

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

2026

DIGITAL EDITION

DISCOVER DAY 38

World Cup 2026

Who ends World Cup 2026 as top scorer?

1 KYLIAN MBAPPE (3) FRANCE 8 GOALS

2 LIONEL MESSI (3) ARGENTINA 8 GOALS

3 ERLING HAALAND NORWAY 7 GOALS

4 HARRY KANE ENGLAND 6 GOALS

5 JUDE BELLINGHAM ENGLAND 6 GOALS

6 MBAPPE 8 GOALS

THE TIE-BREAKER QUESTION Who lifts the Golden Boot - Mbappe or Messi?

VOL. 45, NO. 247

PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

2010000387405

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 TO ATTEND 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF TAC SIGNING

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The Sultanate of Oman will also participate in several high-level bilateral meetings which will be held on the sidelines of the event.

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The participation provides Oman with an effective platform to enhance cooperation and consolidate relations in priority sectors that serve mutual interests, particularly logistics, maritime transport, energy and green hydrogen, food security, tourism, digital transformation, emerging technologies, and advanced manufacturing industries. **REPORT ON P2**

FEVER CLIMAX



Fans take photos with an installation featuring the 2026 FIFA World Cup football tournament official ball 'Trionda' in Mumbai on Saturday on the eve of the final between Spain and Argentina. — AFP

PACT INKED TO BOOST FLIGHTS BETWEEN DHOFAR AND RUSSIA

SALALAH: A strategic agreement between Oman Air and Fun & Son to expand direct flights between the Sultanate of Oman and Russia to Dhofar Governorate with the aim of boosting tourism movement and supporting efforts to diversify tourism markets.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the inauguration of the new headquarters of Grand Tours Company in Salalah, under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of a number of officials and representatives of the aviation and tourism sectors.

The agreement sets for resumption of direct flights between Moscow and Salalah from September 2026 with two flights per week, increasing to five flights per week starting next November. **REPORT ON P2**

New norms to ensure wage continuity during illness

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 18

The Social Protection Fund marks a new milestone when it launches new norms on Sunday to safeguard the income of insured employees during illness or approved special leave. By ensuring wage continuity during such periods, the scheme aims to strengthen financial security for workers and

their families while reinforcing employment stability across the public and private sectors.

Malik al Harthy, Director-General of Benefits at the Social Protection Fund, said the programme provides comprehensive insurance coverage ensuring continuity of both social protection and income during periods of temporary work interruption.

Under the new framework, employers will continue paying employees their full salary during the first seven days of certified sick leave. Beginning on the eighth day, the Social Protection Fund will reimburse employers for eligible wages and social insurance contributions according to a graduated compensation schedule for a maximum of 182 days in a calendar year.

Employees will receive compensation equivalent to 75 per cent of their comprehensive wage from the eighth to the twenty-first day of sick leave.

The replacement rate then decreases to 50 per cent from days 22 to 35, before reaching 35 per cent from day 36 through day 182, which represents the maximum annual coverage under the programme. **TURN TO P2**

Iran hits Gulf states, Jordan after 7th night of US strikes

IRAN ALSO LAUNCHED ATTACKS ON SAUDI FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 3 MONTHS

IRAN LAUNCHED more attacks on Washington's Gulf allies and Jordan on Saturday after a seventh straight night of US strikes on Iranian military targets, escalating the war one week after a ceasefire collapsed.

Kuwait came under sustained attack, with a desalination plant hit and operations at Kuwait International Airport suspended due to repeated missile and drone threats.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it had struck a US military support centre at Camp Arifjan and destroyed a radar facility at Ali Al Salem Air Base. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation later said one of its oil facilities had been hit in "repeated Iranian attacks", causing significant damage and some injuries, according to the state news agency.

Kuwait's armed forces said they had intercepted Iranian ballistic missiles and drones early on Saturday, adding that a number of firefighters and oil sector workers had been injured while responding to the attacks.

Iran was responding to US attacks on bridges, power facilities and other infrastructure.

The secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council condemned recent Iranian attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan on Saturday, saying strikes on civilian infrastructure amounted to "war crimes".

"Iran's actions constitute a highly dangerous escalation, a grave violation of international law and the United Nations (UN) Charter, as well as war crimes requiring international accountability and prosecution, given the deliberate targeting of infrastructure and civilian facilities," Jassem Mohamed Al Budaiwi said, in a statement.

Iran's Health Ministry said on Saturday that 50 people had been killed and more than 500 injured in US strikes over the past three weeks, the semi-official ILNA news agency reported.

The IRGC targeted a site in Bahrain where US combat aircraft were gathered at Sheikh



Bridges attacked by the US in Bandar Abbas region of southern Iran on Friday.

Isa Air Base and an intelligence data centre, Iranian state media reported. The Guards said they had also destroyed at least two US fighter aircraft and three other aircraft during a missile and drone attack early on Saturday on the US base in Al Azraq, Jordan, according to Iranian state TV. Reuters could not independently verify the reports.

KUWAIT POWER, DESAL PLANT HIT

Iran also launched attacks on Saudi Arabia for the first time in about three months, according to two people familiar with the matter, triggering early warning alarms in Al Kharj, east of the capital Riyadh, and at Yanbu on the kingdom's Red Sea coast.

The people said one attack had targeted the Prince Sultan Air Base in Al Kharj,

which hosts US forces.

Saudi state media did not elaborate on what triggered the early warnings and the government media office did not respond to a request for comment. The IRGC made no mention of any attack on Saudi Arabia.

A power generation and water desalination plant in Kuwait was hit in an Iranian attack, the country's Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Ministry said in a statement. It was the second attack on Kuwaiti water desalination sites in two days.

Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said Iran's targeting of vital infrastructure endangered civilians and violated international law, adding it held Tehran fully responsible for the attacks. — AFP

SQU discovers new plant species, names it Oman

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Life Sciences Unit at the College of Science, announced a new scientific discovery of the plant (Adenosciadium omanensis), which had not previously been registered in the list of world plants. This species was named after Oman to indicate its location when it was recorded for the first time in the world, as this plant inhabits the

limestone plateaus on the coasts, especially the eastern regions of Al Hajar Mountains in the north of the Sultanate of Oman.

Adenosciadium omanensis belongs to the Apiaceae family and is similar in some of its characteristics to the Adenosciadium arabicum plant, which belongs to the same family and is found in the south of the Sultanate of Oman and extends to Yemen. However, this new plant



species differs in its apparent characteristics, which developed due to the difference in climate and environmental terrain and is one of the catalysts for evolution and the emergence of species.

The most important specifications of the new type are the leaves with a velvety texture and leaflets with kidney-shaped serrated edges. It is also characterised by a larger number of flowers and differs in

the shape and size of seeds from the other type. This new species was adopted internationally through publication in the Edinburgh Scientific Journal of Botany. No local name has been identified for this species, nor is there any information available about its uses, which requires more research to discover its chemical properties and evaluate its potential medical uses and environmental importance. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The workshop showcased the role of drones in supporting Oman’s tech advancement.

OMAN EXPLORES DRONE TECH FOR AGRICULTURE, SECURITY

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 18

Oman is exploring the potential of advanced drone technology across key sectors, including security, agriculture, infrastructure, oil and gas, and emergency response, as part of efforts to support innovation and economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040.

A high-level workshop on future drone technologies brought together representatives from government entities, including the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, along with stakeholders from industrial and energy sectors.

The workshop identified priority applications for unmanned aerial systems (UAS), including border surveillance, precision agriculture, environmental monitoring, infrastructure inspection, pipeline monitoring, mapping and technology transfer opportunities.

Organised by Fcourier, a Chinese aerospace technology company founded by engineers involved in the development of China’s C919 and ARJ21 commercial aircraft programmes, in partnership with Irfan Trading Company Oman, the event highlighted the growing role of drones in supporting Oman’s technological advancement.

NEW NORMS TO ENSURE WAGE CONTINUITY DURING FROM P1

In addition to sick leave benefits, it also provides full wage replacement for several categories of special leave granted under labour laws. Employees will be entitled to three days of paid leave upon marriage, three days following the death of a parent, grandparent, brother or sister, two days following the death of an uncle or aunt, and ten days upon the death of a spouse or one of their children.

The scheme also recognises bereavement leave for widows. Muslim women will receive 130 days of paid leave following the death of a husband, while non-Muslim women will be entitled to 14 days beginning from the date of death, in accordance with the applicable legal provisions.

Another key feature of the programme is the introduction of paid leave for employees accompanying close family members for medical treatment. The benefit covers up to 30 days per year when accompanying a spouse, parent, son, daughter, brother or sister. Employees will receive 100 per cent of their comprehensive wage for the first 15 days and 50 per cent of the wage for the remaining eligible period.

The Fund confirmed that the insurance branch applies to all Omani employees working in the civil, military and security sectors, including individuals employed under temporary contracts, training contracts and retired persons who have returned to employment. Coverage also extends to non-Omani employees working in government entities and private sector establishments that fall under the labour laws.

To finance the programme, employers will contribute one per cent of each employee’s comprehensive wage on a monthly basis without a wage ceiling. The Social Protection Fund will issue monthly contribution notices detailing registered wages and the value of contributions due from each employer. Employers will be able to submit compensation claims and complete settlements electronically through the Fund’s online portal beginning on August 1, 2026. The first settlement covering claims related to July will be processed during August, enabling employers to recover eligible payments made under the new scheme.

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The relations between Oman

and Asean countries are witnessing steady growth across numerous sectors.

Trade volume with Singapore reached nearly RO 511 million by the end of October 2024, while Thailand’s PTT signed a long-term agreement to purchase 300,000 metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually from Oman LNG, starting in 2025.

Oman offers world-class ports, free zones, and a competitive investment environment. — ONA

Pact inked to boost flights between Dhofar and Russia



The agreement was signed in the presence of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy.

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The agreement sets for resumption of direct flights between Moscow and Salalah from September

and tourism sectors. The agreement sets for resumption of direct flights between Moscow and Salalah from September 2026 with two flights per week, increasing to five flights per week starting next November.

This is in addition to the launch of direct flights from the Russian cities of Kazan and Yekaterinburg, thus enhancing air connectivity between the two countries and keeping pace with the increasing demand for the tourist destination in the Dhofar Governorate.

It was also announced during the occasion that an agreement was signed between Grand Tours and

Fun & Sun Kazakhstan to launch direct flights between Kazakhstan and Dhofar Governorate, starting on October 20, 2026, with 4 flights per week, in a step that contributes to expanding the targeted tourism markets and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s presence in the Central Asian markets.

These programmes are expected to attract more than 40,000 tourists to Dhofar Governorate during the upcoming tourist season as well as support the tourism and hospitality sectors and enhance the economic impact of tourism activity in the governorate. — ONA

Omani silver heritage shines at Belarus exhibition

MINSK: The National Museum of Oman has opened the exhibition ‘The Splendour of Silver: Collections from the Omani Courts’ at the Vitebsk Museum of Local Traditions in Belarus, showcasing the rich heritage of Omani silver craftsmanship and royal collections.

The exhibition, which runs until August 16, follows the success of its earlier showcase at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Minsk in December 2025.

It was inaugurated under the auspices of Belarusian Minister of Culture Marat Sergeevich Markov and coincides with the 35th edition of the Slavianski Bazaar International Arts Festival in Vitebsk.

The exhibition highlights a curated collection of silver artefacts associated with the Sultans of Oman in Muscat and Zanzibar, reflecting the artistic excellence of Omani craftsmen and the cultural significance of silver in Omani society.



Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi inspecting the exhibition in Minsk.

Featuring five sections — the Omani dagger, perfume culture, silver craftsmanship, traditional costumes and elite fashion — the exhibition explores how silver has been

woven into Oman’s identity, from royal traditions and ceremonial objects to everyday life. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General

of the National Museum, said Oman’s participation in the international cultural event marks an important milestone in strengthening cultural cooperation and people-to-people ties with Belarus.

He noted that the exhibition is the result of continued collaboration between Oman and Belarus following the signing of memoranda of understanding in heritage and culture in 2018, paving the way for joint museum, research and educational initiatives.

The exhibition offers visitors insight into Oman’s cultural depth through silver jewellery, traditional attire, weapons and artefacts that represent the craftsmanship, identity and history of the Sultanate of Oman. The Vitebsk Museum of Local Traditions, one of Belarus’ oldest cultural institutions, serves as a major repository of the region’s history and heritage, housing collections spanning fine arts, military history and archaeology. — ONA

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SHORT TAKES



Oman’s membership will enhance its access to global expertise and research.

OMAN JOINS GLOBAL AI COOPERATION BODY AS FOUNDING MEMBER IN CHINA

BEIJING: The Sultanate of Oman has joined the Global Organization for Cooperation in Artificial Intelligence as a founding member, becoming one of 29 countries to establish the international body aimed at promoting AI cooperation and global governance.

The agreement was signed in Shanghai by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, who led Oman’s delegation to the signing ceremony held alongside the World Artificial Intelligence Conference.

Dr Al Shaithani said Oman’s participation reflects Oman’s commitment to adopting artificial intelligence technologies and engaging with global efforts to develop responsible AI governance.

He noted that Oman has been actively participating in international discussions on AI, including the first Global Dialogue on AI Governance under the auspices of the United Nations, presenting its vision of building a global framework that balances technological innovation with responsible regulation.

The newly established organisation, based in Shanghai, is an independent intergovernmental body focused on strengthening international cooperation to make artificial intelligence safer, more inclusive and beneficial to humanity, while helping bridge the AI divide between countries.

Dr Al Shaithani said Oman’s membership will enhance its access to global expertise, research and emerging technologies, while enabling Oman to contribute to shaping international AI governance frameworks. The Omani delegation included Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, and Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, along with other officials specialising in artificial intelligence. — ONA

RAO BAND PARTICIPATES IN BASEL TATTOO 2026



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) band is participating in the Basel Tattoo 2026 held in Basel, Switzerland, from July 17 to 25, with the participation of a number of military bands from around the world.

The participation of the Royal Army of Oman band underscores its excellence in international military music events, highlights Omani cultural identity and military musical heritage, as well as promotes the exchange of expertise, thus reflecting the prestigious international standing of the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA

Municipality launches smoke-free campaign

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 18

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY has intensified its public awareness efforts with the launch of an informational campaign encouraging residents and visitors to comply with smoking regulations in enclosed public places.

Through an awareness poster carrying the message ‘Clean Air... A Right for Everyone,’ the municipality reminds the public that smoking in indoor public spaces affects not only smokers but everyone around them, particularly children, older adults, and people living with respiratory conditions.

The campaign urges members of the public to refrain from smoking inside enclosed public facilities, use designated smoking areas where available, and adhere to the instructional signs and regulations in place. The initiative aims to foster healthier public environments while reinforcing respect for shared community spaces.

Residents have welcomed the campaign, describing it as a timely reminder of the important role individuals play in safeguarding public health.

Rashid bin Said al Alawi, a frequent visitor to shopping malls in Muscat, said the initiative reflects growing public awareness of the dangers posed by second-

The Muscat Municipality initiative aims to foster healthier public environments while reinforcing respect for shared community spaces



Exposure to second-hand smoke significantly increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

hand smoke.

“Many families spend long hours in malls and other public facilities, so maintaining smoke-free indoor spaces is essential. Campaigns like this encourage people to respect public regulations and be mindful of the wellbeing of others,” he said.

Mariam al Maskari, who regularly visits parks and public venues with her family, said the municipality’s message is both relevant and necessary.

“Simple awareness messages can make a real difference. Everyone deserves to enjoy public places without being exposed to cigarette smoke, especially children and older people. Using designated smoking areas is a practical solution that

benefits everyone,” she said.

Health experts continue to warn that exposure to second-hand smoke significantly increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases among non-smokers.

They note that sustained public awareness campaigns remain among the most effective ways to encourage healthier behaviour and improve compliance with public health regulations.

Through initiatives such as this, Muscat Municipality continues to strengthen community awareness and promote a culture of shared responsibility, encouraging residents and visitors alike to help create cleaner, healthier, and safer public spaces across the governorate.

Young artists shape creativity at OFAS summer programme

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 18

Children are turning their summer holidays into a journey of creativity and discovery through art workshops organised by the Oman Fine Arts Society (OFAS), where young participants are exploring sculpture, photography, painting and other creative disciplines.

At the Summer Arts 2026 programme, children of different age groups experimented with foam clay, creating dinosaurs, turtles, camels, flowers, mushrooms, cartoon characters and imaginative sculptures as they took their first steps into the world of three-dimensional art.

“Two snails are racing with each other on a mud path. One is called Turbo, and the other is yet to be named,” one young participant explained while describing his creation.

Awatif bin Ali al Fazari, Director of Art Studio at the Oman Fine Arts Society, said the programme encourages children to explore their creativity through hands-on learning. The first session was dedicated to girls, followed by a session for boys, with participants continuing their artistic journey through different workshops.

Foam clay, a lightweight air-drying craft material, was among the mediums introduced to the children, while upcoming sessions include photography classes.

Artist and sculptor Ahmed



bin Nasser al Rumhi, who is training the students, said the programme helps children acquire new skills while developing social connections.

“The children have learnt something new, and most importantly, they have made new friends. Summer holidays are the perfect time to develop creativity and social skills,” he said.

Organised as part of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth’s efforts to promote cultural engagement and nurture young talent, Summer Arts 2026 offers workshops in fine arts, photography, calligraphy, music, theatre, film, content creation, digital arts and artificial intelligence.

Laila Awlad Thani, Head of the Media Department, said

the initiative aims to provide a stimulating environment for young talents through specialised workshops combining traditional and modern art forms.

The programme seeks to make productive use of the summer break by developing artistic abilities, strengthening national identity, promoting cultural heritage and encouraging creativity among Oman’s younger generation.

Meanwhile, the Children’s Cultural Centre Summer Programme (Summer of Knowledge) 2026 is also offering cultural, scientific and creative activities for children aged 6 to 16, focusing on skills development, innovation and lifelong learning.

SPOTLIGHT



SWAP SCREENS FOR SUMMER SPORTS

SIHAM AL SAIDI

FOR MANY CHILDREN, summer holidays have become synonymous with hours spent scrolling through social media, streaming videos, or playing online games. But across Oman, a refreshing trend is taking shape as more girls are choosing sports over screens, transforming the school break into a season of fitness, confidence-building, and personal growth.

From swimming pools and volleyball courts to martial arts academies and indoor sports facilities, summer programmes are attracting growing numbers of girls eager to stay active. Beyond improving physical fitness, these initiatives are helping participants develop discipline, teamwork, leadership, and resilience while building lasting friendships.

For 13-year-old Mariam, joining a summer volleyball programme was initially her parents' suggestion.

"I thought it would just be another activity," she said with a smile. "But I discovered that sports are fun. I've become more confident, made new friends, and now I look forward to every training session."

Parents are equally enthusiastic about the positive impact.

Fatma al Hinai, whose daughters enrolled in summer sports programmes, said the experience has transformed their daily routine.

"Instead of spending the entire day on their phones, they wake up excited for training. They've become more organised, healthier, and more confident. As a mother, I can clearly see the positive difference."

Moosa bin Abdullah al Qasabi, General Director of the Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Batinah North, said encouraging girls to participate in summer sports goes far beyond promoting physical activity.

"Our commitment stems from the belief that every girl deserves equal opportunities to participate in sports, develop her abilities, and grow



in a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment," he said.

"By offering a wide range of sporting activities, we aim to discover young talents, promote a culture of active living, and encourage girls to adopt healthy lifestyles that will benefit them long after the summer ends."

He said the initiative reflects Oman's broader vision for sports development and women's empowerment while ensuring that school holidays are used productively.

"These programmes provide an ideal platform for girls to strengthen not only their physical fitness but also their leadership skills, self-confidence, discipline, and ability to work as part of a team. Ultimately, they help nurture a generation that is healthy, confident, resilient, and ready to contribute positively to society."

Aisha al Balushi, Head of the Women's Activities Section at the Directorate, said the Girls' Centre has witnessed remarkable enthusiasm, with increasing numbers of participants enrolling in the diverse sporting activities offered through the Summer Sports Programme.

"The variety of sports has attracted girls from different age groups, creating an energetic environment where participants enjoy being active while developing new skills, building friendships, and experiencing the values of teamwork and healthy

competition," she said. She added that the centre is committed to designing high-quality programmes that reflect the interests of young participants while supporting their physical, social, and personal development.

"Our goal is for every girl to leave the programme with greater confidence, stronger abilities, and memorable experiences that inspire her to remain active long into the future."

Health experts continue to stress that regular physical activity benefits not only physical fitness but also mental well-being. Exercise reduces stress, improves concentration, encourages healthy habits, and strengthens emotional resilience — qualities that are particularly valuable during adolescence. As Oman expands opportunities for girls in sports, the growing popularity of summer programmes reflects a broader cultural shift. Families are increasingly recognising that success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by confidence, perseverance, and personal development.

Perhaps the greatest victory this summer will not be found on a scoreboard or in a trophy cabinet. It will be reflected in the smile of a girl who discovers her potential, overcomes her fears, and realises that her greatest challenge is not competing with others, but surpassing the limits she once believed she had.



Every girl deserves equal opportunities to participate in sports, develop her abilities, and grow in a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment.

— **MOOSA BIN ABDULLAH AL QASABI**
General Director,
Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth, Al Batinah North

SHORT TAKES



The project is expected to enhance road safety, increase capacity and improve travel efficiency.

HAIMA-THUMRAIT DUALISATION PROJECT REACHES 24% COMPLETION

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 18

SALALAH: Work on the remaining sections of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road dualisation project between Haima and Thumrait has reached about 24 per cent, with contractors continuing construction while supporting maintenance of the existing route and testing advanced paving technologies.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said implementation of the project was progressing well within the planned three-year construction schedule.

Speaking to Oman TV, Al Shammakhi said the presence of contractors, machinery and technical teams along the road corridor has also strengthened the ministry’s ability to carry out maintenance and repairs on the existing route whenever required.

The ongoing maintenance support is important as the current road remains operational throughout the construction period, continuing to serve residents, tourists, buses, commercial vehicles and freight traffic travelling between Dhofar Governorate and other parts of Oman.

The project covers the final three sections of the dual carriageway between Haima and Thumrait, extending for a combined distance of around 400 kilometres, with contracts valued at more than RO 258 million.

The agreements were signed in May 2025, with each section scheduled for completion within 36 months.

Section Three covers 132.5 kilometres between Haima and Maqshan. Section Four extends approximately 135 kilometres from Maqshan through Qitbit to Dawkah, while Section Five covers around 132.5 kilometres between Dawkah and Thumrait.

Once completed, the project will extend the dual carriageway southwards from Haima to Thumrait, creating a continuous modern road connection to Salalah and improving accessibility to Dhofar.

The route plays a particularly important role during the khareef season, when thousands of visitors from across Oman and neighbouring Gulf countries travel by road to experience Dhofar’s monsoon season.

Dhofar’s living heritage draws Khareef visitors



Traditional performances and folk arts add a live element to the experience.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 18

THE DIVERSE cultural heritage of Dhofar is attracting visitors at the ‘Return of the Past’ event in Al Saada, one of the key attractions accompanying the Khareef Dhofar 2026 season. The event recreates the traditional lifestyles of Dhofar’s mountain, rural, Bedouin and coastal communities, offering visitors an insight into how people lived, worked and adapted to the governorate’s varied environments.

During a visit to the venue last week, families were seen exploring recreated traditional homes, heritage displays, craft stalls, cultural performances and food outlets showcasing different aspects of Dhofar’s identity.

The event presents Dhofar’s heritage through its people and way of life rather than only through traditional objects. Each section reflects a different environment that has shaped the governorate’s social and cultural traditions.

The mountain section highlights the heritage of Dhofar’s Jebali communities, whose lives have long been connected with the highlands, livestock and seasonal grazing.

The rural section showcases

The event is creating seasonal business opportunities for artisans, productive families, food operators and small enterprises

agricultural villages and farming traditions, while the Bedouin section reflects pastoral lifestyles, mobility, livestock-rearing and hospitality.

The coastal section highlights the importance of the Arabian Sea in shaping the livelihoods of communities along Dhofar’s coastline, particularly through fishing and maritime activities.

Together, the sections demonstrate how Dhofar’s cultural identity has been shaped by its mountains, plains, farms and sea, with each environment contributing its own customs, occupations and traditions.

The attraction has drawn strong interest from families, with older visitors sharing knowledge about traditional practices and objects with younger generations.

A visitor from the UAE praised the organisers’ efforts to preserve and present Dhofar’s heritage in an engaging manner.

“We really appreciate what the organisers are doing here. They are preserving the culture and presenting it in a way that families and visitors can understand. It also gives younger generations an opportunity to see how people lived in the past,” he said.

Traditional performances and folk arts add a live element

to the experience, while a dedicated market provides Omani craftswomen and local producers with an opportunity to display and sell handmade products and traditional goods.

Restaurants and cafés serving local dishes and refreshments have also become popular among visitors, making food an integral part of the cultural experience.

Beyond its cultural value, the event is creating seasonal business opportunities for artisans, productive families, food operators and small enterprises by connecting them with visitors during the busy khareef period.

‘Return of the Past’ is part of the wider programme of cultural, family, sporting and entertainment activities being organised across Dhofar during the khareef season.

While Dhofar is widely recognised for its monsoon landscapes, greenery and cool climate, the event highlights another dimension of the governorate — its people, traditions and living heritage.

By bringing together different aspects of Dhofar’s traditional environments in one venue, ‘Return of the Past’ offers visitors a closer understanding of the communities and customs that continue to shape the identity of Dhofar today.

Dhofar’s tropical fruits boost farming and khareef tourism

SAUD AL ANSARI
SALALAH, JULY 18

Dhofar’s tropical fruits have become one of Oman’s distinctive agricultural products, reflecting the governorate’s unique climate and fertile landscapes while contributing to farmers’ livelihoods and seasonal tourism activity.

Supported by the fertile soils of the Salalah Plain and the cool, humid conditions created by the annual khareef season, Dhofar produces a variety of tropical fruits, including coconuts, bananas, lemons and guavas.

The favourable climate, marked by seasonal drizzle, mist and moderate temperatures, has helped farmers improve the quality and productivity of their crops while preserving traditional agricultural practices passed

down through generations.

Farmer Mohammed bin Awad Safrar said Dhofar’s natural conditions make it one of the few areas in the Arabian Peninsula capable of producing tropical fruits on a commercial scale.

“Dhofar, particularly Salalah, is known for its wide variety of tropical fruits, including coconuts, lemons, bananas and guavas. As farmers, we attach great importance to cultivating these crops, especially during the Khareef season,” he said.

He added that Dhofar’s coconut production is a distinctive feature compared with other governorates in Oman and the wider Gulf region, noting that the current harvest has been highly successful.

Agriculture remains an important part of Dhofar’s economy, with many farming



Dhofar produces a variety of tropical fruits, including coconuts, bananas, lemons and guavas.

families depending on seasonal fruit production as a major source of income. The Khareef season, which attracts large numbers of visitors from Oman and abroad, provides farmers with opportunities to sell fresh produce directly

through roadside stalls and farm outlets across the governorate.

Dhofar is also the second-largest banana-producing governorate in Oman, with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water

Resources supporting farmers through technical guidance, agricultural programmes and initiatives aimed at enhancing productivity.

Safrar said the khareef climate plays a crucial role in the success of tropical fruit cultivation.

“The continuous rainfall and moderate weather conditions over nearly three months help trees grow well and produce high-quality fruits. Banana production begins in September and continues until January, allowing farmers to supply markets for several months,” he said.

Beyond agriculture, tropical fruits have become an important part of the khareef tourism experience. Visitors travelling through Salalah and nearby rural areas often stop at roadside stalls to purchase freshly harvested produce, making local fruits

a memorable part of their journey.

Coconuts remain among the most popular choices for visitors due to their freshness and strong association with Dhofar’s tropical landscape. Bananas, guavas and papayas are also in high demand, offering tourists a taste of the governorate’s agricultural heritage while creating additional income opportunities for farmers.

The growth of tropical fruit cultivation highlights the strong connection between agriculture, tourism and Dhofar’s natural environment.

As the khareef season transforms the governorate into a green landscape each year, local farms continue to play an important role in preserving traditions, supporting food production and contributing to sustainable economic growth.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Officials pose with a model of the Vikram-1 rocket after a press briefing following the successful launch at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre . — Reuters

INDIA LAUNCHES 1ST PRIVATE ORBITAL ROCKET MISSION

BENGALURU: Indian space startup Skyroot Aerospace on Saturday launched the country’s first privately developed orbital rocket, a key test of national efforts to compete for a bigger share of the global commercial launch market. The Vikram-1 rocket lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota at 0635 GMT, leaving behind a plume of fire and smoke, carrying several customer payloads and in-orbit experiments on its maiden orbital mission, dubbed “Mission Aagaman”. It successfully injected its payload into a 450-km orbit about 15 minutes later, making India the third country to achieve orbital launch capability through private enterprise.

The launch, which was initially planned to take off at 0600 am GMT, was put on hold temporarily before it was rescheduled. The mission is intended to validate the rocket’s propulsion, avionics, telemetry, guidance, navigation and control systems in flight while collecting data for future commercial launches, Skyroot said. “Mission Aagaman is a grand success,” the company said in a statement. “This is a test flight. We will be doing a few of these before we move into routine commercial flights,” it added. The Indian mission comes amid intensifying competition in the global small satellite launch market, where startups are seeking to challenge incumbents led by Elon Musk’s SpaceX. — Reuters

IRAQ, US SIGN 48 AGREEMENTS DURING PM’S VISIT

BAGHDAD: Iraq signed 48 agreements and partnerships with American companies, many in the oil sector, during a visit to the US by Prime Minister Ali al Zaidi, his office said on Saturday. “A total of 48 agreements, memoranda of understanding, cooperation agreements, and partnership declarations were signed between public and private sector entities in Iraq and the United States,” the Iraqi leader’s media office said. They include “cooperation and partnerships involving the ministries of oil and electricity... with ExxonMobil, KBR, GE Vernova, Shell, and Halliburton,” as well as several deals related to the construction of a major crude oil pipeline between Iraq and Syria. Iraq also signed a deal with Starlink, which dominates the global satellite communications sector, to introduce services to the country. On Tuesday, US President Donald Trump praised Zaidi as a “champion” in a meeting at the White House. Zaidi, a businessman, came to power this year with the US blessing after Trump vetoed another candidate. He has vowed to boost Iraq’s fragile economy and disarm armed groups in Iraq that have targeted US facilities. Iraq has long walked a tightrope between the competing influences of its allies the United States and neighbouring Iran. — AFP

TERROR SUSPECTS

Türkiye arrests 119 accused of links to IS



Türkiye’s interior ministry said on Saturday that authorities had arrested 119 people across the country accused of links to the IS group. “(The) 199 suspects were arrested in a police operation carried out in 30 provinces against the terrorist organisation,” including in Istanbul and Ankara, the ministry said. Charges levelled against those apprehended included IS group membership, posting IS propaganda on social media and financing IS through intermediaries or “so-called charities”. — AFP

LEBANON’S PRESIDENT DEPARTS FOR US TO MEET TRUMP

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Saturday left Beirut for Washington, where he is expected to meet Donald Trump, the Lebanese presidency said, after talks between Lebanon and Israel wrapped up in Italy. It will be the first trip to Washington by a Lebanese head of state since Michel Sleiman was received by Barack Obama in 2009. Aoun will hold discussions “with several American officials on the situation in Lebanon and ways to strengthen the ceasefire”,

particularly in Lebanon’s south, as well as on “the withdrawal of Israel from the Lebanese regions it occupies”, the presidency said. Israel and Lebanon began US-sponsored negotiations in April aimed at reaching a peace deal and permanently ending the Israel-Hezbollah war. On June 26, they reached a framework agreement in Washington under which the Israeli military is to withdraw from southern Lebanon and the Lebanese

army is to deploy, starting with two “pilot zones”. Following the latest round of talks this week in Rome, Israel and Lebanon “agreed on the structure and guidelines” to implement the pilot zones, a US official said. A Lebanese military source meanwhile said that the Lebanese army has begun intensifying patrols in several villages adjacent to areas occupied by Israeli forces in preparation for implementing the pilot zones provision. — AFP

Deadly Israeli air strike near Gaza market kills 8

GAZA’S CIVIL DEFENCE agency and a hospital said an Israeli air strike on Friday killed eight people near a market, while the military reported it had struck a “terrorist cell”. A ceasefire remains in place between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas, but it has not halted violence in Gaza, and efforts to secure a lasting agreement to end the war have stalled. “Eight people were killed after Israeli warplanes struck a gathering of civilians in the Al-Balata market area of the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza,” the civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue service under Hamas, reported.

The area’s Al-Awda hospital said it received the eight dead and 22 people wounded in the strike. Mahmoud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency, said the strike occurred during a funeral procession. The military confirmed carrying out the strike. “A short while ago, the IDF struck a terrorist cell of the Islamic Jihad terrorist organisation in the central Gaza Strip,” the military said. “The IDF is aware of the claims that several uninvolved individuals were harmed as a result of the strike. The results of the strike are under review.”

The civil defence agency and hospitals reported that five other people were killed in separate Israeli

The area’s Al-Awda hospital said it received the eight dead and 22 people wounded in the strike. Mahmoud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency, said the strike occurred during a funeral procession. The Israeli military confirmed carrying out the strike



A Palestinian woman inspects the site of an Israeli strike on a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp, Gaza. — Reuters

strikes on Friday. They included two women and the man whose funeral was taking place when the market strike occurred. Before Friday’s casualties, at least 1,127 Palestinians had been killed since the truce took effect last October, according to Gaza’s health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

The Israeli military says it has lost five soldiers in Gaza over the same period, as well as one civilian contractor. Restrictions imposed on media outlets and limited access in Gaza prevent journalists from independently verifying tolls or freely covering the violence there. Meanwhile, About 50 people,

including doctors, trade unionists and pro-Palestinian activists, gathered outside France’s foreign ministry in Paris to call for the release of a Gaza hospital director who has been held since December 2024. “Free Dr Abu Safiyya,” chanted the demonstrators at the protest organised by hospital unions, among them Patrick Pelloux, the high-profile head of France’s emergency doctor association. It is the latest call for the release of Hussam Abu Safiyya, a paediatrician and director of Gaza’s Kamal Adwan hospital, who has reportedly suffered torture and life-threatening injuries in detention. United Nations experts, the World Health Organization and Amnesty International have urged Israel to set him free. — AFP

VIETNAM REPORTS FATALITIES OVER FLOODS

HANOI: At least four people were killed and four others were missing after a flash flood swept through a mountainous village in Vietnam’s northern province of Lai Chau, state media reported on Saturday. The flood in Muong Than village early on Friday after days of heavy rains in several parts of northern Vietnam also injured seven people. Vietnam is prone to deadly storms and floods during the rainy season that peaks from July through September. Natural disasters, mostly floods, killed 489 people in the country last year, according to government data. The Vietnam News Agency report had photos showing red mud and flood water blanketing the village, with rocks and wood logs piling in a corner of a damaged road. Since Wednesday, landslides and flash floods triggered by heavy rain have also damaged roads, power grids and hundreds of houses, as well as inundating 238 hectares of crops in the region, according to the government’s disaster management agency. Several parts of northern Vietnam are forecast to receive heavy rain of up to 250 millimetres on Saturday, the agency said, warning of more flash floods and landslides. — Reuters



FATAL ACCIDENT

Uganda school bus crash toll rises to 23



The death toll from a school bus crash in Uganda has risen to 23 children and one adult, and all school field trips have been cancelled. The bus was returning to Kampala from a school trip to Sipi Falls in eastern Uganda on Thursday when it veered off the road, killing 20 junior school children and one adult. Since then, “three more pupils succumbed to injuries sustained in the crash while receiving medical treatment”, the police said. Six of the dead have yet to be identified. — AFP

SCORCHING SUMMER

Spain braces for third intense heatwave



Spain is set to enter its third heatwave of the summer on Tuesday, with temperatures forecast to climb above 40°C across large parts of the country. The heatwave will be fuelled by a persistent area of high pressure that will trap hot, dry air from North Africa over Spain for several days, pushing temperatures to exceptionally high levels, AEMET said. The heat is expected to intensify with some isolated areas potentially exceeding 45°C. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Members of the armed forces walk along a street beside damaged buildings in Caraballeda, Venezuela. — AFP

VENEZUELA DEADLY QUAKES DEATH TOLL EXCEEDS 5,000

CARACAS: The twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela last month killed over 5,000 people, officials said, while announcing they drew hundreds of millions of dollars from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for reconstruction. The disasters killed 5,069 people, National Assembly chief Jorge Rodriguez posted on Telegram, with most casualties occurring in the coastal region. The number of people injured remains unchanged at 16,740, with the parliamentary leader earlier stating that most had already been discharged from the hospital. Interim President Delcy Rodriguez said the country tapped \$346 million from the IMF for earthquake reconstruction. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva confirmed the release of funds, saying on X that the institution “worked with key counterparts to help Venezuela access its own resources at the Fund for urgent humanitarian needs,” adding that the funds had been drawn “from their reserve tranche.” Some 20,000 people made homeless by the quakes are living in overcrowded camps, many of which lack water supplies and proper sanitation systems. Venezuela holds 3.568 billion Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) at the Fund, equivalent to approximately \$5.1 billion, which were previously blocked because the institution did not recognise Nicolas Maduro as president. — AFP

COLOMBIA REPORTS DATA BREACH



Colombian state-controlled energy company Ecopetrol said a cyberattack resulted in the theft of data tied to about 3,300 user accounts and that it could not “guarantee” the breach would not have a “material adverse” financial impact. The company, however, said it had not identified any critical disruption to its operations, production capacity or any direct financial impact, and that no stolen data had yet been disclosed by the hacker. Ecopetrol said the hacker had not been identified but had communicated extortion demands and threatened to disclose the hacked information. — Reuters

UN TO LIST MORE SITES AS ‘IN DANGER’ DUE TO CONFLICT, CLIMATE

PARIS: The United Nations looks set to list a Biblical site, Lebanese castles, an antelope migration path and the world’s deepest lake as world treasures under threat, including from war or climate change. The 196 members states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) are to cast votes from Friday next week on new additions to its World Heritage and World Heritage in Danger lists when they meet in Busan, South Korea. Some 1,200 sites around the globe

are listed as part of Unesco World Heritage. Making the heritage list often sparks a lucrative tourism drive, and can unlock funding for the preservation of sites that can face threats including pollution, war and negligence. Unesco members are also to vote on directly listing the Boma-Badingilo grassland and woodland savannahs in South Sudan the as under threat from both war and climate change. One million animals — including antelopes and gazelles — migrate

through the vast wilderness located between the White Nile and the Ethiopian border every year, leaving scars on the grasslands that are visible from the sky. Also a potential candidate is the ancient Greek settlement of Tauric Chersonese in the Crimea peninsula that Russia unilaterally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine argues it is under threat from unauthorised excavations, large-scale construction projects, and the relocation of artefacts after Russia’s attack of Crimea. — AFP

Ukrainian drones hit Russian logistics centre



Firefighters drive past the smoke of a fire at the Russian e-commerce firm Wildberries’ logistics complexes in the town of Elektrostal. — AFP

of the Russian capital, Sergei Sobyenin, said on Saturday. “Most were neutralised by air defence forces at distant approaches. Sixty four enemy UAVs were destroyed on approach to Moscow,” Sobyenin wrote on the state-backed MAX platform. Ukraine is increasingly striking Russian cities far from the border in retaliation for Moscow’s daily attacks. “Two major logistics facilities were hit in the Moscow and Tambov regions, more than 500 and nearly 700 kilometres from the front line,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on X. He alleged the centres were used “to supply sanctioned components for drone production and navigation equipment”. In Ukraine, Russian strikes left one person dead and 13 injured. US-led diplomatic efforts to end the fighting have

stalled in recent months, as Washington has shifted focus to its war against Iran. Meanwhile, the foreign minister of North Korea, which supports Russia’s war against Ukraine, was due in Moscow on Saturday for talks with her counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, the latter’s office said. The Russian foreign ministry said North Korea’s Choe Son Hui would “arrive in the Russian Federation on July 18 for an official visit” at Lavrov’s invitation. Pyongyang and Moscow have strengthened ties since Russia launched its military offensive against Ukraine in 2022. The two countries signed a defence agreement when Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pyongyang in 2024. North Korea has sent missiles, munitions and thousands of troops to assist Russia in Ukraine, and analysts say Moscow is sending financial

aid, military technology, food and energy to the diplomatically isolated country in return. In April, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un pledged to help Russia win its “sacred” war. Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov and several other high-ranking officials visited Pyongyang in April for talks on strengthening military ties. Belousov saying Moscow was ready to sign a cooperation plan for the period 2027-2031. South Korea and the European Union have condemned the partnership between the two countries. North Korea’s foreign ministry has hit back, saying cooperation with Russia is an “exercise of sovereign rights”. In Ukraine, thousands of people turned out in Kyiv to protest Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky’s sacking of his popular defence minister Mykhailo Fedorov as part of a controversial reshuffle. The protesters, many of them carrying the Ukrainian flags and placards expressing support for Fedorov, gathered in the capital for the second day running to protest the decision. During his barely six months in the post, Fedorov repeatedly clashed with the army’s top commander in his efforts to digitise and modernise an army fatigued after four years fighting off the Russian attack. A day after being forced to resign, Fedorov on Thursday accused Ukraine’s commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky of dividing the country. He criticised slow bureaucracy and a lack of flexibility, questioning whether Ukraine could defeat Russia with Syrsky in charge of the army. — AFP

Trump threatens to increase Canada tariffs over wildfire pollution

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump threatened a tariff increase on Canada to cover the cost of smoke pollution from wildfires that have choked large parts of the United States. Dense wildfire smoke billowing down from Canada and northern Minnesota has set off unhealthy air quality alerts across the US. As of Saturday, there were 937 active fires in Canada, most of which were burning out of control, according to the Canadian Wildland Fire Information System. “This is Willful Negligence, and becoming a yearly occurrence, costing the United States Billions of Dollars,” Trump said on Truth Social, adding that the “cost of this pollution must of necessity be added to the TARIFFS Canada is currently paying.” Trump accused Canada of “not properly maintaining” their forests, failing to carry out “basic Forest Management and Debris Removal.” He said he would call Prime Minister Mark Carney to “find out what they are going to do about” the smoke. Canada’s emergency management minister Eleanor Olszewski said Canada and the

Trump accused Canada of not properly maintaining their forests, failing to carry out basic Forest Management and Debris Removal. He said he would call Prime Minister Mark Carney to find out what they are going to do about the smoke



Pedestrians cross Pennsylvania Avenue near the US Capitol in smoky conditions due to the Canadian wildfires. — Reuters

United States were in “constant contact,” pointing toward their “long history of working together to fight wildfires.” She added that Canada has invested \$12 billion in forests sustainability and fire prevention since 2020. Detroit, in the US Midwest, remained the most polluted city in the world on Friday, according to tracker IQAir. Washington and Chicago weren’t far

behind, and officials warned against spending unnecessary time outside. The pollution triggered concern over the World Cup final on Sunday in an open stadium in New Jersey. In New Jersey and New York, the metro area was experiencing air that could be unhealthy for sensitive groups, an improvement after smog on Thursday made the Manhattan skyline barely visible. But the National Weather Service (NWS) warned the smoke may thicken overnight into Saturday morning. Tournament organisers are “monitoring closely,” White House World Cup task force executive director Andrew Giuliani told a briefing. Peter Mullinax, a meteorologist for NWS, said that winds over the Great Lakes could push more smoke into the Northeast, which could keep skies hazy. He said forecasts for that region do expect some improvement. “I don’t believe that this should be as impactful as if you might be playing a game today,” Mullinax said. The issue for Sunday’s game, said Joel Dreessen, an air quality forecaster for the

state of Maryland, is whether more smoke spills south after weekend storm systems. “Some of the models are starting to indicate that we’ll start to pull down some smoke,” he said. In cities across the Midwest and Northeast, people wore masks outdoors to filter out the dangerous air. In New York, libraries and train stations were handing them out for free. Chris Carlsten, who studies the health impacts of fire smoke at the University of British Columbia, said that the fine pollution particles from wildfires are particularly impactful on the lungs, whereas vehicle pollution skews slightly towards heart impacts. The blazes were worsening on Friday in Canada, especially in Ontario, according to authorities there. Fires in Ontario have not caused any casualties, and several remote communities have been evacuated, as dozens of aircraft battle the blazes. Meanwhile 16 active fires were burning in the Superior National Forest, on Minnesota’s border with Canada. — AFP

OPINION

When health advice becomes a trend



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

LAST WEEK, a friend sent me a video of an Egyptian doctor who became famous for his controversial diet advice that goes against what international experts have been advocating for years. The doctor who was trained as an anaesthesiologist became a self-acclaimed expert dietitian without having any formal training in the field.

He called his dietary plan ‘altayybat’, using a name that is found in the Holy Quran to refer to “the good things”, which made many people believe in it because it uses religion indirectly to sell the idea to people. Even after his sudden death a few months ago, many people still follow his advice despite warnings from medical experts about the negative impact on health.

In recent years, social media platforms have evolved far beyond spaces for entertainment and news sharing. They have become one of the primary sources of health information for millions of people. While these platforms have undoubtedly contributed to raising public awareness about many health issues, they have also given rise to a worrying phenomenon, the spread of what might be called “digital prescriptions” in the form of health advice and treatment recommendations that circulate rapidly online without scientific evidence or professional medical oversight.

The danger intensifies when such advice

is presented using a mixture of medical terminology and religious or moral language, giving it an unwarranted sense of credibility. As a result, some individuals discontinue prescribed medications, modify their treatment plans, or adopt highly restrictive diets based solely on recommendations from anonymous or unqualified online sources.

Health authorities in several Arab countries have reported cases of serious complications after patients with chronic illnesses, particularly diabetes, stopped taking their prescribed medications in favour of advice promoted on social media. These incidents have prompted repeated warnings from official health agencies against relying on online “prescriptions” as substitutes for evidence-based medical care.

Scientific evidence tells us that eliminating entire food groups without medical justification can lead to nutritional deficiencies. Avoiding dairy products, for example, may reduce calcium intake, an essential nutrient for maintaining bone health in many individuals. Likewise, reducing the consumption of whole grains may deprive the body of dietary fibre, which plays an important role in digestive health and in reducing the risk of several chronic diseases.

The problem extends beyond the content itself to the way digital platforms operate. Social media algorithms reward content

Social media platforms have also given rise to a worrying phenomenon, the spread of what might be called “digital prescriptions”

that is emotionally engaging, provocative, or controversial rather than content that is scientifically accurate. Consequently, simplistic and absolute health claims often spread much faster than nuanced medical explanations that acknowledge uncertainty and individual differences.

From a psychological perspective, people are naturally drawn to simple, quick solutions, especially when dealing with chronic illness, weight loss, or disease prevention. Repeated exposure to the same messages across multiple platforms also creates the illusion of truth, making unsupported claims seem increasingly credible simply because they are frequently encountered.

This does not mean that social media has no place in health education. On the contrary, it can be a powerful tool for improving public health literacy when used responsibly. However, health information should always be grounded in robust scientific evidence, and health influencers should be viewed as communicators, not substitutes for physicians, dietitians, or other qualified healthcare professionals.

In my opinion, the best prescription is not the one that goes viral or attracts millions of views. It is the one supported by sound scientific evidence, tailored to individual needs, and delivered under appropriate professional guidance.

HONG KONG
ENDS PROBE INTO
‘PREVENTABLE’
DEADLY FIRE

CATHERINE LAI

A devastating fire that ripped through a Hong Kong apartment complex last year and killed 168 people was “preventable”, lawyers told a committee investigating the blaze in closing statements. The November 26 fire at Wang Fuk Court was the world’s deadliest residential building blaze since 1980.

It engulfed seven of the eight high-rise blocks, which were covered in bamboo scaffolding, protective netting and foam boards for renovations.

Almost all fire safety measures failed that day because of human errors; the judge-led panel heard over 30 sessions since March.

The disaster “was preventable but not prevented, and foreseeable but not foreseen”, leading counsel for the committee Victor Dawes told the hearing on Friday.

Former Wang Fuk Court residents attending the hearing wiped away tears as Dawes detailed the rapid spread of the fire.

Evidence suggests the fire was likely caused by a lit cigarette that was improperly disposed of, he said.

The fire alarm and hose systems had been switched off for the renovations, and foam boards placed over the windows, blocking residents’ view, the counsel’s submissions said.

Building contractors had “knowingly created a massive fire risk” by using non-fire-retardant netting on the facade, according to the submissions.

Contractors also failed to stop workers from smoking or to properly dispose of combustible construction waste, and compromised the main escape route, the submissions added.

The windows of staircases had been removed to let workers easily climb in and out of buildings, allowing smoke and fire to spread more rapidly.

The government “must bear a certain responsibility” for failures in the system, Dawes told the hearing.

“A disaster of this scale should not have occurred and should never occur again,” he said.

Government counsel Jenkin Suen acknowledged on Thursday “weaknesses” in the system but said it would be “prejudicial and unfair” to put all the blame on public authorities. — AFP

Wealth, health and power
are trusts from God

ISLAM TEACHES that wealth, health and power are trusts from God. They are given to us for a time and judged by how we use them. They are not proof that one person is better than another. The more a person depends on money, youth, or status for happiness, the more they fear losing them.

I have never forgotten one winter day in Portsmouth. Rain was pouring down and the cold seemed to get into my bones.

An elderly homeless man was sitting begging alone on the pavement. His clothes were wet, and water dripped from the brim of his hat. People hurried past him, trying to get out of the rain, but he stayed there.

There was a burger shop nearby. I went in, bought him a meal and a hot coffee and took them back to him. When I gave them to him, he looked up with surprise and gratitude.

He smiled and thanked me as he held the warm food and drink. I could easily have bought that meal for myself. I could have sat somewhere warm, eaten it and soon forgotten it. But giving it to him gave me something much better than a burger and coffee. The look of pleasure and gratitude on his face has stayed with me ever since.

That small act cost very little, but it gave me a happiness that lasted and helped me understand what Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor and philosopher, meant when he said that “the only wealth we keep forever is the wealth we give away.” Most people think of wealth as money, property, possessions, investments, status, or power.

These things can be useful. They can make life more comfortable.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author



What lasts is the good we do with what we have.

But none can be kept forever. Money changes hands. Houses are sold. Possessions are lost, broken, given away, or thrown out.

What lasts is the good we do with what we have. We talk about owning things, and in everyday parlance, that is true. We can own a house, a car, land, or money in the bank.

These rights matter and help society work. But they are not permanent. Everything we call ours was here in some form before we arrived and it will be here, change hands, or disappear after we are gone. Even our bodies are not fully under our control. We look after them, feed them and try to protect them, but we cannot stop ageing, illness, or death. Accepting this can help us see life more clearly.

It reminds us not to build all our happiness on things we will one day lose. There is nothing wrong with money. It can give security, freedom and comfort. It can help people care for their families and help others.

The trouble begins when money becomes the main purpose of life or when people think it can protect

them from death. It cannot.

When a person dies, the house becomes someone else’s home; possessions are sold, passed on or forgotten. This does not mean we should give everything away without thought. We have duties to our families and should plan for the future.

But once our real needs are met, we can ask what our money and possessions are for. Are they only there to make us more comfortable, or can they also help someone who is struggling? The wealth we give away is not wasted.

It can become a meal for a hungry person, help for a child, comfort for a neighbour, or hope for someone who feels forgotten.

Ultimately, the best measure of a good life is not how much we held on to, but how much good we did with what passed through our hands.

I imagine the old homeless man soon forgot my small gift, my small act of kindness, but for me, giving to someone in need became a lasting memory and a source of enduring happiness.

To bathe, or not to bathe... that is the question



RAY PETERSEN
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The writer is a media consultant

WHAT'S YOUR fancy? A nice hot bath, in which you can luxuriate and indulge yourself in the evening before bed, or a bracing, wide-awakening shower in the morning? Sometimes I can't decide...

Shakespeare himself was fascinated by where a good bath could take him. In Macbeth, he describes sleep as "labour's bath, the balm of hurt minds," while in his Sonnets 153/4, he refers to Cupid's "Seething bath," as being to "cure strange maladies." Modernity perhaps tells us showers, apparently, are contemporarily better, whether hot or cold, reflecting our mood, our personality, stimulating the nervous system, being time-efficient, offering 'eco-friendly' cleaning, and being more practical in terms of maintaining a routine. Otherwise, baths are infinitely more relaxing, curative, ease chronic ailments, muscle pain, improve sleep factors, and offer better skincare responses, according to Loreal et al.

A 2024 study by Buije et al (2016) in Japan found a higher metabolic factor among bathtub users, which supported weight-loss imperatives more effectively, but pointed out that showers produce much more steam, which cleans deeper, eradicating toxins. Their

study also advocated hot-to-cold or cold-to-hot showers being remarkably invigorating and health-supportive, with users reporting far fewer 'sick days.' And speaking of Japan, to 'muddy the water' of this debate even further, Matan Shelomi writes, "Typical Asian baths require a shower first, with soap, completely rinsing off grime and soap. Then you get into the bath and soak. This is apparently ultra-relaxing and has health benefits depending on the additives - whether bubbly, hot, cold, or herbal - then you shower or sauna, and bathe again, and do it as many times as you like." I might try it someday!

Showers are significantly better in terms of hygiene, as dirt is washed away, whereas in a bath, you may be sitting in dirty water for some time. It is also anecdotally obvious that a shower's action on the skin, the pressure element, can wake the nervous system and release endorphins, increasing the feel-good factor, so the debate probably comes down to whether you would rather, metaphorically speaking, bathe under a jungle waterfall, where you most probably shower, with your focus on reinvigoration. On the other hand, fantasising about the romance of bathing in the pool of a desert oasis almost certainly implies a focus on wellbeing and relaxation. Which sounds very much like me! That

Modernity perhaps tells us showers, apparently, are contemporarily better, whether hot or cold, reflecting our mood, our personality, stimulating the nervous system, being time-efficient, offering 'eco-friendly' cleaning, and being more practical in terms of maintaining a routine.

'grande dame' of romantic tragedy, American poet and author Sylvia Plath, was noted for her confessional poetry and several books, including 'The Bell Jar', published shortly before her suicide in 1963. In that - her last book - Plath noted, "There must be quite a few things a hot bath won't cure, but I don't know many of them." She continued... "I never feel so much of myself as when I'm in the bath," concluding that she found her bath healing, calming, restorative, and providing the peace she clearly sought, and sadly for her, so rarely found.

Mae West was an extraordinary talent, but with a far greater appreciation of self. She was a personality who raucously defined what America was at the time. I loved that sense of humour! Showers use much less water, usually 75 litres for a five-minute shower, and given the technological advances, becoming greater all the time compared to a full bath, which will top out at between 100-150+ litres, making them better than a bath for both saving water and saving on energy costs. My bath may be all very decadent and wasteful, but it is so, so luxurious, with oils, aromatherapy, and bath bombs reeking of bathtub decadence. Me... in my element! And which is best? Who cares, shower or bathe... but enjoy!

OPPOSITION TO DATA CENTRES GROWS IN CRAMPED URBAN JAPAN

KYOKO HASEGAWA

The more Yoriko Kitagawa learns of a massive data centre to be built near her home in Hino on the outskirts of Tokyo, the more she worries.

"This is a terrible plan," the 94-year-old said. The explosion in resource-hungry data centres — housing the hardware "brains" of artificial intelligence — is fuelling unease worldwide, with New York State and Australia the latest jurisdictions to announce new rules.

Opponents of data centres in the United States have called for a "national day of protest" on Saturday to "protect our hometowns, our wallets, and our way of life".

Japan, with some of the most densely populated cities among advanced economies — 80 per cent of the country is mountains — has a particular problem: a shortage of suitable urban space to build the facilities.

One centre is even planned next to the famous Tokyo Tower.

In Hino, the height of two of the three planned buildings has been cut by a fifth to 63.5 metres (208 feet), but they still will tower over nearby houses, blocking the sun for some.

"As someone who lives next to the site, I'm most worried about a fire that could be triggered by the massive amount of batteries," said 69-year-old campaigner Yasuo Yamazaki.

"Heat from the data centre is also worrisome, as well as noise," he said.

Developer Mitsui Fudosan plans a "green buffer zone" of up to 78 metres with trees and a stream, reducing the noise, the heat and the "oppressive feeling", said an official in charge of the project.

Trillions of dollars are being spent on data centres to train and run AI models and provide cloud storage for humanity's zettabytes — a unit equivalent to a trillion gigabytes — of digital information.

Japan has big plans in the field, including 10 million AI robots operating by 2040, aiming to become "the most AI-friendly country in the world".

It wants to develop its own sovereign AI models and infrastructure to avoid over-reliance on the United States and China, the sector's runaway leaders.

Partly to meet a projected increase in power demand from AI, Japan is moving to revive its nuclear power sector, 15 years after the Fukushima disaster.

But despite being a large and politically stable economy with good telecoms infrastructure, Japan has "important constraints", said Trung Ghi, energy and utilities consultant at Arthur D. Little.

"Suitable large-scale land near demand centres is limited, particularly because Japan is mountainous and major demand is concentrated around dense urban areas," Ghi said.

Having data centres near end-users is important - not least for the ultra-speed of response needed for financial trading, streaming, or gaming. — AFP

The death of the degree

JUST AS French aristocrats under the ancien régime could hardly imagine the abolition of their noble titles, most of today's university leaders cannot conceive of a world in which the degrees they confer become worthless pieces of paper. The former were in for a rude awakening in 1790; the latter are barreling towards a similar shock.

No longer a social service, education has become the new infrastructure of power. Whoever controls the development of technical talent controls the future. The countries that understand this have stopped arguing about teaching quality and started measuring how fast knowledge translates into capability. The rest are reforming a 20th-century system and calling it progress.

Large employers like Google, Apple, and IBM now have hiring practices that focus on skills rather than degrees. More than half of employers have gone so far as to drop degree requirements entirely for some roles. Recruiters no longer want to know how much applicants have memorised; they want to know how they make decisions amid uncertainty and how quickly they learn.

Y Combinator funds Stanford dropouts — or people who forgo university altogether. A GitHub profile now says more about what you can build than a college transcript. To be sure, degrees still hold value, but mostly for entry to regulated professions like law and medicine, public-sector jobs, and prestige networks. But notice that this value lies in access, not knowledge.

In an AI-transformed world, capability is the new dividing line. True, a free AI chatbot will explain quantum mechanics to anyone. But access to a tool is not the same as the ability to use it. A chasm is growing between people who can harness AI to solve a hard problem and people who only consume the answers it hands them. The defining skill of the next decade will be orchestration: running several AI agents towards an outcome defined by the individual.

This raises an important question: Is AI in education a threat or an opportunity? My answer is that it is an opportunity, but only for institutions willing to rebuild around the technology. That



IRYNA VOLNYTSKA

The author is Founder and CEO of IronCyber and President of SET University

The question that should guide education reformers is how fast they can convert a person's knowledge into a country's gain, before someone else beats them to it



The focus should be less on the number of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates and more on the pipeline from university to product.

means overhauling assessment methods, because reproducing knowledge is no longer as important as demonstrating judgment and application skills. The key is to test whether a student can command and critique an AI system, rather than outsource thinking to it. With this shift, AI can become education's largest-ever scaling lever, providing personalised tutoring at near-zero marginal cost, simulation at scale, and instant feedback.

In the digital era, data trumps all else. Every interaction a student has with a learning platform leaves a trace of their cognitive processing, speed of adaptation, and capacity to collaborate. Universities sit on terabytes of this information but do little with it.

All this points to the need for AI-native institutions. The dramatic death and rebirth of the edtech sector suggest that such a shift is already underway. The companies that simply moved lectures online are disappearing. The investors who once scaled some of Silicon Valley's most prominent tech firms are funding their replacements. Outsmart, launched by former Duolingo executives, has raised more than \$36 million from Khosla Ventures, Lightspeed, and DST Global on a single promise: to build "the university of the future." Other powerful tech players who no longer trust universities have also started building alternatives. Peter Thiel pays young people \$100,000 to drop out of school and launch startups. Y Combinator became a university

of founders, compressing years of iteration into a few months. And yet, elite universities' real product was never education — MIT has given away lectures for two decades. It is the network. Four years in the same room build social capital that compounds for life. That, not the curriculum, is what people pay for.

It follows, then, that the future of the university rests on deliberately designing environments that foster strong connections — which almost no one is doing. Moreover, the focus should be less on the number of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates and more on the pipeline from university to product. Many have fretted that China graduates more STEM PhDs than the United States. But what sets China apart is the speed with which it turns research into innovation that people can use — a few years, compared to a decade or more elsewhere.

Most of the world treats education as a cultural mission to be improved at the margins, even though it has become a crucial determinant of strategic advantage. Why else would Canada, Germany, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates have fast-track visas to import tech workers that someone else paid to train? Developing talent for export is a subsidy to other economies. The question that should guide education reformers is how fast they can convert a person's knowledge into a country's gain before someone else beats them to it.

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HIGH PRICES FAIL TO DETER FANS

*Fifa
President
Gianni
Infantino
claps during
the Legends
Cup of the
2026 World
Cup football
tournament
at the
Rockefeller
Center in
New York. —
AFP*



SUNDAY'S FINAL caps a World Cup where fans were willing to shell out more than ever for a seat at the quadrennial showpiece, as ticket buyers confounded even the greatest cynics in the face of sky-high prices.

In the match at New York New Jersey Stadium — widely billed as the single most expensive sporting event ever played in the United States — Lionel Messi's Argentina face Spain and their teenage superstar Lamine Yamal.

It is a fitting end to a tournament that has tested the limits of what fans will spend, with Fifa's gamble paying off after concerns over visa restrictions and domestic unrest in the United States.

"What Fifa did a very good job of was determining what demand would be because people (were) paying these absurd prices for just about all the 104 matches," said Scott Friedman, a ticketing expert who previously worked for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"A year ago, we didn't think people would be travelling with Trump's ICE stuff and all this other conspiracy stuff. But it's the most popular tournament in the world by far globally and Fifa, to their credit, they set the prices high and people ended up paying them."

A Reuters analysis of Fifa attendance data found that more than half the 72 group matches were attended to capacity, with most others only a few hundred fans short of a full house. Around 99.7 per cent of available seats were filled during the preliminary stage matches, Fifa said.

The data erased early concerns that Fifa's infamously steep prices would put off fans, after swathes of empty seats were seen around the Guadalajara Stadium for the June 11 match between South Korea and the Czech Republic. Fifa reported an attendance of 44,985 at the nearly 46,000-seat stadium but empty seats seen by a Reuters witness around the arena seemed to justify critics' biggest fears.

HIGHER PRICES, HIGHER DEMAND
As the tournament expanded to its largest-ever field, however, with 48 teams involved, so too did interest among fans.

Prices were set initially at \$575 a ticket for group games - more than double the most expensive group ticket available during the 2022 tournament - but Fifa's dynamic pricing system meant that many ticketholders paid far more.

Hundreds of tickets were still available for the final on Wednesday, priced at little more than \$7,000 on Fifa's platform, a surprise fact that prompted speculation over whether Fifa had



finally gone too far with its prices.

But the batch of seats available was likely the result of a process known as "slow ticketing", Friedman explained, a common practice in mega-events in which organisers restrict inventory to motivate buyers.

"They can act like they already sold their seats and kind of just dribble them in accordingly to obviously increase market demand," said Friedman, who runs the 'Ticket Talk Network', dedicated to exploring how seats for sports mega-events are bought and sold.

"Like 'Oh, there's only so-and-so amount of tickets left available in the section, I better buy now'"

By Friday, nearly all tickets

appeared to be sold, with a few listed on Fifa's sales platform at around \$32,000 apiece.

'NO ONE REALLY KNOWS HOW THIS WORKS'

An opaque "dynamic pricing" process has also proven a boon for Fifa, as the sport continues its uneasy evolution from a working-class game to a pastime of the wealthy. Fifa introduced dynamic pricing for the first time at this tournament, allowing ticket prices to fluctuate based on real-time demand and other factors.

"One reason for the frustration over the last few months is that no one really knows how this works," said Adam Elmachtoub, an associate professor of industrial engineering and operations research at Columbia University. "People are willing to accept dynamic pricing - we deal with it for airfare, we deal with it even (for) buying clothes - but I think when it's such a high-profile event, transparency will help a lot."

Fifa introduced a small number of lower-cost tickets in response to backlash over prices, as politicians including New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani lobbied for local residents to have access to affordable seats.

A high-quality tournament also spurred demand, with the four top-ranked nations in the semi-finals for the first time since rankings were introduced, and

Sunday's final will feature the 39-year-old Messi in probably his final World Cup match.

"The notion of what is fair pricing here is complex because entertainment is not like a necessity," said Elmachtoub.

FAN APPETITE HOLDS UP
Lax rules around the resale market in the US have only served to accelerate the pocket-emptying around the tournament, with second-hand ticket sellers largely empowered to set their own prices. The rules in the United States stand in contrast to co-hosts Mexico, where resellers are prohibited from listing their tickets above what they spent - and much of the rest of the world.

A flood of final-week listings brought prices down on resale platform SeatGeek, with the average ticket for the final listed for more than \$11,000 as of Friday. Still, that figure easily made the final the most expensive event that the platform had sold, 8 per cent above the 2024 Super Bowl, SeatGeek said. "What we're seeing with this year's World Cup is that demand fluctuates with every round and every matchup reveal," said Chris Leyden, senior director for marketing at SeatGeek.

"The appetite for this tournament has held up remarkably well from the group stage through the knockouts."

— Reuters

World Cup security dogs sniff threats

INGLEWOOD: Kali, a sweet and well-behaved five-year-old Labrador Retriever, is not scaring anybody. She also is not letting anyone sneak into the Los Angeles Stadium with explosives, fireworks, firearms or other sniffable threats at the World Cup.

Stationed near one of the stadium entrances, Kali was among hundreds of police and security dogs marshalled across North America to provide a first line of defence against potential threats.

About 300 of Allied Universal Enhanced Protection Services' 1,000 dog teams have been employed in World Cup security, according to company president Glen Kucera.

The scale of the World Cup

co-hosted by the US, Canada and Mexico has presented challenges for security organisers. Not only have there been matches at stadiums in 16 cities in the three countries, but security has been needed for training grounds, hotels and transportation routes.

SNIFFER DOGS ON PATROL
Kali represents the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and has a keen nose for things that could go boom. Dogs from the L A County Sheriff's Department were nearby, while private security teams patrolled the perimeter with dogs sniffing vehicles.

Anybody going into the stadium



K-9 security at the Los Angeles World Cup stadium. — Reuters

was going to have to pass close by a public safety dog.

"That's the point. Everybody attending is likely to realise they're being assessed by the nose of a security dog, something which provides a key deterrent to a terrorist or any other person planning something dangerous," Kucera said. "Ninety-five per cent of what we do is a visual deterrent."

Not all security risks are from terror threats. Fans in many countries commonly celebrate goals or wins with fireworks, so security officials were keen to stop such items being brought into stadiums by well-meaning supporters.

Across the tournament, security organisers have been keen to both

provide the visual security of dogs and make fans from across the globe feel comfortable.

Kucera said that was why his firm had used mostly friendly dogs like Labradors to provide security, rather than German Shepherds or more intimidating breeds. Different countries and cities provided different canine approaches. In Guadalajara, Mexico, robot dogs helped sniff out explosive threats. In Vancouver, Canadian agencies developed a multi-layered strategy to make dogs a key part of detecting threats. So far everything has gone well. Reuters found that not one dog approached was unwilling to sit like a good boy or girl to have their picture taken. — Reuters



Spain's forward #19 Lamine Yamal . — APF

Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi. — AFP

OMANI COACHES EXPECT TACTICAL BATTLE IN FINAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 18

THE STAGE is set for one of the most anticipated Fifa World Cup finals in recent history as defending champions Argentina prepare to face Spain in the 2026 Fifa World Cup final on Sunday. While millions of football fans around the globe are eagerly awaiting the showdown, Omani football experts believe the title will ultimately be decided by tactical discipline, fine margins and the ability of the two coaching staffs to make the right decisions under pressure.

Speaking to the Oman Observer, former Omani national team coaches shared their technical assessment of the final, highlighting the contrasting styles of both finalists while explaining why the match has all the ingredients to become another World Cup classic.

Former Omani national team coach Ibrahim Somar believes the two finalists have fully earned their places after displaying the highest technical standards during the competition. “The four teams that reached the semifinals represented the strongest sides in this World Cup. Argentina and Spain proved throughout the tournament that they possess the quality, experience and tactical organisation needed to compete at the highest level,” Somar said.

He pointed out that despite reaching the same destination, the two finalists have taken very different footballing paths. “Spain’s philosophy is built around controlling possession and constructing attacks patiently from the back before accelerating the tempo in the final third. Their players are technically gifted and extremely comfortable on the ball. Under their coaching staff, they have maintained excellent positional discipline while pressing aggressively whenever possession is lost.”

According to Somar, Spain’s midfield remains the team’s biggest strength, allowing them to dictate matches and limit opponents’ opportunities. “Once Spain establish control of possession, they become very difficult to stop. They circulate the ball intelligently and force opponents to chase the game for long periods. This tactical identity has made



Fans in Yamal and Messi jerseys pose beside a World Cup-themed car. — APF



IBRAHIM SOMAR

them one of the most entertaining teams of the tournament.”

In contrast, Somar described Argentina as a side driven by leadership, unity and competitive mentality. “Lionel Messi remains the key figure in Argentina. He is not only the team’s biggest star but also its emotional leader on the pitch. Every player works tirelessly to support him, and that unity has become one of Argentina’s greatest strengths.”

However, Somar stressed that Argentina’s success cannot be attributed to Messi alone. “The entire squad has contributed throughout the tournament. Every player understands his role and sacrifices for the team. That collective commitment has allowed Argentina to overcome several difficult matches during the knockout rounds.”

Based on the performances witnessed over recent weeks, Somar believes Argentina may hold a slight



JAMAL AL BALUSHI

psychological advantage. “Looking at their performances in the last few matches, Argentina appear slightly closer to winning another World Cup title. They have shown enormous character under pressure and know exactly how to manage decisive matches. Their experience from winning the previous World Cup could prove to be an important factor.”

Beyond predicting the final, Somar believes the tournament has offered valuable lessons for Omani football. “As domestic coaches, we have learned a great deal from this World Cup. We have watched coaches from different football schools implement various tactical philosophies with remarkable success. Our responsibility now is to transfer these ideas into our local competitions and continue developing Omani football through better coaching methodologies and tactical education.”

SMALLEST MOMENTS

Former Omani national team coach Jamal bin Bakhsh al Balushi echoed similar sentiments, describing World Cup finals as contests decided by the smallest moments rather than overwhelming superiority. “World Cup finals are often decided by the smallest details. Tactical decisions, in-game adjustments and the ability of the coaches to read the match can ultimately determine who lifts the trophy,” he explained.

According to Al Balushi, Argentina’s greatest weapon extends beyond individual brilliance. “Argentina have reached a second consecutive World Cup final thanks to a combination of Lionel Messi’s brilliance, the team’s fighting spirit and their outstanding collective mentality. They have consistently shown resilience throughout the tournament, with every player willing to work for the team.”

He believes Argentina’s mentality has become one of their defining characteristics. “They never stop fighting regardless of the circumstances. Even when matches become difficult, they remain organised and mentally strong. Those qualities are essential in finals.”

Discussing Spain, Al Balushi praised the European side’s tactical identity and technical quality. “Spain rely on a completely different footballing philosophy. Their greatest strengths are collective play, ball possession and applying high pressure in the opposition’s half. In my opinion, they possess the strongest midfield in the tournament.”

He added that Spain’s dominance in midfield could play a decisive role. “Their midfield allows them to dominate possession and dictate the rhythm of matches. When they are allowed to play their football, they can control games for long periods and gradually wear opponents down.”

Despite offering his tactical observations, Al Balushi insisted that predicting a World Cup final remains extremely difficult.

“Football always remains unpredictable. A World Cup final is influenced by many variables, and unexpected moments can change the course of the match in an instant. That is exactly what makes football so exciting,” Jamal ended.



US President Donald Trump stands by the Fifa World Cup Trophy. — AFP

TRUMP ADDS SPOTLIGHT TO WORLD CUP FINAL

SPAIN AND Argentina prepared to do battle in the World Cup final in New Jersey on Sunday as organisers said they were keeping a close eye on smoke from wildfires in Canada.

Lionel Messi's Argentina are bidding to become the first team since Brazil in 1962 to win back-to-back World Cups, while Spain are trying to win a second title after their maiden victory in 2010.

Organisers said they were "monitoring closely" the smoke that has choked skies over large areas of the United States.

"There's been discussion about it, and we have somebody with the National Weather Service that sits in Fifa headquarters there, so we're monitoring closely," Andrew Giuliani, White House World Cup task force executive director, told a briefing. US President Donald Trump will be among a crowd of over 80,000 spectators as the largest World Cup in history reaches its climax in the MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. It will be the only game of the tournament that Trump will have attended.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she would also attend the final after an invitation from the American president. Trump on Friday hailed the World Cup, also played in Mexico and Canada, as "the most successful sporting event perhaps in the history of the world" as he held a reception in New York with Fifa chief Gianni Infantino.

PHYSICAL BATTLE

Spain captain Rodri said he was bracing for a "physical" battle with Argentina and would aim to ignore any possible "provocations".

Rodri, the 2024 Ballon D'Or winner, said he expected the final to be unlike any other game the European champions had faced.

"I think Sunday's match will be quite different," the Manchester City star told reporters.

"It will be a more physical one, and we must be prepared. But I believe that if we

are known for something in this national team, it is that we know how to play different games based on the moment.

"So we can adapt to having to defend, counter-attacking, to attacking. We are a very complete team, and that is why we are here."

When asked if he expected Argentina to resort to "provocative" tactics, Rodri replied: "Well, that's a part of football." Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni urged fans to make the most of seeing Messi lead out his team in another World Cup final at the age of 39.

"He has made history. He is a legend," Scaloni said of the former Barcelona player, who helped Argentina to win the World Cup in Qatar in 2022.

England arrived in Miami to play France on Saturday in the meeting of the beaten semifinalists to determine who finishes third. England coach Thomas Tuchel admitted that their 2-1 defeat to Argentina in the semifinal had been painful.

"We have to live with this, so it's our pain, my pain and the players' pain — we feel the most pain of all," Tuchel said at a press conference. "And it is our scar that we carry now. It is a very painful defeat, and we have to live with this defeat, first and foremost, not the critics, not the experts, not our family members who suffer as well with us and want only the best for us, but it's basically us."

France coach Didier Deschamps vowed that no tears would be shed as he prepares to take charge of his final World Cup match with Les Bleus.

"I know that the final curtain falls tomorrow," Deschamps said on Friday.

"No one here is going to cry, but I know I'll miss the French team. For 15 years (he was appointed in 2012), I had the privilege of experiencing moments that were magical, and others that were difficult. "

Deschamps' talented team were favourites to win a third World Cup but lost 2-0 to Spain in the semifinals.

— AFP



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BUSINESS

Oman accelerates 61 road projects

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is implementing 61 road projects across the Sultanate of Oman under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, with around 22 projects already more than 70 per cent complete as the government accelerates investment in transport infrastructure to strengthen connectivity and support economic growth.

The projects include new highways, rehabilitation and upgrading of existing roads and strategic infrastructure works aimed at improving links between governorates while supporting the logistics, tourism and industrial sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Saif bin Saeed al Sinani, Director General of Planning at the ministry, said 2026 had been an exceptional year for road development.

During the first half of the year, the ministry inaugurated several major projects, including the dual carriageways of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal Street and Al Farouq Street, the Itin Tunnel Interchange, road paving works in Maqshin, rehabilitation of the Tawi Atir-Wadi Rakah-Jabjat road, the Al Aflaj road in Al Mudhaibi and infrastructure repairs in areas affected by tropical weather

During the first half of the year, the ministry inaugurated several major projects, including the dual carriageways of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal Street and Al Farouq Street, the Itin Tunnel Interchange, road paving works in Maqshin, rehabilitation of the Tawi Atir-Wadi Rakah-Jabjat road, the Al Afraj road in Al Mudhaibi and infrastructure repairs in areas affected by tropical weather systems.



2026 had been an exceptional year for road development in Oman.

systems.

The second half of the year will see the completion of several strategic schemes, including Sultan Turki bin Said Road between Al Kamil W'al Wafi and Sur, rehabilitation of Sultan Thuwaini bin Said Road between Bidbid and Nizwa, Wadi Bani Khalid Aqaba Road, Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Miten Road, Al Mughsail Bridge, the Taqah-Madinat Al Haq Road, Saih Al Khairat-Shisr Road, Al Mamoura-Taqah Road, improvements to the Anatoukh pass in Dhalkout and the coastal road between Rakhkout and Dhalkout.

Sections of several ongoing projects are also scheduled to open before the end of the year, including 6 kilometres of the SOHAR Port and Freezone Link,

30 kilometres of the Al Namaa Poultry Company road in Dhank, 6 kilometres of the Al Hazm-Al Rustaq road, 12 kilometres of the Gas Company Roundabout-Bilad Sur dual carriageway, 7 kilometres of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal Road, 10 kilometres of the Izki-Nizwa dual carriageway and 28 kilometres of the Al Abila-Al Fayyad road.

The ministry is also preparing to launch several new projects during the second half of the year, including the first phase of the dual carriageway leading to the Rub Al Khali in Al Dhahirah Governorate, completion of the Sant-Wadi Al A'la road, rehabilitation works in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and road paving projects serving villages in Al Sharqiyah North

Governorate.

Among the largest schemes due to begin before the end of 2026 are the 132-kilometre Sinaw-Mahout-Al Duqm road in Al Wusta Governorate and the expansion of the Muscat Expressway. Dr Al Sinani said the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road linking Dibba, Khasab and the Niabat of Lima in Musandam Governorate had exceeded 73 per cent completion and would strengthen connectivity while supporting tourism and economic activity.

Construction is also progressing on the 400-kilometre Sultan Said bin Taimur Road between Haima and Thamrait, together with the remaining 37-kilometre section before Haima. Parts of the highway are expected to open during the first half of 2027, with the entire project scheduled for completion in the second half of 2028.

The road will form a strategic transport corridor linking Dhofar Governorate with the rest of Oman. Dhofar continues to witness significant investment through projects including the 33-kilometre Raysut-Al Mughsail dual carriageway, the 46-kilometre Saih Al Khairat-Shisr Road, the 86-kilometre Shisr-Bithna Al Hashman Road, the 210-kilometre Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Miten Road, 170 kilometres of paved roads in Maqshin and several rehabilitation projects, including the Hafouf-Dhalkout-Khadhrafi Road, Al Shuwaimiya and Anatoukh passes, Al Mamoura-Taqah Road and the coastal road between Rakhout and Dhalkout.

— ONA

Canadian energy firm explores investment options in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 18

Canada Business Holdings Inc (CBH), a Canadian project development and investment company, has announced plans to explore energy-related investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman.

Ottawa-based CBH said in a statement that its interest in Oman follows a decision to formally close its development file for a proposed petroleum refinery project in Tunisia for a period of ten years.

The proposed Skhira project in Tunisia envisaged the development of a modern refinery with a processing capacity of around 300,000 barrels per day, designed to produce cleaner petroleum products aligned with international fuel standards.

CBH said the decision to discontinue further advancement of the Tunisian refinery initiative followed an extended period of technical assessment, strategic planning and engagement with Tunisian stakeholders.

However, as part of its global energy investment strategy, CBH said it is now evaluating potential opportunities in Oman's downstream energy, industrial and infrastructure sectors.

The company noted that Oman's strategic location, investment framework and growing role as a regional energy hub provide potential opportunities



CBH said it is evaluating potential opportunities in Oman's downstream energy, industrial and infrastructure sectors.

for commercially viable projects serving regional and international markets.

“CBH is actively assessing jurisdictions where government responsiveness, regulatory certainty and investment protection align with the requirements of major international projects”, CBH Chairman Moses Solomon said.

Any future CBH investment in Oman will remain subject to detailed technical, financial, regulatory, environmental

and geopolitical assessments, as well as the identification of suitable technology, engineering and operating partners, the company stated.

Established in 2006, CBH specialises in public-private partnerships, infrastructure, energy, industrial development, logistics, healthcare and strategic real estate projects, working with governments and private-sector partners to develop large-scale projects internationally.

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ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The sector records strong growth in financing activity.

OMAN ISLAMIC BANKING ASSETS REACH **﷼9.8 BILLION**

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s Islamic banking sector continued its steady expansion, with total assets rising 9.2 per cent year-on-year to RO 9.80 billion by the end of May 2026, accounting for 19 per cent of the country’s total banking sector assets, according to data released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The sector also recorded strong growth in financing activity, with total outstanding financing provided by Islamic banks and Islamic windows increasing 10.5 per cent to approximately RO 7.90 billion during the period.

Deposits at Islamic banks and windows climbed 11 per cent year-on-year to around RO 7.80 billion by the end of May, reflecting continued customer confidence and sustained demand for Sharia-compliant banking products. — ONA

FUND CAPITAL SURGES TO **﷼1.20 BILLION IN OMAN**



The sharp increase was driven primarily by investment funds, whose capital jumped 125.4 per cent to RO 993.70 million.

MUSCAT: The combined capital of investment and real estate funds in the Sultanate of Oman surged 89.9 per cent during 2025 to around RO 1.20 billion, up from RO 630.80 million a year earlier, according to data released by the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

The sharp increase was driven primarily by investment funds, whose capital jumped 125.4 per cent to RO 993.70 million, compared with RO 440.80 million in 2024.

Real estate funds also recorded steady growth, with capital rising 7.4 per cent to RO 203.90 million, reflecting sustained investor interest in property-based investment vehicles.

Net assets attributable to unit holders climbed 71.9 per cent to RO 1.36 billion in 2025 from RO 793.69 million the previous year.

Investment funds accounted for most of the increase, with net assets exceeding RO 1.14 billion, up 94.6 per cent, while real estate funds posted a 6.6 per cent rise to RO 218.20 million.

Best Cars announces Oman’s lowest pre-owned vehicle EMIs

MUSCAT: Unlocking unprecedented affordability for car buyers across the Sultanate of Oman, an exclusive limited-time campaign has officially launched to deliver Oman’s lowest EMIs for pre-owned vehicles.

Available only at Best Cars — Oman’s trusted destination for quality pre-owned vehicles, this massive value drive allows motorists to step into a dependable, high-quality vehicle with introductory monthly instalments starting from an incredible RO 48.

Running until July 30, 2026, this exclusive promotion is structured to make premium automotive ownership highly accessible. This special summer campaign is built around a comprehensive suite of financial advantages designed to



This promotion is structured to make premium automotive ownership highly accessible.

Bank Muscat and Nama launch e-mandate service

BANK Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman and Nama Electricity Supply Company have announced the activation of an e-Mandate solution through Bank Muscat’s API Banking on the company’s app, Nama Services.

The initiative will strengthen the digital payments ecosystem, streamline bill collection and enhance the experience of Nama Electricity Supply Company’s customers through Bank Muscat’s innovative and secure digital banking solutions.

The activation of the e-Mandate solution was officially announced during the partnership agreement signed at Bank Muscat’s Head Office in Airport Heights by Salim bin Said al Kumyani, Chief Executive Officer, Nama Electricity Supply Company and Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer — Banking, Bank Muscat.

Bank Muscat’s e-Mandate solution is based on a one-time direct debit authorisation, enabling customers of Nama Electricity Supply Company to issue an electronic mandate through Nama Services App, authorising the direct debit of recurring bill payments from their bank accounts.

The service is also integrated with Nama’s internal billing system, enabling automated reconciliation and settlement processes, improving collection efficiency, reducing manual intervention and enhancing operational performance and service reliability.

The solution is designed to simplify the execution of direct debit transactions and facilitate the payment of recurring obligations for government entities and corporate customers, providing a secure and innovative digital alternative to post-dated cheques.



The agreement was signed by Salim bin Said al Kumyani, CEO, Nama Electricity Supply Company and Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Deputy CEO — Banking, Bank Muscat.

The initiative also supports the Central Bank of Oman’s efforts to develop the country’s electronic payments infrastructure, reduce reliance on traditional payment methods, promote financial inclusion and advance the digital transformation objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer — Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “The launch of the e-Mandate solution in collaboration with Nama Electricity Supply Company marks another milestone in Bank Muscat’s journey to deliver advanced digital banking solutions that support digital transformation across various sectors.

Through our API Banking platform, we continue to empower our partners with secure, scalable solutions that enhance operational efficiency, simplify collection processes and improve the end-user experience. This partnership reflects our commitment to supporting Oman’s transition towards a fully integrated digital

economy while fostering innovation in financial services in line with Oman Vision 2040”.

Salim bin Said al Kumyani, Chief Executive Officer, Nama Electricity Supply company, said: “We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to activate the e-Mandate solution through Nama Services App. This collaboration forms part of our ongoing efforts to enhance our customers’ experience by providing more convenient and efficient digital services.

Through this service, customers of Nama Electricity Supply Company can now pay their recurring bills securely and seamlessly while benefiting from automated processes that save their time, effort; and ensure accurate collection and settlement of bills.

This initiative represents an important milestone in our digital transformation journey and reflects our commitment to leveraging the latest technologies to deliver services that meet customer expectations and improve our operational efficiency”.

Credit Oman insures **﷼107 million** in sales

MUSCAT: Credit Oman insured sales worth RO 107.00 million during the first quarter of 2026, up 3 per cent from RO 104.00 million in the corresponding period last year, as the state-owned export credit agency continued to support businesses against payment risks amidst uncertain global trading conditions.

Acting Chief Executive Officer Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaquobi said the agency remains focused on strengthening Omani exports and helping businesses access new international markets by providing protection against buyer default and non-payment risks.

He said Credit Oman offers exporters and manufacturers greater confidence to expand



Domestic insured sales rose 10 per cent to RO 52.60 million.

into new markets and increase sales by reducing exposure to commercial and non-commercial risks.

Domestic insured sales rose 10 per cent to RO 52.60 million,

while insured exports declined 4 per cent to RO 54.40 million, compared with RO 56.40 million in the first quarter of 2025.

Manufacturing accounted for the overwhelming majority of insured sales, reaching RO 99.10 million, equivalent to 91 per cent of the total portfolio.

The agriculture and fisheries sector ranked second with insured sales of RO 3.10 million, followed by the wholesale and retail trade, including motor vehicle and motorcycle repair, at RO 3.00 million.

The latest figures highlight the continued importance of credit insurance in supporting business continuity and export activity as companies navigate evolving regional and market conditions. — ONA

maximise affordability for value-conscious car buyers. Key among the benefits are highly competitive finance interest rates starting from 3.5% per annum, making vehicle ownership smoother than ever.

To add further value, Best Cars is offering top-market trade-in prices on existing vehicles, backed by an efficient, on-the-spot quick evaluation process that enables customers to transition into their next vehicle seamlessly and transparently.

The attractive RO 48 monthly instalment is an indicative rate available on selected pre-owned vehicles financed through Oman Arab Bank, subject to standard credit approvals, eligibility criteria and banking terms. Under the

campaign guidelines, the maximum financing tenure is dependent on the vehicle’s age, ensuring that the total age of the automobile does not exceed 9 years from its initial date of registration.

Because the offer is tied directly to current stock, customers are encouraged to visit early to secure their preferred models from the massive lineup of trusted vehicles. Established in 2001, Best Cars operates from its prominent main showroom in Al Wattayah — the largest facility of its kind in the heart of Oman’s automobile market.

The showroom stocks a wide range of prominent vehicles, including Toyota, Lexus, Kia, Ford, BMW, GMC and more, catering to every taste and budget.

SHORTTAKES



Demand for industrial design registration has continued to rise across a wide range of industries.

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN PROTECTION GAINS GROUND IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Registration of industrial designs is playing an increasingly important role in strengthening innovation, supporting creative industries and enhancing the competitiveness of Omani products, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said.

The ministry, through the National Intellectual Property Office, said demand for industrial design registration from businesses and individuals has continued to rise across a wide range of industries, reflecting growing awareness of the commercial value of intellectual property protection.

Industrial designs cover a broad range of products, including packaging, containers, household furniture, wood products, lighting equipment, jewellery, accessories, electrical and electronic devices, textiles, clothing, ceramics, copperware, handicrafts, graphic symbols and digital user interfaces.

Nidaa al Tamimi, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department at the National Intellectual Property Office, said 34 applications were registered during 2025, while 32 applications had already been filed during the first half of 2026.

She said the increase demonstrates growing public awareness of the importance of protecting industrial designs, adding that such designs are as valuable as patents and trademarks in supporting innovation and commercial development.

Al Tamimi said registration grants owners exclusive legal rights, preventing unauthorised copying, registration or sale of protected designs without prior approval. It also strengthens legal protection against counterfeiting and unfair competition, facilitates litigation where necessary and helps safeguard the reputation of products.

She added that protecting industrial designs enhances the commercial value of products, creates competitive advantages and improves their ability to compete in both domestic and international markets. — ONA

Oman FDI climbs to $\text{RO } 32.20$ billion in Q1

FOREIGN direct investment (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman rose 8.7 per cent year-on-year to RO 32.20 billion by the end of the first quarter of 2026, driven largely by continued investment in the oil and gas sector, preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed.

Total investment inflows during the January-March period reached RO 2.57 billion, underscoring sustained investor confidence in the country's key industries despite global economic uncertainty.

The oil and gas extraction sector remained the dominant destination for foreign capital, attracting RO 25.89 billion, up 9.5 per cent from a year earlier. Investment inflows into the sector amounted to RO 2.24 billion during the quarter.

Manufacturing retained its position as the second-largest recipient of FDI, with investments rising 5.4 per cent to RO 2.87 billion, supported by inflows of RO 146.70 million. The financial intermediation



Total investment inflows during the January-March period reached RO 2.57 billion.

sector followed, recording FDI of RO 1.57 billion, up 9.6 per cent, with inflows reaching RO 137.70 million.

The United Kingdom remained Oman's largest foreign investor, with investments increasing 9.9 per cent to RO 16.88 billion by the end of the first quarter.

The United States ranked second, with FDI growing 10 per cent to RO 8.70 billion, while Kuwaiti investment rose 4.6 per cent to RO 1.44 billion. Chinese investment also continued to expand, increasing 9.3 per cent to RO 901.50 million.

The latest figures reflect the continued concentration of foreign investment in the Sultanate of Oman's energy sector, while manufacturing and financial services maintained steady growth as Oman pursues economic diversification under Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Oman gas output rises to 24.18 bn cubic metres

MUSCAT: Natural gas production in the Sultanate of Oman, including domestic output and imports, increased 6.5 per cent in the first five months of 2026 to 24.18 billion cubic metres, compared with 22.71 billion cubic metres in the corresponding period last year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Growth was driven by higher production of non-associated gas, including imports, which rose 7.2 per cent to 18.81 billion cubic metres, while associated gas production increased 3.8 per cent to 5.37 billion cubic metres.

Demand for natural gas also strengthened across key sectors. Consumption by industrial



Consumption by industrial projects rose 8.2 per cent to 12.39 billion cubic metres.

projects rose 8.2 per cent to 12.39 billion cubic metres, reflecting continued expansion in manufacturing and industrial activity.

Gas consumption by power generation plants climbed 13.3 per cent to 6.58 billion cubic metres, highlighting rising electricity demand during the period. Gas consumption in oil fields, including losses, meter discrepancies and shrinkage factors, fell 3.9 per cent to 5.12 billion cubic metres.

Consumption in industrial areas, including industrial estates and Oman LNG operations, declined sharply by 30.3 per cent to 79.40 million cubic metres, compared with 113.80 million cubic metres a year earlier. — ONA

Nama Water expands Suhar wastewater network

SUHAR: Nama Water Services has completed 67 per cent of the third phase of its wastewater network expansion in the Wilayat of Suhar, a RO 19.00 million infrastructure project aimed at strengthening wastewater services, supporting urban growth and improving environmental sustainability in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The project forms part of the utility's strategy to build a more efficient, resilient and sustainable wastewater system capable of meeting future development needs while improving the quality of life and enhancing the readiness of infrastructure in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The expansion covers Al Hambar, Ghail Al Shabul, Al Tarif, Al Waqiba, Al Sabara, Al Shizaw and



The expansion covers Al Hambar, Ghail Al Shabul, Al Tarif, Al Waqiba, Al Sabara, Al Shizaw and Al Hazeera.

Al Hazeera. Once completed, it will improve wastewater collection and treatment, increase the reliability of the network and support continued residential, commercial and economic development in Suhar.

Nama said the project has generated around RO 1.50 million in local added value through the participation of local companies and the utilisation of Omani expertise, reflecting its commitment to strengthening local content and maximising the economic benefits of infrastructure investment.

Engineer Mohammed bin Harib al Makhmari, General Manager of Sector Projects Implementation in Al Batinah North Governorate, described the development as one of Nama's strategic investments to improve infrastructure readiness

and deliver more efficient, flexible and sustainable wastewater services.

He said investment in such projects extends beyond expanding operational assets to improving quality of life, promoting environmental sustainability and preparing cities to accommodate future development, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Project Manager Engineer Mohammed al Muqbali said construction is progressing according to the approved schedule while maintaining international quality and safety standards. The project comprises an integrated wastewater system including sewage networks, pumping stations, vacuum systems and the upgrading of existing operational assets to improve system reliability and

operational efficiency.

The first phase includes the construction of 40 kilometres of sewage pipelines, a 3-kilometre vacuum network, 3 kilometres of pumping lines, the Al Tarif pumping station, the Ghail Al Shabul lift station, completion of the Al Hambar (1) pumping station, vacuum stations at Al Hazeera and Al Shizaw; and the upgrading of several existing pumping stations. This phase is expected to be completed during the Q2 of 2027.

The second phase will focus on household connections, linking 3,432 residential, commercial and government units to the wastewater network connected to the expanded treatment plant. This phase is scheduled for completion during the second quarter of 2028. — ONA

TRADE DISPUTE

China warns over British Steel



China said it would closely monitor UK's nationalisation of British Steel and take appropriate measures if the interests of Chinese investors are harmed.

Beijing warned the move could affect confidence in the UK's investment climate and called for a mutually acceptable solution, including compensation for former owner Jingye Steel, which says it suffered significant losses. — Reuters

TECH MARKETS

Apple regains top valuation



Apple overtook Nvidia to become the world's most valuable listed company after investors reassessed artificial intelligence prospects.

Apple's market value reached about \$4.88 trillion as confidence grew in its ability to monetise Artificial Intelligence through services, hardware upgrades and its broader ecosystem rather than heavy spending on AI models. — Reuters

MARKET VOLATILITY

Global stocks slide on chips



Global share markets fell as semiconductor stocks extended losses for a third straight session, with investors trimming exposure to artificial intelligence shares. Oil prices climbed to a one-month high as renewed US-Iran hostilities raised supply concerns.

Markets also reacted to the launch of a major AI model by Chinese start-up Moonshot, adding pressure on leading chipmakers. — Reuters

OPINION

Local content for sustainable urban development in Muscat



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is
local content,
sustainability and
innovation expert

CITIES become more integrated into functions that drive economic development. As that happens, there's an expectation on local authorities to deliver quality public services that also generate economic and social value.

Local content provides an opportunity for public expenditure to build local structures and capacity, businesses, jobs and tools for innovation. For Muscat Municipality, local content will be an opportunity to build a resilient and inclusive urban economy while working towards the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Local content is more than the buying of goods and services from suppliers in-country. Local content is the greatest value that can be retained in the local economy by the employment of local/ Omani workforce, local firms, the buying and use of local and in-country technology supported by the development of local and in-country suppliers, innovation and investments that aid and develop the capacity of the local community.

Almost all projects that a municipality undertakes (road construction, public parks, waste, management and smart city; and facility workings) can generate even more economic value and benefit beyond the service and infrastructural delivery.

Muscat Municipality's immediate step should be to develop a local content policy which resonates with the Municipality's strategic objectives. This policy should set clear and measurable local content goals for

procurement and contracting, workforce development and local supplier engagement.

This policy should also define local content goals for the Municipality and identify the key local/economic sectors that would benefit from public expenditure in a synergistic manner.

Procurement provides the Municipality with the most valuable means of enforcing local content. Tender documents must specify sufficient local content criteria that would lead prospective contractors to hire Omani nationals, buy their supplies from local manufacturers, engage Omani SMEs, aid Omani SMEs in skill development and provide Omani SMEs with capacity building.

Proposed solutions must balance local content requirements with cost and quality. Developing local suppliers is just as crucial. Muscat Municipality could create special initiatives for developing local suppliers who are Omani SMEs and help them improve in areas such as quality, safety and project management.

Frequent local supplier forums create positive lines of communication between the Municipality and local businesses.

These forums will allow local suppliers to understand the Municipality's local content requirements and how best to fulfil them.

Human capital development must also constitute a cornerstone of the Municipality's local content strategies. Contracts should stipulate the local content of graduate recruitment and the provision of apprentices, interns, citizen trainees and technicians.

Strong partnerships with local universities

Local content is the greatest value that can be retained in the local economy by the employment of local/ Omani workforce, local firms, the buying and use of local and in-country technology supported by the development of local and in-country suppliers, innovation and investments that aid and develop the capacity of the local community.

and professional and vocational training providers will help ensure Omani citizens are the trained workforce and personnel that are employed.

Innovation is a key component to achieving sustainable local value. Muscat Municipality, by creating specific criteria for local content, can support contractors in creating local solutions by purchasing from Omani SMEs for innovative content and services for smart city solutions.

Successful local content implementation relies on successful governance. The Municipality is encouraged to establish a local content unit. This Unit would be responsible for stakeholder engagement, policy implementation, contract monitoring and performance reporting.

Local content management Systems could be digitized to manage contractor records, monitor KPIs, validate reported results and create dashboards to assist management in their decision-making with supporting evidence.

Performance evaluation should not be limited to expenditure. Allocating resources to Omani Companies, spending on Omani SMEs/Companies, the level of Omani employment created, the hours of training given/delivered, Supplier Development Programmes, Technology Transfer and Social Investment measurement would all be relevant.

Independent verification measures would further improve accountability by ensuring that reported results do create an economic impact.

Can renewable energy help solve Oman’s water challenge?

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

As one of the world’s most water-stressed countries, Oman faces an increasingly complex challenge in securing reliable freshwater supplies for a growing population, expanding industries and agricultural sector.

Rising temperatures, declining groundwater reserves and the impacts of climate change are placing additional pressure on already limited water resources. While desalination has long been the country’s primary solution, the future may lie in combining it with another strategic asset: renewable energy.

Traditionally, desalination has been an energy-intensive process powered largely by natural gas. Although highly effective, conventional desalination consumes significant amounts of electricity and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

As Oman accelerates its clean energy transition, renewable-powered desalination is emerging as an opportunity to improve both water security and environmental sustainability.

The International Renewable Energy Agency notes that renewable energy technologies, particularly solar photovoltaic and wind power, are becoming increasingly cost-competitive for desalination applications.

Falling renewable electricity costs now make it feasible to produce freshwater with substantially lower operating costs over the lifetime of a plant, while reducing carbon emissions.

Oman is well positioned to benefit from this trend. The country enjoys some of the highest solar irradiation levels in the world, with vast areas suitable for utility-scale solar developments.

Coastal regions also offer favourable wind resources, particularly in the south, creating opportunities for hybrid renewable energy systems capable of supplying electricity to desalination facilities throughout the year.

Modern desalination technologies have also become considerably more efficient. Reverse osmosis, now the dominant technology globally, requires significantly less energy than older thermal desalination methods. When powered by renewable electricity, reverse osmosis plants can substantially reduce both operating costs and emissions.

Worldwide, several countries are already demonstrating the potential of renewable-powered desalination.

Saudi Arabia has begun integrating large-scale solar generation into water production projects, while Australia and Spain have explored renewable energy to supply desalination plants during periods of peak renewable generation.

These experiences provide valuable lessons for countries seeking to decarbonise water production without compromising reliability.

Beyond water: The true value of Oman’s dams

WHEN a dam fills after heavy rain, attention naturally turns to the water behind it. We measure the volume captured and watch the level rise.

But a dam's real value often lies beyond its walls — in the farm that keeps producing, the road that stays open, the well that is replenished and the business that avoids disruption.

Oman should therefore begin treating its dams not only as water infrastructure, but as economic assets.

As of the end of February 2026, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources supervised 209 dams nationwide.

The country's surface-storage and groundwater-recharge dams had a combined capacity of approximately 458.7 million cubic metres, while the network had impounded more than 3.17 billion cubic metres of floodwater by the end of 2025.

These figures describe scale. They do not capture the full economic return. A flood-protection dam rarely produces a visible revenue stream. Much of its value lies in losses avoided: damage to homes, commercial property, roads, electricity and communications networks, farms and other public infrastructure.

The absence of damage rarely becomes an economic headline. Yet it carries measurable value. A road that remains open during severe weather keeps workers and goods moving.

A commercial district that avoids flooding loses fewer trading days. A farm that retains access to groundwater can sustain production, employment and rural income.

The Wadi Al Jifnain Dam in Muscat illustrates the point. Inaugurated in February 2025 at a cost of RO 45.6 million, the dam has a storage capacity of 11.5 million cubic metres.

It was designed to protect



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

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

Oman's 209 dams are commonly described by storage capacity and construction cost that misses much of their real value: roads kept open, farms made more resilient and economic losses quietly prevented.

commercial and residential areas in Al Khoudh, Al Hail and Al Mawaleh, as well as development projects downstream.

Its performance should therefore not be judged only by the volume of water it holds. It should also be measured against the value of homes, businesses, public infrastructure and future development that it helps protect.

The same principle applies in Dhofar.

The Wadi Anaar Dam, inaugurated in May 2025 at a cost of approximately RO 23 million, has a storage capacity of around 16 million cubic metres and forms part of Salalah's flood-protection system.

Its economic importance lies partly in protecting a growing urban economy whose roads, homes, commercial activities, tourism facilities and public services face recurring seasonal and climatic pressures.

Protection, however, is only part of the picture. Groundwater-recharge dams slow the movement of floodwater and allow more of it to enter underground aquifers.

This is particularly important in areas such as the Al Batinah Plain, where groundwater supports agriculture and local communities.

Surface-storage dams perform a different function, particularly in mountainous and remote areas. They make water available for residents, livestock and agricultural activity, helping communities remain economically viable where alternative supplies may be difficult or expensive.

The government's support for community-funded dams also reflects this wider value. From 2026, the state contribution towards eligible community dam projects increased from 20 per cent to 50 per cent.

Eight community dams were completed in 2025, bringing the total to 35 across Al Batinah North, Al Dhahirah and Al Dakhiliyah Governorates, while another 19 were under construction.

This model matters. It shows that communities can view a dam not merely as a public structure, but as infrastructure that helps preserve water sources, farms, livelihoods and long-term settlement.

Oman's next step should be to establish a formal framework for measuring the economic value of its dams.

For each major project, such an assessment could estimate the value of property and infrastructure protected, the number of residents and businesses benefitting, the reduction in expected disruption, changes in groundwater availability and the value of agricultural activity made more resilient.

The figures would not be exact.

The benefits of avoided disasters and stronger groundwater security are inherently difficult to calculate.

But an informed estimate would still provide a more complete picture than assessing a dam mainly through construction cost, dimensions and storage capacity.

This approach is widely used in flood-risk management internationally. Economic assessments compare expected damage with and without a project, while broader socioeconomic analysis can include business disruption, agricultural losses, transport interruptions and other indirect effects.

Oman does not need to copy another country's framework exactly. It can develop a national model suited to its geography, settlement patterns, water conditions and development priorities.

Such a framework would also sharpen investment decisions. A flood-protection dam serving a densely populated urban area has a different economic purpose from a small storage dam supporting a mountain community.

A recharge dam serving agricultural land must be assessed differently from a structure built mainly to protect roads, homes and commercial districts.

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CULTURALHERITAGE

SAVING GAZA'S PAST, ONE ARTEFACT AT A TIME



Armed with paintbrushes and wearing surgical gloves, volunteers inside a large tent in Gaza delicately brushed dust from a stone mosaic before placing it into storage, part of an effort to preserve cultural heritage hit by war.

More than 160 historic and cultural sites across the Palestinian territory have been damaged during the conflict between Israel and Hamas, according to the United Nations.

Many of these artefacts date back thousands of years.

"Several mosaic artworks have been lost or destroyed, either completely or partially", said Mohammed Abu Lahia, a Palestinian visual artist taking part in the preservation efforts in the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis.

"It is important that we work to revive this art, remind our children and our community and send a message to the world that we are committed to our heritage and our Palestinian cause".

Beyond archaeological treasures, more recent cultural artefacts are also at risk of being damaged or buried beneath rubble from shelling and air strikes.

More than 90 per cent of Gaza's buildings have been damaged or destroyed during the conflict, according to the UN.

Over the centuries, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans all left their mark on Gaza, creating a rich historical landscape of churches, mosques, ports and artefacts, many of which have suffered damage during the conflict.

"This stone is a piece called a mortar and it was used for grinding grains and herbs. It is approximately 5,000 years old", said Muhannad Abu Lahia, a cultural heritage guide with the Mayasem Association for Culture and Arts, the NGO leading the preservation efforts.

Behind him, artefacts already catalogued for safekeeping were stacked on wooden shelves inside weatherproof plastic containers.

Preserving the past

With Israel maintaining tight controls over goods entering the Gaza Strip — restrictions that have at times contributed to severe shortages of food and other supplies — volunteers have had to work without professional conservation equipment.

Instead, they gently removed dust from mosaics using ordinary paintbrushes and built a makeshift scanning station by mounting a camera above a box lined with black craft paper.

The improvised scanner allowed volunteers to digitise old photographs and paper documents, which were then uploaded to a computer for preservation. — AFP

S H O T T A K E S



AWARDS

Chinese-US skier Eileen Gu attends the 2026 ESPY Awards at the David H Koch Theatre at Lincoln Centre in New York. —AFP



SUMMER HEAT

A woman protects herself from the sun with an umbrella and a face mask while walking on a street in Shanghai. —AFP



AGRICULTURE

A dairy cow grazes along the side of a road in Bauta, Artemisa province, Cuba. — AFP

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Archaeologists uncover 3,000-year-old tomb near Egypt’s Luxor

ARCHAEOLOGISTS uncovered a 3,000-year-old tomb near the southern Egyptian city of Luxor, authorities said on Sunday, the latest in a series of discoveries that officials hope will boost tourism.

The tomb, identified as belonging to a man named Paser, was found by a Dutch archaeological mission from Leiden University in the Shaikh Abd El Qurna necropolis on Luxor’s West Bank, according to Egypt’s tourism and antiquities ministry.

Specialists believe the tomb dates to the Ramesside period, which spans Egypt’s 19th and 20th dynasties, based on the artistic style of its inscriptions.

Located east of a previously known burial site, the tomb follows the traditional layout of private Theban tombs from the New Kingdom (1570-1069 BC), they added.

It consists of an open courtyard leading to a rock-cut chapel shaped like an inverted “T”, with burial chambers carved beneath ground level.

Archaeologists found several well-preserved architectural elements in the courtyard, including a mudbrick bench designed to hold a funerary



stela and a staircase flanked by sloping ramps leading to the entrance. Inside, inscriptions bearing Paser’s name depict him worshipping various deities inside shrines, as well as seated with his wife before an offering table.

The excavation team said further documentation and study will continue in order to determine who was buried in the tomb and to better understand its historical and archaeological context.

The discovery comes as Egypt seeks to promote new archaeological finds to support tourism, a key source of foreign currency for the country.

Luxor is home to some of the world’s most significant ancient monuments and archaeological sites. — AFP

ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN MATAYA AL SHAWQ, Omani novelist Tariq al Mandhari invites readers on a journey shaped by yearning, memory and the enduring human search for belonging. The title itself serves as a key to understanding the novel’s spirit. In Arabic, mataya refers to the means by which travellers journey across long distances, while shawq conveys longing, yearning and deep emotional desire. Together, the two words suggest a journey driven not merely by movement, but by the hopes and aspirations that propel people forward.

Set within a historical framework, the novel follows a range of characters whose paths differ but whose motivations often intersect. Some are drawn toward home, others towards family, love, or power. Despite their different destinations, they share a common struggle marked by uncertainty, sacrifice and the desire to attain what seems just beyond reach. Their journeys are united by a sense of longing that shapes their choices and influences their fate.

One of the novel’s strengths lies in its exploration of human emotions and inner conflict. Rather than focusing solely on historical events, Al Mandhari pays close attention to the personal experiences of his characters. Their hopes, disappointments, moments of weakness and acts of determination become central to the narrative. As



the story unfolds, readers witness individuals confronting difficult decisions, testing their convictions and discovering unexpected truths about themselves.

The novel is also distinguished by its dramatic momentum. Conflicts, betrayals and contradictions drive the narrative forward, creating a story rich in tension and suspense. These elements are not presented merely for excitement; they contribute to a deeper examination of the challenges faced by individuals navigating a world shaped by competing loyalties and ambitions.

Another notable aspect of Mataya Al Shawq is its treatment of hope. While pain and hardship are recurring themes, the novel

consistently highlights the resilience of the human spirit. The characters continue their journeys despite setbacks, believing that perseverance may ultimately lead them toward fulfilment. In this sense, longing becomes more than an emotional state—it becomes a source of strength that enables people to endure adversity and continue moving forward.

Al Mandhari’s storytelling benefits from a balance between historical atmosphere and human drama. The historical setting provides depth and context, while the emotional journeys of the characters give the narrative its heart. This combination allows the novel to appeal not only to readers interested in history, but also to those drawn to stories about identity, ambition, love and personal transformation.

Ultimately, Mataya Al Shawq is a novel about the many roads people travel in pursuit of what matters most to them. Whether seeking home, love, purpose, or power, its characters are carried by the same invisible force: longing. Through a narrative filled with conflict, reflection and hope, Tariq al Mandhari presents a story that speaks to universal human experiences while remaining deeply rooted in its cultural and historical setting.

The novel stands as a thoughtful contribution to contemporary Omani literature, reminding readers that the journeys that define us are often guided not by certainty, but by the enduring power of longing.



A SHIP THAT TELLS A STORY ON MASIRAH’S SHORES



Raya stands to draw a magnificent portrait as the golden sand and the blue waters of the Arabian Sea surround her although It no longer sails and hasn’t left either, but it settled there.

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

ON THE SHORES of the quiet island of Masirah, where seasonal winds meet powerful currents, the hull of the ship Raja stands in silence. The island, which has been set apart and known for its rugged beauty for centuries, serves as a solemn backdrop. Raya cuts a magnificent silhouette as the golden sand and blue waters of the Arabian Sea surround her. Although she no longer sails and has not left her resting place, she has settled into the landscape. She has transformed from a means of transport into a landmark that attracts tourists, island visitors and photographers,

all seeking to capture images that blend beauty with mystery against her corroded frame. Masirah: A Land Accustomed to Shipwrecks Raya is not the first ship to meet her end on Masirah’s shore. This island, strategically positioned at the crossroads linking the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf, has seen repeated grounding incidents throughout history. Among the most famous is the grounding of the American warship USS Peacock near the island’s shores in 1835. For thousands of years, Masirah was a resting station for ships—a hub for navigation, trade and traditional shipbuilding. Vessels such as the Madara



and the Baden once sailed from here to Yemen, East Africa and the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula. Such a rich maritime legacy makes the presence of a damaged hull on her shore feel like a natural extension of old tales: stories of sailors who defied the waves, captains who navigated by the stars

and ships that did not always reach a happy ending. From Misfortune to Tourist Landmark Today, Raya stands in defiance of her original, inescapable destiny, having transformed an unfortunate maritime incident into a destination sought out by photographers and travellers

looking for an experience beyond the ordinary. Her wooden hull lends photographs a rare, dramatic quality. She offers a stark contrast between weathered iron and decaying wood against the softness of the sand and the turquoise water. Photographers often plan to visit at sunset, when the sky casts orange and gold shades behind the ship’s frame, creating a scene that feels closer to a painting—one that merges nature, history and the quiet sorrow embedded in every piece of maritime wreckage. A Witness to a Story Not Yet Fully Told Whether we discover the true history of Raya or rely on the story that took shape over time through accumulated

oral tradition, she remains a symbol of the enduring relationship between Masirah’s people and the sea—a sea that has provided them with livelihood and pride, but has also, at times, taken from them their ships and their lives. Perhaps the most interesting thing about Raya is her mystery; she does not require absolute certainty to be understood. Like other shipwrecks around the world, she carries more in her silence than official records reveal, leaving visitors room to imagine for themselves what happened as they stand on the sand, listening to the waves break against her ancient frame. PHOTOS BY TASNEEM AL RIYAMI