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GERMANY RALLY TO BEAT IVORY COAST

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

IN BRIEF

PUBLIC REVENUES INCREASE BY 8 PER CENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance announced on Sunday the final account of the actual performance results of the State’s General Budget for the fiscal year 2025. The results closely aligned with the approved estimates at the beginning of the same year; public revenues were estimated at approximately RO 11.180 billion, and public spending was estimated at about RO 11.800 billion, resulting in an estimated projected deficit of around RO 620 million.

The actual financial performance of the State’s General Budget for 2025 indicated an 8 per cent increase in public revenues compared to the approved budget estimates, reaching RO 12.122 billion. This increase is attributed to the rise in oil and gas revenues.

DETAILS ON P13

SEVEN KILLED, 40 HOSPITALISED IN AMMONIA GAS LEAK

NEW DELHI: Seven people died and more than 40 were taken to hospital after an ammonia gas leak at a private seafood export facility near Tiruvallur district in India’s Tamil Nadu state, police said. The leak began at a seafood processing plant and quickly spread to the surrounding residential area, police said.

Some people reported breathing difficulties, while others suffered bleeding from the nose and mouth.

Police said 44 patients had been admitted to a nearby hospital, with seven confirmed dead and nine others in critical condition.

WORLD CUP 2026: MEN IN ACTION



Spain’s Lamine Yamal in action with Saudi Arabia’s Moteb Al Harbi. Spain beat Saudi Arabia 4-0. — Reuters

SEE ALSO P10

Date set for asset transfer to Social Protection Fund

MUSCAT: The Social Protection Fund has set a date for the completion of the transfer of ownership of assets from several pension funds to the Social Protection Fund, as part of the implementation of the unified pension and social protection system in the Sultanate of Oman.

Article 1 of Decision No (R/11/2026) stipulates that the effective date of the decision shall be the date of the completion of the transfer of ownership of assets

from seven pension funds to the Social Protection Fund. The funds are: the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund, the Royal Oman Police Pension Fund, the Royal Guard of Oman Pension Fund, the Sultan’s Special Force Pension Fund, the Internal Security Service Pension Fund, the Royal Office Pension Fund, and the Royal Court Employees Pension Fund.

Article 2 stipulates that the decision should come into effect

on the day following the date of its publication in the Official Gazette.

The decision marks an important organisational step for completing the procedures for transferring ownership of assets belonging to the covered pension funds to the Social Protection Fund, thereby enhancing the unification of the management of investment and financial assets related to pension systems within a unified institutional framework.

Vance hopes US, Iran can turn the page at ‘historic’ talks

Trump threatens to strike Iran over Hezbollah support



Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi (L) and Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif greet each other. — AFP

The negotiations opened against a backdrop of clashes in recent days between the Israeli army and Hezbollah in Lebanon, threatening to derail the preliminary peace deal.

to chop but we’re going to keep on working at it.”

Vance asserted that Trump and the United States had done more to stop the conflict in Lebanon than any other country in recent months. He said he hopes Washington and Tehran can reset their relationship at the start of what he called “historic” talks.

Vance, flanked by US negotiators Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, was at the luxury Burgenstock resort overlooking Lake Lucerne for talks

with Tehran’s negotiators on the preliminary US-Iran deal to halt the Middle East war.

“This is a historic meeting,” Vance said in the negotiation room, set up with for the US team on one side and for the Iranian delegation on the other.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf were leading the talks for Tehran.

The discussions are being mediated by Pakistan and Qatar.

The negotiation table was set up in a U-shape, AFP journalists in the room saw, with Qatar and the United States on one side, Pakistan and Iran on the other — all with three seats each. Pakistan and Qatar each also had one sat in the middle, at the head of the table.

What Trump “has asked us to do is turn over a new leaf to transform our relationship with the people of Iran”, said Vance. “That is certainly our goal,” said Vance.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israeli forces would remain in southern Lebanon “as long as necessary”, while also vowing to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

“We will remain in the security zone in southern Lebanon for as long as necessary to protect the cherished residents of the north and all the citizens of Israel... Nothing will alter that commitment,” Netanyahu said. — AFP

Europe braces for heatwave as temperatures approach 40°C

A severe heatwave gripped much of Europe on Sunday, with temperatures nearing 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), prompting nationwide warnings, transport disruption and signs of strain on wildlife and at tourist hotspots.

The heat surge on June 21, the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere and typically the start of the three hottest months of the year, raised concerns of an early and persistent onset of extreme

conditions.

After several days of temperatures above 35°C, Italian authorities issued a red alert for June 21 in eight cities, including Bologna, Florence, Milan, and Turin.

In Rome, pilgrims in St Peter’s Square used parasols and umbrellas to shield themselves from the blazing sun as the Pope led a traditional Sunday prayer from a window of the Apostolic Palace.

The spike in temperatures is being



Meteorologists say the system is creating a so-called ‘heat dome’ trapping hot air over western and central Europe. — AFP

driven by a mass of hot air moving north from the Sahara, fuelled by a strong high-pressure system known as the “African anticyclone.”

Meteorologists say the system is creating a so-called “heat dome,” trapping hot air over western and central Europe and allowing temperatures to build day after day. Madrid residents and tourists used fans and drank plenty of cold drinks as they browsed the city’s famous El Rastro flea market.

“I’m dressed all in white because

it’s so hot, and I’m carrying my little electric fan everywhere I go,” said Haily San Cesario, a 22-year-old engineer from Miami.

Spain’s AEMET weather agency issued red and orange alerts across several regions, warning of temperatures exceeding 39°C to 40°C across large parts of the Iberian Peninsula and Mallorca, and said the heatwave would last at least until midweek. The extreme heat has begun to disrupt infrastructure. — Reuters

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SHORT TAKES



Dr Al Harrasi also honoured the employees of the Department of Communication and Media in appreciation of their efforts and contributions in supporting media work. — ONA

INFORMATION
MINISTER HONOURS
MEDIA PERSONNEL

SUR: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, honoured on Sunday in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South a number of students from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Sur who participated in the media gathering titled “Al Sharqiyah South: A Sustainable Impact.”

He also honoured the employees of the Department of Communication and Media in the governorate in appreciation of their efforts and contributions in supporting media work.

During his visit to the governorate, he was briefed on the most prominent media achievements, initiatives, and programmes implemented by the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate in the field of media and communication. He also reviewed the ongoing efforts exerted to enhance the presence of the media message.

This took place during the Minister of Information’s meeting with Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South.

The meeting reviewed the current media efforts within the governorate and discussed a number of topics related to developing media work and enhancing its vital role in supporting local development. — ONA

NCSI TO LAUNCH
DATA MANAGEMENT
APP ‘ARTAJ’



The initiative is in pursuance of efforts made by the NCSI to consolidate the national data system.

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will launch an interactive data management application codenamed ‘Artaj’ (great gates), which serves as a coordination portal for the State’s Administrative Apparatus or a central data repository project. The inaugural ceremony will be held in Muscat on Wednesday this week (June 24, 2026).

The initiative is in pursuance of efforts made by the NCSI to consolidate the national data system and the culture of statistics, while at the same time utilising modern technologies to support development and evidence-based decision-making, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

‘Artaj’ application is also expected to contribute to furnishing an interactive educational experience aimed at developing statistical awareness among school children. Salient features of the project include the professional exchange of reports, publications, studies and government projects, as well as the publishing of the outcome of surveys and public opinion polls. — ONA

OAQAE reviews efforts to enhance institutional efficiency

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQAE), in its first meeting held on Sunday in its new formation, reviewed the competencies, roles, activities and strategic projects of the Authority. This reflects its efforts in enhancing the education quality assurance system and elevating performance levels in educational institutions across their various stages.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour and Chairman

of the Authority’s Board of Directors. The Board also reviewed the internal regulations of the Board of Directors, which organise the Board’s work, its competences, and decision-making mechanisms, thereby contributing to enhancing the efficiency of institutional work and achieving the Authority’s targets.

During its meeting, the Board approved the Authority’s estimated budget for the year 2027, after reviewing its most prominent pillars, programmes and future projects, in a manner

that supports the implementation of the Authority’s plans and strategic priorities.

Furthermore, the Board was briefed on the Authority’s strategic plan for the period 2026-2030, along with the strategic directions and objectives it encompasses. These seek to develop the education quality assurance system, enhance institutional efficiency, and raise the level of services and initiatives provided by the Authority to keep pace with national directions and Oman Vision 2040.



The board approved the authority’s estimated budget for the year 2027. — ONA

Barka emerging as Oman’s
new waterfront destination

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

THE Wilayat of Barka is witnessing growing momentum along its coastline, with the Al Muraisi waterfront project nearing completion, while Barka Marina stands as an integrated investment addition strengthening the wilayat’s position as a rising tourism destination on the Al Batinah coast.

Barka Marina is designed as a comprehensive destination, featuring 450 indoor and outdoor retail units, specialised markets for fish, meat, poultry, fruits and vegetables, restaurants, entertainment facilities, electronic games and a luxury hotel, in addition to a marina, water sports facilities and shops dedicated to local and heritage products.

Hilal al Fulaiti, Director of Barka Municipality Department, said the Al Muraisi waterfront project is proceeding according to its set timeline, with a large proportion of infrastructure and core facilities already completed.

He added that the project reflects the municipality’s



Barka projects affirm a growing direction toward investment in coastal frontage, reshaping its identity as a rising coastal destination.

direction toward developing waterfront areas that serve residents and visitors alike, noting that they look forward to its opening soon as a distinctive addition for the Wilayat of Barka and its visitors, contributing to strengthening its position as a

promising tourism destination on the Al Batinah coast.

Said al Yahmadi, member of the Municipal Council representing the Wilayat of Barka, confirmed that these projects comprise an integrated complex of commercial, recreational and

tourism facilities that make them a comprehensive destination serving all segments of society.

He added that they embody the pillars of Oman Vision 2040 in diversifying sources of income and developing the tourism sector, investing in Barka’s distinguished coastal location to create sustainable economic opportunities that benefit the local community and strengthen the national economy.

Malak al Saadi, a Sultan Qaboos University graduate and social media influencer, said the development projects taking shape across Oman reflect an ambitious vision to enhance quality of life and develop tourism destinations across Oman’s governorates and wilayats.

She described the Al Muraisi waterfront as a prime example of this development momentum, one that will offer residents and visitors a modern space to enjoy the beauty of Oman’s coastline.

Taken together, these projects affirm a growing direction toward investment in Barka’s coastal frontage, reshaping its identity and establishing the wilayat as a rising coastal destination on Oman’s tourism map.

Ensuring maritime navigational safety

MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), represented by Oman National Hydrographic Office, is marking the World Hydrography Day, which falls on June 21 every year.

The celebration aims to highlight the importance of the science of hydrography in ensuring maritime navigational safety and preserving the marine environment to achieve the sustainable development of oceans, given that digital transformation has become one of the fundamental pillars for developing vital sectors and enhancing the efficiency of data-driven services.

The field of hydrography is among the areas witnessing



RNO, represented by Oman National Hydrographic Office, marks World Hydrography Day, which falls on June 21 every year. — ONA

a rapid transition toward digitalisation through the development of mechanisms for collecting, managing, and exchanging marine data in accordance with the latest standards and technologies. This transformation is not

limited to merely enhancing maritime navigational safety; it extends to supporting the blue economy, promoting environmental sustainability and empowering decision-makers with accurate data. This aligns with the

strategic objectives of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), which has focused on supporting digital transformation, developing the universal hydrographic data model, and enhancing the use of hydrographic data and modern technologies in navigation and the management of the marine environment.

This year’s celebration comes under the theme “Transforming How Ocean Data is Shared”. The theme focuses on the rapid development in the management of marine spatial data and how it is shared with sectors, confirming transformation of data from traditional into a digital element. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The workshop reviewed the strategic importance of the Musandam Governorate. — ONA

MUSANDAM DISCUSSES STRATEGIC RISK DOCUMENT

KHASAB: Musandam Governor’s Office organised on Sunday a workshop for the final review of the governorate’s strategic risk document. This comes within the framework of efforts aimed at enhancing institutional readiness and consolidating the risk management methodology, in preparation for approving the document in its final form to support the efficiency of decision-making and elevate the capacity to handle future challenges and risks.

Khadija bint Ali al Harfi, Head of the Risk Management Department at the Musandam Governor’s Office, stated that the workshop represents a fundamental stage preceding the approval of the final document.

She noted that it contributes to enhancing the governorate’s readiness and raising its capacity to confront potential risks and challenges according to a scientific and organised methodology.

The workshop reviewed the strategic importance of the Musandam Governorate, as it is one of the governorates with a unique geographical location overlooking the Strait of Hormuz. — ONA

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS INNOVATION, AI



SUHAR: The activities of the Summer Programme for Innovation and Artificial Intelligence in Al Batinah North Governorate commenced at the Liwa Science and Innovation Center.

Organised by the Directorate-General of Education in Al Batinah North Governorate, as part of the “Our Summer is Entrepreneurship and Creativity” summer centres in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, the programme features the participation of approximately 125 male and female students and will continue until the second of next July.

Dr Khalid bin Mohammed al Saadi, Head of the Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Department at the Directorate-General of Education in Al Batinah North, explained that the programme comes within the framework of enhancing students’ skills in the fields of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This is achieved by offering a diverse range of applied training workshops that combine programming, educational robotics, drones, 3D design and scientific research. — ONA

RAO excels at catering exercise 2026 in UK

LONDON: Represented by the Directorate of Catering, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) participated in the annual International Catering Exercise 2026 that was recently organised by the United Kingdom (UK) in Grantham town for six days.

The RAO’s catering team won an overall 4th place in the catering corps competition, in addition to various first places in different



RAO’s catering team won an overall 4th place in the catering corps competition.

individual contests.

The RAO’s participation aimed to enhance the efficiency of its catering teams and to gain further expertise from global participants in logistical and administrative specialities. The event offered the RAO an opportunity to cope with exceptional circumstances that require top readiness and high efficiency of administrative systems in military arenas. — ONA

Digital lock-pick: Illegal access to passwords

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

OBTAINING A PASSWORD, security code, access token, or any other means of entry into an information system or website without legal authorisation constitutes a cybercrime punishable under Omani law, legal experts have stressed.

With the rapid expansion of digital services and the growing reliance on electronic platforms across government institutions, businesses and individuals, the protection of digital credentials has become a fundamental component of cybersecurity and information protection.

Legal practitioners note that passwords and security credentials serve as the primary gateway to electronic accounts, information systems and online services. Any unauthorised attempt to obtain or access such credentials exposes individuals and organisations to significant risks, including data breaches, financial losses, identity theft and unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

Cybercriminals often employ a range of methods to acquire login credentials unlawfully. These include phishing attacks, fraudulent websites, malicious software, social engineering techniques and the exploitation of technical vulnerabilities.

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Cybercriminals often employ a range of methods to acquire login credentials unlawfully. These include phishing attacks, fraudulent websites, malicious software, social engineering techniques and the exploitation of technical vulnerabilities.

According to legal provisions governing cybercrime in the Sultanate of Oman, intentionally obtaining, without lawful right, a password, code, secret number or any other means used to access an information system, website or information technology facility is a criminal offence.

The law prescribes penalties that may include imprisonment for up to one year, a fine of up to RO 100,000, or either of the two penalties,

Cybercriminals often employ a range of methods to acquire login credentials unlawfully. These include phishing attacks, fraudulent websites, malicious software, social engineering techniques and the exploitation of technical vulnerabilities.



Legal practitioners note that passwords and security credentials serve as the primary gateway to electronic accounts.

reflecting the seriousness with which such offences are treated and the importance of safeguarding digital infrastructure and personal data.

Lawyer Khalid bin Hamad al Ghailani stressed that “protecting passwords and secret codes is no longer just a technical matter, but has become a legal obligation that enjoys clear legislative protection. Obtaining any means that enables access to an information system without legal basis is a criminal act, due to what may result in a violation of privacy or harm to the financial and commercial interests of individuals and institutions.”

Legal experts further explain that criminal liability may arise from the unauthorised acquisition of access credentials itself, even before any subsequent misuse of the information occurs. The legislation seeks to protect the confidentiality and integrity of information systems from the earliest stage of unlawful interference.

As Oman continues to advance its digital transformation agenda and expand electronic services, maintaining public trust in digital platforms remains a national priority. Ensuring the security of information systems requires not

only robust legal frameworks but also increased public awareness of cyber risks and responsible online behaviour.

Experts advise users to adopt strong passwords, enable multi-factor authentication, avoid sharing confidential login information and remain vigilant against suspicious messages and fraudulent links.

Organisations are also encouraged to strengthen cybersecurity measures, conduct regular system updates and provide ongoing awareness programmes for employees.

The growing digital landscape presents significant opportunities for innovation and economic development. However, preserving the security of electronic systems and protecting sensitive information remain shared responsibilities that require cooperation between individuals, institutions and regulatory authorities.

By criminalising unauthorised access to passwords and digital credentials, Omani legislation reinforces the protection of privacy, strengthens cybersecurity and contributes to the creation of a safer and more trusted digital environment.

Programme highlights basic pillars of public policy

MUSCAT: The tenth edition of the “Basic Pillars Guiding State Public Policy” programme, titled “Economic Diplomacy,” commenced on Sunday at the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry.

The programme features the participation of several officials and specialists from various government entities and will continue until the 25th of this month.

The opening of the programme was held under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs.

Organised by the Ministry

of Labour in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, represented by the Diplomatic Academy, the programme comes within the framework of national efforts aimed at enhancing awareness of the state’s strategic directions, consolidating an understanding of national priorities, and empowering national cadres to actively contribute to achieving the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

Choosing “Economic Diplomacy” as the theme for this edition reflects the growing prominence of economic dimensions in international relations and



The programme features the participation of several officials and specialists from various government entities. — ONA

the pivotal role that economic diplomacy undertakes in supporting sustainable development and enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy. This is achieved through attracting investments, building

local and international partnerships, and opening new horizons for economic and commercial cooperation, as well as transferring modern knowledge and technologies and utilising them to support growth and economic

diversification trajectories.

In his speech during the opening of the programme, Shaikh Humaid bin Ali al Maani, Head of the Diplomatic Academy at the Foreign Ministry, affirmed that the programme represents an important national framework for understanding the foundations upon which the state’s public policies are based. It also embodies the strategic vision that guides various political, economic, social and developmental sectors.

He explained that the programme aims to consolidate a set of principles

and pillars upon which the decision-making process is founded. At the forefront of these is achieving a balance between economic development and social stability, reinforcing the principles of justice and equality, and consolidating the rule of law, thereby contributing to building a prosperous and stable society capable of keeping pace with regional and international changes. He pointed out that these pillars stem from a comprehensive vision that places the human being at the core of the development process. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



KABEER YOUSUF

ELECTRIC vehicles are steadily gaining traction in the Sultanate of Oman, marking a significant shift in consumer behaviour and the country’s mobility landscape.

What was once considered a niche or experimental choice is now rapidly evolving into a mainstream alternative, driven by economic, environmental and policy factors.

Recent data shows strong growth in EV adoption, with registrations increasing sharply – from just a few hundred vehicles in 2021 to over 2,000 EVs by late 2025.

Earlier figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) also highlight a 300-per cent surge in EV numbers between 2023 and 2024, signalling how quickly interest is building across the country.

The major reasons behind such traction are considered to be lower fuel and maintenance costs, a quiet, smooth driving experience, and increasing environmental awareness.

While the government is actively rolling out infrastructure, the scarcity of chargers along inter-city highways and the concentration of existing units in major urban centres create range anxiety for prospective buyers.

A major challenge for the low rate of EV penetration, according to Abdulah al Khadouri, an EV user, is the geographic concentration of the public chargers in the city.

To ease some of the challenges, the

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has deployed 160 charging points across the country, with ongoing expansion efforts to increase the public charging network to over 350 stations by 2027.

“Additionally, the government uses a unified national platform called Shahin, which allows drivers to find and pay for charges across different private networks with a single login in order to streamline charging access.”

Private charger providers are also on a mission to expand the charging networks and the results are slowly visible over the past 2 to 3 years.

“Shell Oman has been playing a critical role in addressing this infrastructure gap, positioning itself as a key enabler of the EV transition, and a number of initiatives are currently ongoing towards accelerating EV infrastructure in the country,” says a Shell Oman spokesperson.

From the industrial perspective, Oman has been accelerating its electric mobility ambitions through expanding charging infrastructure, rising electric vehicle (EV) adoption and strategic investments in battery-related industries, reinforcing the country’s broader goals of sustainability and economic diversification.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has plans to install EV charging stations at two prominent hotels in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar – Anantara Al Jabal Al Akhdar Resort and Alila Jabal Akhdar, besides further expanding the network to 350

charging stations by 2027, supporting the country’s transition towards sustainable and low-emission transport.

The Muscat Municipality has also expanded the number of EV charging stations across the governorate, with new installations at several locations, including Al Khuwair Square and the Green Walkway in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

The Sultanate of Oman currently has around 2,200 electric vehicles supported by 160 charging stations, including 49 in Muscat, 12 in Dhofar, 10 in North Al Batinah, 8 in Al Dakhiliyah, and 4 in Al Wusta.

Additionally, the key Shell Oman EV initiatives in Oman include a strategic partnership with Porsche Oman to expand EV charging across the country.

Shell Oman currently has 15 EV chargers across the Sultanate of Oman and has an expansion plan nationwide in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which will ensure accessibility in urban centres, covering highways and travel routes, a customer-centric EV ecosystem focusing on providing reliable, scalable charging solutions, digital tools and subscription-based charging services.

WHILE THE GOVERNMENT IS ACTIVELY ROLLING OUT INFRASTRUCTURE, THE SCARCITY OF CHARGERS ALONG INTER-CITY HIGHWAYS AND THE CONCENTRATION OF EXISTING UNITS IN MAJOR URBAN CENTRES CREATE RANGE ANXIETY FOR PROSPECTIVE BUYERS.

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SHORT TAKES



Tech Oman successfully concluded one of the country's most vibrant and inspiring technology gatherings dedicated to empowering women.

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

MUSCAT: Tech Oman successfully concluded one of the country's most vibrant and inspiring technology gatherings dedicated to empowering and celebrating women in the technology sector. The inaugural Women in Tech event brought together a packed ballroom filled with passionate professionals, aspiring leaders, students, entrepreneurs, and their families for an evening of inspiration, recognition, networking and entertainment.

The event featured an exceptional lineup of more than 12 accomplished women leaders who participated as panellists and moderators, sharing their experiences, challenges, and insights on leadership, innovation, entrepreneurship, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and the future of technology.

Tariq al Barwani, Founder and President of Tech Oman, said: "This event was never intended to be just another conference—it was designed to celebrate the remarkable women who are transforming Oman's technology landscape while inspiring many more to follow in their footsteps. Seeing a ballroom filled with passionate women, their families, industry leaders, and supporters sends a powerful message that Oman is ready to champion greater diversity in technology."

Following the overwhelming response from participants and partners, Tech Oman plans to make the Women in Tech event an annual flagship initiative, continuing to celebrate achievements, encourage collaboration, and inspire more women to pursue leadership roles across the technology sector.

INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY MARKED IN MUSCAT



The Embassy of India in Muscat hosted the 12th International Day of Yoga celebrations on Sunday.

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India in Muscat hosted the 12th International Day of Yoga celebrations with a special event held at the embassy premises in the presence of Ambassador-designate Shri Prashant Pise.

The programme commenced with the Common Yoga Protocol performed collectively by the participants gathered, showcased by advanced yoga demonstrators with dynamic asanas, highlighting the growing popularity of 'Yogasana' and yoga practices within Oman.

The Ambassador-designate of India to the Sultanate of Oman read out the message by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on the occasion.

In his message, the Prime Minister emphasised yoga's global appeal as a path to health, harmony, and balanced living. Referring to this year's IDY theme, "Yoga for Healthy Ageing", he highlighted the importance of preventive healthcare and holistic well-being, noting that regular practice of yoga strengthens physical vitality, enhances mental resilience, and promotes emotional balance.

Turtle revisits Masirah 12 years after first being tagged

MASIRAH: Specialists from the Environment Authority's centre in the Wilayat of Masirah, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, recently spotted a loggerhead female turtle during regular monitoring of the beach in Al Aijah area on the island.

Ghassi bin Hamad al Farsi, Supervisor of the Environmental Monitoring Department at the Authority's Environment Centre in Masirah, said that the turtle had been tagged at the same location 12 years before, during the 2014 nesting season.

The spotting of the turtle consolidates the records of this species of sea turtles along the



The spotting of the turtle consolidates the records of this species of sea turtles along the shores of Masirah. — ONA

shores of Masirah.

Al Farsi pointed out that observation of the turtle's return to the beach affirms a scientifically established habit in the behaviour of this species of marine creatures. Loggerhead turtles show strong attachment to their original nesting sites, which is an innate instinct known as site fidelity.

He explained that the monitoring of the loggerhead turtle indicates that the female is still in an active reproductive state, more than a decade after it was last documented.

The documentation forms part of the 2026 nesting season's field data on the sandgrouse species. — ONA

2025 KHAREEF DHOFAR RAINFALL ABOVE AVERAGE

AS KHAREEF DHOFAR "Monsoon season" begins, a new report has recorded above-average rainfall for the season of 2025, with positive water indicators across Dhofar Governorate, including enhanced groundwater recharge, increased spring flows and improved water collection in surface storage dams.

The annual Khareef season report, issued by the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate, showed that most monitoring stations recorded rainfall exceeding seasonal averages by 11 to 91 per cent, with the Kanzir station in Salalah recording the highest total of 731.6 mm.

Eng Ali bin Bakheet Beit Said, Director of the Water Resources Department, said the low pressure system that affected Dhofar from 15 to 25 August 2025 boosted rainfall totals, activated wadi flows and waterfalls and enhanced groundwater recharge.

He added that hydrological analysis showed a positive response from groundwater reservoirs, with rising water levels and increased spring flows following peak rainfall in July and August.

He explained that total flow from the governorate's main springs reached about 13.4 million cubic metres during the season, while the average flow of the Razat spring recorded 322 litres per second, exceeding its ten-year average.

He said that surface dam storage also increased, with total stored



The total flow from the governorate's main springs reached about 13.4 million cubic metres during the season, while the average flow of the Razat spring recorded 322 litres per second

ENG ALI BIN BAKHEET BEIT SAID



Khareef season's importance extends beyond rainfall totals to its role in sustaining groundwater recharge and spring flows. —ONA

water reaching 13,953 cubic metres compared to 11,177 cubic metres in the 2024 season, improving water storage efficiency and the use of surface runoff. He affirmed that the Khareef season's importance extends beyond rainfall totals to its role in sustaining groundwater recharge and spring flows, which are vital to water security and environmental development in Dhofar Governorate.

He explained that the report was based on data from the governorate's hydrological monitoring network, which tracks rainfall distribution and the response of groundwater and springs to climatic variables, supporting informed water resource management decisions.

He concluded that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues to develop the monitoring system, expand databases, enhance scientific studies on water resources, and improve water harvesting facilities to support integrated water management, adapt to climate change, and advance water security and sustainability targets.

The Khareef Dhofar season is one of Oman's most significant climatic phenomena, supporting water resources, vegetation cover and ecosystem sustainability through drizzle, low clouds and fog that recharge groundwater, sustain spring flows and activate wadis and waterfalls. — ONA

Children's freedom or parents' decisions?

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 21

As the summer arrives, families are wondering how their children will spend the long break. Hence, parents have various options to manage their free time, where some of them are enrolling them in courses, camps and training programmes.

For these families, the summer break is an opportunity to invest in children's skills, talents, and personal growth. However, they usually face difficulties choosing the best programme or activity due to the countless available options.

Moreover, the confusion in households is originated from the challenge to establish a balance between parental guidance and the freedom of children that allows them to explore their interests.

Fatma al Balushi, a mother



For these families, the summer break is an opportunity to invest in children's skills, talents, and personal growth.

of three, says, "I believe parents should lead the decision, especially for younger children, they do not always understand what will benefit them in the future. We need to help them choose activities that develop their skills."

On the other hand, other families see a substantial benefit in giving their children the freedom to enjoy the summer break and join any activity or

programme that interests them.

Mohammed al Omairi, a father of two teenagers, argues that giving children the choice is essential. "When children choose activities they genuinely enjoy, they become more committed and motivated. Forcing them into programmes often leads to frustration and boredom," he says. Likewise, teenagers feel appreciated when they are involved in the decision-making.

Turki Ali, a 15 years old teenager, expressed, "I like it when my parents suggest options and then let me decide, it makes me feel responsible and respected."

However, it is critical to note that complete freedom may not always be the healthiest option. Some children tend to spend much of their summer on screens browsing through social media or playing video games. Accordingly, it comes a concern for many parents, which leads them to restricting their activities during the long break.

Perhaps the real issue is not who gets to decide but how the decision is made. In other words, gaining the ultimate benefits of summer programmes and activities relies on partnership than control. Parents can provide guidance, opportunities, and set limits, based on their children's interests, passions and goals.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A medical student speaks to a police personnel upon her arrival to appear for the NEET-UG re-examination in New Delhi. — AFP

TIGHT SECURITY AS INDIA HOLDS EXAM RETEST

NEW DELHI: India's 2.2 million aspiring medical students sit a re-examination under tight security, after the last test was scrapped following a paper leak that triggered widespread outrage. The failure of the hugely competitive exam, along with a separate marking fiasco in high school tests, sparked an outcry and fuelled youth protests demanding the education minister's resignation.

The authorities say they have deployed more than 200,000 officials, including police, and restricted the Telegram messaging app. The National Testing Agency (NTA) said it had put in a place a "multi-layered security framework to ensure a fair and transparent examination". That includes biometric authentication, AI-enabled camera surveillance and GPS tracking of question papers, it said.

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), the gateway to India's medical colleges, is taken annually by millions of candidates competing for just over 100,000 undergraduate seats. The intense competition has fuelled a vast coaching industry and created opportunities for organised criminal networks seeking to profit from paper leaks and exam fraud. The leak prompted a backlash from students and parents after last month's exam was scrapped, with Indian media reporting suicides of some teenagers.

India's Central Bureau of Investigation has arrested the alleged kingpin behind the leak, identifying him as a chemistry lecturer. The NTA said that messaging apps were used "by cheating rackets to defraud candidates" by sharing leaked questions. — AFP

IRAQ PROJECTS OIL PRODUCTION TO RETURN TO NRORMAL

BAGHDAD: Iraqi authorities predict oil production will return to peacetime levels "within one to two months", state media reported, after the Middle East war caused exports to plummet. The war and Iran's ensuing blockade of the Strait of Hormuz choked off shipments and prompted production cuts in key oil-producing countries, including Iraq, shaking world energy markets. But a deal agreed this week between Washington and Tehran to end the fighting has offered some relief, despite follow-up negotiations having stalled.

The spokesman for Iraq's oil ministry, Salim Farhoud, said on Friday that "we can return within one to two months to the previous production levels". "The fields that reduced their production capacity have currently begun raising this capacity," he said.

Before the war broke out in late February, Iraq exported about 3.5 million barrels per day of oil, the majority of it via the Hormuz Strait.

But the OPEC founding member was forced to halt production in most of its oil fields as reservoirs filled up, limiting its exports to routes via neighbouring Türkiye and Syria. The vital strait began reopening this week following the signing of the initial agreement between Iran and the United States. — AFP

ATTACKING ATTEMPT

UKMTO receives report of tanker incident



United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said that a tanker reported being approached by a skiff carrying five armed individuals about 50 nautical miles southeast of Al Shihr, Yemen.

The armed people appeared to be attempting to board the vessel, prompting the tanker to conduct evasive manoeuvres and alter course away from the skiff. The vessel has since resumed its voyage to its next port of call, with both the ship and crew reported safe. — Reuters

MARCHERS IN PRAGUE PROTEST GOVT’S MEDIA FUNDING CHANGES

PRAGUE: Thousands marched in Prague on Sunday to protest against the Czech government's planned overhaul of a decades-old financing system for public media, which critics say cuts funding and opens the way for political interference. The protest came a day before workers at public broadcasters Czech Television and Czech Radio plan to strike in protest at the financing changes, affecting programming but leaving the stations on air.

The government, led by Prime Minister Andrej Babis' populist ANO party and including right-wing and far-right parties,

agreed last week to end licence fees that are the main source of funding for public television and radio stations. It says most of the public do not want to pay the fees charged to households and businesses, saying it will instead finance the public broadcasters from the state budget. Critics say this would be an attack on their independence.

"Media does not belong to politics," Mikulas Minar, of the Million Moments (Milion Chvilek) group that organised the protest, told the crowd at the start of the march.

The protest route was shortened

due to the heatwave hitting Prague and areas across Europe. CTK news agency estimated thousands took part, marching through neighbourhoods on the way to the Czech Television building and carrying banners saying "Hands off public media".

The government's changes will return funding to levels seen in 2008 to 2024, before a rare fee increase initiated by the last government took place in 2025.

That would mean a 15% cut in financing. Czech Television's chief said this week that could mean forced layoffs of about 300 to 500 of the station's 2,900 staff. — Reuters

ISRAELI THREATS ON LEBANON CONTINUE

ISRAELI SOLDIERS are free to act without restriction to eliminate threats in Lebanon, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday, adding troops remained in position in what Israel refers to as a security zone. A ceasefire with Hezbollah took effect on Friday after months of escalating violence, but on Saturday, Israeli strikes killed at least 20 people in Lebanon, Lebanon's state news agency NNA reported.

Israel said the strikes were a response to projectiles fired by the group at its troops in southern Lebanon, prompting attacks on what an Israeli official described as "Hezbollah targets". A Hezbollah official said that the group was committed to the ceasefire as long as Israel adheres to it, adding that Israeli forces do not have the right to freedom of movement in south Lebanon. The official said Hezbollah forces have not fired on Israeli troops since 6:30 pm on Saturday.

Security sources said that Israel had also launched no major strikes on Lebanon since the same time. That represents the longest spell without major strikes since the war in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel began on March 2. When asked about the last time Israel fired on Lebanon or engaged with Hezbollah, the Israeli military declined to provide a "specific

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A Lebanese man looks under the gap in the rubble of a flattened building destroyed by the Israeli military, in the southern city of Nabatieh. — AFP

time". The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request to comment on the claim they have ceased firing after 6:30 pm on Saturday.

Iranian officials have said Lebanon is the focal point for Sunday's peace talks with the United States in Switzerland after Washington and Tehran signed a framework to halt the war between them that began at the end of February, escalating tension across the region. The Israeli military invaded parts of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah maintains it has the right to fight Israeli forces in Lebanon, but would halt attacks on northern

Israel. Katz said Israeli troops would remain in all positions in what it calls a security zone, which extends about 10 km into southern Lebanon. Lebanese Civil Defence said that 20 people had been killed by Israeli strikes in Lebanon on Saturday, hours after a truce there took effect.

Israel said it was responding to attacks from Hezbollah, while the group said it would not allow Israel "freedom of movement" in Lebanon. Lebanon's state news agency NNA said Israeli warplanes and drones had struck locations across southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley on Saturday, both Hezbollah strongholds. — Reuters

COLOMBIANS VOTE IN PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF

BOGOTA: Colombians began voting in a presidential runoff on Sunday, choosing between a hard-right, White House-backed lawyer and a leftist senator to decide the fate of a stumbling peace process and strained ties with Washington. Up to 41 million voters will choose between frontrunner Abelardo de la Espriella and his leftist rival Ivan Cepeda.

Security issues dominated a campaign marred by guerrilla bomb attacks and the murder of a leading conservative presidential candidate.

De la Espriella, a dual US-Colombian national who calls himself "The Tiger," won May's first-round vote by promising to wage war on drug-running guerrilla groups who refused to sign a 2016 peace accord. He has won President Donald Trump's "complete and total endorsement" and hopes to ride a right-wing wave that has swept rightist candidates to power in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras. — AFP

NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Ethiopian prime minister’s party easily wins



Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party won parliamentary majority in this month's elections, results released by the national election board on Sunday showed. Abiy's party was widely expected to dominate the elections against a fragmented opposition. Abiy, who was appointed in 2018 following mass protests against the long-ruling EPRDF coalition, created the Prosperity Party the following year. The party won more than 90% of the available seats in the last parliamentary elections in 2021. — Reuters

TRAGIC VIOLENCE

Suspected groups kill 11 farmers in Nigeria



Suspected groups killed 11 farmers in two separate attacks in northeastern Nigeria this weekend. Attackers rounded up seven farmers in Kuwawu village, in Borno State, and slit their throats. They blamed militants from the IS West Africa Province (ISWAP). The farmers had gone to the village from the nearby garrison town of Monguno to prepare their fields for sowing. Earlier the same day, four farmers were reportedly killed on their farms outside Kross Kauwa. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Police officers recover a flag tied with wires from a blockade point on the La Paz-Oruro highway. — Reuters

BOLIVIA LAWMAKERS BACK EMERGENCY TO EASE CRISIS

LA PAZ: Bolivia began showing signs of returning to normalcy on Sunday, a day after President Rodrigo Paz declared a state of emergency to resolve a 50-day social crisis that had blocked the nation's main highways. Early on Sunday, the Legislative Assembly overwhelmingly approved Paz's decree, which aimed to restore transit and supply essential goods after protesting groups cut off key roads for weeks, stranding trucks and choking supplies of food, fuel and medicines to many areas.

Sunday's vote in congress coincided with several breakthroughs. In Santa Cruz, officials and protest leaders signed an agreement to lift a critical blockade in the town of San Julian. Meanwhile, a prominent campesino federation in La Paz announced a pause in its protests, although it said the group's demands still stood.

While police and military forces remain deployed, the national highway authority reported that there were no active blockades remaining related to protests. However, many roads require significant cleanup and repair after damage sustained during the protests. The conflict erupted after Paz, in office since November, abruptly cut longstanding fuel subsidies to shrink the deficit amid a worsening dollar crunch and talks with the International Monetary Fund. Despite later steps to stabilise fuel prices and reverse unpopular land reforms, protests intensified, with unions demanding wage increases, an end to fuel and dollar shortages, and Paz's resignation. — Reuters

HALF OF FRANCE ON HEAT RED ALERT



Half of France will be placed under red alert, the government said, as temperatures were expected to climb further amid a fierce heatwave. The highest heat warning was to be issued for 49 of France's 96 mainland departments, or administrative regions, while another 40 departments will be under orange alert, according to Meteo-France. Weather service Meteo-France warned that temperatures could reach as high as 41 °C in some places as France finds itself at the epicentre of a heat. — AFP

DUTCH PM MAKES FORMAL APOLOGY TO MOLUCCANS

THE HAGUE: Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten on Sunday issued a formal state apology to members of the Moluccan community for their decades-long mistreatment by the Netherlands after Indonesia won independence from colonisation. Many Moluccans, from the so-called "spice islands" in eastern Indonesia, fought for the Dutch colonial army during the post-World War II struggle for independence.

After Indonesia gained independence in 1949, around 12,500 Moluccans were brought to the Netherlands in a state-

organised transfer to escape reprisals.

They were supposed to stay only briefly before returning to an independent country, as part of negotiations at the time between the Dutch government and Indonesia. However, the Dutch reneged on their promise to repatriate them and they were housed in dire conditions, with little attempt to find them jobs or integrate them into broader Dutch society.

Unveiling a monument to commemorate that dark period of Dutch history, a visibly moved Jetten told hundreds of Moluccans

gathered in Rotterdam that it was "high time" to apologise. "For the inadequate reception and housing. For being unseen and abandoned. For the unfulfilled longing for home. "I realise the injustice cannot be suddenly removed with apologies. We cannot change the course of history and the reality of today with a few sentences," said Jetten. "But I do hope that the words I just spoke are perceived as a form of recognition and an act of historical justice for you," he told members of the community, many of them clutching family photos of first-generation Moluccans now dead. — AFP

Ukrainian fresh strikes on Crimea pause fuel sales

FOUR PEOPLE were killed and fuel sales were suspended in Russian-occupied Crimea, the Moscow-backed authorities there said on Sunday, after a massive Ukrainian barrage hit the Black Sea peninsula. Ukraine said it targeted military and energy facilities in Crimea — Moscow's key logistics base for its four-year military offensive — in one of the biggest attacks on the peninsula in recent months.

"As a result of the enemy's drone attack on the Kerch peninsula, unfortunately, there are casualties among the civilian population," said Russia-backed Crimea governor Sergey Aksyonov, referring to the part of Crimea that borders Russia. "According to the latest information, four people were killed, 28 were wounded," he added. "Today, June 21, starting from 09:00am, fuel sales at Crimean petrol stations have been suspended," said Aksyonov in a separate statement, adding that fuel would only be sold to state enterprises.

The mass raid also killed one person on a ferry and hit an oil terminal in Russia's southern Krasnodar region bordering Crimea, the authorities there said. Part of the Crimean peninsula, which was annexed by Russia in 2014, was left without power after the attacks, local utilities company Krymenergo said.

Separately, overnight Russian strikes in eastern Ukraine killed three people. "Last night, our long-range sanctions targeted the occupiers' military logistics, oil industry and air defence," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media. Ukraine calls its retaliatory attacks on Russia and occupied territories "long-range sanctions" and denies targeting civilians. "All of this is a just response to Russia's brutal attacks against our people," Zelensky continued. He added that Ukrainian forces also struck the Crimean Bridge connecting the peninsula to Russia, as well as radar and air defence systems.



Residents inspect a damaged apartment building hit by Russian military strike in Donetsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

After upgrading its long-range drone capabilities, Kyiv now says it can strike at will along the land corridor through occupied southeastern Ukraine that Russia uses to supply Crimea and its forces stationed there. Ukraine has in recent months also stepped up drone attacks on energy facilities in Russia, striking targets deep behind the front lines.

Earlier this week, it hit a large refinery in Moscow twice. Ukraine says the attacks are aimed at denting oil revenues that Russia uses to fund the war.

Some petrol stations in Russia, the world's third-biggest oil producer, introduced fuel rationing this month. Fuel exports have been banned since April. Energy Intelligence, a US-based energy research firm, said earlier this month that about a third of Russian oil refining capacity had gone offline because of Ukrainian strikes. Talks on ending Europe's biggest conflict since World War II remain frozen, while fighting on the front line is effectively at a standstill.

A Russian aerial attack killed one person and wounded nine others in Kharkiv city

in eastern Ukraine, local authorities said. Moscow and Kyiv have escalated attacks on each other in recent weeks, as US-led talks on ending the conflict that began in February 2022 remain effectively frozen. Kharkiv mayor Igor Terekhov reported early on Saturday that a woman was trapped under rubble after a "guided aerial bomb strike" hit a residential area. "Sadly, during search and rescue operations, the body of a person who was killed was found under the rubble of the destroyed building," Terekhov said in an update on Telegram.

The strike on Kharkiv's Kholodnogirsky district wounded nine people, with five of them hospitalised, according to Oleg Synegubov, the head of the regional military administration. Authorities in Kherson, in southern Ukraine, reported that a 72-year-old woman was wounded in a drone strike in Zelenivka. Three people were also wounded in drone attacks in Kherson's Korabelny district.

Russia's Ministry of Defence said that its air defences shot down 187 Ukrainian aerial vehicles across the country overnight. — AFP

Britain's King Charles to reveal personal tax bill: Palace

LONDON: King Charles III will reveal his personal tax bill in a bid to improve transparency, Buckingham Palace confirmed on Sunday, as royal finances come under increasing public scrutiny in Britain. British monarchs are legally exempt from paying certain taxes, though they have paid some duties voluntarily for decades. They also have no obligation to disclose their private tax bills, but recent scandals surrounding the disgraced former prince Andrew Mounbatten-Windsor have thrust the royal family's finances into the spotlight.

Charles began releasing his personal tax information when he was heir to the throne, but will become the first monarch to disclose it. "The decision to do so as Sovereign has come at the express wish of the King himself," a palace spokesperson said in a statement released late on Saturday to a limited number of British media outlets. It added that

the move was "part of the adaptations carried across" since Charles acceded to the throne in 2022. "Our aim is to explain all elements of royal finances in a way that further enhances clarity and accessibility, while also placing it in its historical and constitutional context. "To put it simply: we continue to modernise and evolve." Charles's tax information will be shared on Thursday as part of the release of annual royal financial accounts, the BBC reported.

The head of the royal family gets money from various sources, including the publicly-funded Sovereign Grant as well as private duchy income worth tens of millions of pounds more.

The grant — an annual government payment to cover the costs of official duties by working royals — has increased markedly in 2025-2026, to £132.1 million (\$175 million), compared with £86.3 million the prior financial year.



Britain's King Charles III reacts on the fifth day of the Royal Ascot horse racing meeting in Ascot, west of London. — AFP

Meanwhile, Charles received £26.8 million in private income from the Duchy of Lancaster in 2024-25. Profits from the historic duchy — a large, diversified portfolio of land, property, and investments managed like a modern business — funds personal expenses and some official duties. It is the main source of private income for the head of the monarchy, with the heir — currently Charles's eldest son William, Prince of Wales — benefiting from a similar arrangement with his Duchy of Cornwall.

Under UK law, monarchs do not have to pay income, capital gains or inheritance taxes. However, since 1993 they have voluntarily paid the first two, following public pressure and scrutiny of royal finances, including questions over who would pay for repairs following a fire at Windsor Castle. Like his father, William voluntarily pays income and capital gains taxes on his duchy's

profits. The upcoming tax disclosures will illuminate Charles's other personal income. The king owns both Balmoral and Sandringham Estates, which were inherited from his mother, the late Queen Elizabeth II. They were exempt from inheritance tax under a long-standing government agreement. Other private sources of income could include money from investments or trading profits. The UK parliament's watchdog Public Accounts Committee has launched an inquiry into residential property arrangements provided to royals in the wake of the revelations. Norman Baker, a former lawmaker and longtime critic of royal finances, said that this year that Andrew's situation had "opened the door" to greater scrutiny. "In the end Britons are in the dark about the true cost of their monarchy," he said.

OPINION

Football offers a slice of life - in and off the field



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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IT IS football season and while tempo is building up in the World Cup, the lessons emerging from it reflect the world as we know it today. In fact, football reflects the changing cultural and social pre-occupations of our times, and the lessons drawn from it are lessons in life. It may be a cliché to say that football offers life lessons, but it remains true. Like all other team games, football requires determination, patience, extreme hard work and a passion for the game. So far, the teams which have shown such resilience have a chance to move on to the matches that matter. Research shows that football develops psychological strength, emotional fortitude and confidence. The same qualities can be liabilities if the teams or individual players collapse under the burden of expectations. Resilience is a non-negotiable trait for players, often forgotten in the heat of the moment of victory or loss. The lessons are not only for players and team members, but also for the spectators who have serious stakes as they identify with their countries’ teams. Research with

spectators using wearable technology has shown that emotions can vary vastly, with stress levels among fans wavering more than 40% on and during match days. Academic literature also demonstrates a measurable correlation between unexpected victories and short-term excitement that follows such wins. Of course, this also has an inverse impact in the case of defeat, with avid fans known to deflect their frustration on the roads or on social media. While this can be a celebratory moment in victory, it can also show extremes in emotion among fans whose expectations of their teams have been challenged. Teamwork is one of the most important characteristics in football. As a game that is directly based on group work, including strategising, implementing and adapting, the idea of the team as being parts of a whole is perfectly seen here. Increasingly, winning teams across the world are known for being multicultural. The Australian team is a good example this year. While being known for their homogenous nature in earlier years, the team this year

It may be a cliché to say that football offers life lessons, but it remains true. Like all other team games, football requires determination, patience, extreme hard work and a passion for the game. So far, the teams which have shown such resilience have a chance to move on to the matches that matter.

consists of immigrants from such diverse backgrounds as Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and South Sudan. The overriding message in this team is ‘No matter where you come from, football is for everyone’. The sense of shared purpose and identity is central to the team’s performance. Studies have also shown that support for specific teams reflects on social and cultural leanings. Non-national supporters of teams from developing countries often tend to be left-leaning, supporting representation and egalitarianism. As a corollary, first-world supporters could have more conservative leanings. Football is more than the ‘beautiful game’. It is a reflection of our world in real time, exhibiting our attitudes, hopes, and concerns. It is a mirror of the anxieties and realities of our changing world, with its focus on globalisation, commercialisation, and, of course, the use of technology. The lessons we take from it can make the world a better place or one that is further divided by human frailties and unhealthy competition.

COLOMBIA VOTES
PITTING LEFTIST
REFORMER AGAINST
NEWCOMER

Colombians vote on Sunday in a presidential runoff to determine whether the country continues on its leftist path or joins Latin America’s rightward shift by electing a political outsider who has vowed to crack down on crime. After a crowded first-round election produced no winner in May, voters will choose between two runoff candidates: leftist Senator Ivan Cepeda and Abelardo De La Espriella, a right-wing lawyer and businessman with no political experience. Cepeda, 63, is vowing to continue the policies of President Gustavo Petro, a former rebel and the country’s first leftist president, which include state pension payments for the poor, union-backed labour reforms, peace talks with armed groups that have fought the state for decades and a moratorium on new oil projects. De La Espriella, 47, is proposing the exact opposite — ending talks with armed groups and carrying out a broad military offensive against them, and boosting Colombia’s oil and gas sector. De La Espriella blames Petro for the country’s economic and security woes and has vowed to lower taxes and reduce the size of the state by up to 40%, but has said he will preserve Petro’s 23% increase in the minimum wage, along with other popular social measures. Whoever wins will grapple with high public debt and a divided Congress, which could stymie reform proposals. Polls and a wary market favour De La Espriella, who won the most votes in the first round with 43%, but analysts expect a tight race. Both candidates have taken pains to raise turnout among nearly half of the eligible voters who skipped the May first round. Voters in Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador have elected right-wing presidents in their latest presidential races, while Bolivia ended two decades of leftist rule by electing centre-right Rodrigo Paz last year. In Peru, where votes from a June 7 contest are still being counted, conservative Keiko Fujimori, daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori, who served 16 years in prison for human rights abuses, is poised to win the presidency after three failed attempts. Most of those elections, including Colombia’s, were driven by concerns over rising crime and a weak economy. In Colombia, peace talks initiated by Petro have largely failed as armed groups have grown in power and numbers, and drug trafficking gangs have expanded, leading to spikes in murders and extortion along the Caribbean coast. De La Espriella has cast Petro and Cepeda as allies of criminals, though Petro’s government says it has seized more cocaine than any other government. Cepeda has rejected the accusations, saying there is no evidence for them. — Reuters

Life within ‘reeligion’,
streaks, reels and screens

WE LIVE in a strange time, one where phones rarely get forgotten, yet people often walk into a room and stand there, wondering why they came. A low battery now has the power to quietly spoil an entire mood, and a broken streak can feel more serious than missing a real conversation with someone sitting a few steps away. Somewhere along the way, scrolling stopped being harmless entertainment and slowly turned into a habit, a habit settled into attachment, and before we noticed, that attachment began shaping daily life, almost like water shaping stone, drop by drop. Not long ago, the usual worries were simple ones, such as misplaced keys, forgotten wallets, or a door left unlocked. Today, anxiety often begins when the phone battery slides towards five per cent and no charger is in sight. Reels are no longer something we watch now and then; for many people, they have quietly settled into the day like a routine that repeats itself without much thought. Some of us call this “reeligion,” not as an accusation, but as an observation, because there is commitment, there is routine, and there is real discomfort when that routine gets interrupted. Attention is given daily, time is offered generously, and very little resistance stands in the way. Reels were never built to calm the mind or help people think deeply; they were built to keep eyes on the screen and thumbs moving. Short clips arrive one after another, fast and colourful, and before the mind has a chance to settle, the next video is already waiting. Over time, the system learns what lifts emotions, what irritates, what comforts, and what shocks, then offers more of the same, leaving the mind alert and busy while something deeper inside feels strangely empty. Many people say that scrolling helps them relax, but in truth, the body may slow down while



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Sometimes the strongest thing a person can do today is very simple. Put the phone down, break a streak, miss a reel, sit quietly for a moment, and talk without checking notifications.

the mind remains wide awake. Emotions change quickly, moving from laughter to anger, from sadness to inspiration, and then to worry, all within minutes. The heart was never meant to jump like this for hours on end, and slowly, patience becomes thin, focus becomes fragile, and silence starts to feel uncomfortable. Stillness begins to feel strange, as if something important is missing, when in reality what feels like boredom is often just the absence of constant noise, and as the saying goes, an empty vessel makes the loudest sound. Alongside reels, streaks have created their own quiet pressure. A small flame icon now carries meaning far beyond what it deserves, pushing people to send messages without thought, simply to keep a number alive. “Good morning” turns into a task rather than a gesture, missing a day feels like failure, and keeping the streak feels like success, even when nothing real is shared. Communication becomes upkeep, friendship turns into something to maintain, and the system rewards showing up rather than caring, proving once again that not everything that counts can be counted. Social media rarely steals life in loud or dramatic ways; it does it gently, almost politely. You sit with family and glance at the phone, just in case something more interesting is happening somewhere else. A child speaks and you nod, but your attention drifts. You visit a beautiful place and experience it through a screen, and time passes quietly without complaint. Those moments do not return. There is also a growing illusion of learning. A short video feels like wisdom, a quote feels like growth, and a quick summary feels like understanding. The feeling of learning arrives without effort, motivation rises briefly, then fades, and life remains unchanged.

Real learning still takes time, patience, and a willingness to sit with discomfort, because there is no shortcut worth taking when it comes to understanding and growth. Over time, constant short videos change how attention itself works. The mind learns to chase new things instead of staying with one thought; long focus feels heavy, reading feels slow, and quiet reflection becomes difficult. Emotional balance grows harder because the mind is trained to react rather than pause, and the issue here is not technology itself, but what happens when use becomes compulsive and choice quietly disappears. This is where digital disconnect becomes important, not as punishment and not as rejection of modern life, but as protection. Even small breaks make a difference, as sleep improves, thoughts slow down, emotions feel steadier, a quiet cup of tea feels calm rather than dull, and a walk feels lighter when it is not interrupted every few minutes. Slowly, the mind remembers how rest feels, and sometimes less becomes more. Disconnecting also creates space for something deeper, space to think, to reflect, and to notice what often gets missed. When the heart is no longer crowded with constant noise, prayer feels calmer, gratitude feels more honest, and faith grows best in quiet moments. Real religion builds patience, discipline, and inner calm, while reeligion feeds the eyes but leaves the heart unsatisfied, much like eating without ever feeling full. This reflection is not meant as judgment, especially of young people, because many are not weak or careless; they are responding to systems designed to pull attention and reward habit. Blame does not help much, while awareness helps more, guidance helps more, and education helps more, because technology works best when it stays in its place.

The journey built on hope over fear



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHANI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

AS the New Hijri Year has started, it carries with it a story that has travelled across fourteen centuries. This story is not only of a journey between two cities, but of a journey that transformed history itself.

Imagine the desert night and the sands of Arabia lie beneath a sky filled with stars. Think of a small group of travellers moving cautiously through the darkness. Behind them is a city they love, a homeland filled with memories, family, and familiar paths. Ahead lies uncertainty and there are no guarantees of safety, success, or acceptance.

However, they continue, guided by faith and the belief that every step serves a higher purpose. It was not a march of armies or a parade of power, but a migration born from sacrifice. It was a journey that demanded courage when fear was justified, patience when hardship seemed endless, and hope when the future remained unseen.

History often remembers kings, battles, and victories. The Islamic calendar begins with faith in motion. It begins with people willing to leave behind comfort in pursuit of truth and justice. Every year, as we mark the arrival of a New Hijri Year, we are invited to revisit that moment, not as distant spectators, but as travellers ourselves. For each of us has a Hijrah or a journey to make! In fact,

some journeys are visible, such as a student leaving home to pursue knowledge, a family relocating in search of opportunity, and a worker beginning again after a setback. Other journeys are hidden within the heart, just as a person struggles to overcome anger, hatred, or misery.

Another seeks forgiveness after years of regret. Someone else gathers the courage to choose integrity over convenience, or faith over doubt. The New Hijri Year arrives not with fireworks or grand celebrations, but with a quiet question: Where are we heading? In a world that often moves too fast, the Hijrah teaches us the value of purposeful movement.

It reminds us that progress is not measured merely by distance travelled, but by character developed along the way.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his companions did not simply leave Mecca; they carried with them values that would build a civilisation rooted in justice, mercy, and human dignity.

Today, our communities face different challenges, but the lessons remain the same. We continue to need resilience in the face of adversity, wisdom in moments of uncertainty, and unity in times of division. We continue to need the courage to believe that a better future can emerge from difficult

Today, our communities face different challenges, but the lessons remain the same. We continue to need resilience in the face of adversity, wisdom in moments of uncertainty, and unity in times of division.

beginnings. Perhaps that is why the story of the Hijrah never grows old.

It speaks to a universal truth: every ending contains the seed of a new beginning.

As the pages of the calendar turn to 1448 AH, we stand at our own crossroads between what has been and what could be. The past year, with its successes and disappointments, becomes part of our story.

The year ahead remains unwritten. The moon that marks this new year is the same moon that shone over the travellers of the Hijrah centuries ago.

It reminds us that while times change, the human search for purpose, belonging, and hope remains constant.

May the New Hijri Year inspire us to embark on journeys that lead not only to personal success, but also to greater compassion, stronger communities, and a deeper commitment to the values that unite us.

And may we remember that the most meaningful journeys are often those that transform not only our destination, but also ourselves.

The story of the Hijrah is, ultimately, the story of every person who dares to move from fear to faith, from hardship to hope, and from the familiar towards a future filled with possibility.

UK MINISTER SAYS STARMER CONSIDERS ‘POLITICAL REALITIES’ UNDER THREAT

DAVID MILLIKEN

British business minister Peter Kyle said Prime Minister Keir Starmer is reflecting on the “political realities” after party rival Andy Burnham was elected to parliament, setting up a potential leadership challenge. Speaking to broadcasters on Sunday, Kyle said he had no reason to believe Starmer was planning to announce his resignation on Monday but that it would be “delusional” not to think his position was under threat. “Today, as in every other day I’ve ever known Keir, he is out there working hard.

At the same time, he is also trying to create the space where he can think and reflect on the political realities and challenges — and the opportunities — that are before us,” Kyle said in an interview with Sky News. Kyle did not repeat Downing Street’s recent refrain that Starmer planned to fight any challenge.

The threat to Starmer’s position, which has been building for months, increased sharply on Friday when Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham won a seat in parliament that will allow him to launch a formal leadership challenge. Starmer’s unpopularity was laid bare by the ruling party’s heavy losses in local elections in May, and polls of Labour Party members indicate Burnham would win such a contest. The Observer newspaper reported late on Saturday that Starmer was discussing his future with his wife at his official Chequers country residence before making a final decision, and that senior Labour figures expected a clear statement as soon as Monday.

In response to the report, a government source said the prime minister remained focused on getting on with the job of governing. Asked about reports that Starmer was preparing to resign, Kyle told Sky News: “I have nothing to believe that they are true. I am seeing a lot of speculation out there.” Kyle declined to go into detail about what he said was frank conversation with Starmer on Friday, beyond saying it was lengthy and that “not once... did he ever ask about self-interest. It was always about the country”.

In a later interview with the BBC, Kyle accepted that Starmer’s position was under threat. “I don’t want to come on here and be delusional that there is no process, there are no forces at work which are challenging the prime minister as leader. That is clearly the case,” he said.

Former minister Jess Phillips — who is a supporter of health secretary Wes Streeting, another potential challenger to Starmer — told the BBC that “it feels like we’ve come to the end of the road” and that it would be best for Starmer’s departure to be “as dignified as possible”. Starmer has previously said he would stand in any formal Labour Party leadership contest that sought to replace him. Leadership contenders need to amass the support of 81 Labour members of parliament — a fifth of those sitting — to launch a formal challenge. — Reuters

Battle with Anthropic is the start of a new conflict

THE TRUMP administration has spent the past week trying to end one war while pushing deeper into another. The first war, the Iran war, feels like the coda to an era; it seems unlikely that the US will undertake another war for regime change in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. Whereas the second war, the battle over Anthropic’s cutting-edge artificial intelligence models, is the beginning of a new kind of conflict, with private powers and national governments struggling to determine who actually rules an AI-dominated world.

The nature of the Anthropic conflict can be swiftly summarised even if the details are in dispute. Two months ago, the company declined to publicly release its latest model, Mythos, citing various safety concerns (and hyping the model’s revolutionary power). After previewing Mythos to the US government and certain corporate actors, Anthropic then released Fable, a version of the model with various safety guardrails. Amazon, an Anthropic investor and client, discovered a way to bypass some of those guardrails. This was reported to the White House, Anthropic’s response was deemed unsatisfactory, and the administration used its export-control power to forbid the use of Fable by any foreign national inside the US and anybody at all outside it — a rule that Anthropic treated as a requirement to shut the new AI model down.

That’s where we are now, with the company and the administration negotiating over how to bring back Fable while ongoing leaks to the press paint one or the other side as unreasonable or reckless or ideological and clueless about tech.

It’s a conflict rich in ironies. A White House that sees itself as favouring a free-market approach to AI has now twice used heavy-handed regulatory weapons against America’s leading AI company. (In the first case, earlier this year, the Pentagon basically tried to cut Anthropic out of all government supply chains because of disputes over the wartime use of its



ROSS DOUTHAT

The writer is New York Times columnist

American and Chinese AI dominance is going to create new issues for sovereignty, new forms of dependence and coercion, that will weigh heavily on middle powers as their economies become more and more dependent on specific models and access to computing power.

models.) Meanwhile, Anthropic sees itself as the AI company that’s most attuned to safety issues and eager for democratic oversight, but each move from the Trump administration has prompted the company to shout, “No, not like that!”

Of course, this is what wars often look like, with various hypocrisies and culture clashes and misunderstandings driving conflict as much as reasonable assessments of the stakes. But beyond the specifics of why, say, the libertarian tech people in the Trump administration distrust the effective-altruist tech people running Anthropic, the kind of conflict we’re seeing here is overdetermined by the trajectory of the AI models: There is too much potential power here not to have ongoing, escalating struggles over who actually gets to rule.

The war over Fable previews the two broad forms that this conflict will take. First, there is a private-public struggle, where governments grope for a regulatory sweet spot that allows them to maintain a meaningful veto over the AI behemoths without killing off their innovative power, while the AI companies try to maintain control over their own models and influence over how governments use their innovations.

There is a path here that leads to nationalisation in all but name and a path that leads to a kind of de facto corporate takeover of the government, or at least a too-big-to-fail symbiosis.

And along the way, there may be not just conflicts between presidents and AI executives but also increasingly ruthless corporation-on-corporation action, out of fear that the AI landscape is winner-take-all to an extent we’ve never seen in capitalism before. (I’m not saying that’s why Amazon would drop a dime on its dear business partner at Anthropic; I’m just saying that there are potential trajectories for the AI companies that could threaten their current partners with thralldom or irrelevance.)

Then, alongside the struggle to control AI power within

American borders, there is the geopolitical struggle to maximise global power (where the only real players are probably the US and China) and maintain sovereignty (where everyone else is likely to be scrambling to maintain some independence).

The use of export controls to shut down Fable presumably reflected US fears of Chinese access to a jailbroken version of the model, but it was also a warning to every other country in the world: If we end up with economy-permeating AI models that are made and regulated in America, the US government will control the on-off switch.

One possibility for what that means is spun out in “Europe 2031,” a futurist scenario written by European AI researchers and investors in which the European Union ends up choosing political and economic vassalage to either the United States or China, because it lacks sufficiently powerful AI models that are under its own control.

That could be too alarmist: The normal rules of trade and comparative advantage may continue to apply, Europe could maintain geopolitical leverage through other forms of technological expertise, open-source models may remain competitive (instead of being left in the dust by proprietary frontier AIs that build frontier AIs in an accelerating loop).

But at the very least, American and Chinese AI dominance is going to create new issues for sovereignty, new forms of dependence and coercion, that will weigh heavily on middle powers as their economies become more and more dependent on specific models and access to computing power.

Finally, I should note that from the point of view of many AI forecasters, this sketch of future conflict is the optimistic scenario, because it assumes that human actors and human institutions — nation-states, empires, executives, presidents — are still the ones fighting for control. These human wars will be waged in the shadow of the darker scenario — where the war that counts is with our own creation.



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



SPAIN
BACK ON
TRACK
WITH WIN
OVER
SAUDI ARABIA

INSPIRED

BY Lamine Yamal, Spain strolled to a 4-0 win over Saudi Arabia in Group H on Sunday, where Mikel Oyarzabal restored his reputation with two goals and Luis de la Fuente's side found their groove after an underwhelming World Cup opener.

Yamal opened the scoring in the 10th minute and Oyarzabal, who failed to register a touch in the opening half hour in Monday's scoreless draw with Cape Verde, scored twice in quick succession as Spain had the game wrapped up by halftime.

An own goal shortly after the interval failed to reopen the floodgates, as Spain used the opportunity to make changes and rest their scorers.

De la Fuente celebrated his 65th birthday in style, and Yamal, whose only football in the last two months came as a substitute against Cape Verde, sparked life into the team that returned to Atlanta Stadium.

A huge cheer greeted Yamal's first touch, twisting and turning his marker before playing a teasing cross which was cleared by Abdulrahman Al-Ramahi, the scorer of Saudi Arabia's goal in their 1-1 with Uruguay.

The opening goal came with Oyarzabal sending an inviting ball across the box and Yamal was there sliding in at the back post to score his first World Cup goal.

Having toiled in vain in their opening game, the goal relaxed Spain, who began to carve open the Saudi defence at will, and the second goal came from a corner.

Dani Olmo sent the ball back into the mix which the Saudis failed to clear and Aymeric Laporte nodded down to Oyarzabal who bundled the ball into the net.

Three minutes later, Spain were in again with a beautifully worked goal. Pedro Porro floated a pass into the area and the ball never touched the ground until it found the net.

Marc Cucurella's hooked pass found Olmo who headed into the six-yard box for Oyarzabal to tap-in on the volley, as the striker proved that given the right service, he is Spain's man to deliver.

Spain replaced Yamal and Oyarzabal for the second half, but picked up where they left off when the Saudi goalkeeper blocked Cucurella's volley from a corner and the ball ricocheted off defender Hassan Altamrabi and into the net.

The European champions continued to create chances, but understandably took their foot off the gas on a day when even Vozinha, Cape Verde's 40-year-old hero keeper, would have struggled against this version of Spain, who look back to their best.

Spain advance to four points in the standings while Saudi Arabia stay on one after two games each. The other teams in the group, Cape Verde and Uruguay, meet later on Sunday in Miami. — Reuters



Spain coach Luis De La Fuente salutes their fans. — Reuters



Spain's Ferran Torres celebrates with Pedro Porro after scoring a goal. — Reuters



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



EVERY MATCH WRITES NEW HISTORY



FRANCE ARE expected to make only minor

France were occasionally vulnerable defensively against Senegal but were in another league after the break and

While qualification remains the immediate objective, the

"It won't be easy, even if people think that because we're playing Iraq we'll automatically get the three points." — **Reuters**



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LOOKS THE SAME. ISN'T THE SAME.

✗

✓

ORIGINAL HAS A SIGNATURE.

Counterfeit parts copy the look.
They cannot copy the Engineering.

- Precision-Engineered for Toyota
- Tested to global safety standards

Don't gamble with your safety. Choose Genuine Parts.

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 (BIC 9801: 2613 certified) | C.R. No. 1129412
 P.O.Box: 3168, Postal Code: 112, Ruwail, Sultanate of Oman

LEXUS
GENUINE PARTS

TOYOTA
GENUINE PARTS

NO COUNTERFEIT

he had a war of words with German full-back Nathaniel Brown. "I simply told him to stay humble. It's true, he played a brilliant game; he's part of a very, very strong national team. But I don't think he needs to speak ill of us just because his team are behind, or because the score is 1-1 and he'd like to win," Faé said.

- dpa

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,489.168

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The waterfront would help attract more visitors, stimulate tourism and commercial activity.

BUKHA WATERFRONT
NEARS COMPLETION

BUKHA: Construction of the Bukha Waterfront Development Project in Musandam Governorate has reached 95 per cent completion, bringing the coastal tourism and leisure destination closer to opening as part of efforts to strengthen the governorate’s tourism infrastructure.

The project covers an area of 26,000 square metres and forms part of wider government initiatives aimed at enhancing tourism facilities, improving public spaces and leveraging Musandam’s natural coastal attractions.

Officials say the development is expected to support economic activity, improve the quality of life for residents and visitors and reinforce Bukha’s position as a growing tourism destination within the governorate.

Mohammed bin Saif al Jabri, Assistant Director-General of Musandam Municipality, said the project has been designed as an integrated tourism and recreational destination serving both local residents and visitors to Musandam.

He said the waterfront would help attract more visitors, stimulate tourism and commercial activity and provide new spaces for leisure, sports and community events. The development includes an 800-metre promenade overlooking the sea, commercial kiosks, a boat rental facility, a seafront restaurant, a children’s play area, water fountains, landscaped green spaces and shaded seating areas.

Supporting service facilities have also been incorporated into the project to improve visitor convenience and enhance the overall tourism experience.

According to Musandam Municipality, the waterfront project represents a significant addition to the governorate’s tourism infrastructure and is expected to contribute to the development of the coastal area while improving its urban landscape.

Officials believe the project will create opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises through commercial facilities and tourism-related activities, generating additional business opportunities and supporting local entrepreneurship. — ONA

Oman’s 2025 revenue rises
8% as deficit narrows

OMAN’S public revenues rose 8 per cent in 2025, helping narrow the fiscal deficit by more than a quarter, as stronger oil and gas earnings offset higher spending on subsidies, development projects and social programmes, according to final budget figures released by the Ministry of Finance.

Actual public revenues reached RO 12.122 billion in 2025, exceeding the budgeted estimate of RO 11.18 billion. Public expenditure also increased, rising 7 per cent to RO 12.583 billion from the approved budget estimate of RO 11.8 billion.

As a result, the fiscal deficit narrowed to RO 461 million, compared with the budgeted deficit of RO 620 million, representing a decline of 26 per cent.

The improvement was largely driven by higher hydrocarbon revenues. Total oil and gas revenues reached RO 8.481 billion, an increase of 11 per cent over budget estimates.

Net oil revenues amounted to RO 6.640 billion, up 14 per cent from the budgeted RO 5.830 billion. The increase was supported by higher crude prices, with the average realised oil price reaching about \$72 per barrel compared with the budget assumption of \$60 per barrel.

Average oil and condensate production stood at approximately 999,000 barrels per day, slightly below the budget estimate of 1.001 million barrels per day, reflecting Oman’s commitment to OPEC+ production agreements.

Net gas revenues reached RO 1.841 billion, exceeding budget estimates by 4 per cent. The increase was attributed to stronger liquefied natural gas prices, with the average selling price rising to \$7.49 from the budget assumption of \$5.41.

Non-oil revenues totalled RO



Non-oil revenues totalled RO 3.641 billion, including RO 3.602 billion in current revenues and RO 39 million in capital revenues and recoveries.



The final budget results were broadly in line with approved estimates, reflecting prudent financial planning and effective public finance management.

ZAHER BIN MARHOON AL ABRI
Director-General of Treasury and Accounts

3.641 billion, including RO 3.602 billion in current revenues and RO 39 million in capital revenues and recoveries.

On the spending side, current expenditure rose 2 per cent to RO 8.726 billion.

Defence and security spending reached RO 3.066 billion, while expenditure by civilian ministries amounted to RO 4.780 billion. Public debt servicing costs totalled RO 880 million.

Development expenditure recorded the strongest increase, rising 38 per cent to RO 1.577 billion. The increase reflected higher allocations to ministries and governorates to accelerate projects under the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025).

Infrastructure projects accounted for 43 per cent of total development spending, followed by social infrastructure at 40 per cent, services at 12 per cent and productive sectors at 5 per cent.

Other contributions and

expenditure rose 8 per cent to RO 2.28 billion. Fuel subsidies reached RO 124 million, significantly higher than the budgeted RO 35 million, while electricity subsidies increased to RO 606 million, up RO 86 million from the approved allocation, reflecting government measures to stabilise energy prices.

Public debt stood at RO 14.6 billion at the end of 2025, down by approximately RO 15 million from a year earlier.

Zaher bin Marhoon al Abri, Director-General of Treasury and Accounts at the Ministry of Finance, said the final budget results were broadly in line with approved estimates, reflecting prudent financial planning and effective public finance management.

He said the ministry would continue efforts to improve spending efficiency and diversify revenue sources in support of Oman Vision 2040 and long-term fiscal sustainability. — ONA

5th OCCI Franchise Programme to boost global reach of Oman brands

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

In a move reflecting national trends towards enhancing the competitiveness of the private sector and expanding its contribution to economic development, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), represented by its Franchise Centre, launched the fifth edition of its Franchise Programme under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Minister of Economy.

The Franchise Programme comes within the framework of the Chamber’s efforts to improve the business environment, support economic diversification and strengthen partnerships in economic development across the governorates, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The programme aims to establish a franchise culture among business owners in the Sultanate of Oman, enable scalable Omani brands to access regional and international markets, enhance investment opportunities and business



The programme aims to establish a franchise culture among business owners in Oman.

partnerships; and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in achieving sustainable growth, creating jobs and stimulating the national economy.

The launch ceremony witnessed the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding and strategic support agreements to enhance the programme’s outcomes. The Chamber signed an MoU with Oman Oil Marketing Company to provide ten locations at its filling stations in various governorates to host programme projects, in addition to allocating advertising space on the company’s digital screens to support the promotion of participating brands.

A framework support agreement

was also signed with Shell Oman Marketing Company, which includes allocating \$5,000 to support the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Egypt Franchise Exhibition, in addition to making 19 locations at the company’s filling stations available to programme participants.

In the same context, the Chamber signed a cooperation agreement with LuLu Group to study the allocation of between five and twelve retail units in both Al Muzn Mall and Nizwa Grand Mall to brands eligible under the programme, as well as exploring additional opportunities in Barka Grand Centre and Salalah Grand Mall.

The ceremony also witnessed the signing of 62 franchise agreements for a number of Omani brands in seven countries, including Oman, US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Pakistan and Ecuador.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said the programme

contributes to creating new investment opportunities, enhancing the efficiency of national companies and promoting their adoption of best practices and international standards, which will positively impact economic growth and generate more commercial and investment opportunities.

Eng Hamoud bin Salem al Saadi, Chairman of the Franchise Centre Committee, explained that the programme offers a comprehensive package of services, including evaluation and specialised consultations, preparation of operational manuals, development of financial models, marketing of investment opportunities, in addition to specialised training programmes and workshops.

Al Saadi added that the centre aims to empower 300 Omani brands and increase the market value of both franchisor and franchisee brands to RO 1 billion, with a focus on preparing them for expansion both within the Sultanate of Oman and internationally.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Make family memories in the Sultanate of Oman’s coolest destination.

SUMMER PASSES
LAUNCH ACROSS SNOW
OMAN, SKI DUBAI AND
SNOW ABU DHABI

MUSCAT: Swap soaring temperatures for sub-zero thrills this summer! Snow Oman, Ski Dubai and Snow Abu Dhabi launch their summer passes, giving families, friends and adventure seekers the perfect excuse to turn an ordinary summer day into an unforgettable snow adventure.

SNOW OMAN’S SUMMER FAMILY PASS (FROM RO 68*)
Make family memories in the Sultanate of Oman’s coolest destination. From June 7 to August 25, Snow Oman’s summer family pass for five includes unlimited snow park rides and attractions including Snow Block, Red Sea Slalom, Frozen Shipwreck, ice skating at the Frozen Wadi, two Magic Planet Blue Swiper cards, fleece gloves and locker rental.

SKI DUBAI’S SUMMER PASS (FROM AED 335*)
Make this summer one to remember at the World’s Best Indoor Ski Resort. From June 25 to August 23, Ski Dubai welcomes guests as young as two years old to unlimited snow park rides and attractions including tubing, tobogganing, Mountain Thriller and signature thrill rides, unlimited chairlift rides, a heartwarming meal at North 28, fleece gloves and locker rental.
Plus, one free activity of your choice: 2 Snow Bullet (zipline) rides, 40-minute Penguin Experience, 60-minute Ski or Snowboarding Discovery Lesson, or 2-hour Slope Access. Enjoy even greater value with the Summer Family Pass for Four at AED 1,000, saving AED 335.

SNOW ABU DHABI’S SUMMER PASS (FROM AED 225*)
Step into an immersive Enchanted Forest in the heart of the desert. From June 25 to August 23, Snow Abu Dhabi invites guests to an immersive Enchanted Forest with unlimited snow park rides and attractions including the Polar Express Train, Crystal Carousel, Bumper Tubes, signature hot chocolate, fleece gloves and locker rental. Make the most of summer together with the Summer Family Pass for Four at AED 675, saving AED 225.
Advance bookings are available from June 15. For bookings and enquiries, visit [skidxb.com](#), [snowabudhabi.com](#) and [snowoman.com](#).

Lexus launches all-new
BEV RZ500e in Oman

LEXUS announces the launch of the all-new RZ 500e in Oman, marking the first introduction of a Lexus SUV Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) in the region. Purpose-built from the ground up as a dedicated BEV, the RZ represents a significant milestone in the brand’s electrification journey and symbolises the next phase of Lexus Electrified in its commitment towards carbon neutrality. Since pioneering electrification in the luxury segment with the RX 400h in 2005, Lexus has continuously pursued a balance between driving performance and environmental responsibility.

With the RZ 500e, Lexus deepens that philosophy, delivering a fully electric SUV that embodies the brand’s distinctive driving character and emotionally engaging design, brought to life through advanced electrification technologies. The new RZ 500e features a completely redesigned BEV system, refined platform dynamics and an evolved all-wheel-drive system. Together, these advancements enhance “The Natural” driving concept and further deepen the uniquely enjoyable driving feel recognised as the Lexus Driving Signature. Lexus International Chief Engineer said: “Lexus is committed to refining electrification technologies to enhance the fundamental joy of driving and deliver new driving experiences. At the Toyota Technical Centre Shimoyama (TTC-S), engineers and professional drivers work together on test courses designed to replicate demanding road conditions, rigorously refining the vehicle’s core performance. Moving forward, Lexus will continue to push the boundaries of its signature driving experience by



The new RZ500e features a completely redesigned BEV system and an evolved all-wheel-drive system.

seamlessly integrating cutting-edge hardware and software.” At the heart of the RZ 500e is a fully redesigned battery electric system developed with relentless focus on core BEV performance. A newly developed high-capacity lithium-ion battery incorporates improved battery cells and an increased number of cells, enabling the integration of high-output motors and a newly developed eAxle featuring enhanced inverter efficiency. This results in significantly higher motor output, improved energy efficiency and reduced power loss across the system. The increased battery capacity and optimised battery pack structure contribute to an extended driving range, ensuring greater confidence for customers whether commuting daily or travelling longer distances.

Improvements to the onboard charger and charging functionality further enhance charging performance, reducing charging time and improving overall convenience. By optimising battery characteristics, cooling systems and charging control strategies, Lexus ensures that the RZ 500e delivers both performance and practicality suited to modern driving lifestyles. Additionally, the BEV system utilises a water-cooling configuration that supports sustained performance while maintaining thermal stability. By thoroughly reassessing battery capacity, battery pack structure and charging systems, Lexus achieves not only stronger acceleration performance but also enhanced energy efficiency, reinforcing the RZ’s capability as a refined and capable luxury BEV.

NBO to hold fintech accelerator demo day

MUSCAT: Following the success of its inaugural edition last year, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) will host its demo day for the second cohort of the fintech accelerator programme this week, marking the culmination of a transformative journey for participating start-ups, supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Designed to nurture entrepreneurial talent and accelerate the development of innovative financial solutions, the programme provides participants with the resources, guidance, practical experience and regional exposure needed to refine their business models and scale their ideas. Six start-ups are participating in the programme, showcasing innovative solutions across key areas including digital payments, wealth management, financial security, credit assessment and lending, personal finance management and fraud detection.



NBO remains committed to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship and SME growth.

Together, they reflect the growing diversity and maturity of Oman’s fintech ecosystem, addressing numerous opportunities within the financial services sector while supporting the Sultanate of Oman’s broader digital transformation

agenda. As the programme approaches its final stage, participating teams have achieved significant progress in advancing their ventures, including product validation, operational testing and the expansion of commercial partnerships, with three start-ups also securing investment. This progress demonstrates the accelerator’s role in helping start-ups transform innovative ideas into market-ready solutions. As the final stage of the programme, demo day will offer participating teams the opportunity to showcase their solutions to key stakeholders from across the banking, technology, regulatory, government and investment ecosystems. The event will highlight the progress achieved throughout the accelerator while providing a platform for meaningful engagement with industry leaders and potential partners.

Bank Muscat successfully manages series 11 of Omani Rial sukuk issuance

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, along with Meethaq Islamic Banking, announced the successful execution of Series 11 Issuance under the Omani Rial Sovereign Sukuk issued by the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance. The transaction attracted strong demand from investors and closed with a final order book of approximately RO 250 million, around 2.5 times the base issue size of RO 100 million, reflecting continued confidence in the Sultanate’s credit profile and in the structure of the sovereign Sukuk programme. This momentum supported the issuance and helped to achieve a successful outcome. Following the



The transaction attracted strong demand from investors.

Ministry of Finance’s confirmation of the exercise of the RO 20 million Greenshoe option, the final issue size was set at RO 120 million. The 5-year sukuk has a profit rate of 4.20%, with an average yield of

Meethaq’s execution achieved on this transaction. The issuance witnessed participation from different categories of investors, retail as well as institutional. The sukuk is structured in accordance with Sharia-compliant principles. All allocation details and investor records will be maintained and administered by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, as the central registrar and depository for the sukuk. Khalifa Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets at Bank Muscat, said: “The strong oversubscription and the tightening achieved during execution highlight the depth of demand for the Omani Rial sovereign sukuk. Closing the issuance at the target profit rate,

with the greenshoe option fully exercised, is a clear reflection of the quality of this transaction and investors’ confidence.” The selection of Bank Muscat and Meethaq Islamic Banking as the issue managers underscores their strong local, regional, and international reputation among individuals, corporates and financial institutions. Demonstrating their role as key players in advancing the Sultanate of Oman’s financial landscape, the Bank continues to build on the market-leading position by delivering innovative financing and advisory solutions. These include corporate and project finance, debt restructuring, public offerings, equity-linked instruments, private placements and mergers and acquisitions.

SHORTTAKES



Food prices remained a key driver of inflation.

OMAN INFLATION
RISES 3.8% IN MAY

MUSCAT: Oman's annual inflation rate accelerated to 3.8 per cent in May 2026, driven by higher transport, food and personal service costs, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The consumer price index rose 3.8 per cent compared with May 2025, while average inflation for the first five months of 2026 reached 2.8 per cent. The largest increase was recorded in miscellaneous goods and services, which climbed 9.6 per cent year-on-year. Transport costs rose 9.2 per cent, while food and beverages increased 6.6 per cent.

Restaurants and hotels registered a 4.7 per cent increase, followed by furniture, household equipment and maintenance services at 3.1 per cent. Education costs rose 2.2 per cent, while health-related expenses increased 1.8 per cent.

Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels was the only major category to record a decline, edging down 0.3 per cent from a year earlier.

Food prices remained a key driver of inflation. Vegetable prices surged 24.9 per cent, while fruits rose 16.7 per cent and meat prices increased 5.1 per cent.

Beverages recorded a 3.6 per cent increase, while milk, cheese and eggs rose 2.6 per cent. Prices for sugar, honey, jam and confectionery increased 2.5 per cent, while bread and cereals rose 1 per cent.

Inflation varied across governorates. Al Dhahirah recorded the highest increase at 4.8 per cent, followed by Al Dakhiliyah at 4.4 per cent and Muscat at 4.2 per cent.

Al Buraimi registered inflation of 3.9 per cent, while Al Wusta recorded 3.5 per cent. Al Batinah South and Musandam both posted increases of 3.4 per cent. Al Sharqiyah North and South recorded inflation of 3.2 per cent, while Al Batinah North and Dhofar registered the lowest increase at 2.3 per cent.

The latest figures indicate that food and transport costs continue to exert upward pressure on consumer prices despite relative stability in housing-related expenses. — ONA

Oman weighing domestic
gas pricing reform: IGC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

OMAN'S natural gas sector is undergoing a period of transformation as policymakers and industry stakeholders seek to balance rising domestic demand, industrial growth and energy transition objectives, according to Abdulrahman al Yahyaei, CEO of Integrated Gas Company (IGC), the Sultanate of Oman's sole aggregator and shipper of natural gas.

Commenting on the evolving dynamics of the domestic gas market, Al Yahyaei indicated that growing pressure on gas resources is prompting a broader reassessment of how natural gas is valued, allocated and utilised across the economy.

One area attracting increasing attention is domestic gas pricing. With international gas prices having risen significantly in recent years amidst geopolitical tensions and changing energy market fundamentals, Oman is also evaluating how pricing mechanisms can better support efficiency and economic value creation.

"Domestic gas pricing is an important policy question", Al Yahyaei said. "Global gas prices and opportunity costs have changed significantly and this creates a need to ensure that domestic pricing encourages efficiency, reflects economic value and supports responsible consumption".

At the same time, he stressed that pricing reforms must preserve Oman's attractiveness as an investment destination for strategic industries. "The direction is towards more disciplined, transparent and value-based pricing rather than blanket subsidies", he added.

The changing market environment is also encouraging industrial consumers to adopt



Gas allocation is guided by national interest: IGC



“We are seeing increasing interest from industrial customers in energy efficiency, electrification, renewable integration and lower-carbon production models.**”**

**ABDULRAHMAN
AL YAHYAEI**
CEO, IGC

measures aimed at reducing dependence on natural gas.

According to Al Yahyaei, interest is growing in energy-efficiency initiatives, electrification, renewable energy integration and lower-carbon production pathways.

"We are seeing increasing interest from industrial customers in energy efficiency, electrification, renewable integration and lower-carbon production models", he noted.

Some companies are also exploring hydrogen, renewable electricity and process optimisation strategies to improve competitiveness and align with international sustainability requirements. From IGC's perspective, such developments help alleviate pressure on the national gas system by freeing up volumes that can be directed towards higher-value applications.

Export-oriented industries, in particular, are increasingly motivated by the growing importance of green and low-carbon product credentials in international markets. At the same time,

renewable energy is beginning to reshape Oman's energy landscape. Utility-scale solar and wind projects are already contributing to lower gas consumption during periods of renewable generation, although the impact remains gradual.

"Solar helps during daylight hours, but the system still requires gas-fired generation for evening peaks, seasonal demand and system stability", Al Yahyaei explained. As additional solar, wind and electricity storage projects are deployed, renewable energy is expected to play a larger role in reducing pressure on gas supplies. Nevertheless, natural gas will remain indispensable for ensuring reliability and flexibility throughout the energy transition.

Seasonal electricity demand continues to present one of the biggest operational challenges for the gas system. During the summer months, soaring temperatures drive a sharp increase in air-conditioning loads, resulting in significantly higher gas consumption by the power sector.

SEZAD highlights \$1.39 billion tourism, power projects

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has highlighted major tourism and energy developments with a combined value of approximately \$1.39 billion, reflecting the scale of projects planned and under development in the fast-growing economic hub.

Among the projects showcased is a tourism development valued at \$480 million under a cooperation memorandum involving Ruby Prime Investment and Development.

The project will be developed on a 200,000-square-metre site and is planned to include hotels, hotel apartments, a specialised academy and a commercial mall. The development is intended to



Among the projects showcased is a tourism development valued at \$480m.

strengthen Al Duqm's tourism and hospitality infrastructure as the city continues to expand its industrial, logistics and commercial activities. Additional accommodation and retail facilities are expected to support rising demand from business travellers, investors and

visitors to the region.

SEZAD has identified tourism as one of the key sectors supporting economic diversification in Duqm, alongside logistics, manufacturing, energy and fisheries. The planned hospitality project would add to the growing portfolio of tourism-related investments being pursued within the zone.

The economic zone also highlighted a major power project being developed to support future industrial and urban growth in Duqm.

The project involves the design, construction and operation of a power plant with an electricity generation capacity of 890 megawatts. The facility carries an investment value of \$910 million and will be developed on a site covering

210,000 square metres.

The project is being undertaken by Al Sahil Power in partnership with a consortium comprising Korea Western Power, Nebras Power, Union Water and Electricity, and Bahwan Infrastructure Services.

The planned power station is expected to play an important role in meeting rising electricity demand from industrial projects, residential developments and commercial activities across Duqm and neighbouring areas. Reliable power infrastructure has been identified as a critical requirement for supporting large-scale investments in manufacturing, petrochemicals, minerals processing and logistics.

Duqm has emerged as one of the Sultanate of Oman's most significant economic development zones,

benefitting from its strategic location on the Arabian Sea outside the Strait of Hormuz. The zone hosts a deep-water port, dry dock, industrial areas and a growing range of manufacturing and energy projects.

In recent years, Duqm has attracted investments across sectors including renewable energy, green hydrogen, mining, metals, logistics and tourism, reinforcing its role in the Sultanate of Oman's long-term economic diversification strategy.

The projects highlighted by SEZAD illustrate the breadth of developments planned for Duqm as authorities continue efforts to transform the zone into an integrated industrial, commercial and tourism destination capable of attracting regional and international investment.

ENERGY TRADE

China fuel exports recover



China's exports of refined oil products rose in May from April levels, although shipments remained sharply below a year earlier due to restrictions introduced during the Iran conflict.

Data showed exports outside Hong Kong and Macau increased 40 per cent but were down 69 per cent. Diesel exports more than doubled from April, with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka among the main destinations. — Reuters

UK POLITICS

Minister dismisses resignation reports



British Business Secretary Peter Kyle said he has no reason to believe Prime Minister Keir Starmer plans to resign, rejecting media reports suggesting an announcement could come on Monday.

Kyle said PM Starmer remains focused on governing despite growing political pressure following recent developments within the Labour Party and speculation about his future leadership. — Reuters

OIL INVESTMENT

Iran eyes oil sector revival



Iran's oil industry will serve as a key test of any lasting agreement with the United States, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said.

He noted that Iran's energy sector could offer investment opportunities in a post-agreement environment, with hundreds of projects and partnership contracts ready for international participation if commitments under a final deal are upheld. — Reuters

OPINION

Who really benefits from ESG?



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

SINCE its official launch in 2004, ESG (environmental, social and governance) has steadily gained mainstream momentum. The ESG framework takes a holistic view, recognising that sustainability advances beyond environmental issues. Fundamentally, ESG has three areas: environmental (emissions, resource use and climate risk); social (labour, supply chains, community impact and human rights); and governance (board structure, CEO compensation, audit quality and shareholder rights). Today, ESG has become part of how companies do business, as companies recognise that its individual elements are closely interrelated. The current times demand that leaders proactively think and act on ESG to safeguard the company’s long-term success. ESG-oriented investing has also experienced a meteoric rise and investment acceleration is driven by intensified attention from a broad range of strategic stakeholders, including social, government, employer, supplier, shareholder and customer groups, on the wider impact of corporations. Growing research shows that the ESG proposition is associated with higher equity returns and better business performance, including lower downside risk and higher credit ratings. According to McKinsey, ESG

also drives customer preference. A study executed across multiple industries reveals that over 70 per cent of consumers are willing to pay an additional 5 per cent for a green product if it meets the same performance standards as a non-green alternative. For example, Unilever developed Sunlight, a dishwashing liquid that uses less water than other brands. Sales of sunlight outpaced category growth by more than 20 per cent in water-deficient markets. ESG can also reduce operating costs; McKinsey research suggests it can cut expenses by up to 60 per cent. When companies invest in ESG value propositions, they can achieve greater strategic freedom, as it will ease regulatory pressure and engender government support. The ESG proposition is closely linked to employee productivity, as it helps attract and retain talent, enhance the employee experience, promote a sense of purpose and increase overall motivation. Research from leading business schools has found that higher employee satisfaction is associated with superior long term shareholder returns. Other studies posit that when companies invest in authentic ‘give back’ and society initiatives, they often engender strong employee enthusiasm. Conversely, a weak ESG agenda can damage trust, reduce engagement and drag down employee productivity. Farsighted companies

Today, ESG has become part of how companies do business, as companies recognise that its individual elements are closely interrelated. The current times demand that leaders proactively think and act on ESG to safeguard the company’s long-term success.

extend their ESG propositions across their value chains to their suppliers and the environment. ESG propositions can enhance investment returns by directing capital towards sustainable opportunities, including renewable energy and waste reduction, avoiding stranded investments and cash-draining options; and reducing reliance on energy-hungry plants and investments. To drive the ESG value proposition home across all levels of the organisation and in the hearts of consumers and employees, leaders need to channel and prioritise ESG initiatives among the many environmental, social and governance options. The ESG projects must be explicit, clearly articulated and leverage the company’s core competencies in context, thus strengthening their ties with different countries and communities. ESG profiles are not fixed but unique to each company, depending on its industry and position in the corporate life cycle. To institutionalise the case for ESG value creation, leaders must do more than rely on top-down announcements. Leaders have to prioritise, link ESG propositions to value creation and define hard metrics that correspond with the business model. Being transparent and thoughtful about ESG risks can be painful in the short term, but it is important for the company’s long-term credibility.

SINGAPORE MODEL IS ILL FIT FOR THE UK’S JOB MARKET

JON SINDREU

The British right’s dream of “Singapore-on-Thames” is alive and well. Nigel Farage’s Reform UK has taken a page from the city-state’s playbook, planning to tax firms more for employing foreigners. Yet what makes this work in Singapore is a kind of industrial planning his party is unlikely to embrace. While Reform leads in national polls, it performs a delicate balancing act: appealing to working-class regions without embracing unions and clamping down on migration without alienating free-marketeers. The new levy squares this circle. Its proceeds would reverse the 2025 Employer National

While Reform leads in national polls, it performs a delicate balancing act: appealing to working-class regions without embracing unions and clamping down on migration without alienating free-marketeers.

Ironically, this flips the usual anti-immigration narrative of nationals paying foreigners’ benefits. Still, the math appears to work on paper. Reform’s Treasury spokesperson Robert Jenrick suggested an illustrative £3,750 levy on full-time workers earning the National Living Wage — tapered at higher incomes — could more than fund an £11 billion National Insurance cut for brits. That seems plausible based on employment and pay data. Yes, the levy revenues would shrink quickly as firms hired fewer foreigners. But with annual Universal Credit welfare spending amounting to almost £8,000 per claimant, the policy could still pay for itself if 40% of vacated roles were filled by Britons moving off welfare. In reality, expelling foreign workers reduces demand as well as supply, so locals may not gain jobs on net. The £8,000 figure is also misleading: Universal Credit includes many benefits, including for disabilities and childcare and so claimants most likely to move into work — those already job-seeking or working limited hours — probably receive below the average. Nevertheless, the proposal highlights a genuine issue: Britain’s current migration system has recently admitted far more foreign workers than intended, which can be addressed by adjusting hiring costs. Keen observers will notice that the few countries that do this, such as Singapore and the Gulf nations, are flooded with cheap foreign labour. The Southeast Asian country illustrates why.

Insurance increase, which businesses hate, but only for British workers. It would taper as incomes rise, so the United Kingdom still attracts top talent and — by channelling more Britons into low-skilled jobs and off welfare — curb the state’s spending.

The Gulf’s second shock

THE ceasefire will be read as the end of the crisis. It is closer to the beginning of the more difficult one. A shooting war is an event; the structure it leaves behind is a condition. And the condition the Gulf now inherits is not a return to the pre-war equilibrium but a quietly repriced one, in which the cost of being safe has become a permanent line in every regional budget — and in which the region’s principal rival re-enters the market not as a combatant but as a competitor. The instinct after a war is to ask how quickly volumes, prices and confidence recover. That is the wrong frame. The relevant question is what the war changed permanently in the architecture of Gulf economic strategy. Three shifts now look structural rather than cyclical and together they describe a region that emerges from the conflict more secure and less wealthy at the same time. During the war, the Gulf spent on protection as an emergency: air defence, naval escort, the hardening of terminals and pipelines, the insurance and freight surcharges absorbed somewhere along every barrel’s journey. Emergencies end. The expectation they create does not. The post-war Gulf cannot credibly de-escalate its own security spending, because the war demonstrated that the threat is resident rather than episodic — it lives in the neighbourhood and can be reactivated at low cost to whoever holds it. This converts what was a wartime expense into a peacetime fixed cost. Defence budgets ratchet up and stay up. Critical infrastructure hardening becomes a recurring capital line rather than a one-off. The premium that markets, insurers and investors attach to Gulf-origin cargo does not fully unwind, because the war reset the baseline assumption about how risky the region is. Safety, in other words, has been repriced from a contingency into an overhead — and overheads do not disappear when the news cycle moves on. The cruel arithmetic is that these costs land precisely when the revenue to cover them weakens. The transformation programmes that define Gulf ambition — Vision



Vessels at the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman. — Reuters



DR UMAIR WAQAS

The writer is an Assistant Professor of Supply Chain Management and Logistics at Dhofar University, Oman.

The most underestimated structural shift is behavioural and it sits on the demand side. Under wartime stress, large Asian buyers did what rational buyers do: they diversified away from the most exposed supply and toward whatever offered reliability — Sea of Oman — facing terminals, alternative grades, non-regional barrels entirely.

2030 and its regional analogues — were calibrated on stable volumes, predictable prices and a steadily de-risking investment climate. The war broke the third assumption outright and the post-war market threatens the second. Here the return of a sanctions-freed Iran matters more than any battlefield outcome. A rehabilitated Iran does not re-enter the market cautiously; it re-enters to monetise. Years of constrained revenue create overwhelming fiscal pressure to maximise volume and accept discounts to claw back lost share. That additional supply, arriving into a market already nervous about demand, weighs on the very prices the Gulf’s fiscal models assume. The competitor the Gulf just fought returns as a price-softening force in the market the Gulf depends on. The result is a scissors: security obligations rising, fiscal headroom narrowing. Where the gap opens, it is closed by borrowing. Sovereign issuance widens and it widens into a market that now prices Gulf risk less generously than it did eighteen months ago. The region does not merely spend more on safety — it borrows more to do so, at terms set by the same risk perception the war created. The most underestimated structural shift is behavioural and it sits on the demand side. Under wartime stress, large Asian buyers did what rational buyers do: they diversified away from the most exposed supply and towards whatever offered reliability — Sea of Oman — facing terminals, alternative grades, non-

regional barrels entirely. Some of this was emergency substitution. But supply relationships, once rerouted, are sticky. A refiner that has reconfigured its slate and its logistics around a more diversified basket does not automatically reverse course when the shooting stops. A returning Iran then competes directly for those same buyers, offering discounted barrels to a customer base that has just been reminded of the cost of concentration. The Gulf thus faces demand-side erosion from two directions at once: buyers structurally inclined to hold the diversification they built under duress and a rival actively bidding for the share that diversification freed up. The lesson the war taught the Gulf’s customers — that supplier concentration is a risk to be managed — does not expire with the ceasefire. It becomes a procurement principle. Layer the three shifts together and the distributional logic becomes the real story. The capacity to absorb a permanent security premium is not evenly held. The states with deep reserves, genuine bypass geography and diversified balance sheets can carry the new overhead and wait out the price softness. The states without those buffers — thinner fiscal cushions, no meaningful alternative routing, narrower economic bases — pay the same premium against a smaller capacity to bear it. The security premium is therefore regressive within the Gulf itself. It widens the distance between the members that can buy resilience and the members that can only buy exposure. The bloc that the war was supposed to consolidate is instead being stratified by the cost of recovering from it and the same logic radiates outward: the Global South importers at the end of these supply chains inherit the repriced cargo without any of the producer’s compensating revenue. Resilience is a premium and a premium is always paid most painfully by whoever can least afford it. The post-war Gulf confronts a choice it has deferred for a generation.

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NAME CHANGE

I, **SANIYA BABER KHAN** (holder of Indian Passport No. W6228762), daughter of **FAZLE HAQ PATHAN**, having permanent residence at 39/1 NEAR RAPATWALI MASJID, JAORA, RATLAM, MP 457226, INDIA, and presently residing in MUSCAT, OMAN, ZOHA NOORA BUILDING, AL KHUWAIIR, intend to change my name from **SANIYA BABER KHAN** to **SANIYA KHAN** for all practical purposes.

Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to the Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P.Box No. 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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ART/LIFE

THREADS OF MEMORY



VICTORIANREBIRTH

NEW LONDON MUSEUM IN RESTORED VICTORIAN MARKET TO OPEN IN NOVEMBER



The new London Museum will officially open to the public on November 28 following a decade-long restoration project. The opening marks the return of the historic Victorian-era Smithfield Market to public use for the first time in more than 30 years.

The museum's free permanent galleries will showcase London's rich history through a diverse collection of artefacts, including Banksy's Piranhas artwork, King Charles I's execution vest and Emmeline Pankhurst's hunger strike medal. Visitors will also be able to explore a new social space beneath the market's restored dome, featuring a restaurant, shop and performance venue.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan described the opening as a significant moment for both London and the international cultural scene. He said the museum, supported by one of the largest cultural investments in the capital's history, is expected to attract millions of visitors and strengthen London's position as a global cultural hub.

More than 100,000 people contributed to the creation of the museum. Its collection includes notable exhibits such as the Whitechapel Fatberg, the Lord Mayor's Coach and ballerina Anna Pavlova's iconic Dying Swan costume, alongside several items that have never before been displayed publicly.

A new gathering space, Our Time in Linbury Hall, will host a day-to-night programme of events exploring four themes: tastes, sounds, plays and wears. The inaugural programme, London Tastes, will be led by baker Ruby Tandoh and food writer Jonathan Nunn, celebrating the city's diverse food culture.

Visitors can also explore the Past Times galleries, located at Roman street level. These exhibitions trace the lives of people who shaped London across the centuries, from its Roman origins to the Blitz and the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Highlights include Tom Daley's diving trunks from the 2012 Olympics, Queen Victoria's mourning dress and Charles Dickens' chair.

Sharon Ament, director of the London Museum, said she hopes the institution will make Londoners proud and serve as a place where people feel at home. Reflecting on the project, she described it as a challenging but rewarding journey driven by creativity and collaboration.

Ament said the museum was designed to reflect London itself — "in all its grit and glitter" — and to bring together the stories, treasures, challenges and innovations that have shaped the city. Above all, she hopes it will inspire future generations while giving Londoners a deeper connection to their shared history. — dpa

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

Kehinde Oguntoye & Kehinde Adediran pose for a photograph ahead of their traditional wedding ceremony along with their twin brother and sister in Ibadan. — AFP



FASHION FESTIVAL

A girl wearing a bee costume poses for a photo at the Surabaya Fashion Festival along a street in Surabaya. — AFP



PERFORMANCE

A juggler performs in a show during a festival for World Juggling Day, in San Salvador, El Salvador. — Reuters

INSTA PICKS



“A few colourful characters from the wild Oriental Garden Lizard”



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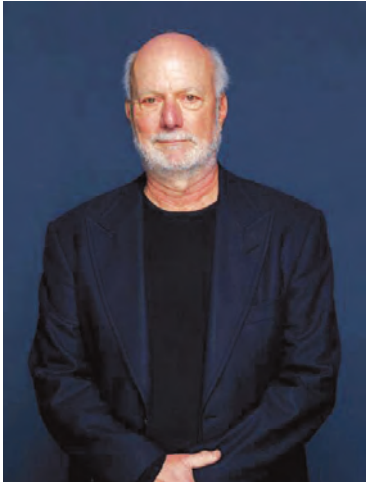
JAMES BURROWS, PROLIFIC INNOVATOR IN US TV COMEDIES, DEAD AT 85

US director and television creator James Burrows, who worked behind the scenes on “Friends”, “Cheers”, “Taxi” and many other beloved comedies, has died, People magazine reported on Friday. He was 85.

“We celebrate the extraordinary life and enduring legacy of James ‘Jimmy’ Burrows, who passed away peacefully today surrounded by his loving family”, his family said in a statement. The time and place of his death were not disclosed.

Burrows won 11 Emmy awards for excellence in television and helmed more than 1,000 episodes of hit programmes, working as a director, producer and writer.

Burrows was among the early innovators of the multi-camera sitcom — short for situation comedy — when his prolific career began in the 1970s, directing episodes of “The Mary Tyler Moore Show”, “Laverne & Shirley” and “The Bob Newhart Show”. His first Emmy came for directing “Taxi”, a groundbreaking comedy starring Danny DeVito, Andy Kaufman and Tony Danza, about the rough and tumble staff of a New York City taxicab company. He directed 236 episodes and



also co-created “Cheers” with longtime collaborator James Brooks, as well as its spin-off “Frasier”. His other hit shows include “The Big Bang Theory”, “Mike & Molly” and “3rd Rock from the Sun”.

Recently, Burrows took a rare step in front of the camera and starred as himself in “The Comeback”, reuniting with “Friends” star Lisa Kudrow for a show that pokes fun at life behind the scenes working on a sitcom in Hollywood.

“For more than five decades, Burrows was one of the most influential and beloved directors in television history. As a legendary director, mentor and creative force, he helped shape generations of comedy and brought immeasurable joy to audiences around the world”, his family said. — AFP



‘SINATRA THE MUSICAL’ DELIVERS AN INTIMATE JOURNEY



FRANK

Sinatra’s songs and life story come to the London stage in a new West End musical. The crooner’s daughter says that it captures the highs and lows of the man behind the myth. “Sinatra The Musical”, which has its official opening night at the Aldwych Theatre on June 24, focuses on the singer and performer’s early years and features more than 20 of his hits, including “Come Fly With Me”, “That’s Life” and “One For My Baby”. “Dad would say ‘Myth is always better than truth. It’s much more interesting’. This is truth and I think it’s very interesting”, Tina Sinatra, the singer’s younger daughter and the musical’s co-producer, said in an interview on Wednesday. The show opens with a 27-year-old Sinatra on stage at New York’s Paramount Theatre on New Year’s Eve 1942, delivering a performance that propels him to the big league. But as Sinatra’s star status soars, his relationship with his wife, Nancy, sours. The musical also looks at the impact of Sinatra’s tumultuous affair with Hollywood star Ava Gardner, whom he went on to marry and how he salvaged his career with “the greatest comeback in showbiz history”. “It’s the intimacy of mom and dad and Ava entering into that, their



lives. It is what I knew as I matured as a child and I had a lot to say about it. They just made a mess together, the three of them”, said Tina Sinatra. “It’s intimate and a roller coaster all at one time. And the music, of course, just enhances it all. And that was the key, that was the real purpose, to put the music into a medium we’d never touched before”. **ACTORS EMBODY FRANK, NANCY AND AVA** Joel Harper-Jackson stars as Frank Sinatra, with Phoebe Panaretos taking on the role of Nancy and Ana Villafañe portraying Gardner. “It’s a very human story”, said Harper-Jackson. “You see his flaws and the permission that Tina has given allows us to not sugar-coat anything, which is very refreshing”. The musical is written by two-time

Tony Award winner Joe DiPietro and has triple Tony-winning director and choreographer Kathleen Marshall at the helm. It features a 17-piece orchestra. “We want audiences to walk out of the theatre not only singing the songs and humming along and going on Spotify and listening to that favourite Frank song again and again, but also having learned something and having been surprised”, said Villafañe. “It’s also passing the baton”, added Panaretos. “I heard people on the Tube the other night saying, ‘we have to bring the kids’ and I thought, ‘We’ve done our job’”. Sinatra, whose instantly recognisable voice won him fans around the world with classics like “My Way” and “Strangers in the Night”, died in 1998. — Reuters

FEATURES



Fatema bint Abdullah al Makhmari is a visual artist and art educator from Shinas, Oman. She holds a Master's degree in Fine Arts and specialises in oil portraiture and contemporary installation art.

BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

SOME people describe their success as a career they chose. For Fatema bint Abdullah al Makhmari, art was a language she was born into.

Growing up in Shinas, a coastal town in northern Oman, Fatema was surrounded by creativity from an early age. Art flowed naturally through her family, particularly from her mother, whose artistic spirit shaped the household. Each sibling pursued a different creative path — one sewed, another practised henna, while others drew and painted.

“Art was inherited in our household”, Fatema says.

For her, drawing became a way to express thoughts, emotions and beliefs. What began as a childhood passion would later develop into a lifelong vocation.

FROM INHERITANCE TO EDUCATION

Fatema's artistic journey took a formal direction when she enrolled in the Department of Art Education at Sultan Qaboos University in 2015. She graduated in 2020 with a clearer sense of purpose — not only to create art but also to share it with others.

As an art teacher, she discovered that teaching and creating were deeply connected. Both involve nurturing imagination and encouraging self-expression.

Her early artistic focus was oil portraiture. She found the human face an endless source of inspiration, seeing portraiture as more than a record of physical features. Instead, it offered a way to capture mood, presence and the invisible aspects of a person's inner world.

In 2025, Fatema completed a Master's degree in Fine Arts, a milestone that transformed her artistic thinking.

“During the Master's, my understanding of art matured”, she says. “I engaged deeply with contemporary art”.

ART AS INNER ARCHAEOLOGY

Today, Fatema's work explores emotions, memory and the unseen forces that shape human experience.

She is particularly drawn to ordinary, familiar objects and materials that often go unnoticed. Through her work, she seeks to reveal the hidden meanings and stories embedded within them.

Contemporary art, she believes, provides the freedom to explore such ideas. Rather than offering fixed interpretations, it invites viewers into open-ended encounters shaped by their own perspectives.

“I became more interested in the idea itself”, she explains, “and in the relationship between the artwork, its place and the reflections it creates in the viewer”.

TALEED: WHEN A THREAD BECOMES A STATEMENT

This philosophy found expression in Taleed, an installation created for Bahaa Oman, a multidisciplinary exhibition celebrating Omani identity through



T H R E A D S O F M E M O R Y

THE ART AND VISION OF FATEMA AL MAKHMARI



Fatema's artistic journey took a formal direction when she enrolled in the Department of Art Education at Sultan Qaboos University in 2015.

visual art, photography, installation, three-dimensional works and AI-generated video.

The exhibition focused on traditional Omani women's dress, inspiring Fatema to work with talli braid — a traditional decorative textile trim woven from colourful or metallic threads and commonly used in women's clothing.

Her central question was simple: What happens when a traditional material is removed from its familiar context and reimagined as a contemporary visual language?

The process involved workshops,

experimentation and critical review. Working with talli was challenging because of its limited flexibility, but Fatema embraced that resistance.

“I worked with talli as a visual element that could be deconstructed and reformed”, she says. “I wanted to create a dialogue between tradition and contemporary expression”. The resulting installation explored continuity, memory and inheritance, asking whether cultural traditions can evolve while preserving their essence.

A Practice Still Unfolding
Taleed does not mark a departure from Fatema's portraiture; rather,



it extends the same inquiry. Both examine what lies beneath the visible surface — whether the inner life of a person or the memory woven into a thread.

Today, her focus has expanded from the individual to the collective, exploring how cultural heritage can be preserved, transformed and passed on to future generations.

Still early in her artistic career, Fatema continues to balance her roles as artist and educator. In both, she is engaged in the same pursuit: finding a visual language for what cannot easily be expressed in words.