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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

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN SYMBOLIC SIGNING OF UN CHARTER

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the signing of the UN Charter 80th Anniversary, a symbolic initiative organised by the United Nations General Assembly to commemorate UN Charter Day, observed annually on June 26.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the signing ceremony by Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations.

The initiative reaffirms the collective commitment to the principles and objectives of the UN Charter and enhances multilateral action for a more secure, just and sustainable future for generations to come.

The Sultanate of Oman's participation in signing the document reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the United Nations Charter and principles and its dedication to upholding the organisation's core values, its continued support for the UN's efforts to maintain international peace and security, promote international cooperation for sustainable development and the protection of human rights, and strengthen international cooperation based on equality and mutual respect. It also underscores the importance of collective action in addressing current global challenges.

The Sultanate of Oman continues its positive contributions to the United Nations system by supporting development efforts and humanitarian initiatives, and by actively participating in addressing regional and global issues, reflecting its foreign policy based on moderation, cooperation and peace. — ONA



The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the signing ceremony by Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri. — ONA

HM begins 2-day official visit to France today

Agreements worth \$2.25 billion to be announced in several areas



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will start a two-day official visit to France on Sunday. The Royal visit is in response to the gracious invitation extended to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik by President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic. His Majesty the Sultan will go on an official visit to the French Republic from 28 to 29 of June 2026.

During the visit, agreements are expected to be signed or projects worth approximately \$2.25 billion to be announced in areas including water treatment, environment, transport, space, technology, energy transition and others.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Araimi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to French Republic, said that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's official visit to



France marks an important milestone in Omani-French relations, reflecting their continued growth and deep-rooted strategic partnership.

The visit reaffirms the depth of bilateral ties and the commitment of both leaderships to strengthening cooperation across various fields, as well as coordinating positions on regional and international issues of common concern, particularly developments in the region, he said.

The strong bilateral relations between the two friendly countries have continued to develop steadily since the establishment of diplomatic ties over five decades ago.

The visit crowns a series of meetings and contacts between the two sides over recent months, including ongoing telephone exchanges between the leaderships and

ministers of both countries. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and French President Emmanuel Macron have held a series of telephone conversations, the most recent on May 31, during which they discussed developments in regional and international affairs, diplomatic efforts to support security, stability, freedom of maritime navigation and international trade, as well as avenues for cooperation and partnership between the two friendly nations. Nabil Hajlaoui, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, said the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to France holds particular significance given the current regional context, adding that it will leave a positive mark on the course of bilateral relations across all areas. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

TRUCE AT RISK AFTER TIT-FOR-TAT STRIKES BY IRAN AND US

Washington/Tehran: Hostilities between Washington and Tehran flared again on Saturday as new US strikes on Iranian targets and reports of fresh attacks in the Gulf raised concerns about the durability of their fragile truce.

Bahrain reported an attack involving several Iranian drones early on Saturday, while

the British maritime security agency UKMTO said a merchant vessel had been struck by an "unidentified projectile." The circumstances surrounding the ship attack were not immediately clear. The framework agreement between Tehran and Washington, which took effect last week, had eased tensions in the war that

has gripped the region since US and Israeli attacks on Iran began on February 28. The deal envisages an end to the fighting and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for global oil trade. But, for the first time since the agreement was signed, the US military struck sites in Iran overnight. — dpa

Organs from a brain-dead donor saves four lives

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital, in cooperation with Khoula Hospital and the Omani Center for Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation, successfully performed a comprehensive organ donation procedure from a brain-dead patient. The donation of the heart, liver, and kidneys saved the lives of four critically-ill patients.

Khoula Hospital received a patient who had been declared brain dead according to the approved medical protocols. Specialised medical teams, in coordination with the Omani Center for Organ and Tissue



Donation and Transplantation, then assessed the case, completed all necessary medical, legal, and ethical requirements and got in touch with the donor's family, who gave their consent for the donation, thereby granting four

patients a new chance of life.

The Centre, in collaboration with medical teams at Khoula Hospital and the Royal Hospital, conducted a series of clinical, laboratory, and immunological tests to assess organ viability

The operation resulted in the transplantation of a heart, liver and kidneys to four patients suffering from advanced organ failure.

and compatibility with patients on the waiting lists, adhering to rigorous scientific standards that ensure the highest levels of safety, quality, and success rates.

Given the specialised equipment and advanced capabilities required for heart transplants, the donor was transferred to the Royal Hospital. There, specialised medical teams performed the organ retrieval and transplantation procedures within a comprehensive and highly coordinated framework, ensuring organ viability and minimising the time between retrieval and transplantation. **TURN TO P5**

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER



Cape Verde have made history by becoming the smallest nation to reach the knockout stage at the World Cup after they drew 0-0 with Saudi Arabia in their final group game. The prize for a side representing a group of 10 islands in the Atlantic Ocean will be to face defending champions Argentina in the last 32.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The initiative will serve as a national repository of knowledge, documenting the names, locations, and historical facts of water bodies across Oman.

PRESERVING KNOWLEDGE ON WATER THROUGH ENCYCLOPEDIA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

The Omani Water Society (OWS), in its 26th year, is working on the Omani Water Encyclopedia. The compilation is expected to be the first comprehensive reference of its kind that specifically looks into water.

The initiative will serve as a national repository of knowledge, documenting the names, locations, and historical facts of water bodies across Oman. The book will also feature traditional practices, community initiatives and the heritage value of water.

The project has already drawn broad support from stakeholders.

“This pioneering project documents the central role of water in shaping Omani civilisation, from the traditional Aflaj irrigation systems to modern desalination and water management technologies,” said Eng Zaher al Suleimani, Chairman of Oman Water Society.

The encyclopedia will have three key themes—historical origins, documentation of water resources, and modern developments. It would also include field surveys, academic research, expert interviews, and digital tools to create a comprehensive national reference.

The project is being developed in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University, key ministries, and other stakeholders.

According to the officials at the OWS, “The initiative preserves traditional knowledge while providing a platform for future research and policymaking.”

Another key achievement of Oman Water Society was officially registered in 2010 and now, for more than a quarter of a century, has been tackling a wide range of water-related issues.

“One example is ‘produced water’—oil-contaminated groundwater generated in large volumes during oilfield operations and treated wastewater. It is a topic OWS has raised awareness of through scientific events and discussions,” the chairman noted.

He added, “We have also addressed risks to aquifers from the various developmental activities and drawn attention to threats facing Oman’s Aflaj irrigation systems from unregulated drilling.”

His Majesty’s visit to France attracts media attention

THE FRENCH capital, Paris, has completed its preparations to welcome His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who will arrive in the French Republic today on an official visit. The visit comes in response to the gracious invitation extended to His Majesty by President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic.

The official visit reflects a commitment to enhancing partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic, fostering cooperation in the economic, investment, scientific, and cultural fields, and opening new vistas for collaboration to serve the common interests of the two friendly nations.

His Majesty’s visit to France drew media attention in France, the Arab world, and several international media outlets, which highlighted its political, economic, and strategic dimensions. It was described as a significant milestone in the Omani-French relationship and a reflection of the Sultanate of Oman’s standing and its balanced role in supporting regional security and stability.

The Élysée Palace published the official agenda of French President Emmanuel Macron, including the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as one of the most prominent diplomatic engagements on the president’s schedule. This underscores the importance of the visit and the significance of bilateral



The official visit reflects a commitment to enhancing partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic.

relations between the Sultanate of Oman and France.

French media focused on the visit’s agenda, including the talks between His Majesty and the French President, the signing of several agreements, and the establishment of a business forum bringing together officials from both countries and representatives of the private sector with the aim of enhancing investment opportunities and economic partnerships.

Several French media outlets covered the announcement of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the French Republic, relying primarily on reports from Agence France-Presse (AFP) or the statement issued by the Élysée Palace. The news was included in diplomatic news

sections or brief articles on the websites of newspapers such as Le Monde, Le Figaro, Libération and Les Echos.

The media also paid particular attention to the anticipated consultations on regional issues, most notably the security of international maritime navigation on the Strait of Hormuz, reducing tensions in the region, and the role of the Sultanate of Oman in promoting dialogue and fostering regional security and stability. In this context, France 24 published a report titled ‘The Sultan of Oman to Visit Paris: What Are the Stakes?’ which addressed the political and strategic dimensions of the visit and its significance in light of current regional developments.

Shams TV highlighted the importance of announcing the

anticipated visit of His Majesty, his first official visit to the French Republic, emphasising that the talks would cover maritime security, in addition to bilateral relations, economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation, and the signing of several agreements.

Al Araby Al Jadeed newspaper focused on regional security issues, particularly the security of international maritime navigation on the Strait of Hormuz.

Al Ahram Gate highlighted the importance of His Majesty’s visit being the first visit to the French Republic and what it represents in terms of fostering bilateral relations.

The Italian news agency Nova published a report that addressed the objectives of the visit, Omani-French cooperation, and its significance in light of regional developments, with a focus on economic and investment partnerships and maritime security.

The intensity of regional and international media coverage reflects the great attention being paid to the visit and what it represents as an opportunity to enhance the Omani-French relationship, expand areas of strategic cooperation, and consolidate political coordination between the two countries on various issues of common interest, in a way that contributes to supporting security, stability and development at the regional and international levels. — ONA

Sohar University enters ‘THE Impact Ranking’



The university has been ranked for the first time in the 601-800 band globally.

MUSCAT: Sohar University has been ranked for the first time in the 601-800 band globally in the Times Higher Education Sustainability Impact Ratings 2026, reaffirming its position among leading universities worldwide and a key contributor to Oman’s higher education landscape. Within Oman, Sohar University stands alongside the country’s top institutions recognised in major global rankings, underscoring its growing national standing.

In the Sustainability Impact Ratings, Sohar University has achieved notable performance across several Sustainable Development Goals, including Quality Education (SDG 4) top

200-300 in the world and joint number 1 in Oman; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) top 101-200 in the world; and number 1 in Oman, and Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9) 301-

400. Sohar University is the only university in Oman to be ranked in this category, reflecting its holistic approach to teaching, research and community engagement. These results demonstrate

the university’s strength in advancing inclusive, high-quality learning while supporting just and resilient institutions in line with global priorities.

Commenting on this achievement, Vice-Chancellor Dr Hamdan al Fazari reiterated Sohar University’s commitment to driving sustainability and innovation, aligning institutional strategies with Oman Vision 2040 and international best practices. He emphasised the ongoing dedication to impactful research, responsible governance and partnerships that will continue to enhance the university’s role as a national and regional hub.

Ruwi’s satellite dish TV sellers score on World Cup buzz

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

Satellite TV vendors are seeing their fortunes turn as the Fifa World Cup 2026 is progressing into knock-out rounds. The sales of new connections and recharges, which were dim in normal days as mobile phones hog the screen time, are on the uptick, according to shop owners in Ruwi, which is home to over 100 such establishments.

“Yes, we were almost redundant over the past few years as traditional dish antennae became obsolete

and the number of satellite connections turned out to be near to zilch. Events like world cup football matches give us a new lease of life,” Ahmed al Wuhaibi, a set-top boxe (STBs) shop owner in Ruwi said.

The phones of technicians are ringing non-stop for new installations and streaming boxes, according to Prem, another shop owner, said.

He receives calls like, “Uncle, my beIN signal is pixelating during penalties!”, “My son’s school friends are coming today to watch the match, can you install a new STP by 7pm?”, or “Can I get



The phones of technicians are ringing non-stop for new installations.

every stadium camera angle?”

These shops have technicians who swung to duty immediately and rush to the home or coffee shops for fixing or installing connections.

“I manage to sell at least 5 to 10 connections every day besides servicing the existing ones or helping them add new channels because viewers actively seek 4K HDR channel feeds, relying on international coverage from providers broadcasting on networks like Fox, BBC, and beIN,” Mohammed Ziyad, an IPTV seller, said.

Mohammad al Subaie, CEO of beIN MENA, which offers exclusive access to the FIFA WC 2026, said, “The evolution to TOD by beIN marks an important milestone in our digital growth at a defining moment for sport and entertainment in our region. “This unifies beIN’s digital streaming proposition under the globally recognised and trusted beIN brand during the FIFA World Cup 2026, while reinforcing our commitment to innovation and a world-class viewing experience for our audiences.”

SHORT TAKES

OMANI, NIGER
FMs REVIEW JOINT
COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Bakary Yaou Sangaré, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Nigeriens Abroad of the Republic of Niger.

They discussed opportunities for cooperation and partnership between the two friendly countries and ways to develop them. The two ministers agreed to organise mutual visits at the public and private sector levels to continue consultations and joint work to bolster ties and common interests in the upcoming period. — **ONA**

UTAS LAUNCHES
DRONE LABS AT
THREE CAMPUSES



The initiative provides students across the University's branches with direct access to one of the most prominent emerging technology fields through advanced technical infrastructure.

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) has launched its Drone Laboratories Project, establishing three specialised laboratories dedicated to drone programming and manufacturing at its campuses in Muscat, Al Musannah, and Nizwa. The initiative provides students across the University's branches with direct access to one of the most prominent emerging technology fields through advanced technical infrastructure.

The project reflects the University's ongoing commitment to enhancing students' practical and applied skills in programming, manufacturing and operating unmanned aerial systems, while strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem to prepare highly qualified national talent capable of competing in the labour market.

The laboratories are the result of a strategic partnership with the private sector, represented by Ben Faranas Company, one of the leading firms specialising in drone technologies. The project is jointly supervised by the University's Electronic Systems Sector, Student Services, and the Executive Committee for Digital Transformation Initiatives, ensuring a practical framework that bridges academic learning with market needs and industry requirements.

The project is also supported by the UTAS's Digital Transformation Programme, which places strong emphasis on building national capabilities, adopting emerging technologies, and fostering an environment that promotes innovation and development, thereby contributing to strengthening the foundations of the national digital economy.

OMAN
CALLS FOR
ENHANCING
JOINT ARAB
ACTION
AT ARAB
PARLIAMENT
CONFERENCE

CAIRO: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, said that the Arab world is currently witnessing a period marked by shifting balances of power and accelerating political, economic and technological transformations that are reshaping many of the equations governing the international order.

In his address delivered during the Majlis Ash'shura's participation in the Eighth Conference of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Councils and Parliaments, held in partnership with the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo and attended by Speakers of



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura

Arab parliaments and legislative councils, Al Maawali stated that such major transformations should not be viewed solely as sources of challenges but also as opportunities to reassess priorities, strengthen national and Arab capabilities, and

build more resilient and sustainable partnerships.

He noted that nations capable of understanding ongoing changes and anticipating the future are better positioned to safeguard their interests and create opportunities, whereas nations that rely solely on reactive approaches remain preoccupied with managing crises rather than shaping future pathways.

He added that the rapid developments witnessed across the region in recent months require careful reflection and an objective and responsible assessment based on a realistic understanding of surrounding developments and the lessons that can be drawn to enhance resilience and the capacity.

Project develops gene-based
dressing for chronic wounds

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

AN INNOVATIVE research project conducted at the University of Nizwa is offering a promising new approach to treating chronic wounds, particularly those associated with diabetes.

The study, titled "Engineered local delivery of extracellular vesicles loaded with si-TNF-α, via a core-sheath 3D-bio-printed scaffold as an effective wound dressing," was recently awarded the National Research Award 2025, organised by the Research and Innovation Authority in the Health and Social Services field under the Young Researcher category. Led by Saeid Vakilian, Associate Researcher at the Laboratory for Stem Cells and Regenerative Medicine, the research focuses on developing an advanced wound dressing that targets inflammation at its source and promotes faster healing.

According to Saeid, chronic wounds are often difficult to treat due to persistent inflammation, which can delay healing and lead to serious complications such as infections or even amputations. To address this challenge, the research team designed a novel solution that combines nanotechnology, gene therapy, and 3D bioprinting. The approach uses tiny particles naturally released by cells, known as extracellular vesicles, which are engineered to carry a therapeutic molecule called si-TNF-α. This molecule works by reducing excessive inflammation through targeting a key protein, TNF-α, that is commonly associated with chronic wounds.

Saeid explains that these

“Winning the National Research Award means a great deal to me. It is a strong validation of our team's dedication and innovative work in addressing real-world health challenges such as chronic wounds

SAEID VAKILIAN
ASSOCIATE
RESEARCHER,
UNIVERSITY OF
NIZWA



Led by Saeid Vakilian, Associate Researcher at the Laboratory for Stem Cells and Regenerative Medicine, the research focuses on developing an advanced wound dressing that targets inflammation at its source and promotes faster healing.

engineered vesicles are incorporated into a specially designed 3D-printed scaffold that mimics natural tissue. The scaffold is designed to gradually degrade, allowing for controlled and localised release of the therapeutic vesicles directly at the wound site. Laboratory results demonstrated that the system effectively regulates the release of these particles and helps shift immune cells towards a healing state.

Further testing in animal models showed that wounds treated with this advanced dressing healed significantly faster than those treated with standard methods or non-loaded scaffolds. The treatment also reduced inflammation levels and improved overall tissue regeneration, indicating strong potential for clinical application.

The study has been published in the Journal of Drug Delivery Science

and Technology. The research team includes Dr Fatemeh Jamshidi-adegani, Fahad al Fahdi, Zahra Mirsanei, Juhaina al Kindi, Khamis al Riyami, Dr Nasar al Wahaibi, Asem Shalaby, Prof Ahmed al Harrasi, Dr Niyaz al Sharabi, Prof Kamal Mustafa and Dr Sulaiman al Hashmi.

Reflecting on the achievement, Vakilian emphasised the significance of the recognition, stating, “Winning the National Research Award means a great deal to me. It is a strong validation of our team's dedication and innovative work in addressing real-world health challenges such as chronic wounds. It motivates us to continue advancing research in stem cell and regenerative medicine, and highlights the importance of collaboration in developing solutions that can improve healthcare outcomes in Oman.”

‘Harfi Asalah’ showcases Omani creativity and community enterprise

SIHAM AL SAIDI
AL SUWAIQ, JUNE 27

In a vibrant celebration of Omani craftsmanship, cultural identity, and entrepreneurship, the ‘Harfi Asalah’ (authentic craftsmanship) initiative brought together artisans and productive families in Al Suwaiq, highlighting the role of traditional crafts in supporting local economic development and preserving Oman's rich heritage.

The event was organised by the Al Suwaiq Volunteer Charity Team. The initiative attracted a wide audience, including dignitaries, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and residents

interested in supporting local products and handicrafts.

Eng Said al Baddaei, the head of the organising charity, highlighted that this event was organised as both a cultural and economic platform. He added that the event aimed to empower artisans and productive families by providing opportunities to showcase and market their handmade products. Organisers emphasised that supporting local craftsmanship contributes not only to preserving traditional skills, but also to creating sustainable sources of income and encouraging small-scale entrepreneurship.

The accompanying



The event highlights the role of traditional crafts in supporting local economic development and preserving Oman's rich heritage.

exhibition featured a diverse collection of handmade products like embroidery, tailoring, perfumes, incense, gifts, household crafts, and products made by productive

families. Each exhibit reflected the authenticity of Omani culture while demonstrating the innovation and dedication of local producers.

The event received a positive response from visitors, many of whom expressed admiration for the quality and variety of the products on display. Attendees noted that initiatives such as ‘Harfi Asalah’ provide valuable marketing opportunities for artisans and productive families, helping them reach wider audiences and strengthen the sustainability of their businesses.

Visitors expressed strong appreciation for the initiative and its impact on the local community.

Fatma al Qutaiti, a visitor, said that the event provided a valuable opportunity to discover authentic Omani

products and support local families. “The quality of the handmade items reflects the creativity and dedication of our artisans. Events like this encourage us to buy local products and preserve our cultural identity.”

Another visitor, Salim al Hinai, highlighted the importance of creating more platforms for artisans and entrepreneurs. “These exhibitions help talented individuals reach new customers and transform their skills into sustainable businesses.

They also inspire young people to appreciate traditional crafts and consider them as viable career opportunities.”

WHO REALLY SHAPES OMAN'S ONLINE IDENTITY?

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 27

A breathtaking sunset over an ancient fort. A short video capturing the charm of a historic place. A visitor sharing a memorable experience with thousands of followers. In today's digital world, such moments can influence travel decisions more than traditional tourism advertisements.

As Oman continues to invest in tourism as a key pillar of Vision 2040, an important question emerges: who is truly responsible for promoting the country's heritage and tourism attractions? Is it the responsibility of tourism authorities alone, or has every citizen become a digital ambassador whose online actions can either strengthen or weaken Oman's image?

The rapid growth of social media has transformed ordinary users into powerful storytellers. Through photos, videos, blogs, and reviews, citizens now have the ability to introduce local destinations to global audiences. Yet this influence comes with responsibility. Inaccurate information, misleading content, or negative portrayals can spread quickly, affecting how potential visitors perceive a destination.

This reality highlights the growing importance of digital citizenship, which refers to the responsible, ethical, and informed use of digital technologies for the benefit of society. In the tourism sector, digital citizenship extends beyond safe online behaviour; it becomes a tool

Every post,
image, or digital
interaction can
either support or
distort the image
of our heritage and
culture.

DR ISAHAQ AL SHARYANI
CEO of Ighnaa Academy for Training and Economic Consultations

for preserving cultural identity, promoting heritage, and supporting sustainable tourism development.

One national example can be found in Harat Al Aqr in Nizwa. The historic neighbourhood reflects many of the qualities that attract modern travellers, like authentic architecture, cultural significance, a strategic location, and a vibrant atmosphere enriched by events and community activities. However, its visibility today depends not only on physical visitors but also on how effectively its story is told online.

A well-produced video documenting Harat Al Aqr's history, a visitor's photo highlighting its beauty, or a social media post sharing local traditions can inspire interest among audiences far beyond Oman. Such content

not only promotes tourism, but also helps preserve cultural narratives and strengthen national identity.

According to Dr Isahaq al Sharyani, CEO of Ighnaa Academy for Training and Economic Consultations, digital citizenship has become an essential component of national development in the digital age. He explains that every citizen now contributes to shaping public perceptions through online platforms. “Every post, image, or digital interaction can either support or distort the image of our heritage and culture,” he notes. He emphasises that responsible digital engagement is crucial for presenting Oman authentically and ensuring that cultural and tourism assets are represented accurately.

Many young Omanis have already embraced this role. They create content showcasing historical sites, share visitors' experiences, document cultural events, and introduce audiences to lesser-known destinations across Oman. Their efforts demonstrate how digital platforms can become powerful tools for tourism promotion when used responsibly.

Thus, no longer promoted solely through brochures and official campaigns. It is increasingly shaped by citizens who carry their smartphones and tell their country's stories online. In this new reality, digital citizenship is not simply a technological skill; in fact, it is a national responsibility. Every post has the power to attract a visitor, preserve a story, and strengthen Oman's position as a destination where heritage and innovation meet.

1. Digital citizenship
is not simply a
technological skill; in
fact, it is a national
responsibility

2. Digital citizenship preserves cultural identity, promotes heritage, and supports sustainable tourism development

3. Digital identity is increasingly shaped by citizens who tell their country's stories online

4. Visibility today depends not only on physical visitors but also on how effectively its story is told online

FIFTH PHASE OF PLASTIC BAG BAN ON JULY 1: EA



The Environment Authority (EA) will launch the fifth phase of decision No 8/2024, which bans the use of plastic shopping bags, on July 1. This phased implementation is part of the EA's ongoing efforts to reduce plastic pollution, promote sustainable consumption practices, and preserve natural resources and biodiversity in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Oman, Nepal promise to advance trade ties

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

A JOINT meeting of the Oman and Nepal businessmen interested in enhancing bilateral relations between the two, ended on a positive note promising to explore opportunities existing in both countries at Crown Plaza Muscat Hotel recently.

Organised by the Embassy of Nepal in Muscat, the Export, Investment, Tourism and Employment promotion programme focused on information dissemination related to the opportunities of export from Nepal and investment avenues in Nepal, labour regulations of Oman, tourism promotion and establishing connection between the Nepali and Omani businesspersons.

Titled 'Economic Partnerships for Mutual Prosperity', the event was attended by more than 100 participants including CEOs, Directors, Managers and representatives of different retail chains, representatives of various companies, media persons, entrepreneurs and community members attended the event and actively took part n the networking event held with the summit.

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman highlighted Nepal's broad potential in trade, investment and tourism vis-a-vis the same in Oman. He outlined both



Oman, Nepal meet promises to advance trade relations

countries' priority sectors for foreign investment and invited the investors and businesspersons to explore opportunities in both countries.

"While Nepal is strategically located between India and China, two of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies, with a combined population of about 2.8 billion, Oman is geographically located at a strategic point. These unique geographic positions give the countries significant potential as a bridge for trade, investment and tourism," he said.

Participants were encouraged to engage with one another and explore possible collaborations in trade, investment and tourism between Nepal and Oman.

Bishesh Kumar Sah, First Secretary, presented on the potential of export

trade from Nepal enlisting a few products with comparative advantages. He also briefed the gathering about the vast investment opportunities in Nepal for the Omani investors. Sah further explained the process one could take up to commence their business or investment in Nepal. He also informed that the Embassy is always ready to facilitate anyone willing to do business in Nepal.

Khawla bint Mohammed al Sadooni, a corporate and litigation lawyer, delivered a presentation on the practical aspects of labour rules and regulations that must be followed by both workers and sponsors in Oman. She explained how workplace issues can be resolved through legal means and how a healthy employee-employer relationship can be maintained.

Organ donation saves four lives

FROM PAGE 1

The operation resulted in the transplantation of a heart, liver, and kidneys to four patients suffering from advanced organ failure. All procedures ended successfully, and the patients' health stabilised following the surgeries. They completed their treatment and rehabilitation programmes and were discharged from the hospital.

Dr Noreen bint Yousef al Balushi, Director of the Omani Center for Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation, emphasised the Center's commitment to managing all stages of the process according to approved regulatory and medical frameworks and in line with best international practices. A number of national experts from various specialities contributed to this achievement.

This included early coordination among the relevant medical teams, fulfilling all legal, religious, and ethical requirements, ensuring the application of donor and recipient evaluation protocols, and overseeing logistical and organisational aspects to guarantee the safety and speed of procedures. — ONA

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

AQUATIC INVESTMENT EXCELLENCE LLC (AQUINEX)

Aquatic Investment Excellence LLC (AQUINEX), a joint venture company headquartered in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, is developing a large-scale Accommodation Facility as part of its sustainable aquaculture development project at Al Jazer.

The Accommodation Facility comprises a built-up area of approximately **55,000 m²** across **64 blocks** and is designed to provide safe, comfortable, and modern living facilities to support the long-term operations and growth of AQUINEX's aquaculture initiatives.

Project Name: Accommodation Facility – Al Jazer Shrimp Farm Project

Tender Title: Supply and Installation of Accommodation Furniture for Al Jazer Shrimp Farm Project

Scope of Work:
The successful Contractor shall be responsible for:

- Supply, delivery, installation, and commissioning of accommodation furniture.
- Supply of fixtures, equipment, accessories, and related items.
- Complete fit-out works for all building typologies.
- Complete installation & handover of fully furnished and operational facilities.
- Compliance with project specifications, drawings, and Client requirements.

Eligibility Criteria:
Interested bidders must:

- Be legally registered and licensed to operate.
- Demonstrate proven experience in similar large-scale accommodation, hospitality, residential, or camp projects.
- Possess the technical capability and resources required for execution of the works.
- Provide references for completed projects of similar scope and complexity.

Tender Documents:
Interested companies may obtain the tender documents by submitting their expression of Interest via email to: **procurement@aquinox.om**

Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.)
P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT THE SECOND QUARTER ENDED ON MAY 31, 2026

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to submit an unaudited financial statement of the company for the second quarter that ended on May 31, 2026, along with related reports.

Revenue is **﷮** 6,754,635 as against **﷮** 6,994,281 in the corresponding period of the previous year whereas net Profit after taxes for the period is **﷮** 1,271,492 as against **﷮** 1,365,576 in the last year.

The total shareholders fund increased from **﷮** 28,026,705 at the end of May 2025 to **﷮** 28,675,287 at the end of May 2026 and as a result of this growth, the net assets per share has recorded **﷮** 3.619.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express the most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour Al Said for his wise leadership and generous support to the private sector. Furthermore, I would extend our gratitude to his government for their cooperation and assistance with special mention to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, Muscat Stock Exchange, and Financial Services Authority.

I conclude this report by expressing our appreciation to the shareholders, Petroleum Development Oman, our bankers and customers for their valued support and cooperation.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors,

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Unaudited consolidated Statement of Financial Position
as at 31st May, 2026

	2026 RO. '000	2025 RO. '000
Fixed Assets	12,789	14,048
Current Assets		
Inventories	27	29
Trade & Other Receivables	5,939	6,052
Receivable from related party	21	41
Bank and Cash	13,186	11,991
	19,173	18,113
Total Assets	31,962	32,161
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other Payables	618	663
Payables to related parties	2,018	2,805
Lease liability	-	12
Tax liability	248	230
	2,884	3,710
Long-term liabilities		
Deferred Tax liability	375	399
Employees' end of service benefits	28	25
	403	424
Total Liabilities	3,287	4,134
Net Assets	28,675	28,027
Shareholder's Fund		
Share Capital	7,923	7,923
Legal Reserve	2,641	2,641
Retained Earnings	18,111	17,463
Total Shareholders' Equity	28,675	28,027

Unaudited consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For 8 months ended 31st May, 2026

	2026 RO. '000	2025 RO. '000
Turnover/Revenue	6,755	6,994
Gross Profit	1,539	1,690
Other Income	257	223
Administration & General Expenses	(299)	(303)
Operating Profit	1,497	1,610
Finance Charges	(2)	(3)
Profit before taxation	1,495	1,607
Taxation	(224)	(241)
Net Profit attributable to ordinary shareholders	1,271	1,366

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such request may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), P.O.Box: 311, Postal Code -100, Muscat.

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
296/2026	Providing care services to residents of the Social Welfare House at Rustaq and general services for the Social Welfare House building at Rustaq	Companies specialized in the field of cleaning, washing and pest control service [Afforestation, gardening and garden care services and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Sunday 12-07-2027 02:00 PM	Monday 27-07-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
297/2026	Providing cleaning services for the National Autism Center building at Al-Khod	Companies specialized in the field of cleaning, laundry and pest control services and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Sunday 12-07-2026 02:00 PM	Monday 27-07-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om**). On **Sunday 28/06/2026**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



People stand in the street following an earthquake in Peshawar, Pakistan. — Reuters

Strong earthquake shakes Pakistan and Afghanistan

KABUL: A strong earthquake struck Afghanistan’s Hindu Kush region on Saturday, the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre said, sending out tremors that could be felt from the capital Kabul across the border into neighbouring Pakistan. People ran out of their doors in panic in Swat district in northern Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, resident Daniyal Ahmad said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties. “It was very huge here in Swat and it lasted for quite a long time,” he said. “People came out of their houses and women and children were seen crying in panic.”

There were no immediate official reports of casualties or damage, but checks were ongoing, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority said in a statement. The magnitude 6 quake was at a depth of 100 km, EMSC said. An earthquake of magnitude 5.4 struck Pakistan earlier on Saturday. — Reuters

Beijing investigates light aircraft crash which killed pilot



The CITIC Tower, where damage is visible on a high floor of the exterior, in Beijing. — Reuters

BEIJING: A light aircraft crashed into Beijing’s tallest building killed the pilot and injured 13 people who were not on board, the local government said following the unusual accident for the Chinese capital, where airspace is heavily restricted. Those injured are receiving medical treatment and authorities are investigating the incident, Chaoyang district government said in a statement on Saturday.

“A single-engine, two-seat light sport aircraft collided with a high-rise building while flying near the East third ring road in Chaoyang, at 5:55 pm on June 26,” said the statement. “There was only one person on board, the pilot, who died,” the statement added, without giving any further details of the possible cause of the crash.

Damage to the exterior of the skyscraper appeared to be limited to a hole caused by the loss of two large glass panels. The gap had been temporarily boarded up as of Saturday. The 528-metre-high building, known as CITIC Tower or China Zun, is in Beijing’s Central Business District, about 6 km from the Forbidden City, which is visited by thousands of tourists each day. Pictures posted on social media in China in the aftermath of Friday’s crash showed debris from the plane and the identifier B-12PP. — Reuters

SEOUL SAYS CHINESE, RUSSIAN AIRCRAFT ENTER AIR DEFENCE ZONE

SEOUL: South Korea said it had sent up fighter jets as a precaution after more than 10 Chinese and Russian military aircraft entered its air defence zone on Saturday. The Joint Chiefs of Staff in Seoul said the Chinese and Russian aircraft had entered and then left the Korea Air Defence Identification Zone (KADIZ) over the East Sea and the South Sea. “South Korea’s military detected the Chinese and Russian aircraft before they entered the zone and deployed Air Force fighter jets to prepare for any contingency,” it said

in a statement, without giving more details. The Chinese and Russian aircraft did not violate South Korean airspace, it said.

An air defence identification zone is not sovereign airspace but a buffer area where countries identify approaching aircraft for security purposes. Military aircraft are generally expected to notify the relevant country before entering its air defence zone, although such notification is not legally required.

Beijing’s defence ministry said in a statement that the Chinese

and Russian air forces conducted a “strategic air patrol” over the Sea of Japan, the East China Sea and the western Pacific Ocean, “demonstrating their determination and capability to jointly uphold regional peace and stability”.

The brief statement did not specifically mention South Korea or its air defence zone.

South Korea and Japan reacted furiously when nine Chinese and Russian military aircraft entered the KADIZ in December 2025, the previous such incident. — AFP

Israel strikes south Lebanon despite US-brokered deal

THE ISRAELI military said it carried out an air strike on Saturday targeting suspected fighters in the Nabatieh area of southern Lebanon, the first such attack since Washington announced a framework agreement between Israel and Lebanon. Israel, Lebanon and the United States signed a trilateral agreement aimed at paving the way for a broader peace deal between the two Middle East nations.

An Israeli military spokeswoman said that Saturday’s air strike targeted “suspected militants who posted a threat to IDF soldiers” in the Nabatieh area. “The results of the strike are still being assessed.” Lebanon was drawn into the broader Middle East war on March 2 when the group Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel responded with heavy air strikes and a ground invasion in southern Lebanon, where its troops occupy swathes of territory and have been carrying out extensive demolitions of homes and other buildings. Friday’s US-brokered agreement followed five rounds



Israeli military vehicles drive amid destroyed buildings in Lebanon. — Reuters

of negotiations between Israeli and Lebanese officials aimed at ending the fighting.

The deal “begins to put in place a framework for lasting peace and security,” US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said at the signing ceremony.

“It’s the beginning of the beginning. There’s a lot of work ahead.” According to the text of the agreement, Israel and Lebanon “declare their intent to conclusively end the conflict, address its underlying causes, and therewith formally conclude any state of war between them.” Lebanon does not recognise

Israel and the two have officially been at war for decades, although Israel has largely fought Hezbollah and other non-state actors in its conflicts in Lebanon.

In the agreement, Israel says its military actions in Lebanon “are solely a consequence of the attacks, threat posed by, and hostile intent of non-state armed groups, particularly Hezbollah.” “Termination of this threat,” notably through disarmament of such non-state groups and “additional security arrangements to be agreed upon between the two countries,” will eliminate any future necessity for

IDF military action or presence in Lebanon, it says. It also stressed that “the Government of Israel declares that it has no territorial ambitions in Lebanon.”

Meanwhile, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem condemned the US-Israel-Lebanon framework agreement on Saturday, saying it is a major mistake by the government and that his group deems it null and void. “The framework agreement in Washington is humiliating, shameful, and a surrender of sovereignty. This agreement is null and void, and the provisions of the Iranian-American memorandum of understanding must be implemented,” Qassem said in a statement, referring to the deal to end the broader Middle East war, which includes a ceasefire in Lebanon.

Qassem called on the government to withdraw from “its sins that are ruining Lebanon”. He accused Lebanese authorities of committing a “grave blunder” and “legitimising the continuation of the (Israeli) occupation for many years,” which “may even lead to the annexation of these lands”. Hezbollah strongly rejects direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel, which have been ongoing since April. — AFP

INDONESIANS GATHER IN ANTI-GOVT PROTEST

SURABAYA: Indonesian police have arrested dozens of protesters following a rally against President Prabowo Subianto’s policies in the country’s second-largest city, a rights group said on Saturday. Around 100 people gathered near a government building in Surabaya, journalists estimated, to protest a fuel price hike and Prabowo’s flagship free meals scheme.

Some demonstrators hurled rocks towards police and set fire to rubbish in the middle of the road, prompting officers to arrest them, the reporters saw. Twenty-four protesters were arrested, Fatkul Khoir, a coordinator at rights group KontraS Surabaya, said. Police questioned them until 3:30 am on Saturday but did not charge them, he said.

Protests erupted in several Indonesian cities this month after Prabowo’s administration raised prices of non-subsidised gasoline by around 30 per cent, seeking to ease budgetary pressures as the Middle East war weighs on global oil supplies. Thousands of students took to the streets in the capital Jakarta to oppose both the fuel price hikes and to demand a halt to the multi-billion-dollar free meals scheme. — AFP

WAVE OF ATTACKS

Gunmen kill 17 in raid on Nigerian village



Gunmen from criminal gangs killed 17 farmers in a raid on a rural community in northwest Nigeria, an official said Saturday. Bandits on several motorcycles attacked the Tungar Baure village of Zamfara state and opened fire, Yahaya Abubakar Yari, political administrator of Talata Mafara district, said. The attack took place in the home district of junior defence minister Bello Muhammad Matawalle, who has previously pledged to deploy 2,000 troops to help fight the gangs. — AFP

DISEASE SPREAD

C African Republic declares cholera outbreak



The Central African Republic has declared a cholera outbreak after confirming 24 deaths and 197 cases near the capital Bangui, according to the health minister. “The Ministry of Health... has today, June 26, 2026, confirmed a cholera outbreak in the health districts of Bimbo and Mbaiki”, southwest of Bangui, said Pierre Somse. Measures to limit the spread have already been put in place in affected areas, and more are being deployed in nearby towns. — AFP

TIGHTEN SECURITY

Türkiye arrests surge ahead of Nato summit



The number of people jailed pending trial on terrorism-related charges in Türkiye rose to 178 ahead of a Nato summit in the capital Ankara, state media reported on Saturday, citing the prosecutor’s office. The detentions followed a series of anti-terror raids this week in the run-up to the July 7-8 summit, which is expected to be attended by 32 leaders including US President Donald Trump. 178 of 225 suspects taken into custody were formally arrested. — AFP

SHORTTAKES



Firefighters work at the site of a Russian military strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

UKRAINE, RUSSIA
AIRSTRIKES KILL 5,
WOUND DOZENS

KYIV: Russian strikes killed two people and wounded more than 20 in Ukraine, Kyiv said on Saturday, while Ukrainian retaliatory strikes on Russian-occupied territory and inside Russia killed three and wounded dozens, local officials said. One person was killed and two injured in the central eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, regional military administration head Oleksandr Ganzha said on Telegram. “The enemy attacked two districts of the region more than 30 times with drones and aerial bombs,” said Ganzha.

In Sumy district in the north, a 66-year-old man was killed in a Russian drone attack on a house, regional military governor Oleg Grygorov said. In another attack on the region, 13 people were wounded, Ukraine’s State Emergency Service said. It also said that strikes on southeastern Zaporizhzhia injured nine, including two children.

Photos on Telegram showed the destroyed roof of a block of flats with shattered windows, a devastated stairwell and a ravaged flat. In the southern Rostov region, drones hit a building of a military museum, governor Yuri Slyusar said, wounding 11 people. In Russia’s Belgorod region bordering Ukraine, a civilian was killed when Kyiv’s “drones struck a manufacturing facility”, local authorities said. — AFP

ITALY ’S LONGEST RIVER RUNS DRY



Seawater is seeping into Italy’s longest river as the waterway starts to run dry in the heatwave, hitting a farming heartland that produces the milk for Parmesan cheese. The Po River has never fallen this low so early in the year, raising fears of a devastating drought in July in this corner of northern Italy. One of the two canals that irrigate it has been shut because the seawater would enter and damage the crops. The Po River’s flow has collapsed in a matter of days, dropping below 300 cubic metres per second, compared with an average of around 1,500 in June, according to Aipo, the interregional river agency. — AFP

UK TO EXPAND
REFUGEE
SPONSORSHIP
SCHEMES

LONDON: The UK interior ministry has announced it will create new legal routes for asylum seekers, including allowing community organisations to sponsor refugees based on a similar system in Canada. The system will come into place later this year, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said late on Friday, with organisations and some “trusted” universities able to sponsor refugees and first arrivals expected in autumn 2027.

A route for employers to sponsor

refugees is also expected to open next year, the Home Office said in a press release. Immigration and asylum are thorny issues in the UK, where the hard-right Reform UK party has rapidly grown in popularity, riding a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. Keir Starmer, who stepped down as prime minister this week but will remain in power until his successor is chosen, has tried to appear tough on immigration since coming into power two years ago.

His government will next week introduce legislation in parliament tightening asylum rules, including making it easier to deport failed asylum seekers and restricting family reunion for refugees to immediate family members.

The immigration policies of his likely successor Andy Burnham — who could replace Starmer as early as July — remain unclear, though he has acknowledged migration concerns in his recent campaign to become an MP. — AFP

Venezuela deaths nearly
1,000 as search continues

THE DEATH toll from twin earthquakes in Venezuela rose to 920, with tens of thousands reported missing as international rescue teams boosted a desperate and slow-moving search for survivors. Caracas residents jeered interim leader Delcy Rodriguez during her visit to a devastated neighbourhood, as fury over the perceived lack of an official response mounted.

United Nations aid chief Tom Fletcher said that more than 50,000 people were missing after two powerful earthquakes struck within a minute of each other on Wednesday evening, flattening buildings in the north of the country. The coastal area of La Guaira, near the capital Caracas, was the worst hit, with one building after another crumpled by the magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 quakes.



Members of Chile’s USAR search and rescue team stand on rubble of damaged buildings Catia La Mar, La Guaira state. — AFP

he was only five months old,” said an anguished Marjosly Salazar, 40, whose 16-year-old daughter died in the quake. The baby and Salazar’s cousin are both missing. “Please, we need support here. We need machinery to start lifting the columns,” she said. “We haven’t seen any government officials here, none at all.”

In an upscale Caracas neighbourhood, Rodriguez was greeted with angry chants from a crowd of people whose loved ones were trapped under the debris. “The government isn’t doing anything for the people,” they yelled from behind cordons next to a pulverised building.

Journalists saw workers using sledgehammers to break through detritus, calling for “absolute silence” to detect cries from survivors. “It’s a

very, very complex emergency response,” the UN’s Fletcher said, warning the death toll could rise significantly. Aftershocks and destroyed buildings still posed significant dangers. Venezuela’s worst earthquake in more than a century has come after the oil-rich country endured more than a decade of economic collapse. The crisis has hollowed out hospitals and public services, driving millions to leave the country. The country is still in a fragile transition six months after the United States ousted leader Nicolas Maduro.

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said search and rescue teams from at least 17 countries were being mobilised to help find survivors.

Rodriguez said on Friday she had received a call from US President Donald Trump

and Secretary of State Marco Rubio who “reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the response efforts by sending rescue workers, specialist equipment, support for temporary shelters and humanitarian aid for the affected families.”

The United States said earlier it was sending a disaster response team of more than 250 personnel, including three special search-and-rescue units with dogs trained to locate people trapped beneath the rubble. A senior US military official landed in Caracas to oversee Washington’s relief efforts.

“Even before the earthquakes, millions of people across Venezuela were facing food insecurity, collapsing health services, protection risks, and limited access to basic services,” the UN and other aid agencies said in a statement. “The international community must not allow this emergency to deepen into a larger human tragedy.” Earthquakes of similar magnitude claimed more than 200,000 lives in Haiti in January 2010 and 73,000 lives in Kashmir in October 2005.

Those killed included 28 Portuguese nationals, five Spaniards, two Brazilians, seven Chinese nationals, one Chilean and one Italian-Venezuelan.

85 Portuguese nationals and 119 Spaniards were missing or otherwise unaccounted for, according to their respective governments. The quakes were the most powerful to hit Venezuela since a 7.7-magnitude tremor struck offshore in 1900. Venezuela’s northern coast sits on a boundary between the Caribbean and South American tectonic plates. — AFP

Records tumble across European states as heatwave moves east

BERLIN: Tens of millions face a weekend of extreme temperatures in Europe as a deadly heatwave moves eastwards, with German forecasters warning that more records could be broken and eastern countries issuing a slew of red alerts for the coming days. Analysis suggested almost 200 million would face temperatures of more than 35°C on Saturday as an unprecedented hot spell that has already seen records tumble in Britain, France, Switzerland drags on.

Scores of people have died either through heat-related illness or drowning accidents and emergency services in several countries have said their facilities are saturated. Street parties and music festivals were cancelled in France, Germany and the Netherlands — though Pride Marches were set to go ahead in Budapest and Munich despite the extreme heat warnings. And both Switzerland and France had switched off nuclear reactors as the water used for cooling was in danger of overheating nearby rivers.

Denmark recorded its highest temperature on record on Saturday, the Danish Meteorological Institute (DMI) said. “With 36.6°C north of Odense, we have the warmest day ever since measurements began in 1874.” DMI had warned that the record could be broken as a heatwave swept over the Scandinavian country



Workers push handcart loaded with water bottles during a heatwave in Saint Mark square in Venice. — AFP

Denmark recorded its highest temperature on record on Saturday, the Danish Meteorological Institute (DMI) said. “With 36.6°C north of Odense, we have the warmest day ever since measurements began in 1874,” DMI said in a post to X. It added that “the day isn’t over yet...” The previous record

temperature in the Scandinavian country was 36.4°C, which was recorded in August 1975, according to DMI. DMI had warned that the record could be broken as a heatwave swept over the Scandinavian country, with media showing images of Danes around the country trying to cool off at beaches.

The German Weather Service (DWD) issued a red alert for most of the country on Saturday. “It can’t be ruled out that temperatures could approach 42°C,” the service said, which would mean another all-time heat record just a day after the previous one. Scientists have shown that recurring heatwaves are a clear marker of global warming driven by humans burning fossil fuels — and are set to become more frequent, longer and more intense. Experts said a “heat dome” of trapped air from north Africa was causing the intense weather, and although the phenomenon was not unprecedented, the temperatures were.

Romania was the latest country to issue a red alert, putting out a warning

that almost the entire country would face extreme heat from Monday to Wednesday. Slovakia had issued a similar warning and confirmed that Friday night had been the warmest on record with temperatures not dropping below 26.3°C.

Denis Ovdienko, a courier, said in Bratislava on Friday he was struggling to keep cool and had to rely on public fountains. “I feel like everything is warm. The road is warm, my phone is warm, my head is warm, everything is hot,” said the 26-year-old.

“After four o’clock, the fatigue starts to kick in.” The Czech Republic, Hungary and Moldova were also on the highest alert for the weekend, with Balkan countries also bracing for a tough few days.

At least 193 million people in Europe were expected to experience temperatures above 35°C, according to calculations based on forecasts, with Germany the hardest hit. Although a slew of events were cancelled, many in Germany were soldiering on. — AFP

OPINION

The lesson beyond ‘Teach You a Lesson’



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

WHEN I learned about the new Korean series “Teach You a Lesson,” I was curious to watch it. The series focuses on a fictional government called the Educational Rights Protection Bureau (ERPBB), an agency set to restore order in problem schools. I enjoyed watching the ten episodes, but episode 5 stood out, as I later learned that it was based on a true story.

The episode starts with a young primary school teacher attempting to hang herself in the classroom. We learn that she was subjected to bullying and harassment from an aggressive parent who bombarded her with false accusations, endless messages, and public humiliation, which slowly eroded her psychological well-being.

The story mirrors a real tragedy that shook South Korea in 2023 when a young elementary school teacher in Seoul committed suicide. The incident ultimately led to legal reforms aimed at safeguarding teachers’ rights. overprotective parents and how those suffering in silence can lead to suicide. It also shows that certain legislation can favour parents over the rights of the teachers.

For psychiatrists, the story is sadly familiar. While the setting may be a

classroom, the psychological mechanisms are universal. Human beings can tolerate hard work, long hours, and even adversity when they feel supported and valued. What becomes truly destructive is chronic stress combined with helplessness.

This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as moral injury, the distress that occurs when individuals are prevented from carrying out the very values that brought them to their profession. Most teachers enter the field because they wish to educate, nurture, and inspire. When they instead discover themselves defending against accusations, hostility, and unrealistic expectations, the gap between their ideals and reality becomes emotionally devastating.

Burnout is often misunderstood as simple exhaustion. In reality, it consists of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and a diminished sense of accomplishment. A teacher experiencing burnout may continue to stand in front of the class every day while feeling psychologically absent inside. The body remains at work, but the spirit quietly withdraws.

Perhaps one of the most heartbreaking details of the real case was that the young teacher reportedly asked her mother to read

Human beings can tolerate hard work, long hours, and even adversity when they feel supported and valued. What becomes truly destructive is chronic stress combined with helplessness.

her diary. Mental suffering often speaks softly before it screams. Diaries, changes in behaviour, social withdrawal, irritability, sleep disturbances, and expressions of hopelessness may all represent cries for help that go unnoticed.

Teachers occupy a unique place in society. Parents entrust them with their children, while societies entrust them with their future. Yet we often forget that teachers themselves are human beings who are vulnerable to stress, self-doubt, and emotional pain.

The lesson from episode 5 extends across many countries as educators increasingly report rising workloads, parental pressures, administrative demands, and fears of complaints or litigation. Protecting teachers is not merely an employment issue; it is a public mental health priority. A system that fails to care for its caregivers eventually harms those who depend on them.

In my opinion, resilience is not just an individual trait alone. It is also created by systems, cultures, and communities. No amount of personal resilience can compensate for a workplace that repeatedly wounds.

A society’s true measure is not just how well it educates its children, but also how compassionately it protects their teachers.

NO FUEL, NO SLEEP: UKRAINIAN STRIKES TARGET CRIMEA

For Yulia, a 23-year-old resident of Crimea, nights have become sleepless due to increased Ukrainian drone attacks on the peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014.

Kyiv’s army is pounding supply routes and striking energy facilities across the Black Sea territory — a campaign it sees as fair retribution for Moscow’s daily barrages of Ukrainian cities, and one that it hopes will turn the tide of the four-year war in its favour.

On Thursday, the Moscow-installed governor of Crimea announced power cuts across the peninsula, which, despite the war, had been a popular holiday destination for Russians.

Fuel sales have been completely suspended to the public, and children’s summer camps have been cancelled.

“It’s like some kind of psychological pressure: every night there are drones, air alerts, it’s impossible to sleep,” Yulia said.

“And if you sleep, you have terrible dreams.”

Since May, Ukraine’s army has destroyed dozens of fuel tankers and military vehicles travelling along supply routes through Russian-occupied southern Ukraine towards Crimea, exploiting advances in its drone technology.

Kyiv slammed the move as illegal, a position supported by the vast majority of the international community, with barely a handful of countries having recognised the peninsula as Russian.

“We were afraid we’d never wake up again, we prayed all night,” one woman, holidaying in Feodosia on Crimea’s southeastern coast, said about a recent overnight attack. “The sky was like Star Wars.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called the campaign “carefully calculated”, designed to create “the conditions” that will force “Russia to choose peace.”

Talks to end more than four years of full-scale war remain deadlocked.

Millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes and swathes of the country’s south and east have been decimated by fighting.

On social media, Crimean residents lament that they now find themselves on the front line in an escalating aerial warfare.

Even fervent Putin supporters have expressed their anger.

For Ukraine, the strikes have both a military and symbolic purpose.

“Zelensky is doing everything to show that Russia’s territorial gains are fragile,” Tatiana Kastueva-Jean, director of the Russia/Eurasia Centre at the French Institute of International Relations, said. — AFP

Racism fractures societies

RACISM MUST be confronted head on. It is a toxic cancer. If it is left to grow, it destroys societies from the inside by turning neighbours into targets and replacing justice with mob rule. I am English and my wife is Omani. We are both practising Muslims. She wears a hijab and she is frightened of being attacked. I have strong anti-racist views.

For these reasons we are both reluctant to visit the UK. Racism and xenophobia have increased. It is weakening the UK by driving communities apart, worsening inequality and eroding trust in politics and public services. Racism does not only harm individuals. It damages social cohesion and fuels social unrest. The UK has seen far-right Islamophobic attacks and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries , including riots targeting mosques, asylum-seeker accommodation and ethnic minority communities. These events spread fear and make it easier for extremists to claim they are “defending” society. Racism also gives ethnic minorities worse life opportunities—limiting access to jobs, housing and fair treatment. Consequently ethnic minority communities often face higher risks of poverty.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Racism must be confronted head-on. It is a toxic cancer. If it is left to grow, it destroys societies from the inside by turning neighbours into targets and replacing justice with mob rule.



An anti-racism march in London. — Creative Commons file photo

people like X”—then select whatever evidence seems to fit, ignoring any official data which contradicts it. When the argument uses official homicide statistics correctly—such as those for England and Wales that record ethnicity for principal suspects and for those convicted—it does not support the sweeping claims made by racists.

Racists thrive on simplified stories that treat one crime as proof about an entire community and they ignore the difference between what statistics show and what slogans insist on. Still, the racist narrative keeps being weaponised through a steady stream of cases.

On 3rd December 2025, Henry Nowak, an 18-year-old white university student, was murdered in Southampton by 23-year-old British Sikh Vickrum Singh Digwa. Sikh groups quickly condemned the murder and made clear they were not responsible for the killer’s actions. But the far right exploited the case. Racists gathered outside Southampton Central Police Station before marching towards Digwa’s family home. Several far-right figures—including white supremacist convicted criminal Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson), UKIP leader Nick Tenconi and

Laurence Fox—addressed the crowd. Violence broke out, with missiles thrown at police, vehicles damaged and some people performing Nazi salutes while shouting “white power”. The same script appeared in Northern Ireland.

After an attack in which Hadi Alodid, a Sudanese man, has been charged with attempted murder, racist protesters, many masked, gathered across Belfast. They set fire to a bus and several cars and residents reported that a building near the city centre was also set alight and that petrol bombs were thrown. This is where the contrast is stark.

In 2025 there were many, many more murders in the UK, including the killings of Igor Pavlov by Anthony Ellis, Dawn Rhodes by Robert Rhodes, Alana Odysseos by Shaine March, Leiland-James Corkill by Laura Castle and Rico Burton by Liam O’Pray. The list is endless. After these murders, there were no riots, no Nazi salutes, no attacks on innocent people unconnected to those tragedies and no widespread blame being assigned to the communities of the convicted murderers. Why? Because the offenders were “indigenous” whites, including people of different religions and social backgrounds.

Teen social media ban a sign of the times



RAY PETERSEN
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The writer is a media consultant

THIS UNITED KINGDOM Government has achieved, say its critics, very little; however, the electorate has been heard in one respect, and while youth will disagree, Mums and Dads nationwide will applaud a pending social media ban for U16s.

Spanish PM Pedro Sanchez pledged recently to protect his youth from the “digital Wild West.” Danish PM Mette Frederiksen accused mobile phones and social networks of “stealing our children’s childhood”. Austria has plans for a parallel complementary educational programme on media and artificial intelligence to offer support. France, during 2015, banned mobile phones in colleges, between the ages of 11 and 15, that may yet become a total ban.

Norway, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia are ‘working through’ the legislative process. In Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia are active, while India and even China, on a reduced basis, are actively investigating their options. For now, the US is leaving legislation to individual states to implement, whereas Brazil has passed a ‘Digital Statute of Children and Adolescents Act,’ as the first move in its protective programme.

Australia is the one country, so far, to implement legislation. Their eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said the restrictions “aim to protect young Australians from pressures and risks that users can be exposed to while logged in to social

media accounts,” where design features encourage greater screen-time, and promote engagement with content harmful to their health and well-being.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said he was “certain that many of the younger ones will be angry, but our role is not to be pleasant.” Young people are not going to like it, and they will resist, disliking a thing that they know is good for them, but such is the impetuosity of youth, but will ultimately have no option.

That, though, is somewhat mitigated through the nationwide consultation process, with the outcome that 90 per cent of parents favoured banning U16s from key social media platforms, with initial thinking that Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and X would all come under the ban, but that messaging apps such as Signal and WhatsApp would remain unhindered.

From 2027, U16s will no longer be able to access the identified social media. They will still be able to keep in touch with friends and family, continue their learning and revision practices, and stay abreast of news, current affairs, and gaming, and keep safe from harm by making ‘stranger communication’ a much less likely for the pre and early-teens.

The government will further promote well-being and healthier lifestyles through safe, dedicated online noticeboards, calendars, and platforms where they can form friendships, develop study habits, and

Make no mistake, however, this legislation, when it happens, will be challenged like no other, because the U16 generation is the most entitled, and petulant, and given their technological excellence, there will be significant kickback

grow within a protective online environment. It has earmarked £500 million to support the young population, and the Department of Education has £132 million to ensure there is no ‘vacuum’ into which young social media users will fall. It is also investing over £3 billion in some 250 youth centres, school sport facilities and equipment, and refurbishing a thousand arts, cultural, and heritage sites to offer greater diversity of active experiences.

Social and societal isolation, and the entire youth landscape of resilience and confidence will be tested in this, if in no other way than individual age compliance, possibly by reverse engineering data already held in terms of adult age-verifications currently held through the Online Safety Act (2023) with its full range of Ofcom inspired data, provisions, penalties and protections, to ensure fairness, validity and reliability.

Make no mistake, however, this legislation, when it happens, will be challenged like no other, because the U16 generation is the most entitled and petulant, and given their technological excellence, there will be significant kickback. From them, from parents who would give up for ‘peace and quiet,’ or the accessibility of virtual private networks, VPNs, with a government update due next month on identity and online safety perspectives.

This will not be easy, but nothing with such merit, nurtured by good, ever comes easy, “la shay’ jayid yati bisuhula.”

Climate change to blame for intensity of Europe heatwave

NICK PERRY

Human-caused climate change is “unequivocally” responsible for the intensity of a record-breaking heatwave scorching Europe, scientists said on Friday.

It would have been “virtually impossible” for such exceptional temperatures to occur in June fifty years ago, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said.

A similar heatwave would have been 3.5C cooler during the day in June 1976, concluded the study by scientists from Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom. But the world is hotter today and “the chance of a heatwave like this has changed immensely”, said the study’s lead author Theodore Keeping from Imperial College London.

“This event would not have been possible in June without climate change,” Keeping told reporters. The planet has warmed about 1.4C above pre-industrial times, driven by the burning of coal, oil and gas.

Scientists agree this is making extreme weather events like heatwaves more frequent and intense, and that limiting warming is vital to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

Europe is the world’s fastest-warming continent and tens of millions of people have sweltered this week in temperatures that broke records in some countries. “The weather pattern itself is not particularly unusual, but the temperatures are — or at least they used to be, without human-induced climate change,” Friederike Otto, the co-founder of World Weather Attribution from Imperial College London, told reporters.

As the heatwave is still unfolding, scientists used observed and forecast temperatures to compare this heatwave against how it might have behaved in the cooler climates of 2003 and 1976.

Even compared to 2003 — when tens of thousands of people died in a major European heatwave — the current episode was notably extreme, the authors said.

A similar heatwave in June 2003 would have been about 2C cooler, the study said.

“In 2003... daytime heat like this would still have been very rare”, while overnight temperatures would have been more than a hundred times less likely. “Our analysis here shows that intense heat is increasing rapidly even in living memory, with such events tens to hundreds of times more likely since only 2003 and virtually impossible just 50 years ago,” said the study.

“Climate change is unequivocally to blame.”

The El Nino weather pattern — a natural warming climate phase — had “no role in driving the heat”, the authors said.

Otto also singled out the threat of “heat stress” posed by the combination of high temperatures and humidity. Heat stress occurs when the body’s natural cooling systems are overwhelmed, causing symptoms ranging from dizziness and headaches to organ failure and death. — AFP

Student cheating tough to detect in an AI era

THE VIDEOS are all over social media, making students an irresistible offer: Go ahead and let artificial intelligence do your homework — with the latest technology, you won’t get caught.

If you hate writing, you can avoid it. Even established ed-tech companies are marketing with a wink and a nod.

These kinds of tutorials are now pervasive on TikTok and YouTube. They show students how to use tools known as humanizers and autotypers, which make it easier than ever to cheat. The videos — sometimes labelled ads, sometimes not — target college and high school students.

Humanizers rewrite AI-produced text to make it sound less robotic, formulaic and trite.

Autotypers slowly drip words and sentences into documents, making it appear as if papers were typed at a human pace when, in fact, they were produced by AI. They even fabricate typos, deletions and revisions.

Both tools can help students evade software designed to detect AI.

Colleges and K-12 schools are trying to keep up, with AI detection becoming a significant expense. But educators attempting to restrict the technology, worried about students failing to develop basic skills, are often lagging in what tech-industry leaders are calling a detection arms race. In some cases, the same companies selling detection tools are also making apps that allow students to cheat, including by writing papers for them or rephrasing text written by others. The apps promise to help them avoid accusations of misconduct by scanning their work before they submit it, allowing them to rewrite passages identified as AI. Even honest students are often willing to fork over \$10 to \$20 per month for premium tools, since AI detectors sometimes flag legitimate work.

Jenny Maxwell, head of education at Superhuman, the AI company that makes Grammarly, called the race between detection and evasion “ultimately, a dead end.” “Bigger cat, bigger mouse,” she said. Instead, she urged educators to accept that most



DANA GOLDSTEIN

The author covers education and families for The New York Times

future writing would be produced in a partnership between artificial intelligence and human discernment.

Even before AI chatbots, the Internet had made cheating easier, in part through the simple mechanism of copy-and-paste plagiarism.

OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Google’s Gemini are the most popular AI tools among students.

But just beneath these behemoths is a roiling, fiercely competitive market of legacy ed-tech purveyors and tiny startups, all using social media to tell young people that their academic lives could be easier — much easier — if they embrace AI.

Some startups explicitly teach students how to cheat.

Meanwhile, established companies often urge students to use their tools responsibly as aids for studying, research, brainstorming, outlining and revision. But many of them are simultaneously producing technology that can easily be used to plagiarise and cheat. They put out tongue-in-cheek ads alluding to their ability to help students get away with something. Smaller companies are sometimes more direct. In one TikTok video, Carter Smith, a young tech influencer known as CarterPCs, gleefully shows viewers how an autotyping and humanising app called Grubby AI can make it seem like a person naturally wrote an essay that was, in fact, produced by ChatGPT. Autotypers are a response to the fact that many teachers and professors now check a document’s version history for signs of AI use. If 1,000 words suddenly appeared in a Word or Google document at 11:59 pm, it could mean the student pasted in text produced by a chatbot.

GrubbyAI and its many competitors are finding ways around those systems.

Dripwriter’s website says the app provides “believable typos and fixes” along with “background autotyping so your essay keeps working when you step away.” Jesse Dwyer, a spokesperson for Perplexity, said the company had cut ties with an advertising agency that had “taken liberties” to increase online engagement,

and that Perplexity had reminded social media partners to focus on “appropriate, responsible uses of Comet.” The browser can help with tasks educators might approve of, like formatting citations and creating study guides. But it can also complete assignments from start to finish. Some professors are increasingly concerned about Grammarly, an app that has existed for 17 years as a sort of muscular spell-check. It now offers an “authorship” tool that helps professors screen for AI misconduct by analysing a document’s version history. At the same time, the app allows students to generate writing from scratch, humanise text, and scan and replace phrases that could set off AI detectors.

Grammarly also provides a paraphraser that instantly rewrites any published text a student copies and pastes into a browser tab, which could be considered a form of plagiarism.

Grammarly advises students to use text-generation features “responsibly,” by citing each instance where AI was used in a paper. But the company also puts out ads that suggest students can use the app to pass off AI-produced writing as their own: “Detect AI text — it’s 2026, after all,” says one TikTok post. “Spot AI phrasing and choose edits that feel true to you.” Like other AI executives, Maxwell, the head of education for Superhuman, which makes Grammarly, said cheating has always existed but represents only a small segment — she estimated 10% — of student AI use.

Still, frustrated educators say AI is short-circuiting student thinking. Several studies have shown that people who rely on AI can experience cognitive off-loading, a process in which they fail to build new skills or their existing skills degrade.

George Cusack, director of AI academic initiatives at Carleton College, noted that Grammarly is sold to students as a benign helper when, in fact, “it’s a suite of tools that will do everything for you. It’s kind of shocking.” He added, “I find the apps explicitly marketed as cheating less problematic than the ones marketed as ‘help.’”



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



IRAN FANS
RIDE EMOTIONAL
ROLLERCOASTER

IRANIANS WOKE early on Saturday to watch the men's national football team face Egypt, riding an emotional rollercoaster as Iran fought back to draw but missed the chance to directly qualify for the World Cup last 32. Fans in Tehran watched a broadcast of the match in a packed hall dotted with Iranian flags. Emotions seesawed throughout the game, as Iranian supporters applauded and cheered every successful tackle while sighing and grabbing their heads in disbelief over the missed chances. The crowd was stunned when Egypt took an early lead but regained hope after the referee awarded Iran a penalty. The optimism was

short-lived as striker Mehdi Taremi failed to convert from the spot. Minutes later, defender Ramin Rezaeian equalised, sending fans into a wild frenzy. "I really believe in Team Melli, especially since they didn't give in after they conceded a goal," Amir, a 16-year-old student, said. People were on the edge of their seats throughout the second half. Some stood, while others paced around the hall to ease the tension before erupting in celebration when Shoja Khalilzadeh appeared to score what could have been the winner deep into stoppage time. Their jubilation was cut short when the referee ruled out the goal. The final whistle left the hall silent. Some supporters headed home, while others went straight to work. — AFP

SPAIN FANS KEEP MANOLO'S SPIRIT ALIVE



GUADALAJARA: Manolo el del Bombo is gone, but in Mexico the drum still speaks for him. Spain beat Uruguay 1-0 on Friday to top Group H and reach the knockout stage of the World Cup. For the Spain supporters in Guadalajara, the victory was tinged with sadness.

Manuel Caceres, the drum-pounding superfan known worldwide as "Manolo el del Bombo", died in May last year at the age of 76, leaving 'La Roja' without the rhythmic heartbeat that followed them for decades. "This is the first World Cup without him," Spain supporter

Pablo Munoz said. "And of course he's missed, because he was the most legendary Spain supporter, the most well-known." Sete Fernandez, who described himself as the "Trumpet of Spain," said supporters from fan groups Marea Roja and Furia Española had brought their own drum to

continue Manolo's legacy in the stands. "We're not talking about successors here; what we have to talk about is continuing his legacy," Fernandez said. In all, Manolo made it to 10 World Cups, missing Qatar in 2022 due to ill health. Fernandez said he has planned

his return flight for July 19 after the final and the drumbeat would follow Spain wherever they play. "If it's Guadalajara, then Guadalajara. If it's Miami, then Miami," he said. "We'll be following Spain and carrying Manolo's legacy wherever necessary." — Reuters



Spain's head coach Luis de la Fuente. — AFP

SPAIN COACH FEARS END FOR ‘HEROIC’ PINO

MEXICO CITY: Spain coach Luis de la Fuente fears that forward Yéremy Pino could miss the rest of the World Cup with a shoulder injury. Pino came on as a substitute during the second half of their 1-0 victory on Friday in Guadalajara but got injured late in the game. The player from Conference League winners Crystal Palace managed to complete the match but examinations are to determine the exact nature of the injury.

“Unfortunately it could be a collarbone injury. We will de la Fuente said post-match. Fearing the worst because Pino was in big pain, he added: “He has an injury that could lead him miss the remainder of the World Cup.

” De La Fuente praised Pino for completing the match despite the injury as Spain had already made their five allowed substitutions. “I am very grateful to him, and his team-mates are even more so,” the coach said, naming Pino’s attitude “heroic.” European champions Spain finished top of Group H with the victory and will play the second-placed team from Group L, either England, Ghana or Croatia, in the last 32 on Thursday.

— dpa



Yéremy Pino.



New Zealand's Chris Wood and teammates look dejected after the match. — Reuters

New Zealand disappointed but proud after exit

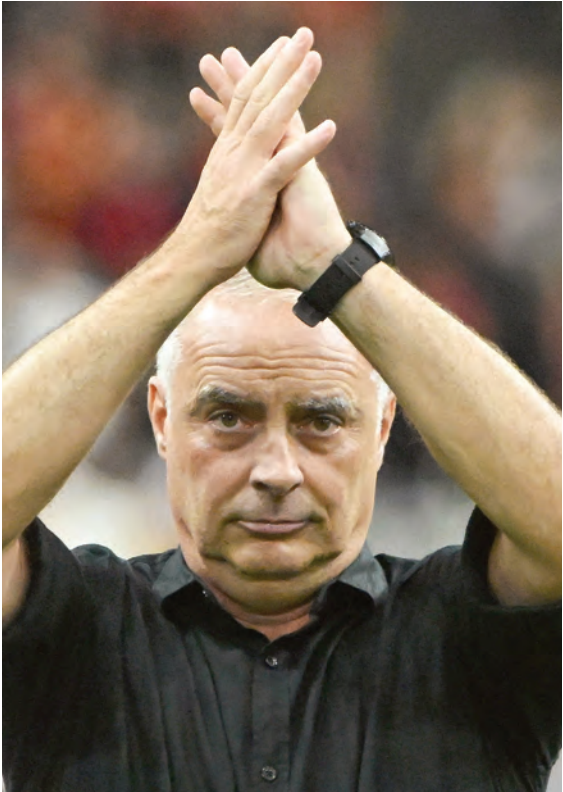
NEW ZEALAND'S World Cup journey came to an end with a 5-1 thrashing by Belgium on Friday, but coach Darren Bazeley said he was proud of how his players had performed despite finishing bottom of Group G. New Zealand led against Iran before being pegged back in a 2-2 draw, and they opened the scoring against Egypt before slumping to a 3-1 defeat.

Bazeley said the World Cup experience would be a valuable one for his squad.

“I think when you saw the draw and we knew we were playing these (Belgium) last, you probably expected them to already be on six points and that maybe could work in our favour ... we needed to pick up our points in the first two games and we gave ourselves the opportunity to do that, and we didn’t take it,” Bazeley told a media conference.

“We tried to get back in the game, we weren’t going to just leave this World Cup defending a 2-0 loss, we wanted to try and score, to try and get back in the game, but unfortunately, we got punished a few times.”

New Zealand did manage to pull a goal back when Elijah Just netted his third of the



tournament, but Belgium went on to score — New Zealand coach Darren Bazeley applauds fans after the match. — Reuters

twice more in the closing stages to complete the rout.

“Most of these guys will be back in four years’ time and they will be better for it, and they have to be better for it, if we’re going to get to where we all want to, which is into those knockout games,” Bazeley said.

“They’ll definitely learn from it.

This is a great group of players that have got a really great future, a bright future, both individually at clubs and together.

They’ll definitely be better for it because it’ll hurt, and it should hurt because we’re at a World Cup and now we’re going home.”

Striker Chris Wood, who was part of New Zealand’s 2010 squad, said there has been a clear progression during his time with the team.

“You always want to play the best teams, that’s how you progress and that’s how you get better. I think we showed that against Egypt and Iran,” he told reporters.

“We raised our level to that, but we couldn’t raise our level to Belgium tonight unfortunately.

They’re a top side, but if we get our players into bigger leagues around the world, that will also help.” — Reuters

Kroos fears Germany can be eliminated early

WINSTON-SALEM: Former Germany midfielder Toni Kroos fears that national team could be eliminated early from the World Cup. “It has to be a nightmare to play against us, we need to be able to defend well and make it a nightmare for our opponents.

We’re not doing that yet,” the 2014 world champion said in a live show on Tik Tok with his brother Felix and former Germany team-mate Lukas Podolski. “And we need Musiala and Wirtz in top form, which we don’t have right now.

If neither of those things changes, it won’t be long



Toni Kroos.



Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann. — Reuters

before we’re out,” he added.

Podolski also pointed out some flaws in the team following the 2-1 defeat to Ecuador in the final group stage match and said it’s important to learn from them quickly.

“Maybe a loss like this is good sometimes. Maybe a loss like this is good so that everyone can go back to their rooms and think things over,” said Podolski, who won the World Cup title alongside Kroos in Brazil in 2014.

Germany won their first two matches and qualified to the knock-out stage as Group E winners. — dpa



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



NORWAY COACH DEFENDS HAALAND OMISSION

NORWAY

COACH Stale Solbakken defended his decision to leave out star duo Erling Haaland and Martin Odegaard in Friday's 4-1 World Cup defeat against France, saying it was a "no-brainer".

"It was a no-brainer, for me, for the physio and for the medical staff, and for some of the players themselves," said Solbakken after he made 10 changes to his starting line-up following the 3-2 win over Senegal on Monday.

"They all said it would be difficult for many of them, and then the only consideration is of course the fans in Norway and here.

"They would have wanted to see Erling and Martin but we want to go as far as we can so it was a no-brainer. It didn't take us long to come to that decision."

Solbakken said the relatively quick turnaround from Monday's win over Senegal was the key factor. He said Haaland and Odegaard were "team players, so they know what is best for the team."

Manchester City striker Haaland scored four goals in Norway's first two matches, a brace in the 4-1 win over Iraq in their opening Group I game and two more in the victory against Senegal which secured their place in the next round.

Without either him or Arsenal midfielder Odegaard, their captain, as well as the likes of Atletico Madrid striker Alexander Sorloth, Norway were torn apart by the French.

Ousmane Dembele scored a hat-trick for Les Bleus and Desire Doue got their fourth goal late on. Thelo Aasgaard scored Norway's goal, while Jorgen Strand Larsen had a penalty saved just after half-time — that would have brought the game back to 3-2 had it gone in.

"Obviously our fans want to see Erling, they want to see Martin, but hopefully because of this we can give them some good summer nights in the next weeks," added the Norway coach, whose side must now travel to Dallas to play Ivory Coast in the last 32 next Tuesday.

"They are a very good team, physically one of the best in the tournament. Like our game against Senegal, this is a very 50/50 game so we need to be at our best," he said of the Ivorians. — AFP



Norway's forward
#09 Erling Braut
Haaland. — AFP

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The Wadi Al Khoudh project forms part of the wider Climate-Resilient Flood Protection Dams Project, backed by IsDB financing (Picture for illustration).

OMAN SEEKS BIDS FOR AL KHOUDH DAM

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

Oman has invited international bids for the construction of a flood-protection dam at Wadi Al Khoudh in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, placing one of Muscat Governorate’s long-planned flood-risk projects back on the infrastructure agenda under an Islamic Development Bank-backed climate resilience programme.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has invited sealed bids from eligible contractors for the construction of the Wadi Al Khoudh flood-protection dam, according to a procurement notification issued by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB).

The notification sets August 9, 2026, as the deadline for bid submissions. The project will be procured through international competitive bidding procedures.

The tender is significant because it moves the project from long-term planning back into an active procurement stage. It also reflects the growing importance of flood protection, urban safety and climate-resilient infrastructure in Oman’s development planning.

The Wadi Al Khoudh project forms part of the wider Climate-Resilient Flood Protection Dams Project, backed by IsDB financing. A general procurement notice for the programme listed several components, including flood-protection dams at Wadi Al Khoudh in Al Seeb, Wadi Rijma in Liwa, Wadi Majlas in Qurayat and Wadi Ahin in Saham.

The wider programme also includes Saham Agriculture City and an institutional development and capacity-building centre, linking flood protection with water management, agricultural development and long-term institutional capacity.

IsDB documents and announcements have cited the wider programme at more than \$600 million. That figure refers to the broader programme and should not be read as the value of the Wadi Al Khoudh dam alone.

The Wadi Al Khoudh scheme has a long policy background. Royal Decree 21/2013 had earlier declared the project to construct a dam to protect against flood risks in Wadi Al Khoudh in the Wilayat of Al Seeb as a public utility project, underlining the strategic importance attached to the site.

Oman plans integrated green industrial park

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

AN ambitious Green Park integrating green metals, green manufacturing and a silica-based industrial cluster is planned for development at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Initiated by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the hub is envisioned as a co-located industrial ecosystem linking mineral extraction, processing, low-carbon metals production and downstream manufacturing, with the aim of maximising value addition while minimising emissions and logistics costs.

Leading international consultants are currently competing for a contract to prepare a detailed master plan for the integrated development, with bids due by July 14, 2026.

The selected consultant will undertake commercial and feasibility studies, market assessments and investment attraction strategies, while developing regulatory frameworks and evaluation methodologies to guide decision-making.

The scope also includes preparing a detailed master plan and advanced engineering designs, alongside integrated infrastructure, utilities, logistics and environmental plans to deliver an implementation-ready roadmap for the project.

The Green Metals Zone is expected to serve as the anchor industrial cluster, centred on the production of low-carbon iron, steel and aluminium using renewable energy and green hydrogen.

Key projects include Jindal Steel’s planned 5 million-tonne-per-annum hydrogen-ready DRI/HBI complex, Meranti Green Steel’s proposed green iron venture and a number of green aluminium projects currently under evaluation.

Collectively, these developments would create a vertically integrated ecosystem spanning



The zone will leverage Al Duqm’s growing green hydrogen ecosystem (Image for illustration).

These developments would create a vertically integrated ecosystem spanning green hydrogen production, iron ore processing, direct reduced iron (DRI), hot briquetted iron (HBI), steelmaking, aluminium smelting, casting and downstream metal products for export markets, particularly in Europe and Asia.

green hydrogen production, iron ore processing, direct reduced iron (DRI), hot briquetted iron (HBI), steelmaking, aluminium smelting, casting and downstream metal products for export markets, particularly in Europe and Asia.

The broader objective is to position Al Duqm as a regional hub for low-carbon metals manufacturing.

The Green Manufacturing Zone will build on the output of the metals and hydrogen sectors to support a range of value-added industries powered by renewable energy.

Likely activities include fabrication of steel and aluminium products, components for renewable energy systems, industrial equipment, automotive and transport-related manufacturing, green chemicals, hydrogen-derived products and export-oriented assembly operations.

The zone will leverage Al Duqm’s growing green hydrogen ecosystem, including projects by ACME, Hyport Duqm and others, together with world-class port and logistics infrastructure, to attract industries seeking low-carbon supply chains and access

to international markets.

Finally, the Silica Zone will focus on the beneficiation and downstream processing of Oman’s high-quality silica resources. Rather than exporting raw silica sand, the emphasis will be on higher-value products such as solar glass, float glass, specialty glass, fibreglass, ferrosilicon, silicon-based materials and potentially solar-grade silicon feedstock.

Leveraging Oman’s abundant high-purity silica reserves, the cluster is expected to support national industrial diversification goals by converting raw minerals into higher-value products serving the construction, automotive, renewable energy and metallurgical sectors.

Solar glass and photovoltaic component manufacturing, in particular, could help position Oman within global clean-technology supply chains.

In essence, the proposed Green Park is envisaged as a vertically integrated industrial city that combines minerals processing, energy-transition technologies and advanced manufacturing within a single export-oriented ecosystem.

Oman non-oil exports reach **ﷵ** 1.61 billion in Q1 2026

MUSCAT: Oman’s non-oil exports reached RO 1.611 billion during the first quarter of 2026, while re-exports rose 4.6 per cent, highlighting continued momentum in the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to diversify trade and strengthen non-hydrocarbon economic activity.

Figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed re-exports increased to RO 367 million by the end of March, compared with RO 351 million during the same period of 2025. The data pointed to solid growth across several export sectors, led by chemical industries, whose exports rose 17 per cent year-on-year to RO 216 million.

Base metals ranked second, with exports increasing 10.8 per cent to RO 376 million, while exports of live animals and animal products



Re-exports increased to RO 367 million by the end of March, compared with RO 351 million during the same period of 2025.

grew 6 per cent to RO 104 million. The United Arab Emirates remained the largest market for Omani non-oil exports, receiving goods worth RO 382 million, equivalent to 23.7 per cent of total

non-oil exports.

Saudi Arabia ranked second with imports valued at RO 201 million, followed by India at RO 156 million, South Korea at RO 154 million and the United States at RO 133 million.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said it continues to strengthen export competitiveness through Oman Exports, which supports Omani companies in accessing overseas markets by improving trade services, facilitating export procedures and promoting participation in international exhibitions and trade events.

Ghalib bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said the results reflect the success

of national efforts to diversify the economy and increase the contribution of non-oil exports.

He said the ministry continues to develop initiatives that provide technical and logistical support for exporters while helping Omani companies expand into new international markets.

The ministry is also preparing specialised market studies, organising training programmes and strengthening engagement with international buyers and trade partners as part of broader efforts to expand Oman’s export base.

The latest figures underline the growing role of non-oil exports in supporting economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040, with government initiatives aimed at increasing the global reach and competitiveness of Omani products. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORT TAKES



The centre was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North.

Aster Al Raffah opens second advanced robotic rehabilitation centre in Suhar

MUSCAT: Aster Al Raffah Hospitals & Clinics, part of Aster DM Healthcare, has inaugurated its second Aster Al Raffah Walk Again Advanced Robotic Rehabilitation Centre in the Sultanate of Oman, expanding access to advanced neuro-rehabilitation services in Suhar following the success of its flagship facility in Muscat.

The centre was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation, in the presence of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, along with senior officials and healthcare leaders.

Equipped with advanced robotic rehabilitation technologies, the facility is designed to provide specialised care for patients with complex neurological and musculoskeletal conditions, supporting recovery, mobility and independence through personalised treatment programmes.

The centre offers rehabilitation services for patients with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, stroke-related disabilities, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, motor neuron disease, muscular dystrophy, movement disorders, ataxia, dystonia, Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. It also provides multidisciplinary care across neurology, spine, sports medicine and mental wellbeing.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari said the opening of the Suhar facility marks an important step in expanding advanced rehabilitation services beyond Muscat and bringing specialised healthcare closer to communities across Oman.

Mohammed al Kindi said the centre would strengthen access to high-quality specialised healthcare services in Al Batinah North and contribute to improving patient outcomes through advanced medical technologies.

Dr Azad Moopen, Founder Chairman of Aster DM Healthcare, said the expansion reflects the group’s commitment to making advanced healthcare more accessible across Oman while supporting the national “Treat in Oman” initiative by reducing the need for patients to seek treatment abroad.

Alisha Moopen, Managing Director and Group CEO of Aster DM Healthcare, said the new facility combines innovation with patient-centred care by providing world-class robotic neuro-rehabilitation closer to communities in northern Oman.

The Suhar centre is led by Dr Vivek Joseph, Senior Consultant Neurosurgeon and Medical Director and Dr Jaikishen Agiwal, Chief Operating Officer, who oversee its clinical and operational functions.

Genetco now the official distributor of TCL Mobile in Oman

MUSCAT: Genetco has announced its entry into the mobility segment through its appointment as the official distributor of TCL Mobile in the Sultanate of Oman. The announcement was made during the Genetco Mobile Dealers Meet, which brought together mobile dealers, retail partners and key stakeholders to introduce TCL Mobile’s latest devices and present the brand’s market direction in Oman.

This step marks a new chapter in Genetco’s growth journey as the company expands its presence in the consumer technology landscape.

With more than 55 years of market experience in Oman, Genetco has built a strong position across multiple consumer and business categories, supported by nationwide coverage, a team of over 1,500 employees, more than 80 trade



Genetco has built a strong position across multiple consumer and business categories.

partners and partnerships with over 25 trusted global brands. Genetco’s entry into the mobility

segment is a natural extension of its long-standing role in bringing international brands closer to

1.99% interest rate on Sportage L this summer

AS part of Kia’s Onward, Together summer campaign, the Kia Sportage L takes centre stage as a sophisticated SUV designed to elevate every journey for families across Oman. Combining bold styling, advanced technology, dynamic performance and premium comfort, the Sportage L continues to redefine the modern SUV experience while offering exceptional value through exclusive seasonal benefits.

To make ownership even more accessible, Kia Oman is introducing attractive finance solutions for individual retail customers. Customers can benefit from special interest rates starting from just 1.99% for finance tenures of up to four years and 2.99% for five-year tenures, subject to credit approval by select finance partners.

These rates are applicable on selected variants including the Sportage L 1.5T ALPHA 26 MY and Sportage L 2.0T MID 25 MY, providing customers with an ideal opportunity to join the Kia family this summer.

In addition, customers can enjoy savings of up to RO 1,700, offered as a direct vehicle price reduction in place of the standard cash gift. The offer package also includes one year registration along with a comprehensive service package of 30,000 km or 3 years.

Existing Kia customers purchasing a new Kia vehicle will receive an enhanced service package of 50,000 km or 5 years, further reinforcing Kia’s commitment to long-term customer satisfaction. These limited-time offers are valid until July 5, 2026.

Designed with practicality and comfort in mind, the Kia Sportage L features a spacious



Customers can benefit from special interest rates starting from 1.99% for finance tenures of up to four years.



2,755 mm wheelbase and a generous 543-litre cargo capacity, making it ideally suited for family travel and everyday versatility.

The SUV is powered by a choice of two advanced turbocharged engines – a 2.0T engine producing 233 HP and a 1.5T engine delivering 197 HP – both paired with an advanced 8-speed Shift-by-Wire transmission for a refined and responsive driving experience.

Further enhancing confidence on the road, the Sportage L comes equipped with features such as an Electronic Parking Brake and an available All-Wheel Drive (AWD) system, which intelligently distributes power to optimise traction and stability across varying road and weather conditions.

Inside, the Sportage L offers a premium

cabin experience tailored for modern lifestyles.

The interior is highlighted by a seamless dual 12.3-inch integrated cluster and infotainment display, complemented by a wireless smartphone charger, panoramic sunroof and front ventilated seats designed to enhance comfort during Oman’s summer season. Additional convenience features such as a smart power tailgate and a sporty D-shaped steering wheel further elevate the driving experience.

Safety remains a key priority, with the Sportage L equipped with a comprehensive suite of Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), ensuring greater confidence and peace of mind for drivers and passengers alike.

Sohar Intl launches Visa Commercial Choice Travel

MUSCAT: Sohar International has officially launched Visa Commercial Choice Travel (VCCT) during a high-profile corporate event held at the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat. This milestone establishes Sohar International as the first bank in Oman to introduce this specialised Corporate Credit Card solution, specifically engineered to transform business-to-business (B2B) supplier payments for Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and travel agents.

The formal launch was attended by executive leadership from Sohar International and Visa, alongside senior officials from Oman’s premier travel agencies. During the event, both institutions jointly showcased the live capabilities of the platform, demonstrating how



The formal launch was attended by executive leadership from Sohar International and Visa.

the specialised corporate credit card directly solves complex transaction challenges faced by the local travel industry.

Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Acting Chief Wholesale Banking Officer of Sohar International, stated, “As pioneers in the Sultanate of Oman’s banking sector, launching Visa

Commercial Choice Travel reinforces our commitment to delivering world-class corporate innovation.

By introducing this specialised corporate credit card to Oman, Sohar International provides OTAs and travel agents with the financial flexibility, robust controls and

global infrastructure needed to optimise operational costs and enhance profitability. We remain steadfast in our pursuit to build a comprehensive portfolio of innovative banking solutions that empower companies to expand and prosper, supporting their journey towards broader horizons of growth and success”.

Nasser Bdeir, Visa’s General Manager in Oman, stated: “Sohar International’s launch of Visa Commercial Choice Travel Card Program demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting the growth of Oman’s travel industry, as this sector continues to grow and connect globally, this unique program addresses common operational challenges facing travel agencies, like payment delays to suppliers and financial control”.

SHORTTAKES



Mazoon dairy farm uses advanced systems for animal care, nutrition and veterinary supervision.

Mazoon Dairy strengthens Oman’s food security drive

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

Mazoon Dairy is expanding its role as one of Oman’s key food security projects, combining large-scale dairy farming with advanced food manufacturing as the Sultanate of Oman seeks to reduce import dependence and strengthen domestic supply chains.

The company, which began operations on October 20, 2019, operates from a 15 sq km site in the Wilayat of Al Sinainah in Al Buraimi Governorate. The project includes an advanced dairy farm with more than 12,387 cows and a 50,000-square-metre factory producing dairy and juice products for the local and regional markets.

The integrated model places Mazoon Dairy among Oman’s strategic investments in food production, a sector that has gained growing importance as countries work to build more resilient supply chains and stronger domestic production capacity.

The farm uses advanced systems for animal care, nutrition and veterinary supervision. Purpose-built barns maintain temperatures at around 25°C throughout the year, supporting productivity in Oman’s climate. The company said average daily yield stands at around 38 litres per cow.

On the manufacturing side, Mazoon Dairy’s plant has a maximum production capacity of 650,000 litres per day. It operates 12 production lines and produces around 150 products, ranging from core dairy items to specialised products for different consumer segments.

Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Balushi, Production Planning Lead, said the company’s production system is designed to respond quickly to market demand while maintaining efficiency. “Today, we produce around 150 different products, ranging from core dairy items to specialised products tailored to various consumer needs”, he said.

He added that Mazoon Dairy has invested heavily in automation, with manufacturing lines now fully automated and packaging lines reaching about 80 per cent automation.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 27

THE Omani French Friendship Association (OFA) is positioning itself to play a key role in translating the outcomes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s royal visit to France on June 28 into tangible business, investment and cultural partnerships, its president Sulaiman al Harthy said.

The visit, which comes amidst growing economic cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and France, is expected to be accompanied by a high-level Omani delegation representing business, economic, scientific and other sectors.

While official agreements and memoranda are expected to be announced during the visit, Al Harthy said OFA’s focus would be on ensuring that those commitments evolve into practical cooperation once the delegation returns.

“The relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and France goes back to the 17th century”, Al Harthy said in an exclusive interview with the Observer.

“This visit is a renewal of that relationship and an opportunity to make it bigger, stronger and more beneficial for both countries”.

Founded to strengthen people-to-people and institutional links between the two nations, OFA serves as a platform connecting Omani and French stakeholders across business, culture, education and civil society.

Al Harthy said the association’s role becomes particularly important after major bilateral visits, when governments establish strategic directions and private-sector organisations help turn them into concrete initiatives.

“We as OFA, once His Majesty



Sulaiman al Harthy, President of Omani French Friendship Association.

comes back, will work very hard towards all the goals of this visit”, he said. “We will try to bring business people together, encourage cooperation and dialogue; and create an everlasting relationship and friendship between Oman and France”.

The visit follows the first Oman-France Strategic Dialogue held in Paris in April, which elevated bilateral engagement and provided a framework for deeper cooperation in economic and political affairs.

Al Harthy said OFA works alongside institutions such as the Oman-France Business Council, which operates under the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but focuses more broadly on facilitating connections between potential partners and creating opportunities for collaboration.

One of the association’s principal activities is organising events and forums that bring together Omani and French companies, entrepreneurs and professionals.

These interactions have, in some cases, led directly to business partnerships and helped companies navigate operational challenges in each other’s markets.

“I think one of the greatest things this association does is bring Omanis and the French together”, Al Harthy said. “It can be social, it can be art, it can be dialogue and it can be business”.

Al Harthy identified renewable energy and manufacturing as sectors with significant potential to attract greater French investment into Oman. He said the Sultanate of Oman’s industrial zones, investment incentives and strategic location continue to appeal to European companies seeking regional expansion opportunities.

“Many French companies are now looking particularly at renewables and manufacturing”, he said.

“Oman provides a very good environment for these sectors through its industrial and free zones and its investment framework”.

Beyond large multinational corporations already operating in Oman, including French firms active in energy and environmental services, OFA also plans to place greater emphasis on supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Al Harthy said future association programmes are expected to focus on

entrepreneurship, digital transformation and financial technology, building on previous initiatives that brought French experts to Oman to share expertise with local businesses.

Tourism is another area where the association sees opportunities for deeper cooperation.

France is among Oman’s most important European source markets and OFA has previously organised promotional initiatives, including hosting French influencers and adventure tourism campaigns showcasing the Sultanate of Oman’s mountains and outdoor attractions.

While the details of agreements expected from the state visit have yet to be disclosed, Al Harthy said the association will measure success by the extent to which signed memoranda and policy directions are converted into real projects, partnerships and economic benefits.

“We want this trip to be unique, to be very successful and to bring benefits both for the French and the Omanis”, he said.

Al Harthy added that the significance of the visit extends beyond diplomacy, noting that the active engagement of His Majesty in international outreach reflects the importance attached to economic cooperation and investment promotion.

“If His Majesty has time and effort to do these visits, it is for us to translate those visits into real measurable benefits to businesses and people on both sides”, he said.

The state visit is expected to mark a new chapter in Oman-France relations, with organisations such as OFA seeking to ensure that political goodwill is converted into long-term commercial and institutional partnerships.

Insurance investments in Oman climb to 876 million

MUSCAT: Total investments by insurance companies operating in Oman rose 10.3 per cent year-on-year to RO 876.3 million at the end of the first quarter of 2026, reflecting the sector’s growing role as a source of long-term investment in the national economy.

According to unaudited figures released by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), national insurers accounted for RO 588.8 million of total investments, while foreign insurers held investments valued at RO 287.5 million.

Insurance companies are required to invest under the FSA’s Investment of Insurance and Takaful Assets Regulations, which require at least 70 per cent of total investments to be placed within Oman.

The data showed national insurance companies allocated around 80 per cent of



National insurers accounted for RO 588.8 million of total investments, while foreign insurers held investments valued at RO 287.5 million.

their investments domestically, while foreign insurers invested about 85 per cent of their portfolios in the Sultanate of Oman.

Cash and bank deposits remained the largest investment category for national insurers, accounting for RO 263.9 million, or around 45 per cent of their portfolios.

Commercial bonds represented the second-largest asset class at RO 87.2 million, followed by government bonds at RO 79.4 million and listed equities at RO 73.6 million.

Several investment categories recorded strong growth compared with the first quarter of 2025. Investments in listed shares increased 90.6 per cent, while investment funds rose 78.4 per cent.

Commercial bond investments climbed 37.4 per cent and investments in unlisted shares increased 32 per cent.

The figures suggest insurance companies are continuing to diversify their portfolios while increasing exposure to domestic

financial markets and investment instruments. The sector remains concentrated among a handful of major players.

Gulf Insurance Group held the largest investment portfolio at RO 106.8 million, followed closely by Dhofar Insurance with RO 106.4 million. Liva Insurance ranked third with RO 97.7 million, while Oman Qatar Insurance Company reported investments of RO 75 million.

Together, the four companies accounted for 44 per cent of the sector’s total investments.

The Financial Services Authority said the figures highlight the insurance sector’s growing contribution to financial market development by directing long-term capital into bank deposits, bonds, equities and other investment vehicles that support economic growth and financial stability. — ONA

ENERGY POLICY

EU revises grid funding

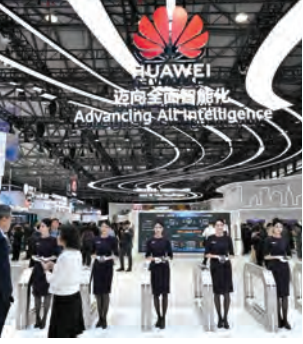


The EU governments scaled back plans to use national grid revenues to finance cross-border energy infrastructure, while agreeing to stronger centralised planning for electricity networks.

Under the plan, 10% of unused cross-border congestion revenues will support EU-backed projects from 2028, rising to 25 per cent by 2031. Several countries had opposed broader funding proposals over revenue concerns. — Reuters

TECH SECURITY

US expands China tech ban



The US has expanded restrictions on Chinese telecoms and surveillance equipment by banning imports of additional products from several manufacturers on national security grounds.

The measure broadens earlier restrictions on equipment from Huawei, ZTE and other firms to include older models. The expanded import ban is due to take effect in July. — Reuters

TRADE DISPUTE

Trump warns over digital tax



US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose a 100 per cent tariff on imports from any country introducing a digital services tax on American companies.

The warning escalates trade tensions with Europe and comes after discussions on tariff reductions between the United States and European Union. Trump said the proposed tariff would override any existing trade agreements. — Reuters

OPINION

How can tourism be a local added value?



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

TOURISM is commonly known to be a leading global economic sector that is vital to the workforce, investment and income of nations. The success of tourism, however, is not just about the number of patrons or the occupancy of establishments.

The greatest potential of tourism is to create local added value by making tourism spending stay in the local economy, supporting local industries, generating jobs and protecting cultural and ecological resources.

Local added value in tourism is the benefit of the economy, society and environment that is kept in the destination and actively engaged in by local businesses, suppliers, workers and communities. Unlike relying on foreign goods, labour, or outsourced services, destinations that optimise local tourism content provide visitors with a superior experience and achieve economic sustainability.

Tourism is a great way to create local added value by utilising local businesses. Resorts, restaurants, hotels and operators of other tourism services all need a variety of services and goods. Tourism leads to the growth of many areas of the economy by providing opportunities to local suppliers of goods and services needed by the tourism sector.

Employment is an important factor in creating value for people in the community. The tourism industry uniquely employs people with a variety of skills including

hospitality, crafting, farming and transport, as well as offering jobs in digital marketing. Investments in developing local skills and the local tourism workforce ensure that tourism-related skills add value to the community's social and economic wellbeing. Ongoing training and development improves the competitiveness of the destination in the global tourism arena.

Added value can also come from cultural heritage. Travellers nowadays want to experience a connection to local people and the history, customs, food and music of the places they visit. Crafts and cooking from various cultures and support and promotion of handicrafts and cultural festivals and heritage villages to local museums add value to the tourism experience and create sustainable income for local artisans.

The greatest potential for tourism's contribution to a community comes from the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Unlike large multinational enterprises, local cafes, guesthouses, local tour operators and community-based tourism activities retain a larger share of tourism-based income to the local economy.

Governments can empower these businesses by supporting access to better funding, developing policies that support SMEs and local businesses, providing digital marketing support and including them in national tourism strategies.

Incorporating sustainability practices into tourism and local businesses has become crucial for maintaining a competitive

The greatest potential of tourism is to create local added value by making tourism spending stay in the local economy, supporting local industries, generating jobs and protecting cultural and ecological resources.

advantage. Economically sustainable tourism preserves natural resources and ensures future generations benefit from the local economy.

Sustainability practices, especially waste and water management, conservation efforts, eco-tourism and biodiversity practices, can result in reduced costs for businesses and an increase in attractiveness for travellers. Responsible tourism is preferred by international travellers.

There are also positive effects resulting from the use of new technologies for local business integration. Digital tourism makes it possible for local businesses to be featured, direct bookings to be made, virtual experiences to be offered and improved destination management to be made through the use of analytics.

Artificial intelligence, digital payment systems, smart tourism and other technologies are levelling the competitive landscape for local businesses and improving the experience for travellers.

In the Sultanate of Oman, tourism is a major contributor to Oman's economic diversification efforts in line with Oman Vision 2040 and has much to offer with a rich culture, diverse landscapes and hospitable people. The potential for tourism to offer significant positive social and economic impacts is great.

The use of local content in developing tourism projects ensures that local procurement, investment and national supply chain integration are achieved.

AI’s energy appetite is reshaping the renewable transition

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Artificial intelligence is transforming industries at an unprecedented pace, but behind every AI model, chatbot and image generator lies an often overlooked reality: electricity.

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence is triggering a surge in global electricity demand as technology companies race to build larger data centres capable of processing enormous amounts of information.

While AI is expected to accelerate innovation across healthcare, finance, education and manufacturing, it is simultaneously creating one of the energy sector’s greatest challenges: how to provide vast amounts of reliable, affordable and low carbon power. Unlike many industrial facilities, AI data centres operate continuously, requiring uninterrupted electricity around the clock. This

makes them difficult to supply using renewable sources alone because solar and wind generation fluctuate with weather conditions and time of day.

The challenge is prompting governments, utilities and technology companies to rethink how future power systems are designed.

According to the International Energy Agency’s latest State of Energy Innovation report, advances in energy technologies, from next generation geothermal energy and sodium ion batteries to perovskite solar cells, are accelerating rapidly.

At the same time, innovation is increasingly focusing on making electricity systems more flexible rather than simply adding more renewable capacity.

Around the world, electricity demand is rising faster than many forecasts anticipated, driven by electrification, air conditioning, industrial growth and the emergence of AI infrastructure.

This is shifting attention towards energy storage, smarter grids and flexible demand management, all of which are becoming essential for integrating larger shares of renewable energy.

Technology companies are also reshaping renewable energy investment. Several major firms have signed long term agreements to purchase clean electricity directly from renewable developers, providing financial certainty for new projects.

Interest is also growing in advanced geothermal energy, which can provide carbon free electricity continuously rather than only when the sun shines or the wind blows.

The missing number in Dhofar’s tourism boom

DHOFAR Governorate no longer needs to prove that people will come. Every Khareef Dhofar Season confirms that. Families drive south from across Oman and the Gulf. Flights to Salalah fill. Roads, viewpoints, markets, hotels and restaurants carry the familiar signs of a season that has become one of the country’s strongest tourism brands.

That success deserves recognition. But the next question is more important than visitor numbers.

How much of the money stays in Dhofar? This is the missing number in the Khareef story. It is also the number that will decide whether the season remains a temporary tourism peak or becomes a real engine of local economic development.

The official picture is encouraging. Dhofar Municipality has said the value of work assigned to small and medium enterprises during Khareef rose to RO 6.5 million by the end of the third quarter of 2024, compared with about RO 4 million in 2023. Around 328 entrepreneurs benefitted from activities and services at event sites in 2024.

These are not small achievements. They show that local businesses are being given space in the season, not left outside it. They also reflect a more serious attempt to connect tourism with entrepreneurship, jobs and local income.

But they do not answer the larger question. RO 6.5 million is the value of work facilitated through official channels. It is not the full value captured by SMEs. It does not tell us how much was spent in local cafés, family-run restaurants, perfume shops, transport services, farms, tour operations, home-based producers, roadside outlets or small retail businesses across the governorate.

Nor does it tell us how much flowed out of the local economy



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

Preliminary figures showed that more than one million visitors came to Dhofar between June 21 and August 31, 2025. Most arrived by land. That means Khareef is not only an aviation or hotel story. It is also a road economy, a family-travel economy and a local-services economy.

through imported goods, external suppliers, large chains, online bookings and companies headquartered elsewhere. That distinction matters. A tourism season can look successful from the road, the hotel lobby and the airport terminal, but still deliver limited long-term value to the local economy if too much of the spending leaves the governorate whose landscape and season created the demand.

This is not a criticism of Khareef. It is the next stage of measuring its success. Preliminary figures showed that more than one million visitors came to Dhofar between June 21 and August 31, 2025. Most arrived by land. That means Khareef is not only an aviation or hotel story. It is also a road economy, a family-travel economy and a local-services economy.

Every vehicle heading south carries potential spending: fuel, food, accommodation, maintenance, shopping, tours, local products and entertainment. The key question is how much of that spending reaches local businesses and how much becomes a passing transaction with little lasting impact.

There is also a difference between SMEs that official figures often do not show. For an established café, food brand, perfume retailer or tour operator, Khareef may be an accelerator. It can increase sales, widen visibility and open new markets. For a temporary stall, small vendor or productive family, the season may be much more serious. It may represent a large part of the year’s income compressed into a few weeks.

Both may be counted as SMEs. Their realities are not the same. This is why licensing speed, site quality, footfall distribution, procurement rules and payment cycles matter. For a major company, delay is an inconvenience. For a small seasonal operator, it can be the difference between profit and loss.

Dhofar’s tourism strategy should now move from participation to

retention. The governorate does not only need more SMEs at Khareef venues. It needs more SMEs that survive after Khareef. It needs seasonal vendors who become year-round businesses.

It needs local suppliers who enter hotel and events supply chains. It needs farmers, artisans, transport operators, guides and food producers who are not merely present in the season, but strengthened by it.

That is the real meaning of tourism under Oman Vision 2040. The aim is not just to attract visitors. It is to build productive local economies, create private-sector jobs; and turn natural and cultural assets into sustainable value.

For that to happen, Dhofar needs an annual Khareef economic-retention account. It should publish, in one clear report, estimated visitor spending, SME capture, local procurement, jobs created, seasonal licences issued, businesses that returned from the previous year and businesses that became permanent after the season. The data does not need to be perfect at the beginning. But it needs to begin.

Without it, the public will continue to see arrivals, occupancy rates and event activity. These are useful indicators, but they are not enough. They tell us that the season is busy. They do not tell us whether the local economy is becoming stronger. Dhofar has already won the argument on attraction. People come.

The next argument is about value. If the money circulates locally, if entrepreneurs grow, if seasonal income becomes permanent enterprise, then Khareef is not only a tourism success. It is an economic-development model.

But if the season brings crowds without enough local retention, then the boom remains incomplete. The future of Dhofar tourism should not be judged only by how many visitors arrive in the mist. It should be judged by how many local businesses are still standing, hiring and growing after the mist has gone.

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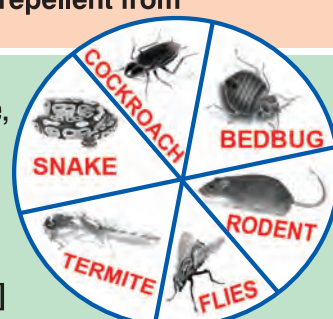
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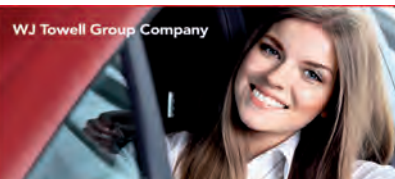
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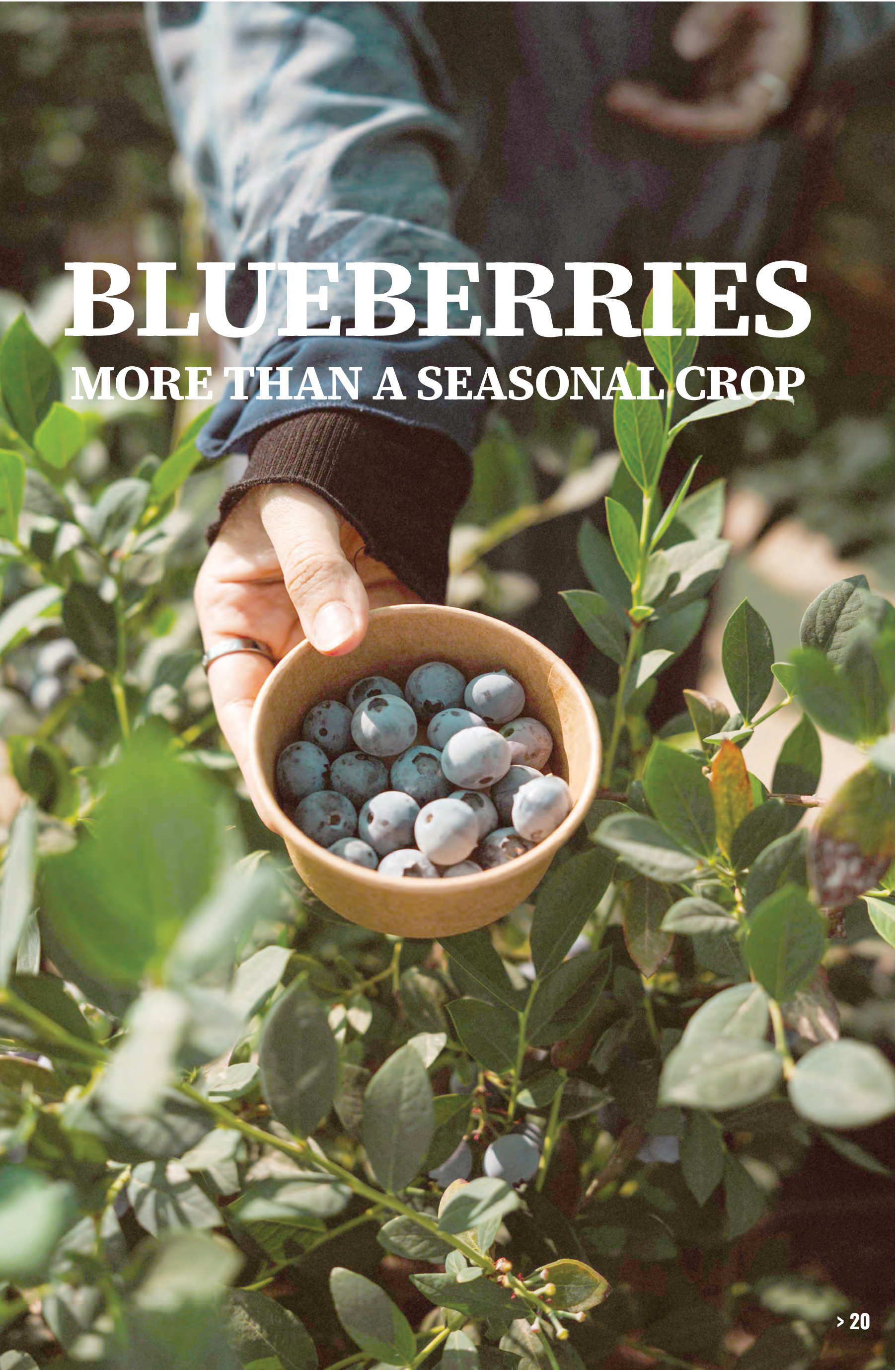
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ART/LIFE



IN FASHION

ANGELINA JOLIE TURNS PERSONAL PAIN INTO PERFORMANCE FOR 'COUTURE' FILM



Angelina Jolie is an Academy Award-winning American actress, filmmaker and humanitarian — and one of Hollywood's highest-paid stars.

Academy Award winner Angelina Jolie faced one of her deepest fears on screen for the French film “Couture” — being diagnosed with cancer.

Based on personal experiences of writer and director Alice Winocour, Jolie plays fictional American filmmaker Maxine Walker, who, while producing a film to accompany a runway show for Paris Fashion Week, discovers she has breast cancer.

Jolie’s mother, Marcheline Bertrand, died of breast cancer at the age of 56 and Jolie underwent a double mastectomy in 2013 after discovering she was carrying the same genetic mutation as her mother.

“I thought often of my mother and how much I think this film would have been wonderful for her when she was going through this”, she said.

But it wasn’t just about her mother; Jolie also got involved to bring Walker’s experience to the world.

“You sit in that chair and whether it’s cancer or anything, whether you’re male or female, we’ve all had that moment. We’ve all had that moment where we’ve gotten some news that has shifted our lives”, the “Maria” actor said.

Jolie had to go through a scene where operation lines were placed on her chest by an oncologist.

“It felt a strange moment to have Hollywood in my hospital room”, Jolie said.

“Here I am, you know, in my gown, getting my needles, doing all the stuff that I do, but now we are sharing it. And so, it felt very vulnerable”, she added.

Alongside Jolie, the cast of “Couture” includes Ada, played by Anyier Anei, who is a model struggling with the fashion industry putting her on a pedestal and make-up artist Angele, played by Ella Rumpf, who is trying to break out of the fashion scene by becoming a writer.

Jolie hopes that each character’s story will resonate with viewers.

“I think what we found in doing this and hopefully what the audience will feel, is that we’re connected”, the 51-year-old said.

“We’re connected as human beings and we all go through something... And it’s very necessary to pull us all through being human”, Jolie added.

“Couture” arrives in American movie theatres on Friday. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer and musician Pharrell Williams as part of his Menswear Spring-Summer 2027 collection show for Louis Vuitton. — Reuters



ENTERTAINMENT

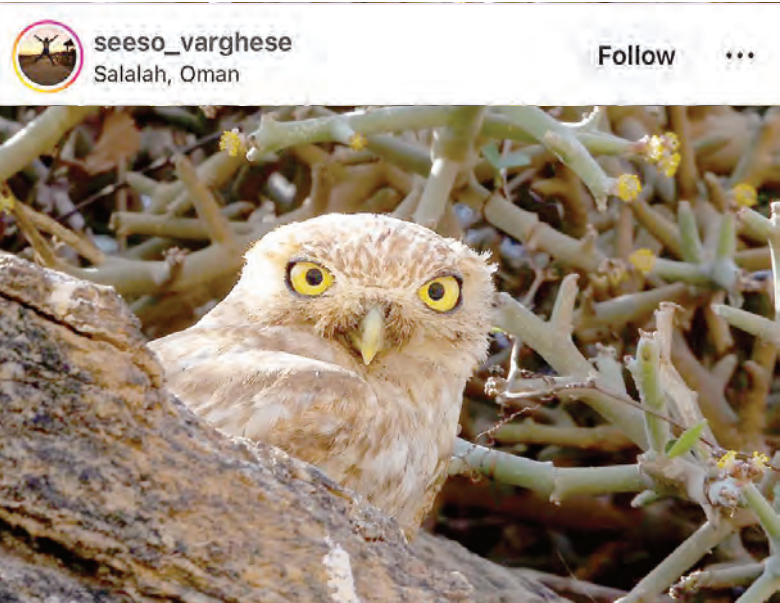
US Actor & Euphoria TV show star Zendaya attends the Italian premiere of the film “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” at Ponte Sant’Angelo in Rome, Italy. — Reuters



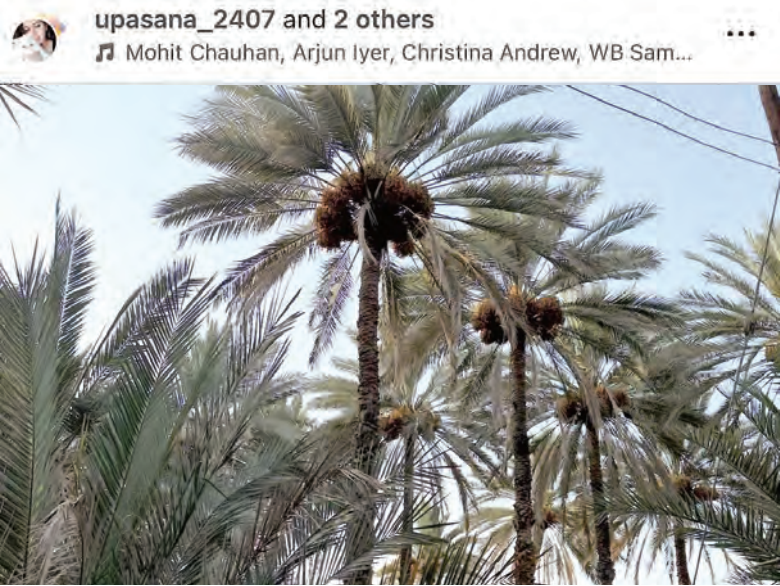
CULTURE

People jump over a bonfire during Ivana Kupala celebrations, an ancient tradition rooted in olden rites that marks summer solstice. — Reuters

INSTA PICKS



Little night watcher in Salalah



Palm trees adorn the Omani summer sky

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SPICE GIRLS’ DEBUT ‘WANNABE’ TURNS 30, AMID REUNION TALK



Thirty years after the release of “Wannabe,” the Spice Girls remain one of the most influential pop groups in music history. Released on June 26, 1996, the infectious debut single quickly topped charts in the UK, the US, and dozens of other countries, introducing the world to the group’s message of “Girl Power.”

The five-member British band, formed in 1994, stood out for celebrating individuality. Unlike previous girl groups with coordinated looks, each Spice Girl embraced a distinct persona. Mel B’s animal prints, Victoria Beckham’s sleek dark dresses, Emma Bunton’s pastel outfits, Melanie Chisholm’s sporty style, and Geri Halliwell’s iconic Union Jack dress became defining symbols of 1990s pop culture.

Music journalist Dominic Mohan said the group offered more than catchy songs, noting that their themes of confidence, friendship, and self-expression resonated with a generation of young women. Their debut hit remains hugely popular, accumulating nearly 1.5 billion streams on Spotify.

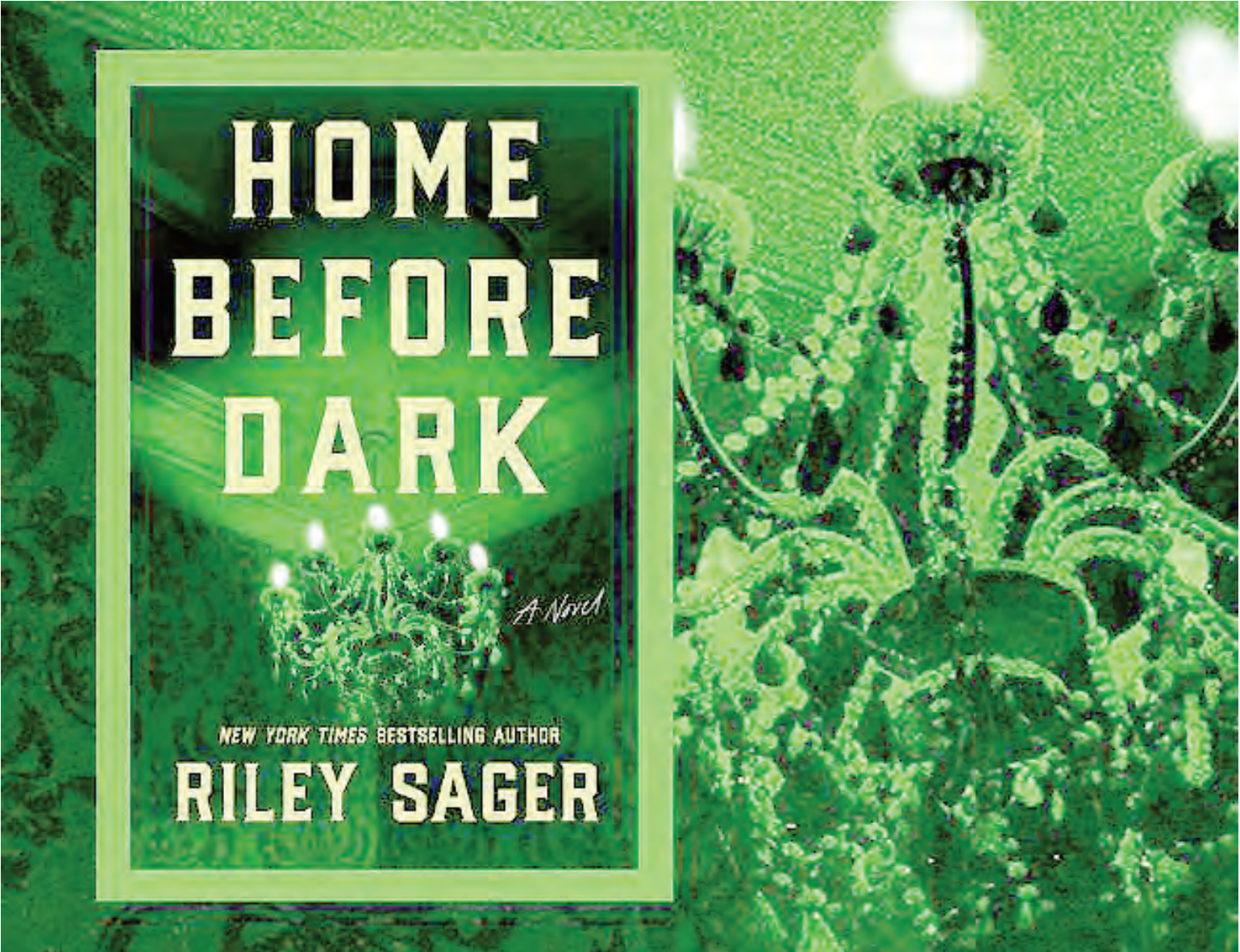
The anniversary is being marked by an exhibition at London’s Barbican Centre, showcasing memorabilia and iconic costumes, including Mel B’s leopard-print catsuit worn at the 1997 Brit Awards. The song won two awards that year and cemented the group’s place in pop history.

Their influence continues to be felt today, with artists such as Taylor Swift, Dua Lipa, Adele, and Charli XCX citing them as inspirations.

Media lecturer Joel Gray argues that, beyond their pop image, the Spice Girls carried a rebellious energy that helped them connect with diverse audiences and become cultural icons.

The milestone has also reignited speculation about a reunion. Although the five members have not performed together since the 2012 London Olympics, Mel B recently revealed that discussions are taking place. While no plans have been confirmed, fans remain hopeful that the group will reunite to celebrate the enduring legacy of “Wannabe.”

— AFP



Home Before Dark: A Modern Gothic Masterpiece



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

It can be argued that the appeal of the gothic genre has faded in the twenty-first century, with some even claiming it has expired. However, in 2020, Riley Sager’s thriller Home Before Dark helped revive interest in gothic fiction, restoring its eerie charm for modern readers. Inspired by the controversial Amityville case and The Amityville Horror (1977), the novel follows Maggie Holt, a skeptical woman who returns to her childhood home, Baneberry Hall, after her father’s death to uncover the truth behind the alleged hauntings that shaped her family’s past.

Sager constructs a narrative that blurs reality and superstition through dual perspectives: Maggie, who rejects the idea of ghosts, and her father Ewan, whose memoir House of Horrors insists the house is truly haunted. This contradiction creates uncertainty and drives the mystery forward. The novel is rich in gothic conventions, including dark secrets, unsettling revelations, morally complex characters, and an atmosphere of decay.

A key strength of the novel lies in its shocking twists. One of the most disturbing discoveries occurs when Maggie finds the body of her missing babysitter, Petra, buried beneath



the kitchen floor. This revelation deepens the mystery, suggesting that Baneberry Hall conceals not only supernatural rumours but also real crimes. The inclusion of Ewan’s memoir as an embedded narrative further complicates the story, forcing readers to question which version of events is true. This layered structure enhances suspense and reinforces the novel’s central ambiguity.

The final twist reveals that the true source of terror is not ghosts, but Marta Carver, a disturbed

woman who has been secretly living within the house. This shift from supernatural horror to human menace, similar to renowned gothic stories like Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, makes the story more unsettling and grounded.

The novel also explores morally ambiguous characters. Marta is portrayed not as a simple villain but as a tragic figure shaped by loss and isolation, though her actions remain disturbing and unjustifiable. Ewan Holt, meanwhile, emerges as another flawed character, whose fabricated account of hauntings hides his attempt to cover up Petra’s murder and protect himself from blame.

Gothic settings of decay further reinforce the tone. Baneberry Hall is described as abandoned and lifeless, its silence suggesting a presence of dread. This sense of deterioration extends beyond the physical house to the characters themselves, particularly Ewan, whose guilt and lies lead to emotional collapse and estrangement from his daughter.

Ultimately, Home Before Dark stands as a compelling modern gothic novel. With its layered storytelling, psychological complexity, and unsettling atmosphere, Riley Sager delivers a gripping narrative that redefines contemporary gothic horror while honouring its traditional roots.

FEATURES



ARWA AL HASHIMI

AMIDS the cool climate and breathtaking landscapes of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, the blueberry season at Rummana Farm has become a distinctive seasonal attraction that blends agriculture, culture and family-oriented experiences. Running from May 15 to June 19, the season offers visitors a limited-time opportunity to hand-pick one of Oman's relatively rare crops.

According to Omar al Harthy, Operations Manager at Rummana Farm, the farm is designed to go beyond the traditional concept of agriculture. "At Rummana, we do not view the farm as agricultural land alone, but as a space where agriculture, culture and art come together. Our goal is for visitors to leave with a complete experience that reflects all these dimensions, not just a brief visit", he said.

The uniqueness of the blueberry season lies in both its rarity in Oman and its short duration. Many visitors are surprised to discover that blueberries are grown locally in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, having previously known them only as imported fruit. The experience becomes even more meaningful as guests see the berries growing on the bushes and pick them by hand.

The visit begins with a warm welcome and a brief introduction to the farm and the season. Visitors then move into the fields for the main experience: hand-picking fresh blueberries directly from the bushes. Afterward, they can relax in designated seating areas and enjoy the produce they have collected, along with a variety of supporting activities.

These activities include tasting sessions, family-friendly experiences and cultural corners that highlight the local heritage, ensuring that the visit offers both entertainment and learning. The farm's approach is designed to cater to all family members, with children engaging in exploration and learning, while adults enjoy relaxation and connection with nature.

Farm management noted that many visitors arrive expecting a short tour or photo opportunity, but are often surprised by how engaging the hands-on harvesting experience becomes. Picking berries and distinguishing between ripe and unripe fruit adds an interactive dimension that transforms the visit into a memorable activity.

One of the most common reactions from visitors is the difference in taste between freshly picked blueberries and store-bought fruit. Many also ask about the next season before leaving, reflecting the strong impression the experience leaves behind.

Al Harthy emphasised that such seasonal experiences play an important role in strengthening the connection between people and Omani agriculture. By allowing visitors to directly engage with harvesting, these experiences help transform agriculture from a distant activity into something tangible and appreciated.

Beyond the blueberry season, Rummana Farm continues to offer seasonal experiences throughout the year. From mid-July to the end of September, visitors can enjoy picking figs, pears and pomegranates directly from the trees. A special pomegranate event is also planned for September, with details to be announced soon.

Through its seasonal offerings, Rummana Farm continues to position itself as a unique agritourism destination that brings together nature, culture and hands-on agricultural experiences in the heart of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.



BLUEBERRIES

MORE THAN A SEASONAL CROP

