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The Observer is bringing out an online supplement on FIFA World Cup 2026, which will be published on [www.omanobserver.om](#) at 12 pm daily.

IN BRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO MALAWI, COMOROS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Prof Arthur Peter Mutharika of the Republic of Malawi on his country’s Independence Anniversary.
In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to the President in achieving the aspirations of his country’s people towards further achievements and developments on all spheres.
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also sent a cable of greetings to President Azali Assoumani of the Union of the Comoros on his country’s National Day.
In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to the President for success in leading his country’s people and achieving further stability and progress. His Majesty also wished the relations of cooperation and partnership between the two countries further growth and prosperity. — ONA

TENDER BOARD CLEARS RO 114M IN PROJECTS

MUSCAT: The Tender Board, chaired by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy and Chairman of the Board, has approved a series of tenders and supplementary works for development projects across multiple sectors, with a total value exceeding RO 114 million, during its second meeting of 2026.
Key approvals include the construction of the Mahout Fishing Port worth RO 36.99 million, along with major infrastructure and service contracts for the health, transport, education, and logistics sectors. Among the largest allocations was RO 24.5 million for integrated catering, cleaning, laundry, and pest control services for hospitals and health institutions under the Ministry of Health. — ONA

FUNERAL PRAYERS SAID FOR SUPREME LEADER KHAMENEI



A man and a woman mourn Iran’s slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the Grand Mosalla on the second day of funeral ceremonies in Tehran. — AFP

GRAND

Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani led the funeral prayers for Ali Khamenei in Tehran on Sunday, the second day of official mourning for Iran’s late supreme leader, four months after his death.
The 97-year-old senior cleric was shown on state television leading the official mourning for Khamenei, who was killed in an Israeli air strike on his official Tehran residence on February 28. A five-week US and Israeli bombing campaign ensued until a ceasefire was agreed at the beginning of April.
From Saturday onwards, the company that operates the Iranian capital’s metro recorded more than 7 million journeys linked to the funeral, the Tasnim news agency reported.
Official figures on the number of people attending the funeral events were not available. Former presidential candidate Saeed Jalili called for Khamenei’s death to be avenged. “Revenge for the revolutionary leader is a demand of the people and a duty of those in charge,” he posted on X.
Khamenei’s body is to remain in Tehran until Monday, after which funeral ceremonies are due to be held in the holy city of Qom. Further funeral events are planned in neighbouring Iraq before the late supreme leader is buried in his home city of Mashhad on Thursday. — dpa

72 MILLION TREES PLANTED TO BOOST NET-ZERO DRIVE



IBRA: The Environment Authority has highlighted major environmental achievements between 2020 and 2025, including the planting of more than 72 million trees and the expansion of Oman’s nature reserve network to 32 protected areas, supporting the country’s path towards Net-Zero emissions. The review was presented at a joint meeting in the Wilayat of Ibra, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.
The Authority reaffirmed Oman’s commitment to national and international environmental obligations under Oman Environment Strategy and Oman Vision 2040. It noted that Oman has joined 22 international conventions and protocols, including key agreements on biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and hazardous waste management.
It also detailed the expansion of protected areas covering 17,827 sq km, with terrestrial coverage reaching 4.85 per cent and marine protected areas 0.51 per cent — exceeding set national and global benchmarks.
Oman’s environmental performance has also gained global recognition, ranking first in the Arab world and second globally in the Numbeo Pollution Index 2025, and 55th in the Environmental Performance Index, placing it second in the Middle East. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The 30.4-kilometre project is being executed at a cost of RO 47 million.

IZKI-NIZWA DUAL CARRIAGEWAY 31 PC COMPLETE

NIZWA: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology continues its implementation of the Izki-Nizwa dual carriageway project in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, with the completion rate currently standing at approximately 31 per cent.

The project is part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts to develop the road network and enhance connectivity efficiency among the wilayats and governorates. The project is being executed at a total cost of RO 47 million, spanning 30.4 kilometres.

It extends from the existing roundabout near South Qarut in the Wilayat of Izki, passing through Birkat Al Mouz and Hayy Al Turath, to the entrance of the Wilayat of Nizwa at the Farq area. The primary objective is to improve traffic flow and elevate safety standards on this vital road. — **ONA**

RAS AL HADD RESERVE STEPS UP PROTECTION OF SEA TURTLES



RAS AL HADD: Specialists at the Environment Centre within the Turtle Reserve in Ras Al Hadd have successfully managed 56 stranded turtles and recorded over 12,000 turtle tracks along the reserve’s beaches during the first half of this year.

These figures underscore the significant ecological importance of the Turtle Reserve as one of the premier nesting sites for sea turtles in Oman.

The daily and periodic patrol operations carried out by the Environment Centre’s specialists constitute one of the most critical field programmes aimed at monitoring sea turtles, responding swiftly to emergency situations, and eliminating potential threats.

Nizar bin Salim al Araiimi, Director of the Environment Department in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, stated that these indicators affirm the success of the Environment Authority’s initiatives in implementing the ‘Environment Guardians’ programme. This programme is designed to intensify field efforts for the protection of sea turtles. — **ONA**

OMANI MILITARY BAND AT ALBERTVILLE FESTIVAL



PARIS: The joint Omani military band recently held high-level performances at the Olympic Hall, Paris, as part of its participation in the 46th Albertville International Military Music Festival, which marks the 400th anniversary of the foundation of the French National Navy.

The Omani band’s outstanding performances constituted a model of advanced discipline and professionalism that inspired great enthusiasm in the audience. — **ONA**

Park vandalism drives up costs: Muscat Municipality

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JULY 5

ACTS OF vandalism and misuse of public parks and recreational facilities are driving up maintenance costs, reducing the lifespan of public infrastructure, and depriving communities of fully enjoying these shared spaces, Muscat Municipality has warned.

The municipality stressed that protecting public property is a collective responsibility that requires stronger community awareness alongside the enforcement of laws and regulations. It noted that vandalism not only mars the appearance of public spaces but also diverts resources that could otherwise be invested in new development projects.

Eng Zakariya bin Said al Nabhani, Agricultural Engineer at the Directorate-General of Projects and Landscaping at Muscat Municipality, said the most common forms of vandalism include damaging playground equipment, writing graffiti on walls and benches, destroying lighting fixtures, cutting or damaging trees and landscaped areas, littering outside designated bins, and misusing public facilities in ways that shorten their operational life.

He said such practices increase spending on repairs, maintenance and replacement works, placing additional pressure on the municipality’s financial and human resources.

“These actions undermine the sustainability of public facilities and the quality of services they provide, while preventing visitors from fully



ENG ZAKARIYA BIN SAID AL NABHANI



ASMAHAN BINT MOHAMMED AL SHUKAILI

The municipality promotes a culture of protecting public property through awareness campaigns, routine maintenance, intensified inspection drives, and encourages residents to report acts of vandalism



benefiting from them until repairs are completed,” he said.

Al Nabhani noted that the municipality continues to promote a culture of protecting public property through awareness campaigns, routine maintenance, intensified inspection drives, information signage, surveillance systems in selected locations, and by encouraging residents to report acts of vandalism.

“These facilities belong to everyone, and preserving them is a shared responsibility that ensures they remain available for future generations,” he added.

Asmahan bint Mohammed al Shukaili, Awareness Specialist at Muscat Municipality, said parks and recreational spaces are essential to improving quality of life, promoting physical and mental well-being, preserving environmental balance, and enhancing the beauty of cities and neighbourhoods.

She said the municipality has placed significant emphasis on developing and maintaining these facilities as part of its vision for a sustainable urban environment. However, recurring vandalism

highlights the need to strengthen public awareness and community engagement to reduce damage and maintenance costs.

Among its initiatives, the municipality has partnered with the Ministry of Education to conduct awareness sessions in schools across Muscat Governorate for Cycle One and Cycle Two students. The programmes use interactive discussions and activities to explain the causes and consequences of vandalism and encourage respect for public property.

Al Shukaili also highlighted the municipality’s ‘Little Observer’ programme, which takes primary school students on field visits to parks and recreational areas, allowing them to identify acts of vandalism, understand their impact, and suggest practical solutions.

She added that awareness campaigns also continue through social media, urging families to encourage children to use public facilities responsibly and help preserve playgrounds, benches, outdoor fitness equipment, trees, flowers and green spaces for the benefit of the entire community.

Oman’s mountains turn into summer escape as heat tops 40°C

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JULY 5

When temperatures across Oman’s plains and coastal regions climb past 40°C each summer, a quiet migration begins. Families pack their cars and head upward — towards Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Jabal Shams, and Dhofar Highlands. The destination is not just scenery. It is relief.

The science behind this relief is straightforward. Al Muathir al Kindi, an Omani geological explorer and PhD candidate, explains that temperatures decrease with altitude. This is why Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and

Jabal Shams enjoy milder summers compared to the surrounding plains, offering natural respite from extreme heat. A similar pattern applies to elevated areas of Dhofar, where altitude softens the intensity of the desert climate.

But cooling is only part of what these mountains do. They also generate rainfall. When moisture-laden winds collide with the steep slopes of the Al Hajar mountains, air is forced upward, where it cools, condenses, and forms clouds and precipitation. These rains feed wadis that carve through valleys and help recharge underground aquifers. Al



Muathir describes these formations as natural reservoirs — an intricate, hidden water system shaped over millions of years.

This pattern is actively unfolding now. The Meteorology Department at the Civil Aviation Authority has reported early formation of cumulus clouds over the Al Hajar mountains, with a possibility of scattered rainfall, sometimes thundery and accompanied by active downdrafts.

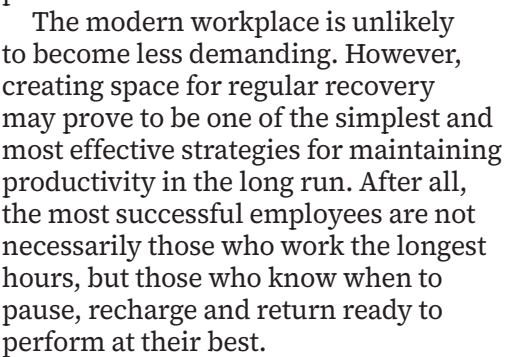
For those who travel to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the experience goes far beyond cooler air.

Local resident Hamda al Sa’adi describes terraced farms cascading

down steep slopes, rose gardens and pomegranate orchards lining winding paths, and aflaj irrigation channels. Life here, she says, is simple and closely tied to the land.

Visitor Said al Sayyadi, who walked the 4.5-kilometre trail between Al Jabal Al Akhdhar villages, returned with more than just a memorable hike. For him, the experience revealed how Omanis do not merely inhabit their environment, but shape it in harmony with its rhythms. The cool air, sweeping views, and balance between heritage and modest development highlight how deeply geography influences culture.

SPOTLIGHT



3. *Successful employees are not those who work the longest hours, but those who know when to pause, recharge and return ready to perform at their best.*

Many employees postpone their annual leave, believing that doing so demonstrates commitment to their organisations. In reality, prolonged periods of uninterrupted work often lead to physical fatigue, mental exhaustion and declining enthusiasm. These early warning signs, if ignored, may eventually develop into occupational burnout, a condition that affects not only individual performance but also workplace morale and organisational efficiency.

**HOOD AL
BALUSHI**

SHORT TAKES



FinTech key to SME sustainability, finds award winning study

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

A recent study conducted in Oman, which won the 12th National Research Award organised by the Research and Innovation Authority in the Culture, Social and Basic Sciences field under the PhD category, has highlighted the growing importance of financial technology (FinTech) in strengthening the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs.



DR MOHD
ABASS BHAT

The research, titled 'Investigating the Critical Drivers of Fintech Adoption to Promote Business Sustainability of SMEs,' was led by Dr Mohd Abass Bhat, Senior Lecturer and Research

Coordinator for the Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (RIE) Committee in the Department of Economics and Business Administration, University of Technology and Applied Sciences Muscat, examines the factors influencing FinTech adoption and its impact on business sustainability among SMEs in Oman, based on data collected from 402 SME owners and managers.

According to Dr Bhat, the findings indicate that perceived benefits such as economic advantages, convenience, and transaction efficiency play a significant role in encouraging SMEs to adopt FinTech solutions.

At the same time, perceived risks, including financial, legal, security, and operational concerns, continue to act as major barriers to adoption. Despite these challenges, the study confirms that FinTech adoption has a positive and direct impact on business sustainability, enabling SMEs to improve financial management, expand market access, and enhance competitiveness.

However, the research also reveals that perceived risks can negatively affect sustainability outcomes, due to concerns related to cybersecurity, skills gaps, social inclusion, and environmental considerations.

These findings underline the need for a balanced approach that addresses both the advantages and challenges associated with FinTech adoption.

The research has been published in the peer-reviewed journal Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication. The project was conducted by a research team comprising Dr Mohd Abass Bhat, Dr Shagufta Tariq Khan, Dr Abeer F Alkhwaldi, and Dr Amir A Abdulmuhsin.

RIA JOINS 75th LINDAU NOBEL FORUM IN GERMANY

BERLIN: The Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) is representing the Sultanate of Oman at the 75th Lindau Nobel Laureates Meeting, a prestigious multidisciplinary scientific forum being held in Lindau, Germany. The forum brings together Nobel Prize winners, leading scientists and outstanding young researchers from around the world to exchange ideas, foster collaboration and discuss some of the most pressing scientific challenges of our time. Among the scientific highlights was a presentation by Prof John Michael Kosterlitz, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics, who shared



Dr Sarah bint Hamad al Araimi, Head, Biotech Dept, UTAS.

insights into his pioneering research on the properties of materials at extremely low temperatures. His work has paved the way for advances in the development of next-

generation materials, electronics and quantum computing technologies. Oman's participation reflects the Research and Innovation Authority's commitment to strengthening the international presence of Omani researchers by providing opportunities to engage with world-renowned scientists, exchange expertise and stay abreast of the latest developments in science and innovation. The initiative also supports the continued advancement of Oman's research and innovation ecosystem. As part of the programme, the forum hosted a dialogue session on global research priorities, exploring

how scientific research can be better aligned with humanity's evolving needs and future challenges. Representing Oman in the discussion was Dr Sarah bint Hamad al Araimi, Head of the Biotechnology Department at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, who participated alongside international researchers and experts. The annual Lindau Nobel Laureates Meeting is regarded as one of the world's foremost scientific gatherings, promoting dialogue across disciplines while inspiring the next generation of researchers through direct interaction with Nobel laureates. — **ONA**

Initiative teaches children smart shopping skills

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 5

CHILDREN in Al Batinah North are learning that being a smart shopper begins at an early age, thanks to an interactive summer initiative by the General-Directorate of Consumer Protection that is equipping young minds with practical consumer awareness and financial literacy skills.

Designed to make learning both engaging and memorable, the programme introduced children to the fundamentals of responsible consumption through hands-on activities that mirrored real-life shopping experiences. Rather than relying on classroom instruction alone, the initiative encouraged participants to make informed purchasing decisions while developing critical thinking skills.

A key attraction was 'The Little World of Creativity,' a simulated grocery store where children assumed the role of shoppers. The interactive setting enabled them to identify genuine products, distinguish counterfeit goods, check expiry dates, compare product quality and prices, and better understand their rights and responsibilities as consumers.

The programme also featured an awareness exhibition highlighting essential consumer protection



The programme featured an awareness exhibition highlighting essential consumer protection concepts.

The initiative demonstrates that lessons gained through participation often leave a deeper and more lasting impression than conventional classroom teaching

concepts, unsafe and prohibited products, and safe purchasing practices. An accompanying art corner allowed children to express what they had learned through drawings and creative activities, reinforcing key messages in an enjoyable and interactive environment.

Naeema al Jahwari from the General-Directorate of Consumer Protection in Al Batinah North said the initiative reflects the Directorate's commitment to building consumer awareness from an early age through practical, experience-based learning.

She explained that children grasp concepts more effectively when they actively participate in situations that resemble everyday life. By encouraging them to compare products, make purchasing

decisions, and recognise potential risks on their own, the programme nurtures sound judgement and responsible consumer behaviour that can benefit them well into adulthood.

Al Jahwari noted that consumer education has become an essential life skill in today's rapidly evolving marketplace. Equipping young people with the knowledge to make informed choices not only safeguards their rights as consumers but also helps cultivate a generation that values quality, safety and responsible spending.

She added that initiatives of this nature support broader national efforts to enhance public awareness and prepare future consumers to navigate increasingly diverse markets with confidence. Developing these habits early, she said, lays the foundation for wiser purchasing decisions while strengthening community understanding of consumer rights and responsibilities.

The initiative highlights the growing importance of experiential learning, demonstrating that lessons gained through participation often leave a deeper and more lasting impression than conventional classroom teaching.

By transforming shopping into an educational adventure, the programme has given children practical skills that they can apply every time they accompany their families on a shopping trip.

الأولوية
AL-AWALIA

Invitation to Tender

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/TD/2026/24	Completion of remaining works for the two gabbro quarries and construction of an exporting jetty at Khatmat Milaha, sultanate of Oman ("Works")	3,000 QAR 308.66 OMR	10,000,000 QAR 1,028,880.68 OMR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	20 July 2026 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected online by sending email to tender.docs@gpmc.qa along with requested documents in point No.2.
- Tender Documents will be shared only after delivery of signed Expression of Interest and NDA and Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID. Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee, Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submitted after this date and time will not be accepted.
- Tenderers shall submit the proposals to our head office located at Lusail, Building No. 108, St. No. 303, Btj Marina Tower, 17th Floor before the closing date. (To get the map of the new building, please scan the QR code below).
- Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-651111-406) at Commercial Bank of Qatar IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006). Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after the closing date.
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the queries in the Form of Tender Bulletin. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such a date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week of the closing date.
- Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- Qatar Primary Material Company's tendering terms and conditions apply.
- For any inquiries about the tender except collecting the documents, please contact tender@gpmc.qa
- Location of the new building

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: 44479559 or email to tender@gpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.gpmc.qa

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TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والسمكية وموارد المياه
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following tender: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
433/2026/MAFWR/HQ-32	Maintenance and Rehabilitation of Al-Malki Falaj Channels in Wilayat Izki, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	Wednesday 1/7/2026	Sunday 12/7/2026	Tuesday 21/7/2026	SMEs Specialized companies registered with Fourth grades	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402244 or etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



France’s President Emmanuel Macron poses at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris. — AFP

SYRIA EXPECTS VISIT BY FRENCH PRESIDENT MACRON

DAMASCUS: Syria on Sunday said that it was expecting a visit by French President Emmanuel Macron, the first by a Western European head of state since the 2024 toppling of longtime ruler Bashar al Assad. State news agency SANA, citing the Syrian presidency’s media office, said, “Macron is expected to visit Syria to discuss ways of strengthening bilateral relations and issues of common interest”, without specifying a date for the trip.

It said he would be accompanied by a delegation “including investors and representatives of French companies” as part of efforts to strengthen economic cooperation. Discussions would also address “regional and international” developments, it added. The last French president to visit was Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009, before Assad’s government brutally crushed pro-democracy protests in 2011, sparking a prolonged conflict that killed more than half a million people and devastated Syria’s infrastructure and industry.

Macron is the first head of an EU state and prominent Western leader to head to the Syrian capital, after hosting Sharaa in Paris last year. The announcement came after a bombing on Thursday at a Damascus cafe killed 10 people. — AFP

NORTH KOREA’S KIM OVERSEES NAVAL WEAPONS TESTS



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observes an assessment of the newly built naval destroyer Kang Kon’s combat systems. — Reuters

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw weapons tests this week of the 5,000-tonne destroyer Kang Kon, including cruise missile launches and “electronic warfare means”, state media reported. The naval vessel was notably the one that tipped over last year during its launch ceremony, but was later repaired.

The tests took place on Friday, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, less than two weeks after another 5,000-tonne destroyer, the Choe Hyon, entered military service. During that commissioning ceremony, Kim vowed to equip his navy with nuclear weapons and develop new 10,000-tonne warships.

After the weapons test, Kim “gave an instruction to complete the trial process of the destroyer in a responsible manner and commission it for the Navy within two months,” KCNA said. While reiterating the need to strengthen the country’s “war deterrent”, Kim also pledged to demonstrate North Korea’s determination to possess “absolute power”, KCNA said. Analysts said Kim’s instruction to commission the vessel within two months could be linked to a major political anniversary. — AFP

FIERCE FIGHTING

Medics report 16 troops killed in Yemen



16 troops were killed in an attack on government-aligned forces south of the port city of Hodeidah, in some of the most violent fighting between the sides in years. The two medical sources said hospitals in the area on the Red Sea coast received 16 dead from pro-government forces and 22 wounded. Earlier, an officer with the government-aligned forces in Jabal Dubas gave a provisional toll of 14 troops and 23 injured in “fierce fighting”. — AFP

JAPAN SPACE PROBE SKIMS ASTEROID IN PLANETARY TEST

TOKYO: A Japanese space probe performed a flyby of a near-Earth asteroid on Sunday, in a test mission for technology that could help protect the planet from space rocks. The fridge-sized Hayabusa2 was due to fly within 800 metres of asteroid Torifune, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) scientists said earlier, a trial run to see whether such a probe could deflect a potentially dangerous space rock away from Earth. The mission comes after Nasa

deliberately smashed a spacecraft into the 160-metre-wide Dimorphos asteroid in 2022, successfully altering its orbit around a larger space rock.

Moving at a speed of more than 18,000 kilometres per hour, Hayabusa2 was not intended to collide with Torifune. Instead, scientists wanted to assess whether they could precisely control the trajectory of the probe, should it ever need to perform a deflection. “At 6:35 pm... Hayabusa2 conducted a

flyby of Torifune and the spacecraft is working normally,” a JAXA spokeswoman said.

Online footage supplied by JAXA showed scientists applauding in a control room. “I was nervous, I felt on edge the whole time... But I’m really glad we were able to see it through to the end,” one of the scientists said. If it is confirmed that the space probe indeed came within 800 metres of Torifune, the mission would be one of the closest flybys of a near-Earth asteroid ever. — AFP

Venezuela quake death toll rises to nearly 3,000

VENEZUELA’S DEVASTATING twin earthquakes killed nearly 3,000, updated official figures showed, as international rescue teams began winding down search operations for survivors in the rubble of the disaster. Fatalities jumped by more than 300 from Friday to 2,954, following the June 24 disaster that has left thousands homeless in the streets and sheltering in camps. Tens of thousands more are still reported missing. The government has not given any estimates, but the United Nations has estimated as many as 50,000 are unaccounted for following the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude shocks.

One of Latin America’s worst earthquake disasters hit hardest in the coastal La Guaira area north of the capital Caracas, where scores of residential complexes were flattened. Ten days after the double shocks, which came just 38 seconds apart, rescue teams are starting to wrap up searches for survivors while families still try to recover bodies of loved ones from the wreckage.

The critical window for rescues in disasters like earthquakes usually ends after 72 hours, though a few people have been found alive this week. In an apparent sign that rescue missions were closing up, interim President Delcy Rodriquez held a ceremony to hand out medals to international teams, including their



Rescue workers walk past a collapsed building cordoned off with tape, in La Guaira state. — AFP

Tens of thousands more are still reported missing. The government has not given any estimates, but the United Nations has estimated as many as 50,000 are unaccounted for following the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude shocks

rescue dogs.

Venezuela is experiencing “a profound grief gripping our people, where families still hold out hope of finding loved ones alive, people who have lost everything,” Rodriquez said. International disaster teams, including some US squads and some South American teams were starting to finish up rescue operations, their members said on Saturday.

The Los Angeles County fire department rescue team is ending operations after its latest searches showed no signs of life, and teams from Florida and Virginia were packing up to leave this weekend, they said. Many Venezuelans have expressed anger at what they see as their government’s slow response to the disaster, saying families spent the initial hours digging out loved

ones themselves before international teams arrived.

Rodriguez has defended her government’s response, saying thousands of troops and officials had been dispatched. In La Guaira, workers with heavy machinery on Saturday were starting to knock down collapsed structures, while in others, families were still trying to remove bodies of loved ones for funerals.

“We’re still working, still searching for bodies. We’re still going. It hasn’t been easy,” said Venezuelan volunteer Francisco Sasquia, helping dig out a collapsed residence. “We found two bodies that have already been released to their families.”

The United Nations has estimated that the twin earthquakes caused \$6.7 billion in physical damage, equivalent to six percent of GDP for Venezuela, an oil exporting country. Even before last week’s disaster struck, Venezuela had struggled with decades of economic crisis and political upheaval that undermined its infrastructure and health services.

Maiquetia International Airport in La Guaira was also damaged in the quakes. It has reopened partially to allow humanitarian flights to land, but commercial flights are still suspended. “We are in touch with some international partners, countries that will help in restoring the Maiquetia international airport,” Rodriguez said. — AFP



ISRAEL VOWS TO PUSH AHEAD IN LEBANON

BEIRUT: Israel’s military chief visited forces deployed around Beaufort Castle in southern Lebanon on Sunday, vowing to push ahead with the campaign against Hezbollah. “The IDF will continue to operate decisively to remove threats from Lebanese territory and is prepared to transition rapidly to offensive operations should the ceasefire be violated,” Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir told soldiers during the visit, according to a statement issued by the military. Israeli forces seized the crusader-era castle and the area around it recently, giving the military a strategic toehold it previously occupied for nearly two decades.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Saturday urged the United States to stand by his country after a recent US-backed framework deal with Israel aiming to permanently end hostilities after the latest Israel-Hezbollah war. The deal reached in Washington calls for the disarmament of Hezbollah, a gradual Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the deployment of the Lebanese army there, starting with two “pilot” areas. — AFP

CALLS FOR NATURE

Albanians rally against resort project



Tens of thousands rallied in the Albanian capital Tirana in the largest protest since a movement against a resort linked to US President Donald Trump’s family began. The 35th consecutive daily protest was the biggest since rallies started in late May against the planned construction of a luxury hotel in a nature reserve. The movement was dubbed the Flamingo Revolution as the pink birds migrate to a nature reserve where the project is planned. — AFP

NEIGHBOURHOOD GUNFIRE

New York shooting injures 8, including kids



At least eight people, including four children, were shot and injured late on the US Independence Day holiday in New York City’s Coney Island neighbourhood. Officers from the NYPD responded to reports of a shooting at around 10:37 pm in Brooklyn. The injured included two men, two women, and four children - aged 14, 12, 7, and 6 - according to the news outlet. It quoted the NYPD as saying all the victims had been transported to hospitals. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Delegates hold up 'No' voting cards on the second day of the party congress of far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) at the Messe Erfurt fairground in Erfurt. — AFP

Germany raises alarm over possible far-right state govt

BERLIN: German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said on Sunday that the federal government is considering withholding information from ministers in state administrations if they are formed by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Polls indicate that the AfD could win an absolute majority in a state election in September in Saxony-Anhalt, meaning that it would form a state government for the first time. Under Germany's federal system state governments have broad powers in many areas, including the activities of the police and intelligence services.

When asked by the Bild daily whether an AfD state government would have consequences for army bases in those states, Pistorius said: "We are looking very closely at the question of whom we can grant access to classified information. "We are obliged to do so because it is about the security of our country."

Pistorius, who belongs to the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD), said he would feel uneasy passing classified information on to an AfD state minister. "You only have to listen to the public statements of many, many AfD representatives. Their proximity to Putin is impossible to overlook," he said, referring to Russia's President Vladimir Putin. Another state in the AfD's eastern heartland, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, will also hold an election in September. — AFP

SUPER TYPHOON NEARS PACIFIC ISLANDS



People in Guam and the Northern Marianas moved to emergency evacuation centers and made last-minute preparations on Sunday, hours before a "super typhoon" was projected to bulldoze through the US Pacific territories. Super Typhoon Bavi was forecast to roar westwards over the area at around 10:00 Monday with winds of 260 kilometres per hour. The National Weather Service (NWS) called the typhoon "very dangerous". — AFP

BRITAIN
HARD-RIGHT
LEADER
FARAGE
FACES NEW
ALLEGATIONS

LONDON: Hard-right British politician Nigel Farage on Sunday faced fresh allegations over non-disclosure of gifts after a newspaper reported a convicted fraudster paid for his security and staff before he became an MP. An MP said he had asked parliament's standards commissioner to investigate the new claims against the leader of the anti-immigration Reform party, which is currently leading in opinion polls. The Sunday Times reported that George Cottrell, a 32-year-old crypto

entrepreneur from an aristocratic family, rents a mansion near Buckingham Palace where Farage has stayed. It reported that Cottrell also paid for Farage's security and paid staff who worked on his social media shortly before he announced a return to frontline politics in 2024. Cottrell pleaded guilty to wire fraud in the United States in 2017 and was jailed for eight months, according to British media. New MPs must register gifts including payments in kind they

received in the 12 months before election, unless they could not be "reasonably" seen as related to political activity. Farage declared only that Cottrell paid for him to attend a conference. Reform politician Robert Jenrick told the BBC that Cottrell is an "old friend" of Farage who paid for his staff and security in 2024 before he became an MP. He said Farage stayed "very infrequently" at Cottrell's rental property. "Absolutely no rules have been broken," Jenrick said. — AFP

Infernos devastate forests as Europe's heat rises again

HUNDREDS OF firefighters battled forest infernos in France, Spain and Portugal on Sunday as temperatures rose again in heatwave-scarred Europe. The latest wildfires have already devastated more than 17,000 hectares of land across the three countries where temperatures in some places were predicted to touch 40°C on Sunday. Authorities registered thousands of excess deaths during one of Europe's worst heatwaves in June, and with more extreme weather on the way, France's Interior Minister Laurent Nunez has already expressed concern that the annual summer wildfire season had started a month early.

A fire near Spain's northeastern Costa Brava coast burned more than 2,200 hectares in two days and firefighters said their operation on Sunday would be "complicated" by rising temperatures and the many "smoking hotspots" within the fire's perimeter. Firefighters "worked tirelessly throughout the night to consolidate the perimeter of the La Bisbal d'Empordà forest fire, which is now stabilised," said a Catalunya fire service statement. Catalunya regional government president Salvador Illa said that a man had been detained in connection with the fire which has badly hit the Gavarres protected natural area between Barcelona and the French border. Nearly 600 French firefighters have been mobilised to contain a wildfire that has burned more than 1,000 hectares on a mountainside at Trevillach, about 36 kilometres east of Perpignan. Roads in the region have



A Canadair firefighting plane drops water at a burning recycling factory in Oreokastro, on the outskirts of Thessaloniki, Greece. — Reuters

been closed and the authorities have ordered mayors to open emergency shelters for people who could be forced to flee their homes. Another 300 French firefighters battled another forest fire in a mountainous district of the southeastern Drome department. In Portugal, emergency services said they had controlled "80 per cent" of a wildfire that has devastated some 13,000 hectares of forest and scrub land in the north of the country. A senior civil protection officer Jose Costa said that the fire had spread 35km since it started on Thursday and that 1,200 firefighters had been involved in the battle. Spain and Italy sent reinforcements and water carrying planes after Portugal appealed for help to fight the inferno that has left nine people injured by burns. Several regions across Portugal, Spain and southern France stepped up heat alerts on Sunday as temperatures

rose again. On Monday the latest heatwave was expected to move north. Forecasters say it could last until next weekend. Western Europe has already seen heatwaves this year in May and June that would have been "virtually impossible" without climate change, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said. Following a two-week surge in temperatures in June, France said there had been more than 2,000 extra deaths than usual in just one week, while Spain and Belgium each reported more than 1,000. Authorities in several countries fear more summer trouble ahead. "Climate change is here, we are living the consequences and it is only the start of July," said French fire service Colonel Eric Belgioino as he made an appeal for people near the Pyrenees inferno to take precautions to avoid starting fires. "The season is going to be long for the soldiers fighting fires. You have to help us," he said. Europe is still taking stock of

a powerful heatwave in late June but experts are already confident it ranks among the worst ever recorded -- even rivalling a freak 2003 episode. Temperature records were rewritten across Europe as hundreds of millions of people withered under extreme heat that closed schools, shut down transport and cost untold lives. A heat dome trapped hot air from North Africa over the Iberian Peninsula in late June before spreading as far as the United Kingdom, eventually weakening over central and eastern parts of Europe in early July. World Weather Attribution, a network of climate scientists, said the heatwave was the "most severe ever recorded" based on a three-day forecast of average peak temperatures over the region studied. Such a heatwave would have been "virtually impossible" without the influence of climate change, they said. A similar event in June 2003 would have been about 2°C cooler. — AFP

Trump hails US, blasts 'communists' in 250th anniversary speech

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump hailed America on its 250th birthday as the "crowning achievement" of human history, even as he used the event to renew his attack on domestic opponents he branded communists. In a speech delayed by several hours when storms forced the temporary evacuation of crowds in Washington, Trump claimed that under his presidency the United States was "prouder than ever before." While Trump had promised a huge political rally to stamp his brand on the national celebrations, the 80-year-old Republican largely stuck to a more traditionally patriotic script. "For two and a half centuries, our American republic has stood as the crowning achievement of

human history," Trump told tens of thousands of people on the National Mall. On stage, he hailed also veterans from World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. But he then hailed the latter two as examples of the battle against "communists" — reprising his message from his speech on Friday night at the iconic Mount Rushmore monument. "Our warriors did not fight communism on battlefields across the word, only to have that menace rear its ugly head right back here in America. We're not going to let it happen," he said. Trump has repeatedly hammered home the theme recently ahead of November's US midterm elections, after the anti-establishment left of the Democratic Party won a string of US primary victories.



US President Donald Trump speaks during the Independence Day celebration on the National Mall in Washington, DC. — AFP

"It's like a cancer, you've got to cut it out," he added. The US leader also used the speech to boast of the recent military campaigns against Iran and Venezuela, saying Washington had "wiped out" Tehran's military. But the speech was short by Trump's standards, at around 45 minutes long. A huge fireworks display began after the speech. Trump has said it will set a record as the world's largest. Americans braved a scorching heatwave in cities across the east of the country to celebrate the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776. Temperatures soared to a record 39.4°C in the capital — an all-time high for July 4 — with 160 million Americans under extreme weather warnings, according to the

National Weather Service. Inclement weather meanwhile forced fireworks in New York to be pushed earlier, and resulted in evacuations at a concert in Philadelphia and a celebration on the Charles River in Boston. The elements also threatened to wreak havoc with Trump's speech as tens of thousands were ordered to clear the National Mall several hours before his address due to approaching thunderstorms. While many streamed toward exits, chaos broke out as other attendees refused to leave or tried to surge back in, where reporters witnessed shouts of "charge!" and "Trump! Trump!" Trump insisted he was pushing ahead with the speech, saying that if D-Day veterans in WWII could brave bad weather then so could he. — AFP

OPINION

Teen social media restrictions remain inconclusive



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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MANY COUNTRIES have started to implement a limit on the use of social media for children under 16. It began with Australia in 2025, followed by other countries that are now in the process of developing rules to restrict access. Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, X and Snapchat are having to follow stricter protocols to ensure that their users are of a legal age as established by the laws of the land. The impetus behind this move is clear. Social media is becoming more toxic by the day, and the repercussions are felt by tweens more than any other demographic. Data suggests that more than 4.5 hours on a weekday and 8 hours on a weekend, per day, are being spent by school-going teenagers browsing online. Studies by the NHS in the UK, Pew Research in the US, and other academic researchers indicate that more than 90 per cent of children aged 9 to 13 use at least one social media platform. The attitudes to these platforms are also worrying. Data from the WHO shows that 32 per cent of children under 16 expressed negative feelings after being on social media, with girls expressing greater levels of

unhappiness. 44 per cent of girls surveyed had online friends whom they had never met, and 22 per cent of the same demographic played video games with strangers for more than 4 hours. The argument for restrictions is thus understandable. What is more contentious is the effectiveness of such bans. This is a whole new territory. Books can be banned, as can films and media which exist in physical spaces like theatres where accountability is clearly outlined. But digital devices, which are personalised spaces, are almost impossible to control. In fact, there have not been enough studies on the implications of a blanket ban on device usage by under-13s. There is a need to distinguish between being on a device and being on social media. Increasingly, young learners are using digital devices to source information, engage in discussions and become involved in community activities which benefit society. Researchers argue that youngsters find a sense of community and individual identity in online spaces. More importantly, as an Australian-based study asks, what are children going to do instead of being in front of a screen? Typical answers include playing outdoors,

Studies by the NHS in the UK, Pew Research in the US, and other academic researchers indicate that more than 90 per cent of children aged 9 to 13 use at least one social media platform.

reading books and listening to music. The first is almost impossible in urban spaces today and the latter two can also be done online. In fact, teenagers will also risk losing access to niche community-building spaces which are central to their identity growing up. There is then the issue of logistics. Bans depend on self-reporting and official identity cards as well as AI-enabled features like facial recognition which in turn raise other issues of privacy and data protection. In fact, we are going to use more technology to prevent the use of digital platforms by some. Nor is the turnaround difficult to imagine. VPNs are well known to youngsters who can easily use them to change identities and enter the desired platforms. There are sufficient loopholes in these systems for tech-savvy teenagers to work their way around them. While bans may be necessary to ensure that vulnerable young teenagers are protected, a more sustainable strategy would be to engage in training parents, forcing tech companies to disable algorithm-based recommendations and making it difficult to access sensitive sites. More timely and relevant research is needed to ensure that practical alternatives are offered to address the issue before imposing blanket restrictions.

EUROPE’S BAKED RICE BOWL SEEKS ESCAPE FROM DROUGHT

TAIMAZ SZIRNIKS

Summer came too early to Europe’s most important rice-growing region and weeds are taking over Sharon Angoli’s parched paddies in Italy’s Pavia province. “That one is done for, no matter what happens,” the 22-year-old said. Even abundant rains for the rest of the summer would probably not save the crop, she said. Angoli and her father, Carlo, also fear for their other fields at Torre Beretti, about 60 kilometres south of Milan, that should be harvested in September. “We need about 50 millimetres of rain, but without hail,” said Carlo Angoli. “Or a big hailstorm in September and then the insurance will reimburse us,” he joked. Pavia is at the heart of Italy’s rice-making industry. The province regularly produces nearly five million tonnes of the grain each year. But this year, there was not enough spring rain, and the rice farmers are despondent. From the Alps to the Adriatic Sea, several waterways in northern Italy are in a ‘critical situation’ because of drought, the Po River Authority (ADBPO) warned. Lakes are being drained to feed the Po and its tributaries, but at the current rate, the reserves will run out within weeks. The province at the foot of the Apennine Mountains is used to abundant rain. The rice fields are normally lush green this time of year. But with temperatures now rising above 30C, Sharon Angoli has had to restrict irrigation and like other farmers, fears a repeat of a devastating drought in 2022. One of the fields used to produce rice for sushi has not been flooded and the weeds are the biggest beneficiaries. Some rain has brought down temperatures in recent days, but they are predicted to rise again for the next two weeks to levels that Carlo Angoli said were “ideal for going to the beach”. “In a normal season, there would be water everywhere,” said Nicola Valdi, 55, a neighbour of the Angolis. She told how it protects the rice in what is a ‘critical phase’ of its growth and must not absorb too much toxic cadmium. “A healthy plant would have 70 to 80 grains. This one will produce 10,” she said, pointing to one shrivelled shoot. The water shortage has left angry fallout. Farmers in the Lombardy region, which includes Pavia, accuse those in neighbouring Piedmont of using too much water. Farmers in the Po delta accuse all their rivals up the Po valley of leaving them with too little. — AFP

When faces tell too little

CHOOSE THE right words, say them clearly, and people will understand you. Simple. Many of us think communication is mainly about words. Over the years, however, I have become less convinced, as some of the most interesting conversations I have witnessed seem to have taken place without anybody saying very much at all. I started thinking about this while watching a meeting. Nothing dramatic happened. A proposal was presented, and the room quickly filled with smiles and nods. Everything looked positive. But, for a brief moment, before the smiles settled into place, a few other expressions appeared. One person looked surprised. Another looked worried. A third seemed to be calculating what the proposal might mean for their workload. The moment lasted no more than a second, then disappeared. The meeting carried on as normal. Still, I found myself wondering what I had just seen. Microexpressions. That is what psychologists call these brief flashes. The name sounds complicated, but the idea is simple. Sometimes our emotions arrive before our manners catch up. Before politeness takes over, surprise may appear. Before somebody says, “That is wonderful news,” another reaction may briefly show itself and then disappear. Scientists still debate how much these expressions can tell us, but most of us have experienced moments when our feelings arrived before our carefully prepared response. The face, it seems, does not always wait for permission. Human beings have always wanted to know what other people are thinking. The possibility that faces might offer a shortcut is naturally appealing. After all,



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we have always tried to “read between the lines,” looking for the real message hidden beneath the obvious one. However, we are often far more confident than accurate. We misunderstand emails, misread text messages and spend half a day wondering whether a full stop in a WhatsApp message means annoyance or nothing at all. Even so, many of us still believe we can understand a stranger’s thoughts after a two-second glance. Parents may be the most confident detectives of all. As a parent myself, I understand the temptation. Many mothers and fathers believe they can instantly spot dishonesty. Their children often believe exactly the same thing about them. Family life may be a long-running competition between people who all think they are excellent investigators. Americans even gave us the expression “poker face” for somebody who can hide emotions completely. Most of us like to think we have one. The evidence suggests otherwise. Emotions rarely arrive one at a time. I remember dropping one of my children off for an important new stage in life. I felt pride, excitement, worry and a little sadness all at once. If somebody had asked me exactly how I felt, I would have struggled to answer. Faces are often left with the impossible task of showing several emotions at the same time. Then there is another challenge. We are not always objective observers. Two people can watch the same interaction and reach completely different conclusions. One sees confidence while another sees arrogance. One notices sincerity while another senses hesitation. Culture adds another layer. Some societies value emotional restraint. Others encourage open expression. Even within the same family, people can be very different. Most of us know

somebody who wears his heart on his sleeve and somebody else who could win the lottery and respond by asking whether the numbers have been checked properly. As if understanding people was not already difficult enough, technology has now joined the effort. Artificial intelligence systems are increasingly being trained to analyse facial movements and estimate emotional states. I already receive enough advice from software and am not entirely convinced that I need a device informing me that I look frustrated at 2:43 in the afternoon. There are situations, of course, where this technology may genuinely help. Healthcare professionals often work with patients who struggle to explain pain or anxiety. Teachers spend much of their time looking at faces and trying to work out whether a lesson is making sense. In these situations, facial expressions can provide useful clues. The important word, however, is clues. A clue points towards an answer; it is not the answer itself. I believe that is the real lesson hidden inside all this. We spend much of our lives trying to understand other people and an equal amount of time trying to be understood ourselves. Faces help. Words help. Experience helps. None of them, though, gives us complete access to another human being. There is always a gap between what somebody feels, what they show and what we think we have seen. Communication has always been imperfect, and that could be a good thing. The face may occasionally leak a clue, but thankfully it still keeps enough secrets for conversation to remain necessary. If every thought could be read as easily as a road sign, there would be very little left to ask, very little left to discover and far fewer surprises in life.

Happiness beyond the holiday countdown



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

AS another summer holiday approaches, airports fill with travellers, calendars fill with plans, and conversations fill with anticipation. Many people are counting the days! During this holiday, families will gather, friends will reconnect, and workers will finally step away from their desks. For many, the holiday represents a well-earned pause from the demands of daily life.

However, there is an irony worth reflecting on. Some people spend weeks waiting for the holiday, only to spend the holiday worrying about its end. They spend months looking forward to the summer holiday, only to realise how quickly it passes. They spend the year waiting for special occasions, while overlooking the ordinary days that make up most of our lives.

In many ways, modern life has become a series of countdowns. People spend the day waiting for the evening. They spend the week waiting for Friday and spend the year waiting for summer! And all too often, those people spend a lifetime waiting for happiness to come.

There is nothing wrong with looking forward to a holiday. In fact, anticipation can be one of life's great pleasures. A vacation, a celebration, or a festive season gives us something to enjoy and share with others. The problem begins when anticipation becomes a

replacement for living.

Most of the time, people treat happiness as a future event rather than a present experience. They believe joy exists somewhere ahead, on the next holiday, the next weekend, or the next achievement. But happiness does not live exclusively in special dates on a calendar.

A holiday is meaningful not because it appears on a particular day, but because it invites us to be fully present. The laughter around a dinner table, the stories exchanged between generations, the spontaneous moments of joy, and the memories created with loved ones are what make holidays special. The lesson is larger than the holiday itself.

Life offers countless moments worthy of appreciation, but they often arrive without announcement. A morning conversation with a spouse. A child's smile. A cup of coffee shared with a friend.

If we are always waiting for the next celebration, we risk missing the celebrations hidden within ordinary days. Perhaps that is why so many people feel disappointed when a holiday ends. The event they anticipated for weeks passes in a matter of days. The excitement fades, and they begin searching for the next occasion to look forward to.

But happiness was never meant to be confined to holidays. They remind us to slow

The happiest people are not necessarily those who have the longest holidays or the biggest celebrations. They are often those who have learned to treasure both the extraordinary moments and the ordinary ones

down, to connect, to appreciate, to laugh, and to be grateful. Those habits should not disappear when the holiday ends. They should accompany us into our everyday life.

The happiest people are not necessarily those who have the longest holidays or the biggest celebrations. They are often those who have learned to treasure both the extraordinary moments and the ordinary ones. Happiness is found in the enjoyment of a festive gathering without worrying about tomorrow. It is found in the appreciation of a beautiful moment before it becomes a memory.

The habit of postponing joy is the habit of missing life. So as the next holiday arrives, enjoy it completely, celebrate it, create memories and cherish the people around you. But when the holiday ends, do not leave happiness behind with it. Carry its spirit into the next day, and the day after, because there is no perfect moment waiting somewhere in the future.

Happiness is not a destination; rather, it is a way of living. There is no perfect future moment when everything will suddenly align and guarantee lasting happiness. The right time that many people are waiting for often turns out to be an illusion. What truly exists is this moment and the choices made within it.

AI THREAT PROMPTS WARNING OVER CHILDREN’S IMAGES

MATHILDE GRANDJEAN

Parents have been warned over posting images of their children online as they could be used to create artificial intelligence (AI)-generated abuse material, the National Crime Agency (NCA) has said.

New guidance on protecting children against the rise of AI child abuse imagery has been issued by the NCA and the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) as part of a new campaign aimed at parents and carers, the NCA said.

It comes after a UK school was targeted by criminal gangs who used publicly available pictures of students to create images of the children using AI technology, then threatened to release the images unless a payment was made, according to the IWF. The organisations have also raised the alarm over a sharp rise in the use of AI tools to create child abuse imagery, with 3,440AI-generated videos found by IWF analysts in 2025 compared to just 13 in 2024.

The new campaign aims to help parents and carers make informed decisions about their children's images, consider image consent, and discuss the dangers of AI and 'deepfake' images with children, the NCA said. "The threat is disturbing," Kerry Smith, chief executive of the IWF, said. "If someone's imagery is online, they could be easy pickings for criminals and anyone, especially children, could find themselves being targeted. "We don't want to say don't share your children's images with the people you love and trust, but we want everyone to be aware of the potential risks and make an informed decision with the full facts at their disposal.

"These are not hypothetical threats; they are real," Smith added. "The impact of this imagery can be devastating. "The harms are very real. And the potential for lasting damage is something which I think every parent would do anything they can to prevent.

"We want to give them back that power, and start a public conversation about whether we should be sharing imagery online as a default." Criminals who previously blackmailed a UK school created more than a hundred images of its students using images from a school website, the IWF warned. Though the IWF managed to stop the images from being uploaded, the fear remains that more schools could be targeted in the future. AI-generated child abuse images are becoming more widespread and realistic as technology improves; the IWF and NCA have also warned. AI is also used to create more violent content, with 65 per cent of the 3,443 AI-generated child abuse videos identified in 2025 classified as Category A - the most severe legal category under UK law, which encompasses offences.

The IWF also identified 8,029 AI-generated images and videos of realistic child abuse in 2025 - a 14-per cent increase in criminal AI content on the previous year. The new guidance suggests creating a 'close friends' group for parents and carers who still want to share images of their children online, or adjust privacy settings on social media posts so that only a selected number of people can see them. — dpa

The digital choices shaping our children’s health

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA and online gaming to generative AI systems, digital environments are powerful determinants of people's health. That is especially true of children and young people. Around the world, childhood is being reprogrammed by digital technologies that shape how young people learn, play, and connect.

Our task is not to celebrate or condemn technology. It is to face a simple truth: our digital environment not only promises far-reaching benefits but also poses grave risks for children's health and development. Our responsibility is to maximise the first while preventing the second. It is not too late to act, but it is too late for merely incremental adjustments.

Digital tools can expand opportunity by supporting learning, communication, and access to health services, especially for children in remote or crisis-affected settings. For many young people, online spaces also offer creativity, community, and belonging, particularly for those facing exclusion offline.

But these benefits are not guaranteed; they depend heavily on who has access, how technologies are designed, and whose interests they serve.

Governments are increasingly recognising that protecting children online is a public-health imperative. Australia has implemented the world's first requirement that social media platforms prevent children under 16 from holding accounts, while France is advancing legislation to prohibit access to social media for those under 15. Indonesia has banned access for children under 16, Spain has announced plans to do so, and Ireland is working with EU partners to develop age restrictions and age-assurance systems focused on protecting under-16s.

The UK, too, recently announced plans to ban social media platforms from offering services to under-16s, alongside additional safeguards like restrictions on livestreaming and contacts from strangers. And Canada has introduced legislation to restrict access to social media for children under 16 while requiring stronger safety-by-design protections and



EMMANUEL
MACRON

President of France



TEDROS
ADHANOM
GHEBREYESUS

WHO
Director-General

Our children and young people are not experimental subjects, a captive market, or a commodity.

accountability from platforms.

Together, these measures reflect a growing global consensus that digital environments require effective governance, age-appropriate design, and stronger safeguards to protect child health. The WHO is supporting this by strengthening the research needed to develop a clearer understanding of the impact of today's and tomorrow's technologies, providing technical advice to countries, and promoting safe, equitable digital health environments.

Solutions are needed because digital environments are not neutral. How they are designed, governed, and monetised shapes many aspects of our lives, not least our health.

For example, repeated exposure to stereotyped, violent, or discriminatory content shapes how children understand themselves and the world around them. Algorithms increasingly filter health information to increase attention rather than accuracy, allowing misleading claims to spread. The collection and use of personal data, particularly for profiling and targeted marketing, raise concerns about privacy, manipulation, and well-being.

Current evidence associates excessive digital exposure with problems such as anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and increased aggression, especially among vulnerable adolescents. Digital marketing on platforms may expose people to the promotion of harmful products.

Social media, gaming, and AI use can deepen loneliness and displace offline relationships. Prolonged use contributes to sedentary behaviour and reduced sleep, which are known risk factors for noncommunicable diseases.

Many platforms are designed to maximise engagement without adequate protection from exposure to harmful content or features to protect children's physical and mental health.

Reducing exposure to illegal or extreme and graphic content is essential. But children's well-being requires more than the absence of harm. It depends on stable relationships, appropriate boundaries, physical activity, and

opportunities for real-world social connection. Risks multiply when digital environments disrupt—rather than support—healthy development.

Generative AI is a major force multiplier in terms of both risks and opportunities for child well-being. Used responsibly, purpose-built AI tools may support education, accessibility, and health. But their long-term impacts on children's expectations of relationships, empathy, or self-regulation are unclear. As long as that remains true, a precautionary approach is not anti-innovation. It is pro-child.

Digital balance is part of the solution. While digital environments require regulation, transparency, age-appropriate design, stronger safety and trust features, and accountability, evidence must keep pace with technology, requiring independent, longitudinal research across income settings and regions.

Above all, we must listen to today's youth. As active users of technology, they can help digital environments evolve responsibly. The online and offline worlds now form a single space where digital tools can support healthy development — or crowd it out. Young people should bring their own lived experiences to bear in order to help shape appropriate guardrails. Parents, caregivers, schools, and communities must also be part of this conversation.

This process demands sustained collaboration across governments, industry, civil society, and public-health institutions, built on a shared commitment to maximising benefits and minimising harms. More transparency, data sharing, health-promoting design choices, and corporate support for effective safety standards, especially for minors, are essential. The WHO can play its convening role and influence in setting norms and standards.

Our children and young people are not experimental subjects, a captive market, or a commodity. Together, we can and must shape digital environments that protect and support their healthy development. The choices we make now will echo for generations.

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Canada's players react after losing. — AFP

CANADA'S dream World Cup run ended on Saturday when they crashed out with a 3-0 loss to Morocco in the last 16, but coach Jesse Marsch said he could not have been prouder of his players after a performance he believed deserved a different outcome. Les Rouges, who had rewritten the record books by earning their first World Cup point, first World Cup victory and first knockout-stage win, dominated for long stretches against the seventh-ranked Moroccans, but were left to rue missed chances, costly errors and the absence of talisman Alphonso Davies.

"I'm very proud to be the Canadian national team coach, and as proud as I am, I'm even more proud of the way our boys played today," Marsch told reporters.

Davies missed the match after suffering a hamstring setback, having played only a few minutes in the tournament.

"We want players on the pitch that are 100 per cent to play the game, I wasn't there yet," Davies told reporters. "It was tough sitting there, watching the game, knowing you know that I'm not 100 per cent."

Marsch said Canada had shown throughout the tournament that they belonged among the world's elite.

"Before today, if you would have said your team's going to play like that, I would have said, 'okay, there's a good chance we're going to win the match,'" Marsch said.

"Thought we totally controlled the number seven team in the world in the first half, total control. There was one team on the pitch. And then we weren't able to make the play.

"Even at the start of the second half, we were the aggressor, we were the ones that looked more likely to score."

Morocco's opener changed the complexion of the game, Marsch said, allowing the North Africans to sit deeper as Canada chased an equaliser.

DAVIES INJURY

Canada's task was made immeasurably harder by the loss of Bayern Munich wing-back Davies, whose World Cup was wrecked by injury.

"He didn't feel right yesterday in training, and we got an MRI, and it was clear, but his hamstring didn't feel right," Marsch said.

"It killed him more than anyone, but I think it was the right decision to preserve him and his career and get him fully healthy."

The American coach urged his players and Canadian soccer as a whole to view the tournament as a springboard rather than a

missed opportunity.

Marsch, who waved away television cameras when he gathered his team on the pitch for a post-game huddle, said Canada's challenge now was to raise the standards established during the tournament.

"I challenged them to understand that we can play like this all the time," he said. "Against the best teams in the world, we can be better on the day.

"The challenge is, can we hold that standard for 90 minutes? Can we continue to build the depth of what we're doing with the team? Can we build a real Canadian DNA into the kind of football we want to play?"

For Marsch, Canada's first home World Cup campaign ended with heartbreak but also belief that the programme has entered a new era. "It is a privilege to have now a Canadian national team competing at levels that had never been dreamed of 10 years ago," he said.

"With that excitement comes higher expectations. Nobody is more disappointed than us, but we have to continue to think about how to get better and commit ourselves to it every time we're together."

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney posted on X: "Nothing but pride ... An incredible run and a sign of what's to come." — Reuters



Canada coach Jesse Marsch reacts. — Reuters



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



Paraguay coach
Gustavo Alfaro.
— Reuters

PARAGUAY
COACH RUES
PAINFUL
DEFEAT



Paraguay fans with look dejected after the match. — Reuters



Paraguay supporters react. — AFP

AFTER Paraguay were knocked out of the World Cup 1-0 by France following a penalty awarded after a VAR review, Albirroja manager Gustavo Alfaro said he could not criticise the decision of Uzbek referee Ilgiz Tantashev.

Tantashev initially waved play on after Desire Doue went down under Diego Gomez's challenge, but changed his mind after he was summoned to the VAR monitor.

"I saw it at the VAR screen when they were looking at it," Alfaro said. "I was behind the referee, and I cannot be objective.

"The referee has a first impression. He says that the player had thrown (himself) trying to generate contact. Then VAR ratifies that it is a penalty, according to them.

"I'm going to look at it more in depth. And when I am looking at the game play, of course,

he's in the air, he's very skilful, and he can move in that small space."

Alfaro had insisted before the game that what his squad achieved was exceptional.

NATIONAL HOLIDAY

His nation will likely agree and Paraguay President Santiago Pena declared Tuesday a national holiday after their shock win on penalties over Germany in the round of 32.

But he conceded the end of the tournament brought a conflict of emotions after coming so close against the twice world champions.

"I leave the World Cup with peace of mind knowing that we played," Alfaro said. "I am sad because I wanted to go further and defeat will never make you happy, of course."

"I do not like losing at anything. And as I was telling the team in the dressing room, if you want to be a winner, the first thing you have to do is learn how to lose."

With Alfaro's contract up at the end of the year, the 63-year-old Argentine who has managed the bulk of his career in his home nation's domestic league said he was unsure of his future. But he clearly holds a deep appreciation for his adopted country.

"Today I have open wounds. I'm bleeding. I cannot really reflect because I am overwhelmed right now. I think I need to wait for things to calm down," Alfaro said.

"Things need to calm down and we'll see what happens. I honestly do not know what I'll do professionally.

"For me, there's no better place than Paraguay. The country has opened up their doors, clubs have opened up their doors, the relationship I have with players, the relationship of gratitude I have with everyone."

— Reuters



Paraguay's Galarza protests France penalty decision. — Reuters



FANS NEVER STOP DREAMING



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,564.219

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Oil activities increased by 4.6 per cent year-on-year to RO 3.035 billion.

Oman’s Q1 GDP rises 2.6% to **ﷵ**9.7 billion

MUSCAT: Oman’s economy grew by 2.6 per cent in real terms during the first quarter of 2026, with gross domestic product at constant prices reaching RO 9.685 billion, supported by stronger oil and gas activity and continued expansion in the services sector, preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

Oil activities increased by 4.6 per cent year-on-year to RO 3.035 billion from RO 2.902 billion in the corresponding period of 2025, driven by higher output from both crude oil and natural gas.

The value added of crude oil activity rose 4.3 per cent to RO 2.554 billion from RO 2.448 billion a year earlier, while natural gas activity expanded 6.0 per cent to RO 481.2 million from RO 453.9 million.

Non-oil activities grew 2.4 per cent to RO 7.039 billion during the first quarter, compared with RO 6.877 billion in the same period last year, reflecting continued gains across agriculture and services despite weaker industrial output.

Agriculture and fishing recorded the strongest growth among the non-oil sectors, rising 6.1 per cent to RO 337.8 million from RO 318.3 million in the first quarter of 2025.

Industrial activities, however, declined 1.2 per cent to RO 1.980 billion from RO 2.005 billion a year earlier.

The services sector remained the largest contributor to non-oil economic activity, growing 3.7 per cent to RO 4.721 billion from RO 4.554 billion in the first quarter of 2025, underlining the sector’s continuing role in supporting economic diversification. — ONA

Oman plans four 1 GW mega solar projects

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 5

AS many as four mega solar PV-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) are planned for implementation across key locations in the Sultanate of Oman, starting from 2028–29.

At 1 GW capacity apiece, these four large-scale schemes are central to achieving the Sultanate of Oman’s goal of generating at least 30 per cent of electricity from clean energy sources by 2030.

The timeline for the projects is outlined in the latest Five-Year Annual Capability Statement (2026–2030) issued by the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owned operator of the national grid.

In addition to the 1,000 MW solar project planned at Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate — the subject of a recent Request for Qualifications (RfQ) issued by Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) — similar-sized projects are also envisioned at Al Kamil (Phase II) in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, Thamrait (Dhofar Governorate) and Mahadha (Al Buraimi Governorate).

While the Adam Solar IPP is slated for commissioning in 2028, the other three projects are expected to be implemented from 2029 onwards, according to OETC.

In the interim period, several smaller solar PV schemes are expected to come online across the country. These include the 500 MW Ibri Solar III project, which is expected to be connected to the grid by 2027. Other projects



Mega 1 GW solar schemes are planned at Adam, Al Kamil (Phase II), Thamrait and Mahadha.

At 1 GW capacity apiece, these four large-scale schemes are central to achieving the Sultanate of Oman’s goal of generating at least 30 per cent of electricity from clean energy sources by 2030.

scheduled for commissioning in 2028 include the Al Kamil I Solar IPP (400 MW), Marsa Solar IPP (280 MW) and Sinaw Solar IPP (500 MW).

In parallel, a number of wind-based IPPs are also in the pipeline for implementation over the next several years.

Wind projects targeted for commissioning in 2028 include the JBB Ali Wind Farm (105 MW), Ras Madrakah Wind Farm (Duqm II) (300 MW), Mahout Wind IPP (800 MW), Dhofar II Wind IPP at Harweel (125 MW) and Sadah Wind IPP (120 MW), adding a combined installed capacity of approximately 1,450 MW.

Further expansion is planned from 2029 onwards with the Al Jazir Wind IPP (100 MW), Duqm III Wind IPP (300 MW), and Shaleem Wind IPP (220 MW), contributing

an additional 620 MW of installed capacity.

OETC, which is tasked with integrating these new solar and wind IPPs into the national grids, projects a significant increase in the share of installed renewable energy capacity, rising from 13.6 per cent in 2026 to 45 per cent by 2030.

This expansion is expected to play a pivotal role in achieving the country’s clean energy objectives while advancing its fuel diversification strategy.

The growing integration of renewable energy sources, the grid operator said, will also reshape transmission system operations, requiring enhanced spinning reserves and reserve capacity to manage the variability and intermittency associated with renewable power generation.

PDO signs **ﷵ** 3.5 million social investment deals

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed nine social investment agreements worth RO 3.5 million to expand education, healthcare, youth development and environmental protection programmes across the Sultanate of Oman, reinforcing its commitment to supporting national development priorities under Oman Vision 2040.

The agreements, signed at PDO’s headquarters in Mina Al Fahal, form part of the company’s broader social investment strategy and its “Journey of Transformation, For Oman” programme, which focuses on creating long-term value beyond its core energy operations.

“At PDO, we believe our success should be reflected not only in what we achieve as a company, but also in the opportunities we help create for people and communities across Oman”, said PDO Managing Director Dr Aflah al Hadhrami.

“These partnerships reflect our long-standing commitment to investing in national priorities and to working alongside our partners to help build a stronger, more resilient future for Oman”.

In education, PDO will continue funding the Community Scholarship Programme with the



The agreements form part of the company’s broader social investment strategy and its “Journey of Transformation, For Oman” programme.

Ministry of Education, enabling 150 students from concession areas to pursue university studies. More than 1,400 students across seven government schools in Haima and Al Jazir will benefit from high-speed internet connectivity to support digital learning.

The company also launched the first Tamayuz cohort, providing 20 outstanding scholarship students with an international enrichment programme focused on leadership, innovation and career readiness.

A separate agreement with the Ministry of Education will provide practical training placements for 250 university students specialising in electrical engineering.

“These agreements reflect the strategic partnership between the Ministry of Education and PDO; and support the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, which places education among the nation’s highest priorities”, said Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Shibli, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Higher Education.

PDO will also continue supporting the fifth edition of the Mustaed Youth Skills Development Programme, implemented by Outward Bound Oman in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The programme will provide leadership, entrepreneurship and employability training to 500 young Omanis aged between 15

and 18.

“The signing of the agreement with PDO to support the fifth edition of Mustaed reflects the programme’s national importance and the confidence placed in the positive outcomes achieved by participants in previous editions”, said Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.

He said around 2,700 young people had participated in the programme over the past four years.

As part of its environmental initiatives, PDO signed an agreement with the Environment Authority to support the National Marine Early Detection System.

The project will deploy floating monitoring stations and smart sensors to monitor seawater quality in real time, providing early warning of pollution risks while helping to protect marine ecosystems and coastal economic activity.

In healthcare, PDO will finance a national capacity-building programme at the Excellence Centre for Developmental Paediatrics at University Medical City. The initiative will support the training and recruitment of specialist professionals, creating 74 jobs initially and increasing employment to 129 within three

years while reducing waiting times for children with developmental conditions.

“This agreement reflects the effective partnership between University Medical City and the private sector; and underscores PDO’s longstanding commitment to social responsibility and its continued contribution to supporting national efforts to enhance the quality of healthcare services”, said Sayyid Dr Mujahid bin Rafi al Busaidy, Director General of Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, University Medical City.

PDO will also fund the construction of a new specialist orthopaedic clinic at Khoula Hospital, replacing the existing facility and increasing annual treatment capacity by more than 40 per cent.

In Al Wusta Governorate, the company will co-fund a new Accident and Emergency Unit at Al Jazir Hospital, which is expected to treat more than 1,000 emergency cases annually once completed.

“The signing of the agreement with PDO to fund the construction of a new specialist orthopaedic clinic represents a leading example of partnership between the healthcare sector and private sector institutions”, said Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director General of Khoula Hospital.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The new partnership aims to revive this ancestral tradition and establish Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as a global perfumery destination.

REVIVING THE OMANI ROCK ROSE: AMOUAGE AND IFF SIGN PACT

MUSCAT: When the sun sets over Al Jabal Al Akhdhar — the Green Mountain — in Oman, its fading light turns the rocky terraces to a warm rose, echoing the colour of the fleshy pink petals of the Omani Rock Rose (*Rosa Damascena* *Trigintipetala*) that bloom across its slopes each spring.

Rising to nearly 2,000 metres above sea level, these ancient terraces have been cultivated for centuries by farming families whose knowledge of the land has been passed down from generation to generation.

Connected through the Falaj irrigation system, a Unesco-recognised tradition that channels rainwater through the rugged landscape with remarkable efficiency, the terraces create the unique growing conditions that give the roses their distinctive olfactive character.

The new partnership between Amouage and International Flavours & Fragrances (IFF) — a renowned global leader in the creation of fragrance ingredients — aims to revive this ancestral tradition and establish Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as a global perfumery destination.

The primary objective of this collaboration is the creation of the world’s first Omani Rock Rose ingredient for high perfumery, derived from roses cultivated and harvested in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, opening a new chapter in the ancestral history of the rose in fragrance.

Blooming during March and April, the flowers are harvested by hand at sunrise, when their aromatic profile is at its richest. Distillation facilities, complying with international standards, will be assembled on the mountain peaks, ensuring full supply chain integration within the Sultanate of Oman.

This modern approach will exist alongside the region’s longstanding tradition of wood-fire distillation in clay pots, through which local villagers continue to produce the distinctive smoky Omani rose water that has long formed part of the mountain’s cultural heritage.

The partnership will also guarantee that local communities are equipped with the knowledge and skills to carry this tradition forward.

OQ’s ‘Steps’ programme builds student leaders

OQ, the global energy investment group, concluded the first edition of the “Steps” Programme, implemented by Outward Bound Oman in partnership with the Ministry of Education, during a closing ceremony held at Outward Bound Oman’s headquarters in Al Seeb.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Intisar bint Abdullah Ambosaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Supporting Educational Programmes and was attended by representatives of the partner organisations, participating students and parents.

The programme is one of OQ’s social investment programmes, designed to support school students in developing their character and strengthening their leadership and life skills. Through experiential learning and hands-on educational experiences, the programme fostered self-confidence and teamwork while preparing students for future opportunities in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The ceremony opened with a speech by Maha al Balushi, Business Development Manager at Outward Bound Oman, who described “Steps” as a national platform for developing students’ capabilities and reaffirmed the importance of investing in young people as an investment in Oman’s future.

She explained that the programme adopted Outward Bound Oman’s experiential learning methodology, enabling participants to take on real-life challenges that strengthened their leadership, communication and teamwork skills while fostering responsibility, initiative, self-reliance and greater awareness of future academic and career pathways.

She added that the programme engaged



The programme is one of OQ’s social investment programmes, designed to support school students in developing their character and strengthening their leadership and life skills.

240 school students from across Oman through three progressive learning levels designed to meet the needs of different age groups and educational stages. She noted that the programme helped shape participants’ character, strengthen their self-confidence, develop their leadership and life skills; and enhance their ability to collaborate effectively and navigate challenges with confidence.

The ceremony also featured a video presentation highlighting the programme’s key milestones, experiential activities, participant challenges, key outcomes achieved throughout its implementation.

Said al Badaai, Head of Social Investment at OQ, said: “Steps embodies OQ Group’s vision for social investment, which is

centred on nurturing national talent and creating lasting impact for society.

Through this programme, students experienced a holistic learning journey that empowered them to discover their strengths, build self-confidence and develop the leadership and life skills that will support them throughout their academic and professional futures”.

He added: “The programme’s success reflects the strength of the strategic partnership between OQ Group, the Ministry of Education and Outward Bound Oman.

Initiatives like Steps play a vital role in preparing a generation equipped with the skills, confidence and values needed to contribute meaningfully to Oman’s continued development”.

OCCI wins regional franchise award in Cairo

CAIRO: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has received the Government Corporate Leadership Award for Supporting and Empowering Franchising at the Egyptian-Saudi International Franchise Exhibition in Cairo, recognising its efforts to strengthen the franchise ecosystem and promote Omani brands.

The award was presented to OCCI’s Franchise Centre in recognition of its initiatives to improve the competitiveness of national brands and support their expansion in local and regional markets through specialised programmes and strategic partnerships.

The exhibition also resulted in



The award was presented to OCCI’s Franchise Centre.

the signing of two memoranda of understanding between Omani and Egyptian companies covering beekeeping, honey production and silverware, expanding commercial cooperation between businesses from the two countries.

OCCI said its participation forms part of its broader strategy to promote franchising as a vehicle for private sector growth, strengthen the regional presence of Omani brands and create new economic partnerships. The chamber said these efforts support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by contributing to economic diversification and reinforcing the role of the private sector.

BankDhofar strengthens national financial talent

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to talent development and the advancement of professional excellence within Oman’s financial sector, BankDhofar recently organised a preparatory training programme for the internationally recognised ACI (Financial Markets Association) certification, equipping participants with specialised knowledge and skills in treasury and financial markets operations.

The programme brought together 20 participants from various government entities, underscoring BankDhofar’s commitment to fostering strategic partnerships with public sector institutions through knowledge sharing, capacity building and professional development. The initiative forms part of the bank’s broader efforts to support the development of highly skilled national talent capable



The programme brought together 20 participants from various government entities.

of contributing to the resilience, competitiveness and sustainable growth of Oman’s financial sector.

Delivered over 10 consecutive days, the programme provided participants with in-depth exposure

to key areas of global financial markets, including Foreign Exchange, Money Markets, interest rate markets, derivatives and financial instruments and market conventions.

Designed to prepare candidates for the ACI certification examination, Risk Management the training also focused on strengthening analytical capabilities, technical expertise and practical understanding of financial market operations.

The programme was led by Juma bin Mohammed al Jabri, Assistant General Manager — Treasury and Investments at BankDhofar, who shared insights drawn from his extensive experience in treasury management and financial markets. Through a combination of theoretical learning and practical case studies, participants gained

valuable perspectives on market dynamics, risk management and international best practices.

Commenting on the initiative, Al Jabri highlighted the importance of specialised professional training in enhancing institutional capabilities and supporting the development of a future-ready workforce.

“Programmes such as these play a vital role in strengthening collaboration between the banking sector and government institutions while providing a valuable platform for the exchange of knowledge and expertise. By equipping professionals with internationally recognised competencies, we contribute to building a highly qualified workforce capable of navigating the evolving landscape of global financial markets and supporting Oman’s economic aspirations”, he said.

SHORTTAKES



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo in this picture. — Reuters

Opec+ raises August output by 188,000 bpd

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

Eight Opec+ producers agreed on Sunday to raise oil production by a combined 188,000 barrels per day (bpd) in August, continuing the gradual unwinding of voluntary output cuts while reaffirming their commitment to maintaining stability in the global oil market.

Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman reached the decision during a virtual meeting to review global market conditions and the outlook.

The increase forms part of the additional voluntary production adjustments first announced in April 2023.

Under the agreement, Saudi Arabia and Russia will each increase production by 62,000 bpd in August. Iraq will raise output by 26,000 bpd, Kuwait by 16,000 bpd, Kazakhstan by 10,000 bpd, Algeria by 6,000 bpd and Oman by 5,000 bpd, bringing Oman's required production level to 836,000 bpd. The combined increase totals 188,000 bpd.

The producers said the phased return of production could be adjusted according to market developments, stressing that the voluntary cuts introduced in April 2023 could be reversed either partially or in full if required.

They reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a cautious and flexible approach, retaining the option to increase, pause or reverse the phase-out of voluntary production cuts, including those announced in November 2023, depending on market conditions.

The group said the latest adjustment would also provide participating countries with an opportunity to accelerate compensation for previous overproduction.

Omani brands target Egypt through franchising

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

TWELVE Omani brands showcased their franchise concepts and explored regional expansion opportunities at the Egyptian-Saudi International Franchise Expo in Cairo, as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) stepped up efforts to position franchising as a driver of private sector growth and economic diversification.

The three-day exhibition, held from July 1 to 3 at the Egypt International Exhibition Centre, brought together investors, franchise operators, government agencies and business support organisations from across the region.

The Omani delegation was led by Eng Hamoud bin Salim al Saadi, Second Vice-Chairman of the OCCI Board and Chairman of the Chamber's Franchise Committee.

The Chamber said its participation was aimed at promoting investment opportunities in Oman's franchise sector, supporting the international expansion of Omani brands and strengthening links with investors and companies specialising in franchise development.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Al Saadi described the exhibition as an important platform for bringing together brand owners, investors and industry stakeholders to build partnerships, exchange expertise and identify new business opportunities.



The OCCI steps up efforts to position franchising as a driver of private sector growth and economic diversification.

He said the Chamber's participation reflects its efforts to strengthen the franchise ecosystem in Oman and increase the presence of Omani brands in regional and international markets.

"Franchising has become an effective tool for business growth, knowledge transfer and expanding private sector investment", Al Saadi said, adding that the Chamber is working to help Omani companies benefit from the business model in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the country's economic diversification strategy.

He encouraged Omani companies to use the exhibition to engage with investors, explore

expansion opportunities and participate in workshops and panel discussions covering the latest trends and best practices in the franchise industry.

Khalifa bin Rashid al Shamsi, Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Ambassador of Oman to Egypt, said the Chamber's participation underlined its commitment to developing the franchise sector and strengthening the role of the private sector in economic diversification.

He said the exhibition provided an effective platform for connecting investors, franchise owners and supporting institutions while helping to strengthen economic cooperation and

trade ties between Oman and Egypt through new business partnerships.

Hamad bin Salem al Harthy, Head of the Business Complex at the Development Bank and Vice-Chairman of the Chamber's Franchise Committee, said the Franchise Centre continues to promote franchising as a growth model while preparing Omani companies for expansion in line with international best practices.

He said participation in regional exhibitions enables Omani businesses to learn from successful international experiences, establish direct relationships with investors and identify opportunities for regional growth.

Oman to modernise air traffic surveillance system

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 5

Oman is investing in Air Traffic Surveillance radars aimed at enhancing the safety, efficiency and resilience of the Sultanate of Oman's air traffic surveillance infrastructure.

A partnership of Thales and Omani prime contractor Ankaa has been awarded a contract by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of the Sultanate of Oman to design, supply, install and commission latest-generation TRACSIGMA Primary Surveillance radar and two RSM NG Secondary Surveillance radars, the France-based advanced tech firm said.

The first radar will be delivered in 2027, demonstrating Thales' ability to rapidly deliver advanced surveillance systems that meet its customers' operational



Officials signing the agreement in Paris recently.

requirements.

At the core of this project is TRACSIGMA, Thales' multi-mission L-band Primary Surveillance Radar

and the latest evolution of the TRAC family, capable of simultaneously supporting civil and military air surveillance and approach control.

Designed for multi-mission operations, it detects all types of aircraft from drones to commercial aircraft.

With a range of up to 300 km, it delivers a more accurate, high-resolution 3D air picture and offers greater resilience to interference, including that generated by wind farm mitigation.

The turnkey project also includes the design and construction of complete radar sites, including a tower, a radome and the supporting infrastructure.

Building on decades of experience supporting civil aviation authorities across the region, Thales is partnering with Ankaa, an Omani company pioneering space technologies, unmanned systems, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

The partnership combines Thales' global expertise with Ankaa's local

capabilities, ensuring a strong in-country presence and long-term support throughout the lifecycle of the radar systems.

The project is expected to generate approximately 40% In-Country Value (ICV) through the localisation of maintenance and support services, while delivering comprehensive knowledge transfer and capacity-building programmes for Omani professionals.

"This collaboration not only showcases Thales' advanced technology and commitment to safety in aviation but also emphasises our dedication to fostering local talent and capabilities.

Together, we are building a robust framework for the future of air traffic management in Oman, aligned with the nation's Oman Vision 2040", said Christophe Lanovsky, CEO of Thales in Oman.

PRECIOUS METALS

JPMorgan cuts gold outlook



JPMorgan Chase has lowered its gold price forecast, projecting bullion to average \$4,300 an ounce in the third quarter and \$4,500 in the fourth, citing weaker-than-expected demand.

The bank warned that earlier US interest rate hikes could weigh on prices, but maintained a positive long-term outlook, expecting central bank purchases and physical demand to support gains beyond 2026. — Reuters

ENERGY INDUSTRY

US oil profits set to surge



Major US oil producers are expected to report their strongest quarterly profits in years as higher crude prices boosted earnings following disruptions linked to the Iran conflict.

The anticipated windfall could heighten tensions with President Donald Trump, whose administration has urged lower fuel prices and warned of possible action if petrol costs remain elevated. — Reuters

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

Nato expands drone cooperation



The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is stepping up cooperation with European defence companies to develop faster and more cost-effective systems to counter the growing threat of drones.

In Germany, military leaders and about 35 firms discussed technologies including radar, interceptor drones and missiles, with officials stressing the need for lower-cost solutions to strengthen European security. — ONA

OPINION

Closing the global gender leadership gap: A strategic priority



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS

TODAY'S senior leadership operates in a landscape in flux. They face a convergence of geopolitical escalations, technological disruptions, digital transformation, climate change and shifting workforce demographics. Leaders are burdened with ever-demanding responsibilities and multiple shareholder expectations, while traditional business models face intense pressure in competitive markets. This presents an urgent need to redefine pathways to the top and to build a diverse talent pool, irrespective of nationality, caste, gender, or sociocultural background.

As work redefines itself in the emerging future of work, organisations wrestle to sustain resilience amidst economic and political uncertainty. In such a context, organisations must rise above barriers and bias to leverage their available talent not only as a matter of fairness but as a strategic competency and source of competitive advantage.

Over the past decade, women's representation at the top has increased from roughly 15% to 30%. However, CEO hires and board appointments for women have largely plateaued since 2022 and women remain underrepresented across all industries.

The global gender gap report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) states that women face compounded disadvantages related to gender, religion, region, language,

race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and disability. In most economies, the majority of tertiary students are women; however, they remain underrepresented, accounting for less than half of the global workforce and one third of top management roles. These findings suggest that educational attainment alone does not translate to workforce participation and leadership representation.

The leadership gap for women is uneven across industries and geographic regions, with Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America and Europe leading at 34.6%, 33.7% and 29.7%, respectively, followed by the Middle East and North Africa at approximately 20.6% and South Asia recording the lowest at 15%.

An important insight is that women's representation is uneven not only across industries but also within them. In oil, gas and mining, women's representation accounts for less than 30% of individual contributions and their share drops by one-third upon the transition to middle-level management, with a further decline at the top.

In sectors such as accommodation and food service, administrative and support services, entertainment providers, government administration and retail, the decline in individual contribution is greater than at the mid to top level of management.

In education, women make up half of the workforce at the entry and mid-levels. Still, their participation sharply decreases in

The global gender gap report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) states that women face compounded disadvantages related to gender, religion, region, language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and disability.

senior roles, underscoring how the “drop to the top” plays out differently across sectors.

Another equally noteworthy insight is that the pattern of decline in women's representation at the entry, mid, or senior levels of management has not changed from 2015 to 2025, suggesting that organisational structural barriers to women's advancement persist.

Even in the C-suite positions in the industry and hiring trends, women's participation is restricted to certain emerging and operational functions, specifically roles with minimal strategic influence and limited long-term institutionalisation within organisations. This pattern is also present in the political sphere.

One positive development is that women's representation in senior leadership has risen from around 27% to 30% and the share of board seats has increased from about 15% to 29% between 2014 and 2024.

The composition of board seats has also substantially shaped perspectives and informed consequential decision-making, planning and the development of future leadership.

Though the statistics indicate progress, the momentum has slowed. Closing the gender gap will require participation and collaboration with policymakers, government and organisations to remove structural disadvantages and adapt to their industrial contexts and strategic PR, thereby increasing women's representation in the workforce.

IRAN’S \$300 BILLION REBUILD FUND RISKS A FAMILIAR FATE

AFIQ FITRI ALIAS

The United States is again trying to lure foreign capital into Iran. A key part of last month’s ceasefire signed between Washington and Tehran was a \$300 billion “reconstruction fund” for the Islamic Republic.

The details may differ from a similar push in the wake of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to limit Iranian nuclear capabilities. But it’s likely to yield the same underwhelming outcome. After the JCPOA, Iran attracted \$37 billion in announced deals and memorandums of understanding with companies

including Airbus and Peugeot. Yet the promised investment boom never materialised; annual FDI inflows rose from \$3.4 billion in 2016 to a peak of just \$5 billion in 2017, according

to UNCTAD data. Even the flagship South Pars gas project led by TotalEnergies was eventually abandoned following President Donald Trump’s 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA.

On the face of it, 2026 looks more promising. For one thing, the sums are bigger. And the reconstruction fund has already attracted more than \$150 billion in commitments from private companies across Asia, the Gulf and the US to develop Iran’s energy, logistics, manufacturing and transport sectors.

Yet these capital providers remain unnamed. Given the gap between good intentions and actual investment, that’s telling.

Meanwhile, many of the underlying obstacles for western companies remain. A decade ago international signatories of the JCPOA eventually had to issue a joint statement reassuring financial institutions that Iran was investable despite the thicket of US sanctions that had held sway. In 2026 these barriers look, if anything, more problematic.

Washington has designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organisation, while the US Treasury found Iran’s construction sector was dominated by IRGC-linked firms.

Admittedly, last month’s US-Iran memorandum of understanding promises licences and waivers for the reconstruction fund, and lifting “all types of sanctions”. Yet such waivers typically require renewal every six months — hardly an ideal foundation for long-term investment.

Companies could actively try to limit sanctioned entities’ involvement, as TotalEnergies attempted in 2018, but the deepening of the IRGC’s role in the economy complicates matters. — Reuters

When a promise becomes a lifeline for children

CHILDREN

today are growing up in a world marked

by extraordinary uncertainty. Conflict, displacement, climate shocks, economic pressure and the erosion of basic services are affecting millions of children and families.

In 2026, Unicef, the UN agency for children, is appealing for \$7.66 billion from supporters around the world to contribute to its humanitarian action for children, with the aim of reaching 73 million children living through crises across 133 countries and territories.

Behind these numbers are children whose lives have been interrupted by circumstances beyond their control: a child forced from home, a child without safe water, a child whose school has closed, a child facing hunger or loss.

These challenges may be global, but our responsibility to respond is shared.

Over the past decades, the world has shown that progress for children is possible when people and institutions come together with a shared purpose. More children survive, learn, are protected and have opportunities today because governments, communities, businesses, philanthropists and individuals chose to act together.

No single organisation, government, or donor can meet the scale of today’s challenges alone. Transformative partnerships are not an “optional extra”; they are how lasting change happens.

The nature of partnership is also changing. Around the world, businesses and philanthropists are increasingly looking beyond traditional giving towards deeper and more strategic engagement.

They want to understand the problem, contribute to meaningful solutions and see measurable results. Some provide resources. Others bring innovation, influence, networks, expertise, or the ability to convene others. Each role matters.



CARLA HADDAD MARDINI

The writer is Unicef Global Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships

Over the past decades, the world has shown that progress for children is possible when people and institutions come together with a shared purpose. More children survive, learn, are protected and have opportunities today because governments, communities, businesses, philanthropists and individuals chose to act together.



For those who make a promise, the Promise bracelet becomes a quiet reminder of the impact they can make, a symbol of compassion translated into action.

This is especially important when we speak about children. Investing in children is one of the most powerful investments any society can make.

A child’s health, nutrition, education, protection and early development shape not only their own future, but the future of families, communities and entire nations. When children are given the chance to survive, heal, learn and grow, the benefits extend across generations.

What I learned from my brief yet inspiring visit to Oman in early June is that this understanding is deeply rooted in a culture of generosity, responsibility and care for others.

For nearly 55 years, Unicef and the Sultanate of Oman have worked together in support of children’s rights and wellbeing.

This partnership has accompanied Oman’s own remarkable progress in health, education, social protection and child wellbeing; and reflects values that are deeply regarded in Omani society: generosity, responsibility, solidarity and care for others.

Oman’s commitment to children, led by the government and sustained over decades, reflects the kind of long-term vision that Unicef works to support in countries around the world.

These values are also at the heart of Unicef Oman’s “Wa’ad” (Promise)

Campaign, which is done with local partners. In Oman, a promise carries meaning. It is sincere. It is not given lightly.

It reflects trust, responsibility and a commitment to stand by one’s word. With Unicef, that promise can travel beyond our immediate world and become action for children who need it most.

A promise with Unicef is not symbolic only. It can help provide safe water, therapeutic food, shelter, warm clothing, education supplies, hygiene kits, protection services and cash assistance for children and families facing hunger, displacement and loss.

What may seem like a simple promise becomes precious when it reaches a child in crisis. It becomes a lifeline, a source of hope and a reminder that they have not been forgotten.

For those who make a promise, the Promise bracelet becomes a quiet reminder of the impact they can make, a symbol of compassion translated into action.

Through Unicef Oman’s Promise Campaign, that commitment becomes part of a wider movement, turning sincerity into support and support into hope for every child; learn more on the Unicef Oman Website and Instagram page. When we keep our promise to children, we help protect not only their present, but their possibility.

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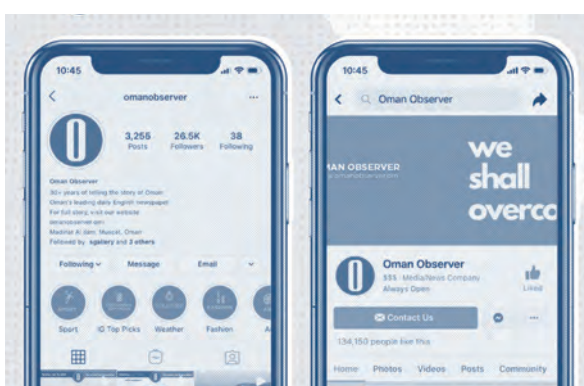
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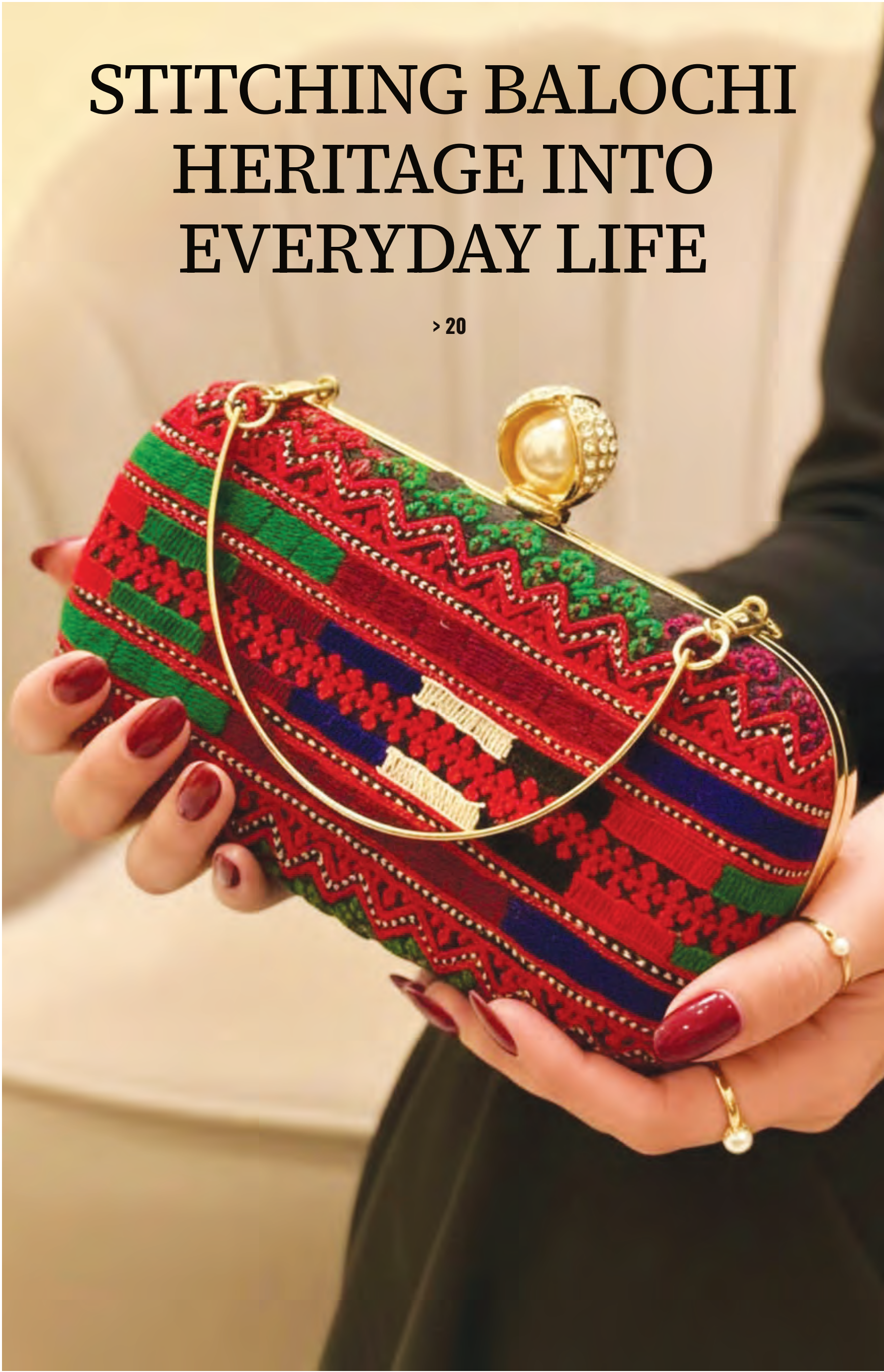
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WEDDING RINGS

A ‘GARDEN INSIDE THE GARDEN’: MORE DETAILS OF SWIFT-KELCE WEDDING EMERGE



A performance by Stevie Nicks, handwritten vows, high school friends and a “garden inside the Garden” were among the highlights of Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce’s star-studded wedding in New York. The pop superstar and the three-time NFL Super Bowl champion, both 36, married on Friday at Madison Square Garden under tight security, with around 1,000 guests reportedly required to sign non-disclosure agreements.

Swift’s publicist, Tree Paine, confirmed the wedding in a brief statement, revealing that the couple wore Christian Dior, Christian Louboutin and Cartier. More details emerged on Saturday as ABC’s Good Morning America hosts Robin Roberts, George Stephanopoulos and former NFL star Michael Strahan shared their experience of attending the celebration.

Stephanopoulos described the ceremony as “as intimate as it could possibly be, given that it was Madison Square Garden”, saying the couple had transformed the iconic venue into “this garden inside the Garden”.

“It’s hard to imagine that a place that big and a wedding with such stars could feel so personal and so intimate”, he said.

Roberts revealed that Swift and Kelce wrote their own vows, while Stephanopoulos said the couple read from small books as comedian Adam Sandler officiated.

“They had their neighbours, their high school friends. It was like any wedding that you would attend”, Roberts said, confirming that Stevie Nicks performed during the celebration.

The guest list, however, was anything but ordinary, featuring celebrities including Selena Gomez, Ed Sheeran, Gigi Hadid, Hugh Grant, Bradley Cooper, Kansas City Chiefs coach Andy Reid, NFL legend Tom Brady and Kelce’s teammates. AMC CEO Adam Aron, in a post later deleted from X, described the venue as resembling “an outdoor garden at a lush countryside retreat”. He praised the couple’s vows as personal, emotional, humorous and heartfelt.

Singer Nelly also shared a video on Instagram calling the wedding “incredible”.

Swift and Kelce announced their engagement last August with an Instagram post captioned, “Your English teacher and your gym teacher are getting married”.

The wedding comes after another milestone year for Swift, marked by the success of her album *The Life of a Showgirl*, her induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and a new song featured on the *Toy Story 5* soundtrack.

Kelce, meanwhile, is preparing for his 14th NFL season with the Kansas City Chiefs while continuing to co-host the popular *New Heights* podcast with his brother Jason, who served as his best man. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FILM FESTIVAL

US actor and film director Jesse Eisenberg poses with the Festival President’s Award Crystal Globe at the 60th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. — AFP



EVENTS

A model presents creations by local designers during a fashion show at the 2026 edition of the Durban July horse race in Durban. — AFP



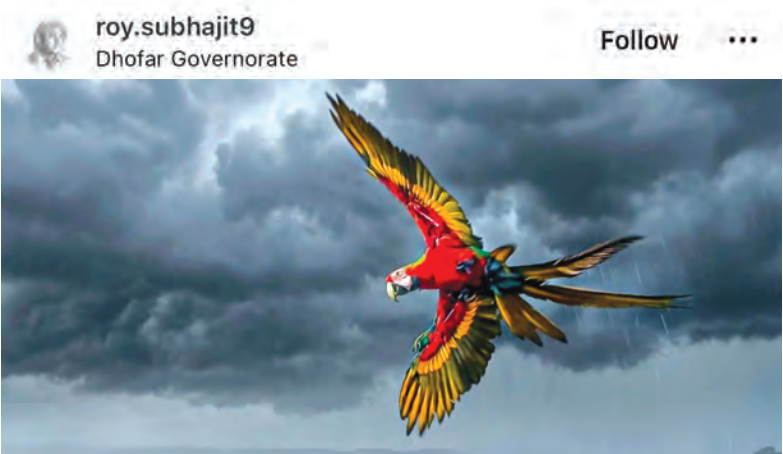
MUSIC

Musician, songwriter and actor Sting performs during the 60th Montreux Jazz Festival, in Montreux. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



“The ever-enchating Arabian Gazelle in Salalah”



“Macaw in full flight during Khareef Dhofar”

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FROM RUBBLE TO MUSIC:
GAZA’S OUD REPAIRMAN

In a modest workshop inside Gaza’s Nuseirat refugee camp, the soft sound of an oud echoes through the ruins of war. Surrounded by wooden pallets, aid crates and broken instruments, Palestinian craftsman Suhail Abu Shawish carefully repairs a battered oud, tuning its strings after days of patient work.

The instrument, scarred by shelling, is one of many brought to his workshop. “Young people have started sending their instruments to me for repair”, he says, as customers arrive with damaged ouds wrapped in black plastic bags.

Restored instruments hang on the walls, symbols of resilience in the shadow of destruction.

For the 60-year-old Abu Shawish, repairing ouds is more than a profession. It is a mission to preserve Palestinian cultural identity at a time when much has been lost.

A trained oud player since the 1980s, he later became an expert in restoration work. Displaced during the war to

Rafah, he eventually returned to Nuseirat. With no proper workshop, scarce materials and frequent power cuts, he works almost entirely by hand — sawing wood, filing surfaces and gluing together shattered pieces others would discard.

“Despite the shortage of wood and its high prices, they turn to me”, he says. “Despite the hardship of war, we continue to work”.

Wood is nearly impossible to obtain. He scavenges scraps from aid crates and reuses broken instruments. “There is no wood available”, he explains. “We use scrap wood from aid boxes and damaged instruments to repair others”.

Costs have soared and electricity is unreliable, forcing long hours of manual labour. Still, he refuses to give up. Each restored oud becomes a small victory, its sound briefly rising above devastation.

He hopes one day to produce Palestinian instruments that can compete globally, proudly made in Gaza. — AFP



A FOOTBALL ANTHEM
FROM NADEEM



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE World Cup has inspired many celebrations and among them is Omani musician Nadeem al Balushi’s energetic anthem, One Game, One World, a song that captures the excitement and unity of football.

Known professionally as NB, Nadeem is an Omani singer, songwriter, composer, keyboardist, music producer and one-man band performer. He has built a reputation as one of Oman’s most versatile live entertainers, performing in Arabic, Hindi, English, Punjabi, Baluchi and Swahili, allowing him to connect with audiences from diverse backgrounds.

Speaking to the Observer, Nadeem said the idea for the song came unexpectedly during the tournament.

“At the beginning of the World Cup, I wasn’t planning to create a song. But about a week into the tournament, I came across Shakira’s 2010 World Cup anthem on YouTube, which has always been one of my favourites. That inspired me instantly. Since I had already written a song for the Oman national football team, I thought, ‘Why not create an original World Cup anthem as well?’”

For the following week, he devoted himself entirely to the project. “It took us about a week to complete the song. We spent a lot of time refining it until we were completely satisfied with the final sound. It was truly a team effort and I would like to thank my friends Leon and Tariq Jalal for their dedication and support”, he said. A lifelong football fan, Nadeem said the sport’s ability



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to unite people across cultures inspired the anthem.

His musical journey began at the age of 10, playing keyboard at school events before performing at weddings and private functions. Since 2002, he has entertained audiences at corporate events across the region while also composing commercial jingles for various companies.

As a one-man band, he has shared the stage with renowned artists from India, Pakistan and Africa, including Bali Brahmabhatt, Sukhbir, Asrani, Asif Mehdi, Shana Shakeel, Bushoke and MB

Dogg.

Among his career highlights are composing and performing the theme song for the 2010 Asian Beach Games and releasing his multilingual international album FOR ALL in 2015. More recently, he has continued releasing original music, including the Hindi singles Talab Hai, Tere Ada and Main Tera Romeo, along with a tribute song for the Oman national football team.

Driven by passion and perseverance, Nadeem hopes to take his music beyond borders while celebrating the universal language of music and sport.

FEATURES

WHERE TRADITION MEETS
CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION

STITCHING
BALOCHI
HERITAGE
INTO
EVERYDAY
LIFE

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

It has always been said that the deeper the roots are, the stronger and more resilient the tree stands. That idea reflects Aida bint Khazoor al Balushi's journey, where her enterprise was shaped not merely as a business, but as an expression of love, belonging, and return to heritage.

A BEAUTY TOO GOOD TO STAY HIDDEN
Aida grew up admiring the embroidery and traditional dress of Balochi culture, captivated by what many would pass without a second glance. She was drawn to the vivid colours and intricate geometric patterns that required weeks, sometimes months, of patient hand-stitching.

"I used to say to myself: I am sorry for these joyful colours, these delicate patterns that take weeks and months of hand-stitching and patience, locked away in a trunk, and that are only brought out for some occasions."

That thought became more than reflection; it became a question. If Balochi embroidery holds such beauty and meaning, why should it remain confined to weddings and special occasions? Why not bring it into everyday life through clothing, bags, phone cases, and the objects people carry daily? The answer, she decided, was that it could. And so, Balucciducci was born.

NOT TO SELL PRODUCTS, BUT TO REWRITE IDENTITY
From the outset, Aida's vision went beyond commerce. Her work was not driven by trends or profit, but by cultural preservation and translation. "The goal was not to sell products," she emphasises. "It was to reframe Balochi identity in a language that today's generation can understand and feel proud of." This philosophy shaped every decision she made, from design to production. Each Balucciducci piece incorporates traditional hand-

stitching and embroidery, released in limited quantities where value outweighs volume. For Aida, every item carries the time, skill, and dignity of its maker. "The goal is not quick profit," she says. "It's to preserve the prestige of handwork and its artistic value, which is something that cannot be measured in money."

THE FAMILY THAT BELIEVED FIRST
Like many creative journeys, Balucciducci began with the support of those closest to her. Aida's brother designed the logo and encouraged her to launch, while her family became her earliest customers, believing in her vision as much as the product itself.

The T-Shirt That Changed Everything
One defining moment came with her 2020 Oman National Day collection. Aida fused her two identities, Omani and Balochi, by designing a T-shirt featuring the map of Oman woven into traditional embroidery patterns.

The design quickly gained attention on Instagram and Snapchat, worn proudly by young Omanis who saw both heritage and modern identity reflected in a single garment. It became a symbol of how tradition could live within contemporary expression. "I felt an astonishment and a joy I cannot describe," she recalls. "And I knew then that my message had begun to reach people."

WHAT COMES NEXT
Aida's ambitions for Balucciducci remain rooted in the same purpose that began it. She hopes to expand the product range, deepen the storytelling behind each piece, and grow the brand into a global name representing living culture. "I hope that through Balucciducci, people will come to know more about Balochi culture and the region of Balochistan," she says. "And that the brand will be known worldwide."

