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IN BRIEF

OMAN AND SAUDI DISCUSS MEANS OF STRENGTHENING TIES



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud in Muscat on Wednesday. — ONA

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of the exchange of fraternal visits between the two countries.

The two ministers discussed the trajectory of the strong fraternal relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia, which continue to witness steady growth across various spheres of cooperation. They also reviewed a number of regional and political matters of mutual interest, along with ways to enhance coordination regarding them.

After that, an expanded talks session was convened with the participation of a number of ministers and senior officials from both sides. The discussions addressed various tracks of cooperation — including economic, investment and logistic domains — and explored opportunities for their development in a manner that supports integration, enhances the smooth flow of trade and opens broader horizons for practical partnership at both the bilateral and regional levels, as well as within the framework of Gulf cooperation among the GCC member states.

TURN TO P2

OMAN AND JORDAN LAUNCH \$100M INVESTMENT FIRM

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and the Jordanian Social Security Investment Fund (SSIF) have signed an agreement to launch the Omani-Jordanian strategic partnership to mark the beginning of a new phase of joint investment cooperation between the two brotherly countries and to enhance the established historical ties and growing economic relations between them.

Under the partnership, the two parties established the Jordanian Oman Investment Company with a capital of RO 38.5 million (\$100 million) equally between the two sides to invest in a number of vital and promising sectors that serve the economic priorities of the two countries, including the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

FULL REPORT ON P13

OIL SHOOTS BACK UP, STOCKS SLIDE AS TRUMP SAYS IRAN CEASEFIRE OVER

IRAN-US WAR RESUMES

US President Trump threatened to attack Iran “hard tonight”, hours after saying he thinks the ceasefire is over as oil prices soared and stock markets slid on Wednesday following renewed strikes in the Middle East.

The latest bout of fighting was sparked by Iranian attacks on ships in the vital Strait of Hormuz shipping route.

Trump said at a Nato summit in Türkiye the ceasefire was “over”, although he left the door open to more talks.

The markets responded, with oil shooting back up again, having in recent days come back down towards pre-war levels.

International benchmark Brent North Sea crude jumped more than five per cent to around \$78 a barrel while the main US contract, West Texas Intermediate, also soared five per cent, although both slipped back slightly mid-afternoon.

Oman crude oil for delivery in September 2026 settled at \$71.36 per barrel on Wednesday. Today’s price recorded a rise of \$5.01 from the price of Tuesday which stood at \$66.35. “Geopolitical risks are rising” for markets, noted Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading group XTB.

Fawad Razaqzada, market analyst with Forex.com, was even blunter.

“After a long and eventful first half of the year dominated by the US-Israel war on Iran and Trump’s constant flip-flopping, the last thing investors, and frankly anyone else, needed with the summer holidays approaching was a return of the same geopolitical environment,” he said.

“Unfortunately, it looks like we could be heading back to that.”

The United States launched extensive strikes on Iran this week following attacks on ships in the strait, triggering a wave of reprisals against American bases in Kuwait and Bahrain. Washington also revoked a temporary sanctions waiver for Iranian oil.

Both the US and Iran said they had hit dozens of targets, placing fresh strain on their interim deal to end the Middle East war. Iranian state media reported a wave of explosions around the strait, including six on the island of Qeshm, seven in the city of Sirik and more in the major port city of Bandar Abbas.

It later reported a series of blasts in the coastal city of Bushehr, which hosts the country’s only civilian nuclear power plant and lies near Kharg Island, the main oil terminal through which 90 per cent of Iran’s crude exports transit.

State media said a member of the



US President Donald Trump and Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte in Ankara on Wednesday. — Reuters

Oman condemns strikes on Bahrain, Kuwait and Hormuz

MUSCAT: Oman has condemned the military strikes targeting the territories of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Kuwait, as well as the attacks on two ships - one Saudi and one Qatari - in the Strait of Hormuz. Oman affirmed its full solidarity with its fellow GCC nations in all measures aimed at preserving their security, stability, territorial integrity, sovereignty and national interests.

A statement by the Foreign Ministry, stressed that the escalating military tensions in the region pose a direct threat to regional security, maritime safety, the free flow of international trade and the stability of global energy supplies. It reiterated its unequivocal rejection of any acts that undermine the security of states or endanger civilian and commercial shipping.

Oman calls upon all parties to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, prioritise dialogue and diplomatic solutions, and commit to the full implementation of existing understandings, in support of ongoing efforts to consolidate peace and security in the region. — ONA

military’s Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) had been killed, while the foreign ministry said monitoring and observation sites had been hit on the southern coast.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) said its forces had struck over 80 targets, including Iranian air-defence systems, coastal radar sites and 60 IRGC small boats. The strikes aimed “to degrade Iran’s ability to continue attacking international commerce flowing through the international trade corridor”, it said. Mark Rutte, Secretary-General of Nato, said at the summit in Ankara that the American strikes were “absolutely necessary”. Kuwait said it intercepted two ballistic missiles and 13 drones, while the Iranian army said it had also attacked US forces at Shaikh Isa air base in Bahrain.

Nawal Saad, a Bahraini civil servant, lamented that “the spectre of war is looming once more”, saying “I do not want to go through that experience of fear and anxiety again”. Hamad Althunayyan, an assistant professor at Kuwait University, said Tehran views Bahrain and Kuwait “as the most accessible and lower-cost pressure points in the Gulf”.

“It allows it to project power, impose costs, and test US and GCC resolve,” he said.

Maritime traffic had tentatively resumed after Washington and Tehran signed the deal last month, but Iran has insisted there will be no return to free passage.

Almost 6,000 seafarers “remain stranded” in the area, International Maritime Organisation chief Arsenio Dominguez said on Wednesday. — AFP

Shura debates MoL regulations’ impact on employment, investment

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura hosted Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, on Wednesday to discuss Ministerial Decision No 602/2025 on the regulation of work permits and licences, including amendments under Decision No 44/2026. The session was chaired by Shaikh Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura.

The minister outlined the decision’s objectives in a visual presentation, saying it aims to

develop the regulatory framework of the labour market, strengthen private sector compliance with national employment policies, and balance economic development with labour market sustainability.

The decision is designed to meet national employment targets, correct the status of private sector establishments, and enhance their role in creating job opportunities for Omani nationals, the minister said, noting that companies have been given a grace period to



Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour

comply. The Ministry of Labour launched a comprehensive media campaign to raise awareness of the regulation’s provisions and their positive impact, targeting employers, investors, foreign workers and recruitment agencies, the minister added.

Preliminary indicators show an increase in compliant establishments and continued entry of new businesses into the labour market, he said, while reviewing the ministry’s responses

to the Youth and Human Resources Committee’s queries on the decision’s legislative background and implementation impact.

Council members raised concerns about the decision’s economic and social impact, particularly on self-employment and small and medium enterprises, and questioned whether fees and penalties for failing to meet Omanisation rates take into account the realities of smaller businesses.

TURN TO P2

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Royal Hospital conducts rare cardiac surgeries

MUSCAT: The National Heart Center, at the Royal Hospital, recently conducted five successful procedures to extract pacemaker electrodes via the veins of cardiac disorder patients.

The procedure, the first accomplishment of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, underscores the efforts undertaken by the National Heart Center to offer specialised services and to localise advanced technologies in treating heart rhythm disorders.

The procedure was conducted during a training workshop held as part of the National Heart Center’s efforts to develop specialised services and raise the efficiency of medical staff.

The extraction of pacemaker electrodes via the veins constitutes one of the most complex operations in the field of cardiac electrophysiology. It is conducted in conditions that require the extraction of pacemaker electrodes due to the inflammation or malfunctioning of the pacemaker electrodes, or when the need arises to replace the electrodes.

The procedure calls for a high level of preparedness among medical teams to ensure the safety of patients and to realise the best therapeutic outcomes. — **ONA**

Shura debates labour regulations and its impact on employment

FROM PAGE 1

They also questioned the rationale for regulating the recruitment of certain nationalities and the implications for operating costs, stressing the need for policies that support the private sector, reduce production costs, and ensure the sustainability of SMEs as a cornerstone of the economy.

Discussions also covered the regulation’s role in addressing labour market imbalances and irregular practices, its impact on job-seekers, business costs, prices, and foreign worker recruitment controls, as well as the capacity of SMEs to absorb the requirements and how revenues will be channelled to support national employment programmes.

The debate also emphasised the need to balance labour market regulation with economic sustainability, align sectoral needs with national employment targets, and evaluate the effectiveness of Omanisation-linked incentives and penalties, alongside the regulation’s impact on competitiveness and investment attractiveness. — **ONA**

Khareef visitors shift towards new buildings and serviced-style units

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 8

Khareef is not only bringing visitors to Dhofar’s mountains, wadis and beaches. It is also reshaping Salalah’s accommodation map, as demand moves beyond hotels and traditional furnished flats towards new buildings and serviced-style units in residential areas that are increasingly becoming part of the seasonal tourism economy.

The shift is visible in areas such as Al Saada and Awqad, where newer buildings have attracted visitors looking for modern units, better access, cleaner facilities and a more organised accommodation experience during the monsoon season.

The trend reflects a maturing visitor market. Many families and travellers are no longer looking only for available space. They are

comparing location, building quality, parking, cleanliness, access to services and booking conditions before making a decision.

This changing behaviour is turning ordinary residential areas into temporary tourism zones during Khareef. For property owners and real estate offices, it creates economic opportunity. For the city, it raises practical questions about parking, service standards, building management and the need for clearer seasonal rules.

The market is no longer a small seasonal side activity. It is one of the main channels through which visitor spending reaches property owners, real estate offices, cleaning services, maintenance providers, transport operators, restaurants and small businesses.

Ahmed Jaaboub, owner of



Khareef is no longer only a tourism event measured by hotel occupancy or visitor numbers.

a real estate office in Dhofar for nearly 20 years, said visitor demand during Khareef is increasingly focused on location and the quality of the property.

“The visitor is mainly interested in location,” he said. “Demand for new

buildings is strong, especially in areas such as Al Saada and Awqad, because many of these buildings offer modern units and a style of accommodation closer to hotel apartments.”

In Salalah, that challenge is becoming more visible as demand spreads into newer

residential buildings. Some of these buildings offer good-quality units and help absorb seasonal pressure. Others may face practical limitations, particularly when it comes to parking.

Parking has become one of the quiet pressure points in the accommodation market. During Khareef, many visitors arrive by road from other governorates and GCC countries, often in family groups with private vehicles. When high occupancy meets limited parking, the issue affects not only visitors but also residents and surrounding neighbourhoods.

Jaaboub said the priority should be a clear seasonal regulation for the sector, aimed at ensuring continuity and benefit for real estate offices and property owners while keeping the market organised.

Such regulation, according to market operators, should

not restrict the sector. Rather, it should give all parties clearer expectations: the visitor, the property owner, the real estate office and the authorities supervising seasonal activity.

The wider lesson is that Khareef is no longer only a tourism event measured by hotel occupancy or visitor numbers. It is changing how parts of Salalah function during the season. Buildings become seasonal accommodation assets. Parking and service standards become part of the tourism experience.

This does not mean the market is in crisis. On the contrary, the strong demand for new buildings shows that the accommodation market is developing and that visitors are becoming more selective. But a growing market needs clearer rules if it is to remain fair, reliable and sustainable.

200,000 given to citizens to perform Haj this year

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 8

THE ‘Awqaf Bait Al Ribat’ programme has provided support worth over RO 200,000 to citizens registered under the Social Security system, enabling them to fulfil Haj without becoming a burden, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The launch of the ‘Tataman wa Ta’ammin’ initiative, a smartwatch for the elderly, people with disabilities, and the sick, to provide health tracking and monitoring services, direct notifications, and accurate medical indicators, was a successful move this year.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the press conference, Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Head of the Oman Haj Mission, said that the rate of satisfaction of the pilgrims rose to 98 per cent, besides achieving high-quality indicators in the level of services provided to pilgrims.

“The success of the Haj season was due to the wise



Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and other officials at the press conference in Muscat on Wednesday. — **ONA**

directives and continuous support of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, close cooperation with various governmental and private entities, and the significant efforts exerted by the Ministry of Haj and Umrah in Saudi Arabia and the participating service and security agencies,” he said, praising the role played by Haj and Umrah companies and all those working in the mission in serving the pilgrims.

As many as 10,966 pilgrims from Oman reached for Haj via air (78 per cent), while 3,034 pilgrims (22 per cent) travelled by land. The average cost of Haj by air was RO 2,013, while the average

cost by land was RO 1,647. As part of the development initiatives implemented by the mission, he explained that the ministry organised the Second Haj and Umrah Conference and Exhibition with the participation of more than 60 governmental, private, local, and international entities. In addition, 19 working papers and training workshops were conducted, and four memoranda of understanding were signed.

The ministry also launched the ‘Haj Lab’ initiative, which contributed to studying more than 133 development ideas and holding more than 32 meetings with relevant parties

to improve the experience of Omani pilgrims.

The “Aviation” initiative launched by the ministry has helped individuals to reduce RO 40 from their airfare cost per pilgrim, totalling over RO 490,000. Furthermore, the number of pilgrims travelling by land was reduced from 5,122 in the 1446 AH season to 3,034 in the 1447 AH season, a decrease of more than 2,000 pilgrims, thus enhancing pilgrim safety and the quality of services provided to them.

“Also, the precise digital tracking system for the movement of Omani buses along the land route ensured direct monitoring and rapid response, thus safeguarding the safety and comfort of pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman.”

He further confirmed that the Oman Haj Mission had officially received the preliminary arrangements document for the 1448 AH Haj and had begun preparations for the upcoming season before the end of the previous one. He noted that the ministry would continue working to develop the Haj system and improve services.

Oman and Saudi Arabia discuss Hormuz

FROM PAGE 1

They also addressed partnership initiatives within the framework of the Joint Omani-Saudi Coordination Council, building upon the comparative advantages available to both countries, the shared objectives between Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030, and the role of the private sector in the partnership tracks.

In the context of regional and international issues, the two sides discussed developments pertaining to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, emphasising the strategic importance of this waterway to the stability of international trade and energy security. They underscored the imperative of prioritising de-



The ministers addressed partnership initiatives within the framework of the Joint Omani-Saudi Coordination Council.

escalation, avoiding any steps that could expand the scope of risks, and working through diplomatic channels to identify practical pathways that alleviate tensions and preserve the safety and freedom of maritime navigation.

Participants in the expanded talks session from the Omani side included Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance; Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Shaikh

Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry; Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs; and Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Participants from the Saudi side included Dr Rumaih bin Mohammed al Rumaih, Deputy Minister of Transport and Logistics Services; Dr Saud bin Mohammed al Sati, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs; Eng Majid al Otaibi, Deputy Minister of Energy for Technical and Regulatory Affairs for Petroleum and Gas; and Ibrahim bin Saad bin Bishan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman. — **ONA**

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SHORT TAKES



The two surgeries aimed to spare the hospital the need to transfer patients to referral hospitals and, in the meantime, facilitate beneficiaries’ access to specialised medical services near their places of residence.

AL SUWAIQ HOSPITAL DOCTORS PERFORM SPECIALISED SURGERIES

AL SUWAIQ: A specialised medical team from Al Nahdha Hospital recently performed two specialised oral and maxillofacial surgeries at Al Suwaiq Hospital, the first operations of their kind at Al Suwaiq Hospital. The surgeries enhanced the concept of decentralisation, integration and expansion of specialised medical services across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The two surgeries aimed to spare the hospital the need to transfer patients to referral hospitals and, in the meantime, facilitate beneficiaries’ access to specialised medical services near their places of residence.

Dr Salma bint Musallam al Jahdhami, Head of the Department of Dentistry, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at Al Nahdha Hospital, said that the operations were in pursuance of efforts undertaken by Al Nahdha Hospital to promote medical expertise and to enhance the principle of integration between referral hospitals and other health establishments in a manner that contributes to upgrading health services and making them more accessible to the beneficiaries.

Dr Salma added that Al Nahdha Hospital is pressing ahead with a drive to implement specialised medical programmes in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the approach of the Ministry of Health to improve medical care and minimise the need to refer patients to referral hospitals. — **ONA**

Sultanate of Oman ranked second safest in the world

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

OMAN SECURED the second spot globally in the US News & World Report safety index for 2026, ranking just behind Singapore.

The ranking, which also features Japan, Qatar, New Zealand, Switzerland and several other leading nations, is based on a range of indicators including crime rates, the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, political stability, emergency preparedness, infrastructure resilience and public perceptions of personal safety.

The recognition underscores the close relationship between security and sustainable development, with safety continuing to serve as one of the key pillars supporting economic growth, investment and social well-being across the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman’s reputation for stability has been built on long-term planning, strong institutions and the consistent development of its security framework.

Continuous investment in modern policing, digital security, emergency response systems and smart technologies has enhanced the ability of security agencies to prevent crime, improve public services and respond effectively to emerging challenges.

An official source said maintaining high standards of public safety requires sustained efforts by both institutions and society.

“Security is a shared responsibility. Preserving a safe environment depends not only on the efficiency of national institutions, but also on public

“The feeling of safety here is genuine. My family and I can go about our daily lives with complete peace of mind, and that is something we deeply value.

OMAR KHALED
Egyptian resident



Oman’s reputation for stability has been built on long-term planning, strong institutions and the consistent development of its security framework.

awareness, respect for the rule of law and constructive cooperation between the community and the relevant authorities,” the source said.

Residents say the sense of security in Oman is reflected in their daily lives.

Omar Khaled, an Egyptian resident who has lived in Oman for more than eight years, said the country’s peaceful environment has been one of the main reasons for making Oman his permanent home.

“The feeling of safety here is genuine. My family and I can go about our daily lives with complete peace of mind, and that is something we deeply value,” he said.

Similarly, Rajesh Kumar, an Indian expatriate, described Oman as a country where security and mutual

respect are evident across society.

“The respect for the law and the welcoming nature of the people create an atmosphere of confidence. Oman offers an exceptional quality of life, and security is undoubtedly one of its greatest strengths,” he said.

International experience continues to demonstrate that countries consistently recognised for high levels of safety achieve such standing through effective governance, transparent legal systems, quality education and strong social cohesion.

For Oman, the latest recognition serves not only as an international benchmark but also as further affirmation that security and stability remain central to the nation’s development journey and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Al Dakhiliyah kicks off the sports season with diverse programmes

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, JULY 8

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and Sports Makers Company launched the Sports Season 2026-2027, which will run from August 2026 to February 2027, during a ceremony held at the Oman Across Ages Museum under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.

The events include a number of championships, activities, sports and community programmes. The aim is to activate sports as a driver of sustainable development, enhance quality of life, promote sports tourism, support economic activity, and capitalise on the governorate’s rich natural and cultural heritage.

Shaikh Mahmoud bin Rashid al Saadi, at the office of the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said: “The launch of the sports

season comes as an extension of the governorate’s direction towards investing in the comparative advantages of its wilayat. It also helps employ sports as one of the enablers supporting sustainable development, through quality programmes and events that contribute to enhancing the quality of life, expanding community participation, and stimulating tourism and economic activity, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.”

The sports season will feature a wide range of competitions and events, including Al Dakhiliyah Electronic Games Festival, the Government Employees Sports Games, running race, the Empire Race, Nizwa Urban Games Festival, a mountain hike, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Football League, the Gulf Equestrian Gathering, a Classic Car Exhibition, Salout Marathon, the Adam Legends Sports, sports caravans,



The season will run from August 2026 to February 2027.

open sports days, fitness programmes, and a variety of recreational sporting activities.

Among the events in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival, which runs from mid-July to the end of August and includes tourism, cultural, entertainment, and sporting programmes. These include the Gulf Equestrian Gathering,

which brings together riders from the GCC countries for a tourism experience that showcases the natural beauty of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and the Fig and Olive Festival.

Ahmed bin Salim al Toubi, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said: “The preparation for the sports season was based on an

integrated operational plan that included technical, organisational and logistical aspects, in coordination with government agencies and implementing partners, to ensure the readiness of the event sites and the smooth implementation of the approved timetable. We were keen to distribute the events across a number of its wilayats according to the natural, tourist and heritage features that distinguish each wilayat, in order to achieve integration between the events, raise the quality of the experience of participants and visitors, and enhance the benefit of the economic sectors and small and medium enterprises from the activity accompanying the season.”

Zayed bin Khalifa al Rashdi, Director of Public Relations at Sports Makers Company, said: “The company works to implement events according to the best organisational practices, while applying the

highest standards of safety and quality, which contributes to providing an integrated sports experience.”

The ceremony also reviewed the careers of a select group of Omani athletes and their achievements in regional and international forums, highlighting inspiring national role models and their role in spreading a culture of sports excellence.

Among the athletes taking part in the exhibition are the sprinter Barakat al Harthy, tennis champion Fatma al Nabhani, and free diving champion Omar al Ghilani.

Al Rawas said: “This season the programme offers distinguished services to the community, and it is the result of integration between government institutions and the private sector. It is also an opportunity for the community to practice sports. We hope and invite everyone to participate in these distinguished events.”

SPOTLIGHT

READING
RESHAPES THE MIND

IN a world of information explosion, the challenge is no longer access to knowledge, but the ability to understand it and distinguish what builds genuine awareness from what adds mere intellectual noise.

How can reading restore human equilibrium in an age of rapid content consumption, particularly among young people? As life accelerates and space for reflection shrinks beneath the deluge of digital content, writer and cultural enthusiast Labeed bin Mubarak al Amri argues that conscious reading is no longer a cultural choice but an existential necessity for recalibrating inner balance. Reading, he said, is not merely consuming texts, but an act of “internal engineering” that helps repair the soul and reshape the mind. When one reads, they do not simply store words, but build a mental library that serves as a road map for understanding themselves and the world.

The rapid pace of modern life, with its constant notifications and accelerating content, drives people toward



READING IS NOT A WITHDRAWAL FROM REALITY BUT A DEEPER ENGAGEMENT WITH IT



READING CAN TRANSFORM KNOWLEDGE INTO BEHAVIOUR AND SHAPE A VALUE SYSTEM



TRUE UNDERSTANDING ACHIEVED THROUGH SELECTION, REFLECTION AND CONNECTION



ONE WHO READS BIOGRAPHIES LEARNS PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

intellectual superficiality and diminishes their capacity for reflection, making deep reading a necessary practice to resist fragmentation, he said.

Thoughtful reading is not a withdrawal from reality but a deeper engagement with it, granting individuals the ability to view events from a wider analytical distance, fostering understanding over reaction, and awareness over consumption. Reading, he affirmed, is a counterforce to the culture of rapid consumption, as a deep reader imposes their own intellectual rhythm rather than having it imposed upon them.

FERTILE SPACE

The solitude that accompanies reading is not emptiness, but a fertile space for reflection and self-reconstruction — in contrast to the “digital alienation” experienced amid abundant connectivity yet scarce meaning.

The rise in psychological disorders in the modern era is partly linked to the accelerating digital pace, he noted, suggesting that conscious reading could serve as one of the most important tools for psychological and intellectual balance in this context.

Visual artist Sanaa bint Said al Humaidi views reading as a fundamental pillar of human development and a strategic tool for building a knowledge society, aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which places human beings at the heart and purpose of development.

CRITICAL THINKING

She described reading as an effective tool for developing critical thinking, enhancing creative capacities, and producing knowledge that moves beyond reception to creation and impact. Translating the impact of reading from the individual to the community represents a direct investment in people as the axis of development.

Establishing a reading culture among

young people requires an integrated system, she said, beginning with the family as the primary incubator of knowledge, extending to educational institutions that foster thinking and innovation, and reaching cultural and media institutions responsible for entrenching reading as a sustainable societal value.

ROLE OF INTERACTION

Reading clubs, intellectual forums, cultural initiatives and exhibitions help transform reading from an individual activity into a productive community movement, opening space for dialogue, expertise exchange and idea generation. Knowledge does not flourish in isolation, but grows through interaction and participation, she added.

Her experience as a visual artist and researcher in culture and leadership has reinforced her conviction that reading is the primary source of creativity, she explained. Any successful artistic work, cultural project or community initiative is preceded by an accumulation of knowledge that enriches the imagination and deepens vision.

If the previous perspective focused on reading as an investment in intellectual capital and the building of a knowledge society, Hajer bint Ali al Masfari shifts the dialogue toward a deeper dimension: reading’s capacity to transform knowledge into behaviour and shape a value system that guides individuals in their daily decisions — particularly among young people.

She said that while the world today experiences an unprecedented flow of information and speed of access, this does not necessarily translate into higher levels of understanding or deeper knowledge. The essential difference, she stressed, lies between those who consume information and those who transform it into genuine awareness.

LASTING KNOWLEDGE

Conscious reading is the means by which one distinguishes fleeting information from lasting knowledge, she explained. Its impact may not be immediately apparent, but it accumulates gradually to reshape behaviour and one’s view of self and the world.

She added that fleeting information is consumed quickly and forgotten quickly — news, numbers and daily facts — while lasting knowledge is that which transforms into conviction and principle, reflected in behaviour, thinking and one’s approach to life.

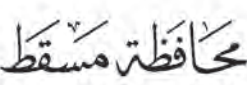
She said that conscious reading is based on reflection, not consumption, and on asking fundamental questions such as: What is the author trying to say? Do I agree? Why? How does this relate to my reality? This kind of reading requires taking notes, connecting meanings and rethinking texts, she said.

She elaborated that a conscious reader is not a passive recipient but a critical reader who seeks meaning rather than quantity, and reads for transformation rather than mere entertainment, she added. True understanding is achieved only through selection, reflection, connection and application.

INTERNAL COMPASS

She explained that transforming knowledge into an internal compass is the essence of conscious reading, through which a person develops a value system that helps them make sound decisions, understand themselves, and distinguish the important from the trivial.

She pointed out that this compass is built through reflective reading, self-review and applying knowledge in reality. — ONA



Muscat Governorate



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PRS/26/031	Supply of Equipment, Solutions & Materials for MM Laboratory	28/07/2026	18/08/2026
PRE/26/104	Consultancy Services for Strategic Study for the Rental Values in Muscat Governorate	28/07/2026	18/08/2026
PRE/26/105	Design, Supply & Installation of Lighting Poles in Al Khoudh area at A' Seeb	28/07/2026	18/08/2026
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Tender No.	Tender Title	Eligibility	Tender Fee	Tender Documents Sale Dates	Tender Submission Closing Date
MCD-2026-001	Consultancy Services for the Feasibility Study and Implementation Roadmap for a Central Counterparty (CCP) in Oman	Vendors specialized in this field	500 OMR (non-refundable)	09 – 16 July 2026	29 July 2026 12:00 PM (Muscat Time)

Tender Documents (RFP) shall be obtained from Procurements & Services Department (email: procurements@mcd.om), Muscat Clearing & Depository, First Floor, MBD, RUWI, Sultanate of Oman (Tel.: +968-24822212) during office hours after paying the participation charges mentioned above, to be paid into MCD Bank account details provided below.

All Vendors who are bidding must provide a bank guarantee from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY COMPANY, valid for (90) days from the date of submission of the proposal in response to the RFP.

Riyada card holders from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) must attach a valid copy of the card in order to be exempted from tender fees and submission of bid bond.

MCD 's Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract Agreement shall be applicable.

MCD is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Tender.

MCD Bank Account details:-

Bank Name & Branch : Bank Dhofar, MBD Branch

Bank Account Name : Muscat Clearing & Depository Company

Bank Account Number : 01010010875001

SWIFT/BIC Code : BDOFOMRXXX

SHORT TAKES



Introduce partners with MoTCIT to accelerate Omanisation

MUSCAT: Introdut Group has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) to strengthen the development of Omani talent and accelerate the localisation of skills within Oman's rapidly growing technology sector.

The agreement was signed by Dr Seema al Kaabi, Director-General of Sector Stimulation and Future Skills, alongside Viktor Larionov, Group CEO and Senior Managing Partner of Introduce Group, in the presence of senior leadership representatives from both parties, underscoring the shared commitment to advancing national capability building and digital transformation in Oman.

The collaboration supports the ministry's efforts to prepare national talent for the digital economy by providing practical, industry-led training that bridges the gap between academic education and real workplace requirements. Through the initiative, 60 graduates from various information technology disciplines will receive hands-on training designed to improve their employability and readiness to contribute to Oman's digital transformation.

The partnership reflects Introdut's long-term commitment to building a sustainable technology ecosystem driven by Omani professionals. Beyond technical training, the company aims to create pathways that connect education, industry, and employment, ensuring graduates develop the practical experience and professional competencies sought by employers.

Environment Authority unveils 'Zero Paper' plan

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 8

THE Environment
Authority on
Wednesday
launched its Zero
Paper initiative in
line with the government's
digital transformation agenda
and sustainable development
objectives.

The initiative's objectives and expected outcomes were presented, highlighting its role as a strategic initiative aimed at reducing reliance on paper-based processes and creating a more efficient, flexible, and digitally enabled work environment that enhances service quality and accelerates workflow. The initiative was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), in the presence of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, along with a number of officials and employees.

The EA emphasised that the initiative stems from its responsibility to protect the environment and promote sustainability while serving as a model for adopting environmentally responsible



The initiative focuses on reducing paper consumption, lowering printing and document storage costs, improving access to information and records, and strengthening data management efficiency.

practices within the workplace. This will be achieved by minimising paper consumption and expanding the use of digital solutions for document management and administrative processes.

“The idea behind the Zero Paper initiative at the Environment Authority was inspired by the authority’s core mandate to protect the environment and promote sustainability. We aspired to lead

by example and by adopting environmentally responsible practices by reducing paper consumption and transitioning to a more efficient and sustainable digital workplace.

“Thanks to these efforts, we have achieved tangible results, including a significant reduction in paper consumption, lower printing and document storage costs, improved accessibility to information, and strengthened the Authority’s environmental

initiatives through more efficient and sustainable business practices,” explained Nasr bin Nasser al Buraidi, Head of the Documents Organization Section and the Project Manager, Zero Paper initiative.

EA noted that the initiative focuses on reducing paper consumption, lowering printing and document storage costs, improving access to information and records, and strengthening data management.

Tabseel season brings families together in orchards of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JULY 8



SAID BIN RASHID
AL MASHAYKHI

As the summer harvest season begins, farmers in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan prepare for the annual Tabseel season, one of Oman's oldest

agricultural traditions that continues to preserve ancestral practices and strengthen family bonds.

The season begins towards the end of June, with the main Tabseel activities taking place from July 1 until around July 10 or 15. Farmers start their work early after Fajr prayers to take advantage of the cooler morning temperatures, as the process requires long hours of effort and dedication.

Farmer Said bin Rashid al Mashaykhi said the work continues until late evening, sometimes extending to 8 pm, 9 pm, or even 10 pm, due to the large amount of work involved in preparing the harvest.

"Tabseel is not just a season of work; it is a season of joy and family gathering. Everyone participates, from the oldest member of the family to the youngest child. Sons and daughters who live in Muscat or other wilayats return during the harvest season to take part in this tradition, just as they return during Eid occasions," he said.

Al Mashaykhi explained that the Mabsali date palm variety in Falaj Al Mashayikh area of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan is among the most famous varieties used for Tabseel production.

He said the process begins with harvesting the dates, followed by sorting the produce into three categories. The first is busr, the dates selected for Tabseel; the second is sah, which is allocated for consumption or trading; and the third category is used as animal feed.



The season begins towards the end of June, with the main Tabseel activities taking place from July 1 until around July 10 or 15.

“The cooperation among family members is genuine and goes beyond ordinary participation. Tabseel represents a season of abundant blessings from Allah, and for us it is more a celebration than simply a period of work,” he added.

The farmer noted that the busr goes through several stages, starting from harvesting it from the palm trees, transporting it to designated drying areas, and later collecting the finished product before marketing and selling.

The Tabseel harvest is marketed either through established traders who purchase the produce directly from farmers or through designated channels that receive and support the marketing of Tabseel products.

The annual season remains a significant part of Oman's agricultural heritage, reflecting the close relationship between farmers and date palms while preserving a tradition passed down through generations.



محافظة مسقط

Muscat Governorate

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Announcement of Public Auction No. (20/2026)

Muscat Municipality, represented by the Auction Committee, announce the establishment of a public auction as per the following details:

	Items	Location
Set No.1	PC's-Printers-Scanners -Office Furniture-Metal Lockers-Doors	MM Store at Gala
Set No.2	Metal Scrap-Concrete Foundations-Porta Cabins-Lighting Poles-Fiberoptic Cables	MM Labor Camp at Al Amerat
Set No.3	Porta Cabins-Metal Scrap-Water Tanks	MM Yard at Quraiyat
Set No.4	Lighting Poles & Equipment-Metal Scrap- Fiberoptic Cables	MM Labor Camp at Quraiyat

Interested individuals for this Auction must comply with the conditions set out here under:

- Those wishing to enter the auction must pay a fee and its amount (=4 OMR) (four Omani rials) which are not refundable, and an amount of (500 OMR) (five hundred Omani rials) as a temporary deposit to participate in the auction (refundable). The payment shall be done electronically to Muscat Municipality's representative on the auction day at site.
- The person who wins the auction is obligated to pay the full price of the **items** if they were awarded to him plus 5% as value added tax, and the brokerage fees by (=3%OMR) of the total amount of the **items**. The payment shall be done electronically to Muscat Municipality's representative on the auction day at site.
- Items** are sold in their current condition, and Muscat municipality is not responsible for the loss or damage of any part of it once its value has been paid; and it does not bear any obligation regarding the sold **items**. Those wishing to participate in the auction must inspect the items on the day specify for that purpose.
- The sold **item** is neither refundable nor devalued, and no appeal will be accepted in this regard.
- The buyer is obligated to transfer the **items** that have been awarded to him after paying their full value within a period not exceeding two weeks from the date of purchase. In the event of delay, a daily penalty of (=50 OMR) shall be imposed for each day, but not exceeding one month. Muscat Municipality shall not be responsible of the sold items if it were not transferred within the specified period; and it reserve the rights to resell the items on the expenses of the buyers.
- The buyer is obligated to clear and clean the site after transferring the sold items. In the event of failure, the temporary deposit will not be paid back to the buyer.
- The auction details are specified as follows:

Location	Set No.1: MM Store at Gala Set No.2: MM Labor Camp at Al Amerat Set No.3: MM Yard at Quraiyat Set No.4: MM Labor Camp at Quraiyat
The Date/Time of the inspection	From 14/7/2026 to 16/7/2026 From 08: 00 AM to 12:00 PM
The location for submitting the participation fees	Auction locations as per the above details
Auction date	Set No.1: 20/7/2026 at 8:00 AM Set No.2: 20/7/2026 at 9:00 AM Set No.3: 20/7/2026 at 10:30 AM Set No.4: 20/7/2026 at 11:00 AM
For inquires and coordination	Please contact the Auction Committee representative on (99293206 – 24753648)
Other terms	- The VAT specified in the law will be applied to the successful bidder. - It is not allowed to enter the auction yard without paying the entrance fee and the insurance amount. - Muscat Municipality reserve the rights to cancel or postpone the sale without providing any justification. - The security deposit will not be refunded in these cases: - If the buyer does not pay the value of the sold items. - If the buyer does not transfer the items from the auction yard within the specified period.





WORLD

SHORT TAKES



US President Donald Trump meets Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa (L) at the Bestepe Presidential Compound in Ankara. — AFP

SYRIAN PRESIDENT ARRIVES IN ANKARA FOR TRUMP TALKS

ANKARA: Syria’s President Ahmed al Sharaa arrived in Ankara on Wednesday, where he met US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the Nato summit. Al Sharaa was invited by Türkiye’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

“Because of the president (Erdogan), we have a very good relationship with Syria’s new leader,” the US leader told reporters on Tuesday. “He’s done an amazing job in a year and a half; he’s pulled the whole country together. And I have a very, very good relationship with him. “Somebody said, well, he’s pretty tough... I approved him along with the president (Erdogan); we were the two that really wanted him. And he’s done a great job; he’s pulled it together. Not an easy job.”

Sharaa visited Washington in November last year seeking financial support for Syria. But last month, he refused calls from Trump to intervene militarily in neighbouring Lebanon against Hezbollah, which is in open conflict with Israel. “We are looking for economic channels between Lebanon and Syria, not military ones,” he said in an interview last month. — AFP

PAKISTAN LOCATES WRECKAGE OF MISSING PLANE

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy and the Maritime Rescue Agency on Wednesday found the wreckage of a Boeing cargo plane that had gone missing the previous night in the Arabian Sea, the country’s airport authority said. The forces, after searching for 12 hours, “have successfully located and identified wreckage of K2 Airways Cargo B737 which was declared missing last night” in the waters off Ormara town, the Pakistan Airport Authority said in a post on X, adding that rescuers were still searching for five crew on board.

The aircraft was approaching Karachi from Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates when radar showed it “rapidly descending” on Tuesday evening after reporting a “navigational system issue”, the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said in a post on X.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed “deep sorrow, grief, and regret over the tragic incident in which a private cargo aircraft (K2 Airways) flying from Sharjah to Karachi crashed into the Arabian Sea and went missing”, according to a statement from his office. He offered condolences to the families of the five crew members on board and directed Pakistan civil aviation authorities, the navy and the air force to intensify search and rescue operations and use all available resources.

Preliminary data sent from the plane “indicated a loss of altitude, followed by a climb, and then a second, sudden and dramatic loss of altitude”, according to Flightradar24.com, a global flight-tracking service. K2 Airways is a private cargo airline in Pakistan that operates scheduled and charter flights domestically and internationally. — AFP

SECURING PARTNERSHIP

Modi visits Australia for minerals talks



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Australia on Wednesday ahead of talks tipped to focus on defence ties, critical minerals and securing prized uranium. India and Australia have grown considerably closer in recent years. Securing a reliable uranium pipeline is expected to be a key topic of discussion when Modi sits down with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese on Thursday. India has plans to drastically expand its nuclear power capacity. — AFP

FALSE PROMISE FRAUD

Nepal convicts ex-ministers over scam



A Nepali court has convicted two former government ministers for taking money from citizens with the false promise of international resettlement as refugees, officials said on Wednesday. Former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi was convicted of offences against the state, fraud and organised crime. Former interior minister Bal Krishna Khand was convicted of being an accomplice in the case, in which at least 15 people in total were convicted. — AFP

SEVERE TEMPERATURE

Barcelona sets new heat record at 40.5C



Barcelona sets new heat record at 40.5C, according to the weather agency. Spain’s AEMET declared a top-level red heat alert in three eastern regions and predicted that temperatures would rise above 40C. The Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia regions were predicted to be among the worst hit in a new heatwave that is hitting southern Europe this week. The red alert signals potentially “very serious impacts” on health and property. — AFP

Ships attacked in Hormuz

UN DEMANDS ‘RESTRAINT’ AS 6,000 SEAFARERS STRANDED



An oil tanker berthed at one of Iraq’s oil terminals near Basra over the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. — AFP file photo

THE HEAD of the International Maritime Organization on Wednesday called for “maximum restraint and de-escalation” as almost 6,000 seafarers remained stranded amid fresh US-Iran attacks. “These attacks further intensify the fear, uncertainty and psychological strain already being endured by the nearly 6,000 seafarers who remain stranded on board vessels,” IMO Secretary-General Arsenio Dominguez said in a statement.

US President Donald Trump earlier on Wednesday said the US-Iran ceasefire was over, though he left the door open to more talks, after fighting sparked by Iranian attacks on ships in the vital Strait of Hormuz. The strategic shipping route remains a flashpoint in the conflict, which began in late February with massive US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Tehran insists on controlling the waterway, saying it will charge fees for passage and threatening to hit vessels that deviate from its authorised route. Its military has struck at least three ships in recent days, prompting extensive US strikes against Iranian targets on Tuesday followed by retaliatory attacks from

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Iran on Gulf countries.

“I condemn the attacks over the past two days against several ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz,” Dominguez said, adding that “innocent seafarers” are “in grave danger”. He called on “all States concerned to exercise maximum restraint, de-escalate the situation without delay, and facilitate the safe departure of the ships still trapped in the Gulf since the crisis began. “The safety of seafarers must remain our foremost priority,” he stressed.

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“As far as I’m concerned, it’s over,” Trump said at a Nato summit in Türkiye on Wednesday when asked if the truce was intact. “It’s just a waste of time dealing with them,” he added. “I’ll let our wonderful negotiators keep talking if they want, but I don’t see it. I don’t like these people.”

Oil prices immediately jumped five per cent after Trump’s remarks, having already reached their highest level in two weeks. Both the US and Iran said they had hit dozens of targets, placing fresh strain on their interim deal to end the Middle East war. Iranian state media reported a wave of explosions around the strait, including six on the island of Qeshm, seven in the city of Sirik and more in the major port city of Bandar Abbas.

It later reported a series of blasts in the coastal city of Bushehr, which hosts the country’s only civilian nuclear power plant and lies near Kharg island, the main oil terminal through which 90 per cent of Iran’s crude exports transit. State media said a member of the military’s Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) had been killed, while the foreign ministry said monitoring and observation sites had been hit on the southern coast. — AFP

BOARD OF PEACE PLANS ‘HUMANITARIAN ZONE’ IN GAZA

GAZA: US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace is planning a pilot “humanitarian zone” in southern Gaza which would aim to accommodate tens of thousands of vetted Palestinian civilians, a board official said. The official said the zone could act as a “starting point” for the Palestinian technocratic committee meant to assume day-to-day governance during Gaza’s transitional phase out of war under Trump’s 20-point plan.

The pilot zone, which the board is eyeing for Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, would be secured by multinational troops from the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), a fledgling body which operates under the Board of Peace. The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), the group of Palestinian technocrats established by the board, would carry out screening and access control, supported by the ISF. Movement in and out “will remain free for all unarmed civilians”, the board official said on condition of anonymity.

The concept of closed humanitarian zones, which has been discussed in various forms for several months, has raised serious reservations, with diplomats and NGO officials working in Gaza saying on condition of anonymity that such a mechanism seems to be incompatible with international humanitarian law. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Rescuers search the rubbles of a damaged residential building in Kharkiv. — AFP

RUSSIA, UKRAINE
EXCHANGE FRESH
DEADLY STRIKES

KYIV: Russian strikes on Ukraine overnight killed at least seven people as Kyiv’s army said it had hit several Russian tankers, in fresh attacks. A first large blast in Kyiv was heard shortly after midnight even before the city’s air alert sirens sounded — a rare failure in the system that has spooked residents of the capital. That was followed by a barrage of several more explosions, journalists in the city said. One person was killed in Kyiv, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said, having reported warehouses on fire after a missile strike.

Ukraine also mounted its own strikes deep into Russia — attacks Kyiv calls fair retribution for the nightly barrages of its cities. The Russian governor of the central Saratov region said one person was killed in a Ukrainian drone attack. Ukraine has also upped its attacks on Russia’s so-called shadow fleet — ageing tankers that export its vital oil products, bringing in crucial revenue for Russia’s stuttering economy. The commander of Kyiv’s drone forces said 21 Russian ships in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov had been hit over the last 72 hours. — AFP

UN TO RAISE \$296 MN FOR VENEZUELA



The United Nations launched an urgent appeal on Wednesday to raise \$296 million for Venezuela earthquake relief operations after the death toll from the disaster rose to more than 3,600 people. “We do have a clear plan. \$296 million needed to reach 1.3 million in socioeconomic need right now over six months. It’s a time-bound plan,” UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said. Venezuela’s interim President Delcy Rodriguez said on Tuesday the international airport damaged in last month’s twin earthquakes would reopen as soon as possible using an alternative runway. — AFP

LE PEN HITS
CAMPAIGN
TRAIL
MORNING
AFTER
ANNOUNCING
RUN

PARIS: France’s far-right supremo Marine Le Pen hit the campaign trail on Wednesday fresh off her announcement she would run for president despite an embezzlement conviction. Surrounded by crowds and journalists in the western town of La Fleche, that was won by her National Rally (RN) party in municipal elections, Le Pen brushed aside criticism of her candidacy.

Convicted again on appeal on Tuesday over a fake European Parliament jobs scam, she was

cleared to run for office but said she would take the case to France’s highest court, allowing her to avoid wearing an electronic tag on the campaign trail. “The court has restored my eligibility. I am innocent, and I am filing an appeal to the Court of Cassation to prove my innocence,” she said. “You have to take risks to win,” she added.

The 57-year-old is set to run for president for a fourth time in next year’s elections her anti-immigration party views as its

best chance yet to take power. She brushed off the risk the Court of Cassation would reject her appeal before the vote and criticism of her candidacy, steering the narrative to policies she hopes will win her the Elysee. “I’m not going to spend the presidential campaign giving you legal analyses,” she said. “If my political opponents have no other arguments than that, it means that on substance they have absolutely nothing to offer the French,” she added. — AFP

Trump lashes out at allies
as key Nato summit begins

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump lashed out at Nato allies on Wednesday at a summit in Ankara, as the fallout from his war with Iran threatened to overshadow the key gathering. With tensions peaking after an overnight flare-up between US and Iranian forces, Trump declared the Iran ceasefire was “over”, then took aim at Nato allies who failed to back his campaign against Tehran. And he insisted he still wanted Greenland, calling European resistance to his stance a “big problem”. “I’m very upset with Nato.. because of what they did with Greenland, and.. because of the fact that they didn’t want to help us with the number one state sponsor of terror, that’s Iran,” he said.

Trump singled out Spain for particular criticism calling it a “terrible partner in Nato”. “Spain is a wasted cause. We don’t want to do any trade business with Spain anymore,” he said, dragging up a bitter row that also touches on Madrid’s defence spending, urging his Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to “cut it off”.

And he raked up more sensitive territory by reiterating his desire for Nato member Denmark’s territory of Greenland. “Greenland is a big problem for us,” he told reporters, saying it was “very important for the United States, but it’s not important for Denmark”. “We need it for protection of the world, not just the United States.. It doesn’t help Denmark, but it helps us.” Denmark’s Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen had earlier issued a terse response to Trump’s remarks a day earlier, saying: “Greenland is, of course, not for sale.”

Nato chief Mark Rutte had earlier sought to shore up confidence in Washington’s “complete commitment” to the military alliance as anxious allies readied



US President Donald Trump and Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte (R) attend the Nato Summit in Ankara. — AFP

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for a face-to-face meeting with the mercurial US leader. As he landed in Turkiye on Tuesday, Trump was effusive in his praise for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, highlighting their “chemistry” in remarks that contrasted sharply with his lingering bitterness with European allies. The summit comes at a fraught time for the 77-year-old transatlantic alliance, with Trump demanding members make good on a pledge to ramp up defence spending as Washington takes a step back from Europe.

Nato allies unveiled tens of billions in new arms contracts on Tuesday in a bid to prove they were making good on a pledge to hike defence spending. “Yesterday was a great success,” Rutte said on Wednesday, saying allies were “delivering” by moving to take more responsibility for the defence of their continent in the face of Russia. “This is a big win for the American president.”

With Nato keen to focus the US leader’s attention on its surging defence budgets, stalled efforts to halt the Ukraine war were also back

on the agenda, with Trump saying he believed both sides wanted to end the fighting. “I think they both want to make a deal,” said Trump, who will meet Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky later on Wednesday. With negotiations at an impasse, Trump spoke with Russia’s Vladimir Putin before flying to Turkiye and was to “follow up” with him after meeting Zelensky, a US official said.

President Donald Trump told a Nato summit that the United States wanted to “remain” with the alliance, a source at inside the closed-door session said, despite his earlier anger at European allies over the Iran war. Trump told the meeting: “We want to remain with you,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Nato leaders reaffirmed on their “ironclad commitment” to the mutual assistance clause enshrined in Article 5 of the military alliance’s treaty, according to the final declaration of their Ankara summit. “We, the heads of state and government of the North Atlantic Alliance, have gathered in Ankara to reaffirm our ironclad commitment to our collective defence under Article 5... An attack on one is an attack on all,” it said.

Meanwhile, The UK government will lead a coalition of around a dozen European countries to step up funding for the next generation of long-range missiles designed to protect Europe, the UK government said.

The premier would “convene around a dozen European partners at the summit today to launch the new initiative, which is expected to announce that allies will spend \$50 billion (£37 billion) over the next 10 years to develop deep precision strike capabilities to bolster defence and deterrence across the alliance”, his Downing Street office said in a statement. — AFP

Rescuers search for survivors of China storms as super typhoon nears

LIULAN: Shanghai Rescuers scoured flooded parts of China for survivors on Wednesday after storms killed 17 people and caused dozens of rivers to overflow and a reservoir dam to burst, with officials warning of more rain. Extreme weather has wreaked havoc on southern and central China this week, with a super typhoon heading towards eastern provinces this weekend.

In the southern region of Guangxi, six people died and at least 130,000 people were evacuated to safety after torrential rain and severe flooding from Typhoon Maysak, officials said. Authorities said more rainfall was expected in Guangxi and neighbouring Guangdong province on Wednesday.

Fast-flowing muddy water

burst the banks of 40 rivers and waterways in Guangxi, damaging nearly 13,000 acres of agricultural land, state media reported. A resident of Hengzhou city, one of Guangxi’s hardest-hit areas, said the flooding had been severe but that the rain had let up on Wednesday afternoon. “Some houses collapsed... and were washed away” by the floods, the restaurant worker surnamed Huang said.

Chinese authorities were sending additional disaster relief like food, raincoats and rubber boats to the region, state news agency Xinhua reported. Guangxi officials have maintained the second-highest level for flood-control emergency response, according to the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters.



Rescue workers evacuate flood-affected residents in China’s southern Guangxi region. — AFP

Flood peaks “exceeding the warning water level” by more than six metres (20 feet) are expected at the Wuzhou Hydrological Station in Guangxi early on Thursday, Minister of Water Resources Li Guoying said. “Due to the impact of persistent heavy

rainfall and the prolonged passage of floodwaters at high levels, the safety of reservoirs and embankments in the affected areas faces a severe test,” he added.

In the central province of Hubei, thunderstorms and gale-force winds have killed

11 people and injured 331, and tornadoes were reported elsewhere late on Monday, Xinhua said. One person is missing in Hubei, 4,800 houses were damaged and 22 more had collapsed, it added.

Eastern provinces are meanwhile preparing for the impact of Super Typhoon Bavi, which could make landfall “near the Zhejiang-Fujian border area” between Saturday and Sunday, CCTV said, citing the National Meteorological Center. The typhoon could also move northwards over waters east of Taiwan and make landfall directly on the coast of Zhejiang, CCTV added.

Bavi week tore through US Pacific territories earlier this week, leaving tens of thousands of people without power on Guam and the Northern Marianas.

Jiangsu’s provincial education department suspended “all in-person educational activities” at schools from Thursday afternoon through Friday and urged students and teachers to “pay attention to typhoon safety”, authorities said.

Natural disasters are common across China, particularly in the summer when some regions experience intense rainfall while others bake in scorching heat. But scientists warn the intensity and frequency of global extreme weather events will increase as the planet continues to heat up because of fossil fuel emissions.

Separately in northwestern China’s Gansu province, the death toll from a Tuesday landslide rose to 21 as search and rescue operations had concluded. — AFP

OPINION

The hidden cost of resilience



RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI

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The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

HAVE stood at enough gates to hear the announcement before it comes. The airline is looking for volunteers. The flight is oversold, because airlines sell more tickets than an aircraft has seats on the calculation that some passengers will not appear. Usually somebody takes the voucher. When nobody does, the airline turns to a hierarchy it wrote long before any of us reached the gate: the fare, the hour you checked in, your standing in the loyalty programme. Regulators require it to publish that ranking and to tell the passenger it removes how she was chosen, which is more candour than most systems offer, and the plane leaves on schedule carrying everyone who could afford not to be chosen.

What we call stability looks like this from underneath. The timetable holds, the lights stay on, the shelves stay full, and the smoothness persuades us that nothing is being paid, when the cost has only been moved out of view, onto a person selected in advance by a rule they never read.

We once promised the opposite. The old ideal was a machine that never falters, given up for good reason, since systems built to resist everything break all at once. Resilience

is the word every serious institution now reaches for, meaning redundancy, absorption, small contained failures that keep the whole from collapsing, and it is wiser than the fantasy it replaced. It carries a decision the vocabulary tends to swallow, because a controlled failure still has to happen to someone.

Airlines are not the only ones who write it down. After 2008, regulators gave up the pretense that large banks would never fail and required them to hold what the rules call loss-absorbing capacity, with the Financial Stability Board insisting that creditors, customers and depositors know in advance the order in which they will absorb losses. Shareholders lose everything first, then junior bondholders, then senior creditors, with depositors protected at the back.

Elsewhere, the same queue exists unwritten. Football's governing body sets the temperature at which it would stop a World Cup match well above what the players' union calls dangerous, and the fixture list holds while a body absorbs the difference. A grid sheds load and a neighbourhood goes dark, rarely a wealthy one. A harvest fails and the shortfall finds households with the

Resilience, described honestly, is a question about power dressed in the vocabulary of design. None of this counts against resilience, which we will need far more of.

least room to pay more. The shock does not disappear because the system recovered. It is routed to whoever has the least standing to refuse it, which makes the two candid systems worth a second look. The airline ranks passengers by the fare they paid. The banking queue was drafted by capital, and protects capital's instruments in the order capital preferred. Both are published, available on request. Both, read plainly, sort people by money and say so without embarrassment. Disclosure was never the difficulty. The systems willing to name who absorbs the failure turn out to be the ones most confident nobody will object to the name.

Resilience, described honestly, is a question about power dressed in the vocabulary of design. None of this counts against resilience, which we will need far more of. The point is to say the hard part out loud while the design is still on paper and the ranking can still be argued, before the drought and the failed harvest arrive to settle it. Who have we chosen to carry the volatility we can no longer prevent, and are we willing to name them now, knowing that the naming has never once been the hard part.

MISINFORMATION
INCITING HARM TO
REFUGEES: UN

GENEVA: Misinformation and hate speech are inciting harm to refugees, with artificial intelligence exacerbating the spread, the United Nations warned on Monday, as it urged tech giants to help turn the tide.

However, if handled the right way, AI could be put to good use in managing humanitarian crises, said UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

UNHCR is taking part in the AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, putting across its point that the world's major displacement crises are often twinned with "information crises".

The summit is an attempt by the wider UN to focus on using AI's potential to serve humanity by solving global challenges, and to look at the state of AI standards.

"The spread of misinformation, hate speech and deepfakes is exacerbating and inciting real-world harm to refugees and humanitarians," Gisella Lomax, UNCHR's senior adviser on information integrity, told reporters.

UNHCR said this swirl of misinformation and disinformation had resulted in an increase in "false, hostile narratives targeting operations and staff".

Lomax said trusted information was a necessity for refugee protection.

"We need to turn the tide on this, and I do see some encouraging progress," she said, adding that it needed to be systematised and scaled up.

"Our call to action is to all tech companies, AI companies and digital platforms to partner, invest and collaborate with humanitarian organisations."

Lomax said that when information was distorted, it could reduce access to jobs and education, make integration harder and threaten social cohesion.

"Online rumours, false accusations, scapegoating and dehumanising speech have triggered protests and attacks. In extreme cases, they have been linked to physical violence, killings, and are even a factor in forced displacement," she said.

UNHCR said generative AI was compounding the effects, at scale, saying deepfake videos of its staff and refugees were presenting a growing challenge.

UNHCR wants to ensure that content moderation tools work in humanitarian contexts, and in less-common languages.

UNHCR says there were 117.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2025, of whom 68.7 million were internally displaced and 35.6 million were refugees under its mandate.

Of those refugees, two-thirds come from five countries: Venezuela, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan. — AFP

Red card for justice

FOR GENERATIONS, the Fifa World Cup represented one of humanity's rare common languages. Every four years, passports became secondary to jerseys, rivalries remained on the pitch, and billions celebrated the simple idea that talent, not nationality, should determine victory.

The 2026 Fifa World Cup in the US, Canada and Mexico has begun to challenge that ideal. Instead of becoming history's most inclusive tournament, the expanded 48-team competition has become a reminder that global sport cannot escape geopolitics. Visas, mobility restrictions, sanctions, and unequal access for the have-nots of the world have become as decisive as tactics, fitness, or finishing.

The world's most beloved game is increasingly being asked to operate under rules that resemble international politics where only the less powerful faced injustices and suffer the consequences of a Red Card. Justice, not football, is the real casualty. The irony could hardly be greater. Fifa's statutes emphasise political neutrality and prohibit discrimination on the basis of nationality or politics. Yet neutrality becomes difficult to defend when athletes may travel while supporters, journalists, officials, referees, and even football administrators face obstacles that have nothing to do with the sport itself, just in case of Cape Verde and Iran.

Human rights institutions warned months before kickoff that restrictive travel policies could prevent thousands of legitimate supporters from attending matches. Reports documented visa delays, entry denials, concerns over aggressive immigration enforcement, and uncertainty affecting fans from multiple participating nations. Reuters similarly reported warnings of a "climate of fear" surrounding the tournament due to visa restrictions and immigration policies. Football cannot truly call itself global if the world cannot reliably enter the stadium. The numbers alone demonstrate what is at stake.



KHALID ALSAFI
AL HURAIBI

The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

The 2026 tournament is the largest in Fifa history, featuring 48 national teams, 104 matches in most inconvenient and unhealthy timings for our part of the world, and an expected audience measured in billions.

Some supporters have encountered visa refusals despite holding valid tickets. Others have faced lengthy administrative delays, while officials, journalists and referees have reportedly experienced entry complications. Several participating nations have seen their ordinary citizens affected by broader immigration restrictions even where players themselves received exemptions. None of these decisions determine who scores goals. Yet they determine who gets to witness them.

This is not merely an administrative inconvenience. It strikes at the philosophical foundation of international sport. Football has always claimed that qualification should occur on the pitch. Increasingly, qualification for attendance depends on passports, politics, and diplomatic relationships. The result is a hierarchy of mobility that mirrors global inequality itself.

History offers a warning. The modern Olympic movement and the Fifa World Cup were created partly because sporting competition offered something politics often could not: equal rules applied to unequal nations. Once access itself becomes selective, sport begins losing the moral authority that makes victory meaningful.

The concern extends beyond visas. International football has witnessed growing debates over sanctions, suspensions, selective enforcement, and differing institutional responses to conflicts around the world. Regardless of where one stands on any individual case, consistency matters. Rules perceived as inconsistent inevitably invite questions about legitimacy. Justice is measured not only by outcomes. It is measured by whether identical principles are applied consistently.

That lesson is hardly new. One of the oldest principles of justice appears repeatedly across civilisations:

laws derive legitimacy from equal application rather than selective enforcement. When exceptions become political, institutions gradually lose credibility even if their intentions remain honourable.

Football is no different. The danger is that Fifa increasingly finds itself navigating pressures once reserved for institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, where geopolitical influence often shapes outcomes as much as formal principles. Football should never become another arena where power determines access while fairness becomes negotiable.

Supporters do not buy tickets to participate in geopolitical competition. They buy tickets because they believe football belongs equally to humanity. That belief has enormous value. The World Cup succeeds because a child in Muscat, Lagos, Buenos Aires, Seoul, Casablanca, or Sarajevo can dream under exactly the same rules.

The moment that dream becomes conditional upon geopolitical privilege rather than sporting merit, something much larger than football is lost. Fifa cannot solve international politics. Nor should it attempt to. But it can defend the principle that football should remain the world's most accessible global gathering. It can work with host governments to minimise unnecessary barriers, improve transparency surrounding entry procedures, protect accredited participants, and consistently defend equal treatment wherever the tournament is held.

The World Cup was never meant to celebrate only those fortunate enough to possess the right passport. It was meant to celebrate humanity itself. Because football can survive controversial referees. It can survive difficult weather. It can even survive disappointing finals. But if it loses the universal promise that every qualified nation, and every peaceful supporter belongs, then the Beautiful Game risks becoming something far less beautiful.

A World Cup that gives the have-nots of the world a red card is no World Cup at all.

A profound swing in emotions during the World Cup



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

SEVERAL FOOTBALL matches during the World Cup 2026 have provided fans with a rollercoaster of emotions. The tournament is characterised by suspense, surprise, and shock, as well as overt favouritism displayed on the pitch.

I will not discuss branded teams, soaring player salaries, Botoxed athletes, footballers' ego, or refereeing tendencies.

The topic focuses on the emotional fever generated by the World Cup. This encompasses both intense psychological and physiological reactions. Fans, whether die-hard or not, experience extreme mood swings, adrenaline rushes, and a profound sense of shared identity.

The World Cup provides a unique emotional outlet where displays of passion, tears, or hugs with strangers are socially acceptable. It creates a global community that unites diverse populations in a shared experience, momentarily dissolving feelings of isolation and enhancing life satisfaction when your team wins.

It is a pity we don't see the same emotional enthusiasm towards the victims of genocide, war, and famine. Scholarly articles on the psychology of watching football indicate that this experience triggers a mix of psychological, neurochemical, and physical responses. Spectators often oscillate between strong feelings of joy, excitement, frustration and sadness.

According to studies, watching a favourite team score or win triggers a surge of dopamine, leading to feel-good sensations. The experience of watching matches activates a 'fight or flight' response, resulting in real-world spikes in heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones during high-stakes moments. Studies indicate that the pulse can reach up to 150 beats per minute.

Uncertain moments, such as penalty shootouts, VAR reviews, shots hitting the post, or last-minute goals, trigger the brain to release adrenaline and cortisol. The VAR effect creates a frustrating non-reward loop. This happens when the thrill of scoring a goal is abruptly halted by a review, causing the human brain to feel anxiety rather than joy in that moment.

When an opposing team scores, it can cause disappointment. The human brain doesn't cope well with information that contradicts its preconceived beliefs, which can contribute to feelings of anger and confusion, potentially posing health risks.

The science of heartbreak suggests that fans develop a parasocial relationship, a one-sided emotional bond, with their national squad. A win is processed as a personal triumph, but an elimination triggers devastating emotional and cognitive distress. This excitement can significantly heighten physical health risks.

I am not a die-hard fan, but I do get really anxious about games, especially when Brazil plays in the World Cup. But I tell myself, "No

The tournament is not merely a sporting event; it is an exercise in collective psychology and shared human rituals. It taps into tribal demands for belonging, identity, and emotional connection.

heart attack, not now, not yet, not here".

The registration of my testament with local institutions is waiting for agencies to show good-faith, competence and professionalism. So, not dying (yet) because of missed penalties or the team losing the game. However, it would be beneficial to have my will officiated while I am still alive.

Football itself is not the problem. Rather, the body's reaction to intense emotions is! The World Cup has an unparalleled ability to transcend boundaries and cultures. The shared communal experience of supporting a team unites us in ways that few other modern institutions can. Fans from various backgrounds wear the same colours and sing the same songs, instilling a strong sense of belonging and community.

This industry is a massive cultural and economic magnet that draws attention, investment, and infrastructure from diverse sectors worldwide.

Because of the World Cup's quadrennial format, fans dedicate four years of hope, expectation, and patriotism to a single event. The tournament is not merely a sporting event; it is an exercise in collective psychology and shared human rituals. It taps into tribal demands for belonging, identity, and emotional connection.

The greatest challenge of the World Cup is having mental strength. The pressure is immense. May the best team win through skill, effort and integrity.

HOW A VIRAL POST SPARKED INDIA'S GEN-Z PROTEST

UZMI ATHAR

Engineering graduate Abhijeet Dipke said he didn't intend to spark a student movement, after India's chief justice reportedly likened young people who criticised the government to "cockroaches" and "parasites".

The 30-year-old, who was looking for work in the US at the time, said he was "taken aback" by the comments made by Chief Justice Surya Kant — who later claimed they were taken out of context.

Despite rapid economic growth, millions of people in the world's most populous nation struggle to find stable and well-paying jobs, fuelling discontent.

"How can the custodian of the constitution compare the youth with cockroaches and parasites, just for expressing their opinions and criticising the system?" Dipke said.

Dipke went online in May to air his frustrations, making a satirical post on X that said: "What if all cockroaches come together?"

The post went viral, driving Dipke to transform the idea into a parody platform that he named the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), playing on the name of country's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"Within two hours we got some 5,000 sign-ups on the Google form... and that made me realise — why not launch an official website and a manifesto?" Dipke said.

More than 30,000 people joined within 24 hours of its launch, he added.

It now has more than 22 million followers on its Instagram account, eclipsing the BJP's by 13 million followers.

Dipke said momentum for the movement has been largely driven by Gen Z students in their 20s.

What began online has since spilled onto the streets, with CJP holding protests in different cities across the country.

Dipke, who flew back from the US on June 6, began his second protest last month, still ongoing at New Delhi's well-known protest site Jantar Mantar.

The movement's primary demand is the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, whom they blame for repeated failures in the education system, particularly in the conduct of India's medical entrance examination.

Alleged irregularities, including a paper leak that forced a retake of the exam, have become a key reason for the mobilisation of CJP.

Renowned climate activist Sonam Wangchuk also joined the protests in solidarity, beginning a fast on June 28.

"It is our duty to raise our voice," the 59-year-old, who remains on hunger strike at the protest site, said.

When asked about his ambitions, Dipke, who previously worked with the opposition Aam Aadmi Party as a communications strategist, stressed he does not intend to turn the movement into a political outfit. — AFP

A peek into game-changing drone industry of Ukraine



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Drones are no substitute for the air-defence systems, long-range missiles, and other conventional weapons Ukraine needs to end the war

net throwers to automated systems that can locate and intercept enemy drones with little or no human intervention.

The industry is highly dynamic: constant communication between producers and army units means that prototypes are tested and deployed in a few months or even weeks. Although Russia often reverse-engineers Ukrainian technologies and starts producing drones at scale, Ukrainian military leaders claim to have 50 per cent more FPV drones than the Russians.

That is no accident. Although the industry's initial growth spurt was truly grass-roots, government policies have since provided significant support. In 2023, the government created the Brave1 cluster, which unites producers, researchers, military personnel, and investors in order to streamline the production and delivery of equipment needed at the frontlines. The government provides seed grants to innovative projects, helps Ukrainian producers to register their innovations, and connects them with users of their products. Producers can also report bureaucratic obstacles.

In June 2025, the government launched the DOT-Chain procurement platform. Army brigades can place orders for munitions there, and the State Logistics Operator (DOT, which runs military procurement) can fill the orders. The platform includes a reward programme: the more enemy targets a brigade destroys, the more additional drones it can receive from the government. As of February 2026, DOT-Chain offered some 470 products from 135 producers, including drones and electronic warfare systems.

Restarting weapons exports, a step announced early this year, could also help Ukraine's military technology industry. Exports effectively stopped in February 2022, but in 2024 weapons producers started lobbying for reopening. With the government unable to procure everything producers can manufacture, exports would provide additional revenues to scale up production to meet Army demands.

Returning to the international market would also allow joint ventures with European producers to be established in Ukraine. To leverage Western capital and access to safe production, Ukrainian firms already have joint ventures with enterprises in Germany, Canada, the UK, and elsewhere. Localising such ventures would keep human capital and technology at home.

This is especially important given the domestic industry's shortage of qualified personnel, particularly engineers. And localisation is needed to address another major problem facing drone producers: reliance on imported components, which are sourced mostly from China. According to research by the Lviv-based IRON defence technology cluster, localisation stands at 85 per cent for frames and structural components, 14 per cent for cameras, and 12 per cent for engines. Some producers within the Brave1 cluster have started manufacturing cameras to replace Chinese products, while other firms produce drone-borne munitions.

The bigger problem is that drones are not a panacea. While a special army branch, Unmanned Systems Forces, has destroyed Russian assets worth \$40 billion since it was established about a year ago, drones cannot replace personnel and do not make "traditional" weapons obsolete.

But even if drones are not a magic bullet, they have transformed geopolitics. When Russia uses drones to test the defences of Poland or Romania, or fly over critical German infrastructure, neither Nato nor individual countries respond for fear of escalation. Similarly, Iran has demonstrated how low-cost drone-based warfare can upend conventional tactics.

Ukraine's rapid emergence as a leader in drone technologies can help Nato and Gulf countries defend themselves against Russia and Iran. But Ukraine urgently needs help, too. Drones are no substitute for the air-defence systems, long-range missiles, and other conventional weapons Ukraine needs to end the war.

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FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



DALIC STEPS DOWN AFTER LEADING TEAM AT THREE WORLD CUPS

CROATIA'S most successful head coach, Zlatko Dalic, stepped down on Wednesday after nine years in charge, less than a week after his side's exit from the 2026 World Cup following a loss to Portugal in the round of 32. Under Dalic's tenure, Croatia finished runners-up at the 2018 World Cup and third in the 2022 edition in Qatar, but the team exited the tournament without a medal this time around. "When I took over the national team, I believed in the players' quality and in myself, but I didn't dare dream that we'd achieve everything we have over these nearly nine years," Dalic said.

"I can't describe how proud I am of every victory, of qualifying for major tournaments, of the three medals, of those great nights in Croatian football like when we beat England or Brazil at World Cups." Following his appointment in 2017, Dalic led Croatia in 111 matches, recording 62 wins. His team were also runners-up in the 2022-23 UEFA Nations League "Head coach, thank you for everything - the victories, the achievements, the qualifying berths, the medals, the unity, the respect, and your unwavering commitment to fight for Croatia, both on and off the pitch," the Croatian Football Federation said in a statement.

In this year's World Cup campaign, the 59-year-old's side advanced to the round of 32 after finishing second in Group L, despite a 4-2 defeat by England, a narrow 1-0 win over Panama in which they managed only two shots on target, and a victory over Ghana. But their campaign ended with a 2-1 defeat by Portugal, after which Dali criticised what he described as poor officiating, citing a VAR-awarded penalty and a late offside decision that ruled out Josko Gvardiol's stoppage-time equaliser, though he said refereeing was not an excuse for Croatia's World Cup exit.

Before taking the national job with Croatia, Dalic had spells with Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal and UAE side Al Ain. — Reuters



Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic during the match. — Reuters



FIFA suspended two USMNT staffers for Belgium game

TWO US men's national team staff members were suspended by Fifa for the team's World Cup round of 16 match against Belgium on Monday. Team manager Sam Zapatka and US Soccer Federation vice-president of security Frank Pannell weren't allowed at the match, multiple media outlets reported on Tuesday. Fifa reportedly handed out the suspensions pregame on Monday without specifying an exact reason.

The US Soccer Federation also didn't address the cause behind the punishment, though it did say it was unrelated to the federation's work that resulted in Polarin Balogun's red-card suspension getting pushed back.

According to ESPN, the two were sanctioned regarding a violation of Fifa match protocols as well as people having access to areas where they shouldn't have been. Per the report, no physical dispute occurred.

Balogun started on Monday, a match the US lost 4-1 to Belgium.



Team manager Sam Zapatka.

Front Office Sports reported that the cause of the two suspensions might have been Balogun coming back onto the field on July 1 to celebrate the United States' 2-0 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina in Santa Clara, Calif.

Balogun was sent off for a bad tackle in the second half of the Bosnia game, and players who receive a red card are not allowed to return to the pitch during or after that contest.

Per multiple media outlets, Zapatka joined US Soccer in 2015 and has been in his current job since 2020.

In an April article, Seton Hall University newspaper The Setonian wrote that Pannell previously worked for the Secret Service, the CIA and in the private sector.



Alex Freeman of the US in action with Belgium's Maxim De Cuyper. — Reuters



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



MOROCCO

coach Mohamed Ouahbi is already a World Cup-winner, but his success was at junior

level and he is treading new ground in the senior ranks as his side prepare to take on France in Thursday's quarterfinal.

It has been a remarkable accession for the 49-year-old, born in Belgium to Moroccan parents and another example of the wealth of talent the North African can draw on from the diaspora. Ouahbi was coach of the Morocco

side that won last October's Under-20 World Cup in Chile, ironically eliminating France at the semifinal stage. The success made him a potential candidate to replace Walid Regragui when the Morocco coach quit after the Africa Cup of Nations in January, but the 49-year-old Ouahbi was expected to be down the pecking order. Counting against him was a lack of experience as a senior head coach, but he got the job and has since proven wrong those who doubted he could make the transition from the juniors.

Ouahbi hails from Schaerbeek, the industrial suburb northeast of Brussels, and at 21 began as the under-nines coach at Anderlecht. He rose through the ranks to eventually become assistant to former Albanian international Besnik Hasi in 2016.

But it proved a short tenure and when Hasi was fired, Ouahbi returned to the youth ranks, working with talent at Anderlecht like current Belgium players Jeremy Doku and Youri Tielemans plus Bilal El Khannouss, who features in Morocco's midfield.

"I have to say that he was not only a good youth coach but also a man of strong values and principles," Jean Kindermans, who was in charge of Anderlecht's youth development for years, told Belgian media.

Ouahbi left the club in 2021 after 17 years. "Anderlecht has had many great players trained under Mo, who went on to enjoy brilliant careers abroad," Anderlecht wrote in a tribute.

He joined Al Fateh in Saudi Arabia, where he served as assistant coach to former Anderlecht colleague Yannick Ferrera before, four years ago, joining the Morocco federation and taking charge of their junior ranks.

"He is an incredibly good motivator," Kindermans added.

"I think that is one of his strengths today, dealing with all those superstars, something he never was as a player himself. To command their respect, there has to be something like motivation and that is something he is capable of."

Thursday's quarterfinal will be Ouahbi's 11th game in charge since his March appointment. Morocco have won six and drawn four of the previous 10 in an unbeaten run that has seen him feted for tactical changes that have improved the side.

"He sticks to his own style of play and isn't dictated to by the opposition. When Morocco play now, we have our own identity," says the country's former international Youssouf Hadji, one of the team assistants. — Reuters

We are ready to face any team, says bullish Morocco coach.

COACH OUAHBI
DEFIES INEXPERIENCE
ON WORLD STAGE

THURSDAY'S QUARTERFINAL WILL BE MOROCCO COACH OUAHBI'S 11TH GAME SINCE HIS MARCH APPOINTMENT

MOROCCO ARE UNBEATEN UNDER OUAHBI WITH SIX WINS AND FOUR DRAWS IN 10 GAMES

OUAHBI COACHED MOROCCO TO THE UNDER-20 WORLD CUP TITLE IN CHILE LAST OCTOBER

Morocco's Azzedine Ounahi celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,637.531

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$71.36
BRENT \$78.22
LIGHT \$74.10



SHORT TAKES



Majis specialises in industrial water solutions and utilities serving Suhar’s industrial sector.

Rakiza — IV3 Aqua to acquire OQ stake in Suhar water utility

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Oman’s OQ has signed an agreement to divest its stake in Majis Industrial Services SAOC, a company specialising in industrial water solutions and utilities serving Suhar’s industrial sector, to an investment consortium comprising the Oman Infrastructure Investment Fund (Rakiza) and global water infrastructure specialist IV3 Aqua. The acquisition brings together Rakiza’s extensive experience in the local investment landscape and broad regional network with IV3 Aqua’s technical and operational expertise in water infrastructure across the Middle East and Asia. Together, they provide a strong platform for Majis to continue its growth and further strengthen its role in supporting industrial development across the region. Azzan al Abdullatif, Chief Portfolio Officer of OQ, said: “This transaction reflects OQ’s commitment to active portfolio management and disciplined capital allocation. As Majis enters its next phase of growth under new ownership, OQ can redeploy capital towards opportunities that support long-term value creation and Oman’s economic priorities, as part of OQ’s annual divestment programme. We are confident that Majis is well positioned to continue delivering reliable services while pursuing future growth”.

Khalid al Khatib, CEO of Rakiza, said: “Our investment in Majis reflects our strong conviction in the importance of critical infrastructure that underpins industrial growth in Oman. As Suhar’s leading integrated industrial water platform, Majis combines strategic importance, a distinguished customer base and secure long-term contracted returns, making it a highly attractive investment opportunity that aligns perfectly with our long-term investment strategy”.

Olaf Krohg, CEO of IV3 Aqua, added: “Majis represents exactly the type of strategic business that IV3 Aqua seeks to invest in and develop, given its critical infrastructure, long-term contractual framework and leading position in Oman’s industrial water sector. Together with Rakiza, we look forward to supporting the company’s continued growth and delivering sustainable long-term value for all customers and partners”.

OMIFCO shares list on MSX post landmark IPO

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Shares of Oman India Fertiliser Company SAOG (OMIFCO), a leading integrated producer of anhydrous ammonia and granular urea in the Sultanate of Oman, were listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday, July 8. The listing follows the company’s landmark initial public offering (IPO) last month, in which 25 per cent of its total issued share capital was offered and heavily oversubscribed by both institutional and retail investors. With a market capitalisation of approximately RO 1.04 billion (\$2.7 billion), the IPO marks a critical step for OMIFCO and emphasises the confidence investors have in the Company’s next phase and long-term value creation. The bell ringing ceremony at the MSX commenced the listing and trading of OMIFCO’s shares



Dignitaries and officials at the formal listing of OMIFCO on the MSX on Wednesday.

under the ticker symbol OMIF. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) President Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi. In remarks, Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, CEO of OQ Group, said the listing of OMIFCO on the Muscat Stock Exchange represents

an important national milestone in OQ’s investment journey and the culmination of a path that began with Abraj and extended to five public offerings in just three years. Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said the listing represents a qualitative addition to the capital market and reflects the continued

Oman and Jordan launch \$100m investment firm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

OMAN Investment Authority (OIA) and the Jordanian Social Security Investment Fund (SSIF) have signed an agreement to launch the Omani-Jordanian strategic partnership to mark the beginning of a new phase of joint investment cooperation between the two brotherly countries and to enhance the established historical ties and growing economic relations between them.

Under the partnership, the two parties established the Jordanian Oman Investment Company with a capital of RO 38.5 million (\$100 million) equally between the two sides to invest in a number of vital and promising sectors that serve the economic priorities of the two countries, including the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. The sectors are communications and information technology; agricultural and food; medical equipment and medicine; energy; mining; tourism and logistics services. This strategic partnership builds on OIA’s approach to enhancing the geographic



The partnership builds on OIA’s approach to enhancing the geographic and sectoral diversification of its portfolio.

and sectoral diversification of its investment portfolio, which serves as a strategic instrument for safeguarding assets, diversifying risk and developing investment platforms that ensure sustainable economic returns and the flow of capital. Mulham bin Basheer al Jarf, Deputy President of the Oman Investment Authority for Investment, said that the Omani-Jordanian strategic partnership represents a significant milestone in the longstanding relations between Oman and Jordan. It reflects the directives of the leaders of both countries

into projects that enhance economic aspects, building on a legacy of cooperation, exchange of experiences and investment in promising projects with sustainable economic and developmental impact that enhances the common interests of the two countries. This partnership enhances OIA’s role in implementing economic diplomacy as it works to deepen cooperation with partners in brotherly countries. It also contributes to directing investments towards priority sectors and enhances the geographical and sectoral

diversity of OIA’s portfolio. On the Jordanian side, the Chief Executive Officer of the Social Security Investment Fund, Dr Ezzeddine Kanakrieh, said the agreement represents a strategic step in the process of cooperation between the Fund and OIA, embodying a shared vision of deploying capital and institutional expertise to build economically viable investments in priority sectors. The agreement is an extension of the Fund’s approach to expanding its presence at the regional and international levels”. This agreement establishes a new phase of joint investment action based on governance and efficiency, following OIA’s partnerships with Qatar, Türkiye, China, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Pakistan, Spain, Azerbaijan, India, Brunei Darussalam, Kazakhstan and Belarus. It also confirms the commitment of OIA to enhance Oman’s position to be an attractive regional centre for quality investments and a driver of sustainable economic growth by building long-term partnerships that contribute to knowledge transfer, attracting capital and enhancing the competitiveness of the Omani economy in its various sectors.

OMAN AND THAILAND SIGN AML COOPERATION PACT

BAKU: The National Financial Information Centre (NFIC) of the Sultanate of Oman has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Anti-Money Laundering Office of the Kingdom of Thailand to strengthen cooperation in combating financial crimes. The agreement was signed by Colonel Juma bin Matar al Dhahli, Chief Executive Officer of the NFIC, on the sidelines of



the Egmont Group meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan. The agreement forms part of a series of agreements signed by Oman with friendly countries during the July 5-10 gathering to enhance cooperation in tackling money laundering, terrorist financing and the proliferation of weapons through closer information sharing and collaboration. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The offering includes the Bank Muscat Visa Gold Credit Card and the Bank Muscat Visa Prepaid Card.

Bank Muscat launches limited-edition FIFA World Cup 2026™ Visa Cards

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing commitment to offering innovative banking products that enrich customer experiences and cater to their diverse interests and aspirations, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of special limited-edition Visa cards featuring an exclusive FIFA World Cup 2026™ inspired design, courtesy of Visa.

The offering includes the Bank Muscat Visa Gold Credit Card and the Bank Muscat Visa Prepaid Card, launched in celebration of the global excitement surrounding FIFA World Cup™ matches and to provide football enthusiasts with a unique banking experience.

On this occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager of Personal Banking at Bank Muscat, said: “The bank continues to invest in developing innovative banking solutions that enhance the customer experience and deliver value beyond traditional banking services.

The launch of the limited-edition FIFA World Cup™ Visa cards, courtesy of Visa reflects our commitment to offering unique products and services that align with the interests of various segments of society, while providing customers with the opportunity to enjoy comprehensive banking benefits through an exceptional design that celebrates their passion for football.

We encourage all customers and football enthusiasts to seize this opportunity and apply for these exclusive limited-edition Visa cards to join in celebrating this global sporting event.”

Bank Muscat remains committed to enriching customer experiences and strengthening engagement with its brand through innovative products that combine functionality with distinction. This initiative also reflects the bank’s dedication to keeping pace with major global events and interests that attract widespread appeal across different customer segments.

Customers can apply for the limited-edition Visa Gold Credit Card through Bank Muscat Internet Banking, the Mobile Banking app, or by visiting any of the bank’s branches across the Sultanate.

The limited-edition Visa Prepaid Card can also be obtained directly through the bank’s digital channels, with the added convenience of complimentary card delivery to the customer’s preferred location. Customers who apply for these cards during the campaign period will automatically receive the exclusive design, subject to availability.

Bank Muscat continues to strengthen its leadership position in the banking sector by offering a comprehensive range of innovative products and services designed around customer needs and aspirations.

Elevate your drive with big chill summer offers

BRINGING a wave of premium value to the season, the sophisticated Chery Arrizo 6 sedan is moving into the spotlight across the Sultanate of Oman through the ongoing Chery Big Chill summer campaign.

Running through July 30, 2026, this seasonal initiative is designed to deliver complete peace of mind and exceptional financial ease during the peak summer months.

To ensure a seamless and premium ownership experience right from the start, every qualifying purchase of the Arrizo 6 currently comes packed with a comprehensive suite of benefits, including 1-year free insurance (valid in Oman only), free registration, a complimentary 3-year or 30,000 km service package, free 3M window tinting, and a complimentary RO 50 fuel card (equivalent to 200 litres of petrol)—all backed by an outstanding 6-year or 200,000 km manufacturer warranty.

Crafted to leave a lasting impression on any road, the Chery Arrizo 6 commands attention with a highly dynamic, refined and sporty aesthetic.

Its exterior design language perfectly blends elegance with a modern edge, highlighted by a bold front grille, sleek LED headlamps and a beautifully sculpted aerodynamic silhouette.

This sophisticated look is matched by an advanced turbocharged engine tucked under the hood, engineered to deliver an exhilarating balance of responsive power and enhanced fuel efficiency.

Paired with a smooth dual-clutch transmission (DCT), the powertrain ensures effortless acceleration and quiet gear transitions, making every daily city commute or open-highway cruise an



Every qualifying purchase of the Arrizo 6 currently comes packed with a comprehensive suite of benefits.

absolute pleasure.

Inside, the cabin serves as a luxurious, driver-centric sanctuary built with premium materials and an incredibly spacious layout.

Occupants are welcomed by plush leather seating, customisable ambient lighting and an intuitive dashboard that collectively elevate the overall interior ambiance.

Staying connected and entertained on the move is entirely seamless thanks to the crisp 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment system, which integrates effortlessly with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Furthermore, smart conveniences such as intelligent keyless entry, push-start ignition, an advanced climate control system and a hands-free voice control system allow drivers to easily operate essential functions

while maintaining total focus on the road.

Safety and dynamic handling remain absolute priorities in the Arrizo 6, which is heavily equipped with cutting-edge technologies to protect all occupants.

The sedan features an advanced electronic stability programme (ESP) for superior control, alongside a sophisticated 360-degree camera system, blind-spot monitoring and a lane departure warning system that act like an extra pair of eyes in tight spots.

This intelligent driver-assist framework is anchored by a reinforced, high-strength body structure, a high-performance braking system and a comprehensive multi-point airbag layout, guaranteeing a confident, highly secure and memorable driving experience across Oman’s diverse terrains.

Zubair EDC hosts new ‘Tajribati’ session

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to empower entrepreneurs and foster a culture of innovation, Zubair Enterprise Development Centre (Zubair EDC) hosted a new session in its ‘Tajribati’ series titled ‘Entrepreneurship in the Age of Artificial Intelligence’. Held at The Zubair Corporation, the session brought together entrepreneurs, business professionals, technology enthusiasts, and employees from across the corporation and its subsidiaries.

The session featured Maha al Habsi, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of the Artificial Intelligence Technologies Academy. Ali Shaker, Head of Sustainability at The Zubair Corporation and Head of Zubair EDC, moderated



The discussion explored the rapidly expanding role of AI in entrepreneurship.

it. The discussion explored the rapidly expanding role of artificial intelligence in entrepreneurship, highlighting how AI technologies can

streamline business processes, enhance operational efficiency, and strengthen the competitiveness of start-ups in an increasingly dynamic

marketplace. Participants were introduced to a range of AI tools that entrepreneurs can leverage throughout the various stages of building and growing their businesses. The session also showcased local and international success stories, demonstrating how the adoption of AI has accelerated innovation, supported business development, and enabled sustainable growth. The session further addressed common challenges entrepreneurs may encounter when implementing AI solutions, emphasising the importance of adopting these technologies strategically and responsibly to maximise value creation and ensure long-term business sustainability.

Seven or Eight: Omantel turns Dhofar’s khareef question into a campaign

MUSCAT: Every year, as the mist rolls over Dhofar’s green mountains, one question travels faster than the khareef clouds themselves: “Is it better to go in July, or wait until August?” This year, Omantel has decided to answer that question with a campaign, not a calendar.

The company has announced its participation as the official technical partner of Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, unveiling a new marketing campaign titled “Seven or Eight?” a playful, instantly recognisable nod to the age-old visitor dilemma of choosing between the two peak months

of Oman’s most spectacular natural transformation. Far more than a clever tagline, the campaign anchors a broader commitment: strengthening Dhofar’s standing as one of the region’s premier tourism destinations, while positioning Omantel as the invisible infrastructure behind every visitor’s khareef experience, from the moment they search for directions to the moment they upload their favorite photo of Wadi Darbat in the fog. Saba Saeed al Busaidi, Acting General Manager of Corporate Affairs and Brand at Omantel, explains the thinking



Omantel decided to answer that question with a campaign, not a calendar.

behind the idea: “The ‘Seven or Eight?’ campaign captures a question we hear every single year from people planning their trip to Dhofar during khareef: when is the best time to go? We turned that everyday curiosity into an interactive campaign that speaks directly to what our audience is already talking about, while supporting national efforts to promote Dhofar as a distinctive summer destination and showcasing Omantel’s role in powering an integrated digital experience for every visitor”. “Our sponsorship of the Dhofar Tourist Season is

an extension of Omantel’s commitment to national initiatives with real economic and social impact through investment in digital solutions, support for small and medium enterprises, and a genuine contribution to strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s position on the regional tourism map,” she added. Behind the campaign’s light-hearted tone sits a season-long operation. Omantel’s participation includes an integrated program of corporate social responsibility initiatives, activities and events benefiting a number of charitable associations.

SHORTTAKES



Mamun representatives meeting with executives in Hong Kong.

MAMUN EXPANDS HK PRESENCE TO BOOST OMAN, GCC TRADE FINANCE LINKS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 8

Mamun, the Oman-based fintech and alternative finance platform, is strengthening its presence in Hong Kong as part of its strategy to expand two-way trade finance flows between Oman, the GCC, Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area.

The company’s growing Hong Kong engagement reflects a broader opportunity to connect GCC buyers, Asian suppliers, financial institutions, technology partners and trade origination channels through regulated, Sharia-compliant trade finance infrastructure.

As part of this engagement, Mamun held a productive meeting with King Leung, Global Head of Financial Services, Fintech & Sustainability at InvestHK and Peggy Kwok, Senior Vice President of Fintech at InvestHK, focused on Mamun’s expanding Hong Kong presence and the development of trade finance partnerships across Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area.

The meeting was attended by Saleh al Tamami, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Mamun; Mohammed al Tamami, Co-Founder and Chief Commercial Officer of Mamun; and Nareen al Maamary, Head of Compliance at Mamun, alongside King Leung and Peggy Kwok.

Earlier this year, with the support of InvestHK, Mamun established its Hong Kong presence. That presence is now growing through strategic partnerships, deeper market engagement and increasing settlement flows.

About 40 per cent of Mamun’s trade finance settlements, executed on behalf of Murabaha contracts for GCC customers, are settled to Hong Kong-based financial institutions and businesses.

Oman’s Al Baleed backs CO₂-to-chemicals venture

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 8

OMAN-based Al Baleed Petrochemical has announced its participation as a strategic partner in Carbeau, a newly established company commercialising a breakthrough CO₂-to-chemicals technology that the Omani firm aims to deploy at its ambitious Salalah Petrochemical Park.

Carbeau, launched earlier this week as a spin-out from Dutch sustainable technology company Avantium, is commercialising one of the world’s most advanced electrochemical carbon dioxide conversion technologies.

The company aims to transform captured CO₂ into high-value chemicals using renewable electricity, providing a commercially viable pathway to decarbonise the chemical industry while creating sustainable feedstocks for future manufacturing.

Alongside Al Baleed Petrochemical, Carbeau’s founding partners and investors include GKT GmbH, an Austrian engineering and industrial process technology specialist, Invest-NL, the Netherlands’ national promotional institution, NOM, the regional development agency for the Northern Netherlands and Avantium.

The technology’s initial commercial products include glycolic acid, a specialty chemical used in personal care and industrial applications; and PLGA, a next-generation biodegradable polymer with significant commercial



Al Baleed Petrochemical says Salalah is a strong candidate for the first commercial-scale deployment of Carbeau’s technology outside Europe. Picture for illustration only.

potential. In a statement, Al Baleed Petrochemical said its investment reflects the company’s long-term strategy to position Oman at the forefront of sustainable chemicals and carbon utilisation.

As the developer of the Salalah Petrochemical Park, it is creating an integrated downstream chemicals hub that combines conventional petrochemical production with next-generation low-carbon technologies.

According to the company, Salalah is a strong candidate for the first commercial-scale deployment of Carbeau’s technology outside Europe.

The governorate’s abundant solar resources, expanding renewable energy programme, established industrial and export infrastructure; and the integrated Salalah Petrochemical Park provide favourable conditions for

converting captured CO₂ into value-added chemicals, supporting both industrial decarbonisation and the circular carbon economy.

“We believe the future of the chemical industry lies in transforming carbon emissions into valuable products”, said Eng Saeed al Shanfari, Managing Director of Al Baleed Petrochemical.

“Oman’s strategic location, abundant solar resources and industrial ambitions make Salalah an ideal destination for commercialising this breakthrough technology. Our vision is to establish one of the world’s first commercial CO₂-to-chemicals plants in Salalah, creating a new sustainable chemical value chain for the region”.

The Salalah Petrochemical Park is being developed as an integrated downstream chemicals complex that will

convert locally available LPG, methanol and ammonia into a range of higher-value petrochemical products.

The first phase is expected to include Oman’s first Propane Dehydrogenation (PDH) plant to produce propylene, alongside facilities manufacturing maleic anhydride, acetic acid, formic acid and hydrogen peroxide.

The park is also designed to accommodate emerging carbon utilisation technologies, including projects that convert captured CO₂ into value-added chemicals.

By integrating conventional petrochemicals with low-carbon manufacturing, the complex aims to strengthen Oman’s downstream chemicals sector, expand exports, reduce dependence on imported specialty chemicals and advance the country’s industrial diversification goals under Oman Vision 2040.

IFC sees United Solar as diversification catalyst

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 8

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) views its investment in United Solar Polysilicon’s \$1.6 billion manufacturing facility in Suhar as a strategic step towards building a new high-value industrial sector in Oman while strengthening the global clean energy supply chain, a senior World Bank Group official said.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Wendy Werner, World Bank Group Country Manager for Oman, said the project stood out because of its scale, job creation potential and ability to position Oman as a critical player in the renewable energy value chain.

The comments follow the



WENDY WERNER
World Bank Group Country Manager for Oman

30 per cent of the total project financing for the Middle East’s largest and only operational polysilicon manufacturing facility.

“Because of its scale and potential, this \$1.6 billion facility is large enough to anchor an entirely new industry in Oman, backing the

financial close of IFC’s \$50 million equity investment in United Solar, the final tranche of the company’s \$1.6 billion capital raise. IFC has now arranged and mobilised more than

country’s vision”, Werner said.

She said the project’s expected creation of around 3,000 direct and indirect jobs closely aligns with the World Bank Group’s priority of supporting private sector-led employment and sustainable economic growth.

“United Solar is the Middle East’s only operational, large-scale polysilicon manufacturing facility, putting Oman on the map as a high-technology, critical link in a key supply chain for renewable energy”, she said. “All of this makes it a direct match for what the region needs most: a private sector-led engine of quality jobs”.

United Solar’s 100,000-tonne-per-year facility in SOHAR Port and Freezone began operations in January and is expected to reach full production capacity by the end of

2026.

The plant produces high-purity polysilicon, a key raw material used in solar photovoltaic cells and is expected to support the production of around 40 gigawatts of solar modules annually.

Werner said IFC’s support extends well beyond financing, describing the investment as evidence that Oman can attract international capital into advanced manufacturing industries.

“Beyond the capital, this project is a proof point”, she said. “It serves as evidence that Oman can compete for global capital and plug into industries of the future”.

She added that locating the region’s largest polysilicon plant in Oman helps shift the country’s economic base towards high-value manufacturing while strengthening

the resilience of the global solar supply chain.

“At the same time, a project of this scale helps diversify where the world’s solar supply chain is built, giving Oman a genuine foothold in that industry’s future growth, enhancing the global supply chain; and improving the traceability of polysilicon”, Werner said.

The project is backed by the Oman Investment Authority through Future Fund Oman, with United Solar positioning itself as a fully traceable, Foreign Entity of Concern (FEOC)-compliant supplier to leading global solar manufacturers.

The company says the facility will also help avoid an estimated 8.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually through the deployment of solar energy worldwide.

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil surges on Iran fears



Oil prices surged more than 5 per cent on Wednesday after US President Donald Trump declared the US-Iran peace memorandum “over”, renewing fears of supply disruptions in the Middle East.

Brent crude climbed to \$77.98 a barrel, while US crude (light) rose to \$74.14. The rally was also driven by renewed military strikes and tighter United States restrictions on Iranian crude exports. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold swings on tensions



Gold prices fluctuated as renewed tensions between the United States and Iran lifted oil prices, Treasury yields and the US dollar, while investors awaited minutes from the Federal Reserve’s June policy meeting. Spot gold rose 0.5 per cent to \$4,125.59 an ounce after earlier touching a one-week low.

Traders are seeking fresh clues on the outlook for US interest rates and inflation. — Reuters

ECONOMIC DATA

Japan posts current account surplus



Japan recorded a current account surplus of 3.968 trillion yen (\$24.43 billion) in May, supported by strong export growth and a modest trade surplus, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Exports increased 14.7 per cent, while imports rose 8.1 per cent, resulting in a trade surplus of 6.9 billion yen. Japan’s financial account also posted a surplus of 5.086 trillion yen. — Reuters

OPINION

Islamic banks: A new milestone for Oman’s financial sector



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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

OMAN'S banking sector has witnessed remarkable progress since the establishment of the Central Bank of Oman in the early 1970s. One of its most significant achievements came in 2012 with the introduction of Islamic banking.

Although Oman was the last GCC country to adopt Islamic finance, it did so through a carefully designed legal and regulatory framework that has enabled the sector to grow into an important pillar of the national economy.

The latest step in this journey is the Central Bank of Oman's decision to convert Islamic banking windows operated by conventional banks into independent Islamic banks under the new Banking Law issued by Royal Decree No. 2/2025.

This reform is expected to strengthen the institutional independence of Islamic banking, enhance Sharia governance, improve operational efficiency, and support the sector's long-term competitiveness.

Under the new framework, conventional banks may establish wholly owned Islamic banking subsidiaries rather than continue operating Islamic windows.

This structure requires complete separation of assets, financial statements, governance systems, and information technology platforms, ensuring that Islamic banking operations remain fully independent from conventional banking activities. Such separation enhances transparency,

strengthens regulatory oversight, and reinforces public confidence in Sharia-compliant financial services.

The development of Islamic banking has provided an important alternative for customers seeking financial services that comply with Islamic principles. Before 2012, many citizens preferred to avoid conventional banking because Sharia-compliant products were unavailable.

Today, Islamic banks is offering a wide range of financing solutions and enabling customers to meet their financial needs while adhering to their religious values.

Beyond serving individuals, Islamic banks have become significant contributors to Oman's economic development.

They finance small and medium-sized enterprises, industrial projects, commercial businesses and infrastructure. Islamic sukuk have also become an increasingly important source of financing for both government and corporate entities since the first sovereign Sukuk issuance in 2015.

The sector's growth has been impressive. According to the CBO, Islamic banking assets reached approximately RO 9.16 billion by the end of 2025, representing nearly 20 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman's total banking assets.

With around one hundred branches operating across the country, Islamic banking has evolved from a niche service into an integral component of Oman's financial system. Its expansion has also strengthened competition within the banking industry.

The presence of Islamic banks has encouraged both Islamic and conventional institutions to improve service quality, accelerate digital transformation, introduce more innovative financial products, and enhance customer experience.

As a result, consumers now benefit from a wider choice of banking solutions and higher service standards. Public confidence in Islamic banking continues to grow. While many customers choose Islamic banks for religious reasons, others value their transparent financing structures, clearly defined contractual relationships, and strong regulatory oversight.

Many expatriates also use Islamic banking services when the products are competitively priced and efficiently delivered, demonstrating that Islamic banking appeals to a broad customer base beyond purely religious considerations.

The conversion of Islamic banking windows into fully independent Islamic banks represents more than a regulatory adjustment; it marks the maturity of the sector and its readiness for a new phase of growth.

Supported by strong governance and a comprehensive regulatory framework, Islamic banking is well positioned to play an even greater role in financing strategic projects under Oman Vision 2040. Together with conventional banks, it will continue to strengthen the resilience, diversity, and global competitiveness of Oman's financial system in the years ahead.

Although Oman was the last GCC country to adopt Islamic finance, it did so through a carefully designed legal and regulatory framework that has enabled the sector to grow into an important pillar of the national economy.

OIL REFINERS’
HORMUZ WINDFALL
MAY PROVE
SHORT-LIVED

RON BOUSSO

Oil refiners around the world have seen profits surge, thanks to a rare combination of robust fuel demand and weak crude prices, as markets have rapidly readjusted following the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

The windfall is unlikely to last. The benchmark US 3-2-1 crack spread a widely watched measure of refining profitability, recently climbed above \$60 a barrel, the highest level on record. Refining margins in Asia and Europe have also risen sharply. Refining profitability is determined by two factors: the cost of crude oil and the price of the gasoline, diesel and jet fuel produced from it. At the moment, both are moving in refiners’ favour.

CRUDE AWAKENING

When it comes to feedstock costs, the tide has turned dramatically since the US and Iran signed an interim ceasefire agreement on June 17. Only last month, crude markets were grappling with an extreme supply shortage caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Today, the market is instead being flooded by hundreds of millions of barrels that had been stranded in the Gulf during the blockade.

Total Middle East crude exports, including volumes shipped through ports in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that bypass Hormuz, rose to 12.35 million barrels per day in June from less than 8 million bpd in May, according to Kpler data.

July exports are currently expected to reach 12.5 million bpd, Kpler estimates.

Although regional exports remain well below their pre-war average of around 18 million bpd, the sudden release of large volumes of crude has created a temporary glut.

That shift is reflected in global benchmark Brent crude futures , which have retreated to around \$70 a barrel, roughly where they traded before the Iran conflict erupted on February 28 and \$50 below the wartime peak.

Conditions in the physical market are even more bearish. Gulf producers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are competing for market share, leading to aggressive pricing and discounts on cargoes

This dynamic could persist for months. Producers are not only releasing crude stored on tankers and in onshore facilities, but also bringing back oilfields that were shut during the conflict. The result is a growing wave of supply hitting a global market facing questions about demand growth.

Refiners are also enjoying a windfall on the products side of the equation. — Reuters

Private equity investors
stall as AI deals grow

THE impact that Artificial Intelligence (AI) could have on the business models of wealth managers is holding up fresh private equity (PE) investment into the sector.

Potential wealth deals have failed to secure approvals from private equity investment committees, which are increasingly running tougher screens on how protected wealth firms are from AI threats, according to corporate finance advisors.

“There’s definitely a bit of apprehension,” said one dealer. “There’s a blood bath in certain sectors and it happened very, very quickly. People just want to feel like they are not going to get totally blindsided”. Renewed anxiety comes as sale processes for once white-hot software businesses have been put on pause, with investors scrutinising valuations following a technology stocks sell-off in February.

Shares in top wealth managers, including St. James's Place, Quilter and Rathbones, took a beating when US fintech Altruist unveiled a new tax planning tool during the same month.

Rapid progress made by AI has made it harder for investors to reliably predict a company’s growth prospects, with some fearing that the technology could render human advisors obsolete. AI also poses a risk to businesses with legacy operating systems vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

Anthropic has restricted use of its mythos AI model following the potential threat it poses to companies’ cybersecurity, due to its ability to spot weaknesses in IT systems.

“If you have got a three-to five-year hold, you have got to sell it to somebody who also believes in a three-to five-year hold,” said a private equity lawyer.

“Can you, hand on heart, say that for the next 10 years the business model is not going to be undermined?”



People enjoy the view of the City of London skyline in London, Britain. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Renewed anxiety comes as sale processes for once white-hot software businesses have been put on pause, with investors scrutinising valuations following a technology stocks sell-off in February.

Fred Hansson, Managing director at M&A advisory firm MarshBerry UK, said that the visibility on holding periods has been “disrupted” with the rapid growth of AI, as investors perceive higher risks.

“The average (leveraged buyout fund) out there is more nervous now about what impact (AI) will have over the next decade that could potentially impact quite severely their earnings, because they could have an impact on fees,” he said.

“If the market perceives (wealth management) services being delivered by machines, they will probably depress the fee rates that people can change.”

Nordic Capital, which backs advice firm Ascot Lloyd, said last month that it now looks at a wealth manager’s “moat” against AI competition when assessing potential investment opportunities.

“We are probably at the point now where business models are not being truly disrupted just yet, but I don’t think it is going to be very long until they are,” said co-head of financial services at the private equity firm, Emil Anderson.

Growing anxiety could add to the

downward trend in the UK wealth management M&A, which has already seen deals reduce from 193 in 2023 to 157 in 2025, data compiled by wealth consultancy Solve Partners shows.

However, investor concerns have not yet meaningfully impacted deal flow or valuations, bankers and lawyers said, with buyers bearish on the sector still in the minority.

With the average wealth management client aged around 60, MarshBerry UK’s Hansson noted that this cohort of investors values personal contact.

Personal relationships are also important for a chunk of new business flow, particularly among advisors.

“At the end of the day, these are regulated businesses, and, as such, there will have to be individuals responsible for it,” he added.

Proskauer’s private equity M&A partner Andrew Wingfield said AI is not “replacing” wealth management, but rather “stripping out” a lot of the “lower-value work” around it.

“You can already use fairly basic AI tools to put together a decent portfolio, which tells you where the pressure is going to sit,” he added.

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FUTURECINEMA

AI ACTRESS TILLY NORWOOD TO STAR IN FEATURE FILM



Virtual actress Tilly Norwood, who has not appeared in a film since her debut in late 2025, may finally be on the verge of a breakthrough role, despite the film industry’s lingering scepticism towards artificial intelligence.

Her creators, London-based AI studio Particle 6, announced on Monday that Tilly will star in *Misaligned*, a feature-length film that will be produced almost entirely using AI. While artificial intelligence will power much of the production process, the studio stressed that the project will also rely heavily on human creativity, with writers, technicians and actors playing essential roles in bringing the film to life.

The title *Misaligned* references one of the most widely discussed challenges in AI development: ensuring that increasingly powerful systems remain aligned with human values, ethics and intentions. By making this concept central to the story, the filmmakers hope to explore not only the capabilities of AI but also the questions it raises about creativity, trust and the future relationship between humans and intelligent machines.

Particle 6 chief executive and founder Eline van der Velden said the film is intended to demonstrate that AI is not a replacement for filmmakers, but rather a tool that can enhance storytelling when guided by experienced creative professionals.

“AI can support premium narrative filmmaking, but only with substantial amounts of human craft, skill, judgement and time. That’s not a limitation of the technology. That’s the point”, she said.

Van der Velden added that the filmmakers best positioned to succeed in the coming years will be those who combine traditional storytelling instincts with emerging technologies.

“The filmmakers who thrive in the next decade will be the ones who bring decades of storytelling instinct to these new tools and *Misaligned* is where we put that to work at feature scale”, she said.

Particle 6 has yet to reveal when the film will be released or whether it will debut in cinemas or on a streaming platform. A company spokesperson said that discussions about distribution remain at an early stage.

The announcement comes as Hollywood continues to debate AI’s growing role in filmmaking. Actors, writers and other creatives have voiced concerns that generative AI could threaten jobs and use copyrighted material without consent.

Leading performers, including Scarlett Johansson and Cate Blanchett, have joined industry unions in calling for stronger safeguards to regulate AI’s use in creative industries, particularly regarding intellectual property and artistic rights.

Against that backdrop, *Misaligned* is likely to become more than just another film release. It may also serve as a test case for whether artificial intelligence and human artistry can coexist in the future of cinema. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



TECHNOLOGY

This photograph shows a humanoid robot developed by Geneva-based technology company RB Labs at the AI for Good Global Summit.

— AFP



CINEMA

US actress Maia Kealoha attends the world premiere of Disney’s “Moana” at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles with the fictional Stitch character.

— AFP

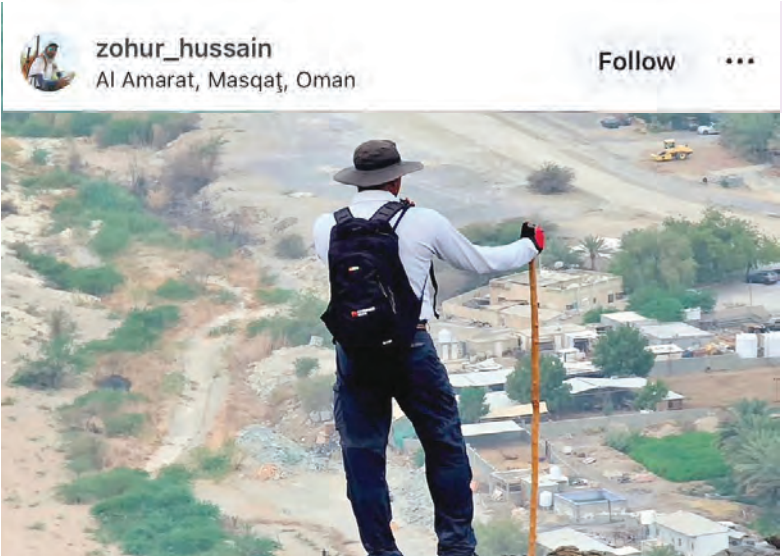


NATURE

Wild bear expert Akiko Takii crosses a waterway in a forest where a bear trap has been set in Ina, Nagano Prefecture.

— AFP

INSTA PICKS



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GEORGE CLOONEY’S CAREER TO BE CELEBRATED AT VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

Haruki Murakami has said that he writes novels that are “completely different” from what AI can create, as his first book in three years hit shelves in Japan Friday.

Starring a woman as the main character for the first time, his new volume went on sale at midnight in bookstores in Tokyo.

Dozens of fans queued to get their hands on the novel, local media reported.

“AI takes into account everything that has happened so far and draws analogies,” Murakami said in an exclusive interview with Kyodo News published Friday.

“But the process of how I write novels is something completely different,” he said.

With the rapid advances in generative AI, it is now possible to use the technology to write novels.

However, the role of a novelist is “to drag in something new that suddenly flashes into your mind,” Murakami said.

The Japanese author of “Norwegian Wood” and “Kafka on the Shore” is known for his intricate tales about the absurdity and loneliness of modern life, which have been translated into about 50 languages.

When he is deeply focused on writing a story, characters suddenly show up, and “that’s not something that comes out from analogy,” he said, adding “AI probably can’t do that.”

Titled “The Tale of KAHŌ”, the author’s latest release will see the titular character as the first female protagonist in his catalogue of full-length novels, publisher Shinchosha has said on its website.

In a separate interview



with the Asahi Shimbun, also published on Friday, Murakami said: “I had the feeling that I was seeing the world through eyes that were different from my usual ones.”

“Of course, I can only imagine how women see the world,” he said. “But when I wrote ‘Kafka on the Shore’, I was looking at the world through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old boy, and in that sense, a novelist can become anything.”

“Not long before I wrote this, I spent some time at Wellesley College, a women’s college in the United States,” he told the Asahi.

“Right now, women’s perspectives are being valued very highly, and I think breathing in that kind of atmosphere also had an influence on ‘Kaho’ this time around,” he said.

Murakami also said he never really liked writing about parents and children but “every time I write a novel, there’s always an urge to try something I haven’t done before.”

“This time, that might have been the parent-child” relationship, he said. — AFP



ONCE IN A 1,000-YEAR CHANCE TO SEE BAYEUX TAPESTRY IN ENGLAND



THE first tickets for the British Museum’s exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry, sold out within hours, in what it’s called “an extraordinary response” to the 11th-century artwork being shown outside France for the first time in nearly 1,000 years.

The famous tapestry, depicting the 1066 Norman conquest of England, is believed to have been made by English embroiderers, and its return home has so far netted the museum £2.5 million in sales, making it its best-selling show ever.

“The level of demand reflects the unique opportunity this exhibition brings,” Nicholas Cullinan, director at the British Museum, said on Thursday, in a statement which said the online queue peaked at 80,000 people.

SECRET JOURNEY OF CULTURAL TREASURE

France confirmed that the London-based museum could borrow the tapestry last July during President Emmanuel Macron’s state visit to Britain as the guest of King Charles. The loan of such a cultural treasure is seen as a sign of closer ties between the countries after the discord caused by the 2016 Brexit vote. The 70-metre-long tapestry is the product of an earlier period of Anglo-French discord, woven in the



years after William the Conqueror, backed by a Norman-French army, took the English throne.

It will be on display in London from September until July 2027 and there will be further releases of tickets later on this year, the museum said. While the Bayeux Tapestry’s precise origins are obscure, it has been in France for the last 950 years.

It will be transported to England via the Channel Tunnel in the coming weeks, with details of exactly how the now fragile wool and linen tapestry will be moved kept secret.

The stitching’s detailed depiction of the build-up to William’s invasion at Hastings, and the brutal clash that followed against the army of Anglo-Saxon ruler King Harold, includes the scene of an arrow



hitting Harold in the eye. A special glass container, which the British Museum believes is the world’s longest showcase, has been made to display and protect the tapestry, and visitors will be able to view its entire length from above and also look at it up close.

— Reuters

FEATURES



SIHAM AL SAIDI

THE scent of freshly picked mangoes drifts through the warm summer air. Children weave between colourful market stalls, families sample homemade delicacies and farmers proudly share the fruits of months of hard work. It is a familiar scene at food festivals across the world, from Italy's renowned truffle fairs and France's celebrated wine festivals to Japan's seasonal fruit celebrations and Thailand's tropical fruit fairs, where thousands of visitors travel each year in search of authentic flavours and unforgettable cultural experiences. Today, Oman is writing its own chapter in that global story.

Seasonal events such as the North Al Batinah Mango Festival have evolved into far more than agricultural exhibitions. They are becoming cultural landmarks where food, heritage, tourism, and community come together, offering visitors an authentic taste of Oman's identity while creating new opportunities for local farmers and entrepreneurs.

At the first glance, visitors think that they arrive for the fruit only, yet they leave with something much richer.

Rows of vibrant mangoes and carefully harvested grapes reveal the remarkable diversity of Oman's farms, while local producers introduce visitors to traditional recipes, fresh juices, homemade sweets and innovative products inspired by the country's seasonal harvests. Every stall tells a story, not only of the land itself, but also of the families who have cultivated it for generations.

For farmers, the festivals represent more than a marketplace, they offer recognition, direct access to consumers and an opportunity to demonstrate the exceptional quality of Omani produce. At the same time, small businesses, home-based entrepreneurs and artisans find a valuable platform to showcase their creativity, transforming local harvests into products that reflect both tradition and innovation.

Equally important is the educational role these festivals play. As urban lifestyles increasingly distance younger generations from agriculture, such events reconnect children with the origins of their food. Interactive activities, cooking demonstrations, research findings and conversations with farmers help transform agriculture from an abstract concept into a living experience.

"For my children, this is more than a family outing," said Fatima Ali al Hosni, who visited the Mango Festival with her family. "They discover that every fruit has a story and that behind every harvest are people whose dedication deserves appreciation. It helps them value our farmers and our national heritage."

Another visitor, Turki al Saidi, believes the festivals strengthen bonds between people and place. "When we celebrate our local harvests, we celebrate ourselves," he said. "These festivals remind us that agriculture is not only an economic activity. In fact, it is part of who we are. They encourage young people to appreciate the land that has sustained our communities for generations."

The impact extends well beyond the festival grounds. Families travel between governorates, local restaurants



HOW FOOD FESTIVALS TELL OMAN'S STORY



From vibrant mango orchards to bustling festival stalls, Oman's seasonal food festivals are blossoming into celebrations of heritage, community and sustainable tourism. More than showcasing local harvests, they connect generations, support farmers and entrepreneurs, and tell the story of a nation through the flavours of its land.

welcome new customers, hotels accommodate weekend visitors and nearby heritage attractions benefit from increased tourism. What begins as a celebration of fruit quietly grows into a catalyst for local economic activity and community development.

Around the world, successful food festivals have become symbols of regional pride and sustainable tourism. Oman is steadily following the same path, demonstrating that its fertile valleys and orchards offer experiences every bit as memorable as those found abroad.

In the end, the true success of these festivals cannot be measured solely by the number of visitors or baskets of fruit sold. It lies in something far more lasting which are the memories they create, the traditions they preserve, the livelihoods they support and the powerful reminder that the story of a nation can often be told through the harvests of its land.

