job of rescue between two robots. A drone flies above the disaster zone, mapping the terrain, identifying obstacles and calculating the safest route. A ground rover then follows that route autonomously to reach trapped civilians and deliver supplies. As Kabir puts it, intelligence lives in the air, while execution lives on the ground.

He built the working prototype himself. It uses a drone-mounted Raspberry Pi for real-time vision and planning, visual markers to track the rover’s position and heading, and a custom algorithm that avoids sharp turns and unnecessary stops on rough ground.

In August 2026, Kabir worked at NIC as a researcher intern under the supervision of Dipendra Basnet, adapting his system for Nepal’s mountainous terrain. He developed a pipeline that turns drone photographs into a three-dimensional model of the ground and generates optimised routes. He validated it against the Hesai A120 3D benchmark, an international research dataset.

In an appreciation letter, NIC’s General Manager, Col Sanjay Jha (Retd), confirmed that the system was based on Kabir’s own engineering design. He said the work has contributed to efforts to adapt it for operational use with the Nepali Army’s Disaster Response Unit. He described Kabir’s technical maturity as comparable to that of an engineer with several years of professional experience.

Kabir was also recognised at “Celebrating Young Innovators,” a programme organised by the Ambassadors’ Club Nepal in Kathmandu on 18 August. The Club’s President, Ambassador Dr Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, praised his work, saying: “Great ideas do not belong to any particular country, age or background.”

Speaking at the event, Kabir said he had been inspired by NIC’s work and its impact across Nepal. He hopes to return to continue developing collaborative projects.

Kabir’s journey began in after-school robotics at The British School Muscat. After winning the World Robot Olympiad (WRO) Nationals, he represented Oman at the WRO International Finals in Turkey. He then founded his school’s first WRO and VEX clubs, followed by the Oman Robotic Society, a free, nationwide online platform. His disaster-response rover has been patented in Germany, and he works on computer vision with an international FIRST Robotics Competition team.

The lessons from Nepal resonate in Oman. The Sultanate knows the force of adverse weather conditions and of wadi flash floods that can isolate communities within hours. Faisal AlDhuhli, a senior search and rescue officer in Oman, appreciated Kabir’s project and stressed the importance of developing such ideas for Oman.

ENHANCE AWARENESS

Discover cyber fraud methods and share your story through short film competition

MUSCAT: The Short Film Competition on Cyber Fraud Awareness (Khalik Wa’ei), recently launched by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Bank Muscat, continues to receive strong participation. The competition comes as part of their joint campaign to enhance awareness of fraud risks, evolving fraudulent methods and ways to combat them. It aims to highlight some of the most prominent forms of electronic fraud, enhance digital and financial literacy, and encourage members of society to adopt safe practices when using electronic services.

The competition invites participants to produce a short film of no more than 90 seconds highlighting one of the identified electronic fraud methods, while explaining how to recognise and prevent it. The initiative seeks to promote a culture of vigilance and responsible digital behaviour. Omani individuals aged 18 and above can submit their entries through the dedicated competition website, www.khalikwa3i.om, which also provides full details and guidelines. The deadline for submitting entries is 20 November.

The competition covers eight key



themes reflecting some of the most prominent methods that fraudsters may use. Participants are encouraged to focus on these themes when producing their short films, while highlighting the importance of vigilance and never sharing confidential information or verification codes with any party.

The first theme focuses on the takeover of mobile phones and digital accounts, which may occur through hacking a smartphone, remotely gaining control of a device, taking over digital accounts and resetting passwords using stolen information, or gaining access to digital wallets. This type of fraud aims to take control of accounts and exploit them for criminal ac-

tivities, including identity and professional impersonation.

The second theme focuses on identity and professional impersonation, where fraudsters pose as employees of government entities, banks, telecommunications companies and other service providers. This may also include the use of video calls to create greater credibility and legitimacy. This method relies on exploiting the victim’s trust to obtain money or confidential information. The third theme addresses fraud involving official websites and platforms, including the creation of fake websites, payment portals and pages that imitate the visual identity of official entities, with the aim of stealing identity information, bank account details and payment information.

The fourth theme highlights social engineering as one of the common methods used by fraudsters. In such cases, the fraudster may convince the victim that there is an issue requiring account verification, or request that personal information be updated through phone calls, text messages or social media platforms. The fraudster may also request a One-Time Password (OTP). This method relies on

manipulating and persuading the victim to disclose sensitive information without the need for direct technical hacking.

The fifth theme focuses on phishing in its various forms, including malicious links, phishing scams, targeted phishing, fraudulent text messages and scam phone calls, all of which seek to obtain login credentials and financial information.

The sixth theme covers financial and investment fraud, including fake investment opportunities, fraudulent cryptocurrencies and requests to transfer money to fraudulent accounts.

The seventh theme focuses on fraud through digital platforms, which may take the form of fake online stores or applications, fraudulent advertisements, and fake buying and selling offers, with the aim of obtaining money or payment information.

The eighth and final theme focuses on AI-enabled fraud, including voice cloning, deepfake videos, AI-generated messages and conversations, as well as the impersonation of public figures. These methods increase the level of deception and make fraudulent attempts more challenging to detect.

GATHERING

Europcar Open brings together business and diplomatic leaders ahead of 12th edition



MUSCAT: Europcar Oman & Bahrain hosted an exclusive pre-launch gathering on Wednesday, 7 October, at The Diplomatic Club, Muscat by the Sea, welcoming sponsors, board members of the Oman Golf Association, general managers of golf clubs, representatives of the golfing community and golf enthusiasts ahead of the 12th Europcar Open, scheduled for 11 December at Al Mouj Golf.

Presented this year under the banner “Asha Enterprises Presents the Europcar Open”, the tournament continues a legacy spanning more than a decade, having evolved from a corporate golf competition into an established platform connecting Oman’s business, diplomatic and golfing communities.

The pre-launch gathering provided an opportunity to reconnect

with longstanding supporters, welcome new partners and celebrate the relationships that have shaped the Europcar Open over the years.

Adding to the evening’s experience, guests enjoyed a specially curated culinary offering by Mumtaz Mahal, whose signature flavours and warm hospitality brought a distinctive touch to the gathering.

Building on the success of its 11th edition, which attracted 124 golfers and over 260 guests at the evening

gala, the tournament continues to strengthen its regional appeal, bringing together golfers and business leaders from Oman, Bahrain, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Nitin Sapre, Group CEO of Asha Enterprises, commented: “The Europcar Open has always been about much more than golf. Over the years, it has become a platform where business, diplomacy and sport come together, creating friendships and relationships that extend far beyond the fairways. As we prepare for our 12th edition, we remain grateful to our sponsors, strategic partners and the golfing community whose continued trust and support have made this journey possible.”

The Europcar Open continues to enjoy the support of its strategic partners, including The Diplomati-

ic Club, AmCham Oman, British Business Forum Oman (BBF) and INMECC. The 2026 edition is further strengthened by the support of its corporate and hospitality partners, including Ford Oman, Mistal, ITL World, Howden Insurance Brokers, Al Omaniya Financial Services, Tivoli LA VIE Muscat Hotel & Residences, Alila Jabal Akhdar, Alila Hinu Bay, W Muscat, The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, Hilton Barr Al Jissah Resorts, JW Marriott Hotel Muscat and dusicD2 Naseem Resort, Jabal Akhdar.

With preparations underway for 11 December, the Europcar Open looks forward to another memorable edition, celebrating the spirit of golf while continuing to create meaningful connections and lasting partnerships beyond the course.



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