

Observer



IN BRIEF

HM GREETES GRAND DUKE OF LUXEMBOURG

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Grand Duke Guillaume of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and sincere wishes to the Grand Duke and the people of his country, wishing them further growth and prosperity on all spheres. — ONA

SOLIDARITY WITH QATAR FOLLOWING EXPLOSION

The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its solidarity with the State of Qatar following an explosion incident at a factory in the Ras Laffan Industrial City. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman affirmed its stance alongside the State of Qatar and its people during this circumstance, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured and safety for everyone. — ONA

European leaders offer farewell to Starmer

BERLIN: Outgoing British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced his departure on Monday amid plunging approval ratings, but there were warm words from European leaders who had generally found him easier to work with than his recent predecessors.

Starmer, the first non-Conservative prime minister since Britain voted to leave the European Union, rejected suggestions that it could rejoin the 27-member bloc, but he had pushed to improve relations after the trauma of Brexit.



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer walks with his wife Victoria, on the day he announces the timeline for his resignation. — Reuters

He also kept up Britain's central role in the region's support for Ukraine, alongside his fellow "E3" leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz.

"It can take many leaders years to grow into the statesman you became in just two years," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on the social media platform X. "European and Ukrainian security is stronger because of you. Thank you, dear Keir." — Reuters

SEE ALSO P7

Omani authorities issue new Ebola-related controls

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Monday issued a notice to travellers arriving in the Sultanate of Oman, whereby they are required to complete an electronic health declaration form upon arrival at border crossings or before.

The move aims to protect public health and enhance health monitoring procedures at border crossings. The ministry stressed the importance of disclosing any travel, stay, or transit (temporary stopover) within the past 21 days in countries or regions affected by Ebola or any other public health concern.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Monday issued a circular to travellers and airlines operating in the Sultanate of Oman, reading as follows: "In light of the epidemiological updates issued by the World Health Organization, which indicate the continued outbreak of Ebola disease



Health workers wearing personal protective equipment carry the coffin of a person who is suspected to have died from Ebola in Bunia, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — **Reuters**

caused by the Bundibugyo virus, and the increase in the number of confirmed, suspected and probable cases in both the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Uganda, and based on coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Medical Response Sector, we would like to inform travellers and airlines operating in the Sultanate of Oman of the necessity to fill out the

electronic self-disclosure certificate via the QR code, for all travellers arriving in the Sultanate of Oman from the following two categories: citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Uganda, and travellers arriving from either of the aforementioned countries or those who have visited either of them within 21 days prior to arriving in the Sultanate of Oman.”

US EASES SANCTIONS ON IRANIAN OIL

THE United States Treasury on Monday announced the temporary easing of sanctions on Iranian oil up to August 21 following talks with Iranian representatives in Switzerland. The measure authorises the production, delivery and sale of crude oil, petrochemical products and petroleum products of Iranian origin, a Treasury Department statement said.

US Vice-President JD Vance said his talks with Iranian officials in Switzerland had laid a good foundation for a final peace deal, although Iran denied that it had begun discussions of its nuclear programme. The two sides, trying to build on the interim deal they signed last week, agreed to a road map towards a permanent agreement within 60 days at the talks in the Qatari-owned Swiss mountain resort of Buergenstock, mediators Pakistan and Qatar said.

The move is the largest since the start of the current Iran war on February 28. In March, the US temporarily eased sanctions on Iranian



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

oil tankers with the aim of calming the energy markets. Oil prices rose sharply on global markets after the war effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz through which most oil and petroleum products from Iran and the Gulf States are exported. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent described the latest talks with Iran as “productive.” In line with the ongoing

productive talks in Switzerland, Iran has committed to free and open transit in the Strait of Hormuz and to permit International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors into their country,” he posted on X.

Meanwhile, maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz on Monday continued to flow at a faster pace. — **Agencies**



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OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The exhibition showcased the professional and craft skills that the participants gained during the training year. — ONA

AL Wafa CENTRE MARKS CONCLUSION OF ANNUAL COURSE

MUSCAT: Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Nizwa on Monday marked the conclusion of the 2025-2026 training course. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs.

The ceremony included an exhibition featuring products and works in which the persons with disabilities took part. The exhibition showcased the professional and craft skills that the participants gained during the training year. It also embodies the centre’s efforts to empower persons with disabilities and enhance their social and economic integration.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief guest felicitated the partners and contributors who supported the centre’s programmes and activities, in appreciation of their efforts to promote the rehabilitation process. — ONA

OMAN RECORDS HIGHEST AVERAGE TEMPERATURE

MUSCAT: Oman recorded its highest average maximum temperature in three years during 2025, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), highlighting a warming trend across the Sultanate of Oman amid notable shifts in humidity and rainfall patterns.

The average maximum temperature climbed to 34.1°C in 2025, up from 32.9°C in 2024 and 32.8°C in 2023, marking the highest level recorded during the three-year period under review.

At the same time, humidity levels declined significantly. The average maximum humidity fell to 66.4 per cent in 2025 from 72 per cent in 2024 and 74 per cent in 2023.

‘SALALAH EYE’ SET TO STRENGTHEN DHOFAR’S TOURISM APPEAL

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Salalah Eye project, currently under construction in Al Haffa, is expected to enhance Dhofar Governorate’s tourism offerings and support efforts to position Salalah as a year-round destination. Rising 55 metres above the waterfront, the observation wheel overlooks the Arabian Sea and is located near the New Haffa Souq.

Expected to become operational at the beginning of July, the attraction is set to welcome visitors as the Khareef season gets under way, adding a new landmark to Salalah’s growing tourism landscape.

The project forms part of broader efforts to expand Dhofar’s tourism infrastructure and diversify visitor experiences. Once completed, the Salalah Eye is expected to become a prominent feature of Salalah’s waterfront,



The project forms part of broader efforts to expand Dhofar’s tourism infrastructure.

offering panoramic views of the city and coastline while supporting tourism-related investment and economic activity in the area.

Its opening comes as preparations gather pace across Dhofar ahead of the Khareef season, which begins on Sunday and runs until September 21.

Government entities, including Dhofar Municipality, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Royal Oman Police, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Environment Authority, are working alongside private operators to ensure visitor facilities, entertainment venues and service centres are ready to receive tourists from within Oman and abroad. Dhofar’s tourism sector has continued to record steady growth in recent years.

According to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, Khareef Dhofar attracted 1,070,738 visitors in 2025, compared to 1,047,751 in 2024 and 962,196 in 2023.

Visitor spending also increased to RO 125 million in 2025, up from RO 121 million in 2024 and RO 103 million in 2023, highlighting the season’s growing contribution to accommodation, transport, retail, entertainment and small businesses across the governorate.

Land grants move towards readiness-to-build model

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 22

OMAN’S RESIDENTIAL land-grant process is being pushed towards a more disciplined model that asks a practical question before allocating land: is the beneficiary ready to build? That was the central message of a Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning presentation delivered during an awareness seminar held on Monday at the multipurpose hall of the Office of the Wali of Taqah.

The seminar, titled “Together Towards Sustainable Housing and Urban Planning Services”, was organised by the Directorate-General of Housing and Urban Planning in Dhofar under the auspices of Eng Khuwaidem bin Mohammed bin Salim al Maashani, member of Majlis Ash’shura representing the Wilayat of Taqah. The presentation outlined a shift from a land-grant process shaped largely by waiting lists, manual draws and in-person procedures towards a digital route that allows eligible citizens to select land plots or housing units electronically and complete payments through digital channels.

The most significant change is the weighting of eligibility criteria. Financial ability accounts for 50 per cent of the total assessment score, followed by priority of application at 30 per cent, family social status at 10 per cent and the applicant’s age at 10 per cent.

The weighting gives the system a clearer policy purpose: land allocation is being linked not only to entitlement but also to the likelihood that a granted plot will become a completed home.

Ahmed al Maashani, Director of the Lands Department at the Directorate of Housing and Urban Planning in Dhofar, told the Oman Observer that the digital transformation of land services is not merely a technical change.

“It is not just about moving a transaction from paper to a



The seminar was held under the title ‘Together Towards Sustainable Housing and Urban Planning Services’.

Under the “Choose Your Land” service, citizens whose turn has arrived through electronic sorting can select an available residential plot in or near their place of permanent residence. The service uses interactive geographic maps showing the plot location and details, with the selection link remaining available for five days.

platform,” he said. “It is about reorganising the full journey of the beneficiary — from application to selecting the land plot or housing unit and completing payment electronically — through clearer and more transparent standards.” He said giving financial ability the highest weight in the assessment reflects a direction aimed at ensuring that granted land is used effectively and converted into completed homes, rather than remaining unused for long periods.

“The priority of application remains important, but the system must also ask whether the beneficiary is ready to build and benefit from the land,” he added.

According to the presentation, the previous route involved submitting applications by post, notifying beneficiaries when their turn arrived, conducting manual draws and completing payment in person. The digital process replaces this with electronic selection and payment, reducing the need for repeated visits and making the beneficiary’s options clearer.

The model also introduces firmer timelines after allocation. Beneficiaries are given three months to complete payment procedures. If payment is not completed, the application is deferred for one year.

Land is first granted under a temporary title deed for three years,

which may be extended for one additional year. A final title deed is issued only after the housing unit is completed. If construction is not completed within the specified period, the plot allocation is cancelled and the application is deferred for one year.

The ministry also reviewed a set of housing options designed to give citizens different routes depending on location, need and financial readiness. These include Future Cities, Plan Your Land, Sorouh Schemes, Choose Your Land, Acquire Your Land, Replace Your Land and Sorouh Projects.

Under the “Choose Your Land” service, citizens whose turn has arrived through electronic sorting can select an available residential plot in or near their place of permanent residence. The service uses interactive geographic maps showing the plot location and details, with the selection link remaining available for five days.

The “Acquire Your Land” service allows eligible citizens to obtain a premium plot at a government-supported price, with support ranging from 20 to 40 per cent, without waiting for their turn, in fully serviced schemes.

Updated controls also allow two eligible beneficiaries to share one plot, with support doubled for joint plots, provided the shared land area is not less than 600 square metres.



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION

LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADAM SOLAR INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECT (IPP) AND SINAW SOLAR INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECT (IPP), SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

In line with PWP’s ongoing commitment to ensuring a reliable and sustainable energy future and maintaining grid security in the Sultanate of Oman through a balanced energy mix, and in support of Oman Vision 2040 and the Sultanate of Oman’s energy transition and carbon reduction objectives, PWP is planning to develop two (2) solar photovoltaic power plants in partnership with the private sector, as follows:

- Adam Solar IPP: 1,000 MW Solar PV with Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)
- Sinaw Solar IPP: 500 MW Solar PV plant

PWP is announcing the launch of the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) document.

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Purchase Price	Statement of Qualification Submission Deadline
OPWP/2026/022	Request for Qualification for the Development of Adam Solar IPP and Sinaw Solar IPP	350 Last day of purchase is 07 July 2026	27 July 2026 Before 12.00 PM (Gulf Standard Time)

Disclaimer

This RFQ is for interested developers and is not applicable to interested or potential EPC contractors. The tender documents will be available for purchase in electronic format through the PWP website after completion of the registration process via the e-tendering system: [<https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx>]

The supplier user manual can be accessed on the official website of PWP. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@omanpwp.nama.om with a copy to: tendering.support@nss.nama.om and prj.Solar28@Omanpwp.nama.om



الشركة العامة لشراء الطاقة والمياه، مسقط، عمان
Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC PO Box 1386, Rustaq PC 132, Rustaq, Sultanate of Oman | Tel: +968 28004880 | C/A No: 17/2021/O | Tax Number: 986331

SHORT TAKES



The performance reflects the efficiency of medical capabilities. — ONA

University Medical City hits milestone in oncological surgeries

MUSCAT: A joint team from the University Medical City — represented by the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) and the Department of Surgical Oncology at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre — has successfully performed the first operation of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman to connect lymphatic vessels to veins following the excision of lymph nodes during tumour removal.

The operation is considered an advanced and precise supermicrosurgical procedure, as it relies on connecting ultra-fine lymphatic vessels with a diameter of less than 0.5 millimetres to veins. This aims to improve the drainage of lymphatic fluid following lymph node dissection, thereby contributing to reducing lymphedema and its associated symptoms, enhancing the patients’ quality of life, and limiting long-term complications.

The medical team emphasised that the successful performance of this advanced operation within the Sultanate of Oman reflects the efficiency of medical capabilities and embodies the level of integration and cooperation among specialised medical teams at the University Medical City.

It also represents a launching pad toward developing an integrated national programme in this field, thereby enhancing access to highly precise specialised healthcare services within the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Serdal leadership, skills development programme begins



Serdal reflects OQ’s commitment to investing in human capital and developing national capabilities. — ONA

MUSCAT: In coordination with the Ministry of Education, the first phase of the Serdal Leadership and Skills Development Programme officially began today as part of a national initiative funded by OQ, the global energy investment group, and delivered in partnership with Oman Sail.

Bringing together students from across Oman, the programme is designed to equip participants with the leadership and life skills needed to navigate a rapidly changing world and contribute meaningfully to the nation’s future through practical challenges, applied learning experiences and personal development activities that promote self-confidence, responsibility and independence.

Serdal reflects OQ’s commitment to investing in human capital and developing national capabilities by providing high-quality learning opportunities that help build character and strengthen communication, teamwork, leadership and decision-making skills, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Covering multiple governorates across the nation, the programme targets specific school grades to ensure maximum impact. A total of 188 students will participate in a comprehensive learning journey that combines practical learning, marine-based activities and educational adventures, helping participants build character, strengthen initiative and responsibility and discover their potential in new and engaging environments. — ONA

Oman-EU meeting discusses innovation opportunities

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) hosted the EU-Oman Knowledge Exchange Meeting, under the theme “Bridging the Gap in Excellence: Overcoming Challenges in Scientific Exchange between the European Union and the Sultanate of Oman.” The meeting aimed to enhance the strategic partnership and discuss ways to advance cooperation in the fields of scientific research and innovation.

The meeting witnessed the delivery of a series of specialised visual presentations. The first presentation addressed ways to enhance cooperation under the umbrella of the “Horizon Europe” programme, which is the European Union’s largest framework programme for funding research and innovation globally,



The meeting witnessed the delivery of a series of specialised visual presentations. — ONA

and reviewed the current state of cooperation and its future prospects. Meanwhile, the second presentation highlighted the academic opportunities and grants provided to the Sultanate of Oman by the “Erasmus+” programme, which is dedicated to supporting education and international academic and student exchange.

For its part, the Research and Innovation Authority delivered a visual presentation on preparing and identifying available opportunities for scientific exchange between the two sides. The programme also included another visual presentation reviewing the success story of a graduate who benefited from the “Erasmus+” programme. — ONA

ZAKAT BENEFICIARIES SET TO GET FREE TREATMENT

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

OVER 400 PATIENTS who are the beneficiaries of the Zakat fund are expected to receive the free medical treatment at private hospitals this year, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA).

Free medical treatment for the Zakat beneficiaries was launched in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to allocate funds for the treatment of the Zakat beneficiaries, in association with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), through the Endowment Health Foundation ‘Athar’.

Hilal al Sarmi, head of the Ather programme, said, “These Royal directives aim to provide treatment for those eligible for Zakat, thereby strengthening the spirit of participation, a deeply rooted characteristic of Omani society.” “These generous directives also underscore the importance of upholding the values of solidarity and giving, enhancing quality of life, bridging the healthcare gap, and accelerating access to healthcare services for the Zakat beneficiaries and all segments of the society. Last year alone, 221 Zakat beneficiaries availed the benefits of the Programme,” he added.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs sponsored 31,642 families through 66 community Zakat committees and the ministry

Eligible families and individuals can apply or verify their statuses by visiting their local state-level Zakat Committees during official working hours. Registration can be done on the websites of MoH or MoARA or by scanning the QR code provided to the beneficiaries.



Zakat beneficiaries to get free treatment at private hospitals.

currently manages this distribution and facilitates specialised medical treatment and charity payments online. These families were supported with Zakat funds and community committees, distributing an estimated RO 16 million. In addition, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, offers specialised medical registration programmes to Zakat beneficiaries for treatments in public and private institutions.

“Eligible families and individuals can apply or verify their statuses by visiting their local state-level Zakat Committees during official working hours. Registration can be done on the websites of MoH or MoARA or

by scanning the QR code provided to the beneficiaries. They can avail free medical treatment at more than 10 private hospitals with which the ministry has come to an agreement,” Al Sarmi added.

Registration for treatment applications from Zakat beneficiaries registered with the ministry will begin at the start of July and continue until mid-August, with treatment procedures commencing at the beginning of September 2026, for the second phase of the initiative, which also includes performing surgical procedures and diagnostic radiology services in private hospitals across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

National workshop to combat desertification

MUSCAT: The activities of the national workshop to approve the National Strategy to Combat Desertification 2040 commenced on Monday.

Organised by the Environment Authority in cooperation with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the workshop sees the participation of members of the National Committee to Combat Desertification, alongside a selection of experts and decision-makers from various government, private and civil society sectors.

The strategy embodies the Sultanate of Oman’s commitments toward the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and aligns with the environmental targets of Oman Vision 2040. It aims to enhance national efforts to reduce land degradation, protect natural resources and achieve sustainable development.



The three-day workshop reviews the operational targets of the strategy. — ONA

The opening ceremony, held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, featured the screening of a documentary film reviewing the strategy’s road map. The film highlighted the prominent natural and climatic challenges facing Omani lands due to their location within the desert belt, and the subsequent impacts on vegetation cover, soil and water resources.

The documentary also addressed the scientific foundations upon which the strategy was built, which involves dividing the Sultanate of Oman into four main environmental regions to direct field initiatives efficiently and effectively.

The three-day workshop reviews the operational targets of the strategy, which include reclaiming and rehabilitating more than 100 square kilometres of degraded land, significantly

increasing tree cover and implementing national afforestation initiatives while monitoring tree growth within sustainable environmental programmes and initiatives up to the year 2050.

Saud bin Salim al Araiimi, Acting Director-General of the Directorate-General of Vegetation Cover Development, stated that combating desertification represents a fundamental pillar for enhancing food, water and environmental security.

For his part, the representative of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development affirmed the level of ongoing cooperation with the Environment Authority in preparing the National Strategy to Combat Desertification, underscoring the importance of exchanging expertise and enhancing joint action to support national efforts in this field.— ONA

SPOTLIGHT

REDUCE YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT BY CHOOSING OMANI FRUITS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MITIGATING the effects of climate change is vital, especially during the summer. In addition, enjoying the blessings of the Omani nature can reduce carbon footprint. In other words, purchasing local produce supports the environment by reducing long journeys of import from distant lands and, at the same time, supports local farmers. Quite often, the local fruits are found in vegetable markets across all wilayats. To begin with, the Sultanate of Oman has 8 million palms, which make dates one of the main local crops with more than 250 native varieties. Naghal is the first one to arrive as the summer begins, which is suitable for individuals with diabetes. In addition, all varieties of dates are known for their fibre content.

Mangoes are definitely a summer delight, whether they are consumed raw, ripe, pickled, or in salad. They are a nutrient-dense tropical fruit packed with over 20 vitamins and minerals. According to health experts, a single serving provides 50% of your daily vitamin C and is rich in fibre, potassium and antioxidants. Qurayat is known for mangoes, and so are places like Suhar, Shinas and Saham in Al Batinah North. Sohar Mango Festival is a popular feature.

In Oman, stronger regulation of groundwater extraction and initiatives to rehabilitate aflaj systems help preserve long-term agricultural viability.

Masoud Sulaiman Abood al Azri, Director General of Marketing for Fisheries and Agricultural & Ministry Digital Transformation Supervisor and Ministry spokesman explained, “Overall, Oman’s approach recognizes that food security under arid conditions is achieved through innovation, efficiency, and sustainability, ensuring that agricultural growth does not come at the expense of natural resources or future generations.”

He said that Oman’s food security strategy is based on comparative advantage and resource efficiency, rather than attempting full self-sufficiency across all food categories. This means prioritizing local production where it is economically and environmentally viable, while securing strategic imports for water- and land-intensive staples.

This is where the Omani seasonal fruits become even more significant.

Grapes are considered an agricultural success story in Oman, with domestic production expanding rapidly in Al Sharqiyah North, notably in Ibra, Al Mudhaibi and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Besides, Wakan Village vineyards are known for their unique sight of grape vines, where tourists can walk around and enjoy popular local and regional varieties such as the Halawani, Omani yellow, Omani black and Taifi. According to Healthline, “Grapes are highly hydrating and nutrient-dense, primarily consisting of carbohydrates (natural sugars) and water. A standard 1-cup serving (about 151 grammes) contains approximately 104 calories, 27g of carbohydrates, and less than 1g of protein and fat each. They are especially rich in vitamin K, copper and potent antioxidants.”

Bananas were a traditional crop in Oman and were considered second to dates. Historians also trace it back to the ancient trade routes to India and East Africa. About 11 varieties are grown, and popular types include Malindi, Fard, Razat Boufan, Nagal, and the commercial Cavendish/Williams varieties. Bananas provide quick energy because they have calories and carbohydrates and filling dietary fibre. They are considered fat-free and sodium-free but provide micronutrients such as potassium, vitamin B6 and vitamin C. Salalah plantations are known for their fresh produce; in addition, other centres of production are Al Suwaiq, Suhar and Saham in Al Batinah North.

Apricots of Oman can be found in the terraced, falaj-irrigated mountain villages of the Al Hajar Mountains, including Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Wakan Village and Jabal Shams. They have become a tourism attraction, as orchard tours are popular with visitors. They are picked to be eaten

fresh, dried for later consumption, or made into jams or other products. According to Manipal Cigna, dried apricots are a highly concentrated, nutrient-dense superfood. A few pieces provide an excellent dose of dietary fibre, potassium and antioxidants like beta-carotene. They aid in healthy digestion, promote cardiovascular health, and support vibrant skin and vision.

Coconut groves of Salalah are a unique feature not to be seen anywhere else in the Gulf region. Coconut drinks are a major attraction during the Khareef season. Omani coconuts are predominantly grown in Dhofar Governorate. They are highly nutritious and are the best way to keep oneself hydrated while exploring Dhofar, as it provides exceptional natural hydration, heart-healthy fats and powerful antioxidants. They are known to boost immunity, aid digestion and maintain overall wellness.

Watermelon and sweet melons of Najd have been known to grow in popularity in the GCC countries.

“They are juicy and delicious,” said a regular customer.

Farmers are known to grow both traditional Omani watermelons (often called Arabic watermelons) and premium sweet melons (such as rock melons and honeydews). They are available in the local markets, especially during the summer. Watermelons are known for a high hydration level that can replenish fluids and electrolytes. It is also referred to as an antioxidant powerhouse because of its lycopene content, and at the same time it is recommended for muscle recovery and is recognised for its support of skin and eye health. Meanwhile, sweet melon is known to be rich in vitamin C for immune support and vitamin B6 for nerve function, in addition to vision support due to beta-carotene, as well as being known for creating electrolyte balance – regulating blood pressure and fluid balance. It is also proven to support skin elasticity as it contains high levels of copper.

Papaya fruit of Oman is something to look out for. It is widely available in Omani supermarkets and is packed with vitamins A, C and E, plus antioxidants and a unique digestive enzyme called papain.

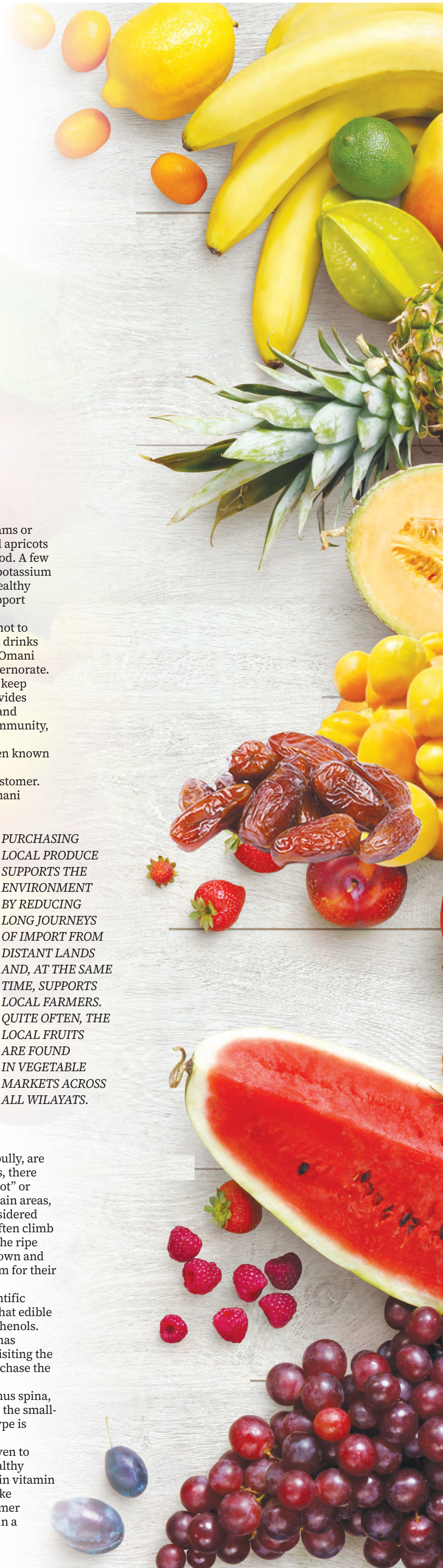
Boot fruits of Oman, otherwise known as gum bully, are popular locally. High up in the Al Hajar Mountains, there is a small wild fruit that many people know as “boot” or gum bully. It grows naturally in the rugged mountain areas, especially during the summer months, and is considered one of Oman’s traditional seasonal fruits. Locals often climb steep mountain slopes and rocky paths to collect the ripe fruits by hand. Once gathered, they are brought down and sold in local markets, where many people buy them for their sweet taste.

They are known to be rich in polyphenols. Scientific studies featured on PubMed Central (PMC) show that edible Sideroxylon fruits contain notable levels of total phenols. It is known to fight free radicals, as the fruit pulp has proven to exhibit strong antioxidant properties. Visiting the locations during the season is the ideal way to purchase the freshly hand-picked tiny fruits.

A popular fruit that is popular in Oman is Ziziphus spina, locally known as Nabq. “There are two varieties – the small-sized fruits are the Omani variety, and the other type is slightly bigger and is from outside the country.

Nabq, known as the fruit of the Sidr tree, is proven to have carbohydrates, high-quality proteins and healthy organic acids. Researchers say it is also abundant in vitamin C and carotene and rich in essential electrolytes like potassium, calcium and magnesium. So, this summer might be the best season to start exploring Oman in a different way – through the fruits of the land.

PURCHASING LOCAL PRODUCE SUPPORTS THE ENVIRONMENT BY REDUCING LONG JOURNEYS OF IMPORT FROM DISTANT LANDS AND, AT THE SAME TIME, SUPPORTS LOCAL FARMERS. QUITE OFTEN, THE LOCAL FRUITS ARE FOUND IN VEGETABLE MARKETS ACROSS ALL WILAYATS.



NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS

AL Fairuz Trading & Contracting Co LLC, a company registered under Commercial Registration No. (1001302), hereby announces that certain administrative changes have been made concerning the employees and representatives authorized to act and deal with third parties on behalf of the Company.

Accordingly, and for the purpose of identifying and settling all existing financial rights and obligations, the Company invites all individuals, entities, institutions, and organizations that have any financial claims, rights, receivables, or outstanding debts against the Company, as well as any parties owing amounts or having financial obligations towards the Company, to contact the Company's management and submit all supporting documents and evidence substantiating such claims, rights, obligations, or liabilities.

All such claims, notices, and supporting documents must be submitted within a period not exceeding fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this Notice.

The Company further reserves its right not to recognize or entertain any claim, allegation, debt, liability, or demand submitted after the expiry of the above-mentioned period unless the Company has been duly notified thereof and provided with the relevant supporting documentation within the specified timeframe.

This Notice is published for the purpose of safeguarding the Company's legal position, settling its financial records, and enabling all concerned parties to preserve and assert their respective rights in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Al Fairuz Trading & Contracting Co. LLC



(NOTICE : Auction No. 2/2025)

The Ministry of Health announces an extension for the deadlines of the public Auction for the sale of medical equipment.

Interested Companies and establishments may collect the documents and specifications of this Auction from the Directorate of Tenders at General Directorate of Financial Affairs at the Ministry's headquarters, ground floor in Al Khuwair. The fee for the documents is 25 O.R. and can be collected during official working hours (8:30 AM - 12:30 PM) until Sunday, 28/June/2026. Companies must present proof of registration with the Authority for Projects, Tenders and Local Content when purchasing the tender documents.

The offers must be enclosed in sealed envelopes duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to H.E. the Chairperson of the Tender Committee, clearly stating the title: (Auction No.2/2025) for Selling medical equipment (X-ray machines). The offers must be valid for 90 days. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder's name or identity.

The Offers shall be submitted at the Tender Department in Directorate of Financial Affairs by 10: 00 am on Wednesday, 08/July/2026. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry reserves the right to reject any bids without providing reasons.



الروبيان الطبيعي للإستزراع السمكي ش.م.م
Natural Shrimp Aquaculture L.L.C

الروبيان الشرقي للإستزراع السمكي ش.م.م
Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture L.L.C

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER

Natural Shrimp Aquaculture LLC and Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture are subsidiaries of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) inviting you to share offers for the below table.

Tender Number	Description	Last Date of Collection of RFP	Last Date of Submission	Tender Fee
NSA/ORAT/004/2026	Supply of Sodium metabisulfite (SMBS) on a call off basis	30 th June 2026	8 th June 2026	NA

Please note:

- You may request for tender document by sending an email to osara.tenders@nsa.om
- All proposals should be submitted via email to bidopening_osara@nsa.om. Failure to submit the bid to this email address will automatically disqualify the submission, and no further correspondence will be entertained.
- Any inquiries regarding the tender should be directed to Osara.tenders@nsa.om. Responses to queries will be provided in writing and shared with all suppliers approached for this tender.

Oman to participate in Saba Saba expo



The team continues to implement its plan during 2026. — ONA

THE Sultanate of Oman will participate in the 50th edition of the Saba Saba Exhibition 2026, which will be held in the United Republic of Tanzania from June 28 to July 3.

Khalid bin Sulaiman al Salhi, Director-General of Marketing and Commercial Affairs and Official Spokesperson for “Madayn”, stated that the participation of the supervisory team for the promotion of Omani products “OPEX” in this trade exhibition comes to enhance the presence of Omani products in global markets by organising and managing national participations in prominent international exhibitions.

He explained that the exhibition represents a favourable opportunity to attract and localise investments in the Sultanate of Oman and boost exports, as it serves as an important platform to access East African markets and promote Omani products across multiple sectors.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman will participate in the exhibition with a pavilion featuring 24 companies representing the industrial, commercial and service sectors, aiming to introduce Omani industry and the progress it has achieved in the fields of specifications, quality and packaging. — ONA

UTAS-Al Musannah launches summer programme



The initiative targets school and university students, employees, job-seekers and members of the local community.

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences – Al Musannah has launched the “Al Batinah South Summer 2026” programme under the theme “Creativity – Connection – Impact”.

Organised by the Department of Continuing Education and Community Service in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah South and several government and community partners, the programme will continue until July 9.

The initiative targets school and university students, employees, job-seekers and members of the local community through more than 35 free workshops covering eight key areas, including technology and artificial intelligence, English language, engineering, arts and design, entrepreneurship, scientific research, health and Islamic studies.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (R.O)
18/2026	Building works - Seeb	First & Above	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	551/- R.O
19/2026	HVAC system works - Seeb	First & above - specialized in HVAC system	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	240/- R.O
20/2026	Civil maintenance works - Seeb	First & above - Civil maintenance works	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	158/- R.O
21/2026	Building works - Khasab	Excellent	02 July 2026	10 Aug 2026	693/- R.O
22/2026	Building works - Seeb	First & Above	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	527/- R.O
23/2026	Building works - Masirah	Excellent	02 July 2026	17 Aug 2026	1,575/- R.O
24/2026	Civil maintenance works - Salalah	First & above - Civil maintenance works	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	158/- R.O
25/2026	Building works - Salalah	Excellent	02 July 2026	17 Aug 2026	1,200/- R.O
26/2026	Building works - Seeb	First and above	02 July 2026	10 Aug 2026	245/- R.O
27/2026	Building works - Shafa	Excellent	02 July 2026	10 Aug 2026	1221/- R.O
28/2026	Civil maintenance works - Masirah	First & above - Civil maintenance works	02 July 2026	03 Aug 2026	289/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- Bidders shall present the omanization certificate issued by the ministry of labour prior to purchasing the tender documents provide that it meets the approved that it meets the approved minimum omanization percentage as stipulated by ministry of labour.
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as SOFT COPY (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Qatar's Energy Minister and CEO of QatarEnergy Saad al Kaabi speaks during a press conference in Doha. — AFP

Qatar fatal gas plant blast kills 13, injures dozens

DOHA: A huge blast at a Qatar gas hub killed 13 people and injured 66 others, the Gulf state's energy minister said on Monday, one of the deadliest accidents at a Gulf energy facility. Authorities are investigating the cause of the incident, which Saad al Kaabi said was "an accident and not sabotage or hostile in nature", after Iranian attacks targeted energy facilities in the Gulf during the Middle East war. He announced "the tragic loss of 13 lives of our people who hold Indian and Pakistani nationalities. 66 people have been reported injured and are receiving medical treatment, none of whom are in life-threatening condition".

Earlier, the interior ministry had said a "technical incident" caused the explosion late on Sunday in the Gulf emirate's Ras Laffan industrial zone. The blast took place at a unit supplying gas to local firms and reverberated across the capital Doha. "It will not affect anything regarding export. It will not affect anything regarding our local requirements," Kaabi said, adding the explosion had "no environmental impact".

Qatar's state-owned energy company said the blast occurred "during the start-up of operations at Ras Laffan Industrial City, which resulted in an explosion and fire at Barzan local gas supply facility". QatarEnergy said the fire had been brought under control after emergency response teams were deployed. — AFP

Malaysia vows to up Bangladeshi workers' rights as PM visits



Bangladesh's PM Tarique Rahman (L) and Malaysia's PM Anwar Ibrahim shake hands during a press conference at the Federal Government office "Putra Perdana" in Putrajaya. — AFP

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim pledged stronger protections for Bangladeshi migrant workers on Monday, after a series of labour abuses affecting the Southeast Asian nation's largest foreign workforce. Around 800,000 Bangladeshis work in Malaysia, making up a third of the country's migrant workforce, who have faced unpaid wages and recruitment scams that left many job-seekers stranded after paying hefty recruitment fees.

Speaking with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Anwar described "human resources cooperation, particularly the workers" as "critical for our survival". "This continued use of workers being exploited, ill-treated... purely for personal or company gains cannot be tolerated," Anwar said. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA JAILS EX-JUSTICE MINISTER OVER MARTIAL LAW DISASTER

SEOUL: A South Korean court sentenced a former justice minister to 25 years in prison on Monday for his role in ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol's brief and disastrous declaration of martial law in 2024. Park Sung-jae was found guilty of involvement in "insurrection" by the Seoul Central District Court, according to a recording of the verdict shared online.

Park held a meeting of justice ministry officials in the early hours after the martial law declaration

and checked on prison capacity should the authorities arrest anti-government figures, prosecutors said.

"Due to the actions of the defendant, the country nearly faced a situation in which the people's fundamental rights and the basic order of liberal democracy could have been violated," presiding judge Lee Jin-gwan said on Monday. As justice minister, Park "ignored the various opinions that had been raised at the meeting regarding

the illegality of the December 3 insurrection", Lee said.

Prosecutors had sought a 20-year sentence for Park, arguing that he had "reduced the law to a tool of insurrection in his abuse of power and posed a challenge to the rule of law". Park, who had been standing trial without detention, was taken into custody following the ruling.

Yoon's late-night national televised address plunged South Korea into an unprecedented political crisis. — AFP

Lebanon weighs truce to back regional peace efforts

LEBANESE PRESIDENT Joseph Aoun spoke with senior US and Qatari officials on Monday about consolidating a ceasefire in Lebanon and forming a "de-confliction cell", his office said, after US-Iran negotiations in Switzerland. Fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in support of Iran, has repeatedly threatened to derail regional peace efforts. After a first round of talks in Switzerland on ending the regional conflict, mediators Pakistan and Qatar said on Monday that Tehran and Washington had agreed to set up a "de-confliction cell" with Lebanon "to ensure the adherence of the termination of military operations" there.

Aoun received "a telephone call from US Vice-President JD Vance, senior adviser to the US president Jared Kushner, and the Qatari Prime Minister" Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, a statement from the Lebanese presidency said. They discussed "the issue of consolidating the ceasefire in Lebanon, stopping the Israeli military escalation, and steps that should be taken in this regard, including the possibility



A Lebanese woman weeps as she sits on the rubble at the site of an Israeli air strike that targeted the southern Lebanese village of Qennarit. — AFP

of forming a cell for this purpose", the statement added.

After the talks in Switzerland, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X: "1st real test: Lebanon deconfliction cell." The talks came after Washington and Tehran last week signed a memorandum of understanding to end the broader Middle East war that includes "an immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon".

Israeli strikes and clashes with Hezbollah late last week

threat they encountered inside Lebanon.

Israel also said all war-related restrictions in its northern border areas were lifted from Monday morning. The developments come ahead of a fifth round of direct talks between Lebanese and Israeli officials in Washington set to begin on Tuesday. Tehran and Washington, meanwhile, have set up communication lines to end the fighting in Lebanon and to keep the vital Strait of Hormuz open, mediators said. Iran closed the strait, through which much of the world's oil and gas travels in peacetime, early in the war, sending economic shockwaves across the globe. Before the conflict began, there was free international passage through the strait, but Tehran appears keen to monetise the waterway as part of any deal.

Lebanese authorities are seeking the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the country and to separate the negotiations from the US-Iran deal, as officials try to determine the future of ties between the two nations after decades of hostilities. "We negotiate for ourselves, and we do not accept any other party doing so for us," Aoun said later on Monday. — AFP



PHILIPPINE SCHOOL SHOOTING KILLS 3, WOUNDS 7

MANILA: Two students opened fire on Monday inside a school in the central Philippines, a rare campus shooting that killed three teens and wounded seven others, police said. The two alleged shooters, aged 15 and 14, were in custody after firing "randomly" in San Jose National High School, police Lieutenant Evalyn Diaz said of the violence that sent terrified students running for cover.

A Glock 9mm pistol used in the shooting was registered to a policewoman in the region, national police spokesman Allen Rae Co told a media briefing, adding that she was taken into custody. Over 40 empty shells were found at the scene, police added. As of late afternoon, no updates had been given on the status of the seven wounded students, who were receiving treatment at a local hospital. An earlier police tally had placed their number at five.

President Ferdinand Marcos's spokeswoman on Monday said the president had been "saddened by what happened". "Anyone, especially the parents of the victims, would feel grief and fear," Claire Castro told reporters, adding that unspecified measures were being taken to ensure safety at public spaces including schools. — AFP

DEADLY INCIDENT

Fire at training centre in India's kills 15



At least 15 people, most of them students, were killed in a fire at an animation training centre in Lucknow city in northern India on Monday, authorities said. The fire broke out in the Aliganj area of Lucknow, the capital of India's state of Uttar Pradesh, local media reported. News footage showed a group of men in uniform carrying bodies as a crowd gathered nearby. About 21 students were present when the fire broke out, police said. — Reuters

LONG-WAITED ELECTIONS

S Sudan announces date for national polls



South Sudan will hold elections on December 22 after years of repeated delays and despite a dire security situation. The National Election Commission (NEC) confirmed that polls would take place on December 22. However, chairperson Abednego Akok Kacul cautioned that multiple conditions of the peace deal to allow elections to proceed were still not in place. The commission has only been given \$21 million of a proposed election budget of \$250 million. — AFP

DIPLOMACY TOUR

Rubio heads to Gulf to discuss Iran deal



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will travel on Tuesday through Thursday to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain, on a trip that will give a chance to sell US preliminary Iran accord directly to Gulf allies. While in Bahrain, Rubio will also meet with the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, a grouping of six countries, State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said. The trip comes amid a broader flurry of Iran-related diplomacy. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Ukrainian war veteran walks at a makeshift memorial for service members in Kyiv. — Reuters

EU LEADERS TO MEET FOR UKRAINE TALKS IN BERLIN

BERLIN: The leaders of Europe’s top military powers will meet on Wednesday in Berlin to discuss the Ukraine conflict and an upcoming Nato summit, the German government said. Chancellor Friedrich Merz plans to host the leaders of France, Britain, Italy and Poland, a spokesman said on Monday, adding that the resignation of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer had not changed those plans. “We’ll stick to our plan and carry on as we have been doing over the past few days,” government spokesman Stefan Kornelius told a regular press briefing.

Nato chief Mark Rutte is set to join the talks via video link. The meeting is due to start at 4:45 pm (14:45 GMT) and a joint press conference is planned for 18:00 GMT. “The focus of the meeting... is preparation for the Nato summit in Ankara on July 7 and 8 and of course the attack on Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East,” said Kornelius.

A European Union official said EU chief Antonio Costa’s office had made “brief contacts at diplomatic level” with Moscow aimed at opening communication channels. But some EU states have been wary about reaching out to the Kremlin, with diplomats saying several leaders pushed backed against Costa’s efforts at last week’s EU summit in Brussels. — AFP

EBOLA INFECTS OVER 1,000 IN CONGO



Ebola has now infected more than 1,000 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo in an outbreak that has spread to a third displacement camp and killed an 18-month-old girl, official reports showed. The confirmed death count stood at 254, Congo’s government said late on Sunday, more than a month after the declaration of the outbreak of the rare Bundibugyo strain that has no approved treatment or vaccine. The speed of its spread across three provinces of eastern Congo has prompted warnings from African health experts. — Reuters

SPANISH PM’S EX-TOP AIDE SENTENCED TO 24 YEARS IN JAIL FOR GRAFT

MADRID: A Spanish court on Monday sentenced Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s former right-hand man to 24 years in jail for graft, a harsh blow to the already fragile Socialist-led government. The case is one of several investigations into alleged corruption by Sanchez’s family and ex-political allies that have threatened to topple his minority coalition.

The Supreme Court found ex-transport minister Jose Luis Abalos — a former Socialist heavyweight who helped propel Sanchez to power in 2018 — guilty of membership of a criminal organisation, bribery,

embezzlement of public funds and influence peddling. The court also sentenced Abalos’s former adviser Koldo Garcia to 19 years in jail for the same crimes. The two men were accused of pocketing kick-backs for handing out public contracts worth millions of euros for sanitary equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prosecutors argued in court that both men had abused their government positions and contacts to favour businessman Victor de Aldama, who had already admitted his role in the vast and complex affair. Aldama, who was also

tried in the case, was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison, but his sentence was suspended because of his cooperation with investigators during the probe. In its ruling, the court highlighted “the serious deterioration of public trust in the political system caused by corruption, which undermines the democratic architecture of the state”.

Abalos was a key architect of Sanchez’s rise to power and served as the Socialist party’s powerful organisation secretary before becoming transport minister after Sanchez took office. — AFP

UK’s PM Starmer resigns, paving way for Burnham

PM KEIR STARMER said on Monday he was quitting, paving the way for what is expected to be an orderly transfer of power to front-runner Andy Burnham, who could become Britain’s seventh leader in 10 years as early as next month. In an emotional speech, Starmer said he had listened to his governing Labour Party and realised that he was no longer the man who should lead it into a national election due in 2029.

After making his announcement on the steps of his Downing Street office and London residence, Starmer’s move to stand down could have triggered a divisive leadership contest, but several Labour lawmakers said they now expected more of a coronation. Burnham, a 56-year old career politician, quickly won the support of another potential leadership rival, former health minister Wes Streeting, with one Labour lawmaker saying it was more likely the former mayor would now be installed as leader.

British lawmaker Andy Burnham, the front-runner to replace Keir Starmer as prime minister, said on Monday there were many steps ahead when asked if he planned to call a general election. When asked by a BBC journalist if he would call an election, which he could only do if he became leader of the Labour Party, Burnham said: “You’re jumping several hurdles ahead there.”

By appointing Britain’s seventh prime minister since the Brexit vote to leave the European Union 10 years ago, the



British PM Keir Starmer announces the timeline for his resignation outside 10 Downing Street, in London, Britain. — Reuters

Labour government is the latest to fall foul of voter anger over politicians’ failure to deliver on their promises of change.

Starmer said he would ask the Labour Party’s organising committee to set out a timeline for a leadership contest to find his replacement. Nominations would open on July 9, close by mid-July, and if there is a contest, a new leader will be in place by September.

A coronation could mean a new leader would enter office by mid-July. “The question my party is asking now is whether I am best placed to lead us into the next general election. I have heard the answer from my parliamentary party to that question and I accept that answer with good grace,” he said.

After describing the achievements his government had secured in his two years of power, a man who was often criticised for being robotic became visibly emotional, his voice cracking when he thanked his family for their support. “When I leave the biggest job in the country I will spend more time on the most important job, being the best husband I can to my fantastic wife Vic who has been a rock by my side through good times and bad, and being the best dad I can to my beautiful children who are my pride and my joy.”

Starmer spent the weekend with his wife, Victoria, at his country residence to consider his future. With support draining away, he realised the political

reality of his position. There was some sadness in the Labour ranks, with industry minister Chris McDonald saying his speech underlined the fact “he’s a really decent man”. However, others said he had been treated the way he treated others as prime minister, being “royally done over”.

The threat to Starmer, which had been building for months, increased sharply on Friday when Burnham decisively won a parliamentary election to return to Westminster, beating a candidate from Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party, which has led opinion polls for more than a year.

That victory gave hope to Labour lawmakers that Burnham, known for his strong communication skills, could transform the fortunes of a party that has lost support under Starmer. The pound rose against other currencies and British government bonds rallied after Streeting’s announcement, as investors welcomed a more certain path to Burnham’s premiership.

Despite hoping for a smooth handover, the change is not without risk. Burnham, who is expected to arrive in London on Monday to take up his newly won seat for the northwestern English area of Makerfield, has yet to flesh out a full policy agenda and Reform’s Farage immediately called for a national election. “I’ve had enough of waiting around. Britain needs change — real change, not another washed-up has-been shoved into place by the uniparty,” Farage said in a statement. — Reuters

Temperatures to exceed 40°C in European heatwave as 3 die in France

PARIS: Three people died due to extreme heat in France and thousands of schools closed or modified timetables as European authorities issued heatwave warnings and forecasters in Britain said temperatures could smash records for June this week. Temperatures in Bordeaux in southwestern France were forecast to exceed 42°C on Monday and weather agency Meteo France said 49 regional administrative areas would be under a red heatwave warning.

“We’re heading for, at the very least, several days of very, very hot weather. We don’t know when temperatures will start falling,” French Health Minister Stephanie Rist said on TV channel TF1. Three elderly people, aged between 80 and 95, died over the weekend in the Bordeaux region as a result of health issues caused by the current heatwave, local government official Sophie Brocas told France TV late on Sunday.

The Met Office, Britain’s national weather forecaster, said on Monday that a four-day heatwave covering southern and central England and parts of Wales could push temperatures above 39°C in some places, easily breaking the record of 35.6°C set for June in 1957 and 1976. The June heatwave follows a record-breaking May, when Britain recorded its hottest day for the month, hitting 35.1°C.

In Spain, state weather agency Aemet issued a red alert for the Basque region, in the normally cooler north of the country, with the mercury in San Sebastian set to rise to a high of 40°C, more than double the city’s historic average for June 22, according to the Reuters Climate Monitor. San Sebastian was set to be hotter than the southern cities of Seville and Cordoba, which normally record the country’s most intense summer heat. “We are seeing temperatures between 5 and 10



A person shelters from the sun under an umbrella along the banks of the River Seine in Paris. — Reuters

degrees above normal for this time of year, and in some northern areas even more than 10 degrees above average,” said Rubén del Campo, spokesperson for Aemet.

The night was providing little relief in some parts of Spain, with temperatures failing to drop below 25°C or even 30°C in places like the southwestern province of Almeria, Aemet said.

Europe was the continent furthest from its historic norm on Monday, with an average high temperature of 24°C, which was 4.1°C above what was typical from 1961-1990, according to the climate monitor. By comparison, Asia and North America were 2°C and 1.3°C above the historic norm.

Near Rome’s Pantheon, tourists dipped their hats or caps in fountains and splashed their faces or draped wet towels round their necks, while others took refuge in restaurants with misting fans.

Wildlife shelters in northern Europe were struggling to cope with the number of animals being brought in suffering from the heat. Birds such as swifts, swallows, sparrows

and starlings, which make their nests in the eaves of roofs, have been particularly affected by abnormally high temperatures, said Romaine de Jaegere, a biologist and founder of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Animals Living in the Wild (Creaves) wildlife refuge in Temploux in Belgium. “Temperatures on the roofs can sometimes reach 50, even 60 degrees Celsius. So they prefer to jump rather than let themselves die and literally cook in their nests,” De Jaegere said, adding that the shelter had received 150 animals in the last three days.

Spain’s Labour Ministry said it was monitoring whether companies were complying with laws that allow workers to reduce or adjust their working hours when orange or red weather alerts are issued. Workers are also entitled to up to four days of paid leave if they are unable to reach their workplace due to weather conditions, it said. — Reuters

OPINION

From oil dependence to sustainable revenues



OMAN'S BUDGET narrative is changing. For much of the last decade, the headline was the deficit: low oil prices forced borrowing, delayed projects, and squeezed spending. That cycle made long-term planning difficult for families, businesses, and the government alike.

Today, the picture looks different. Tax and non-oil revenues are climbing, total revenues are higher, and the fiscal deficit is narrowing. That is progress. But the real measure of success will not be this year's numbers. It will be whether Oman can convert stronger revenues into durable stability without losing momentum on growth, jobs, and diversification.

The improvement is not only about oil. Crude prices have helped, but the structure of revenues is what sets this moment apart. VAT at 5 per cent, introduced in 2021, has become part of daily commerce. Corporate income tax collection is more effective. Excise duties on tobacco, energy drinks, and carbonated drinks bring steady income. Fees and other non-tax revenues have been streamlined and made more predictable. Taken together, these steps mean the budget is less dependent on the price of a barrel each month and more tied to the activity of the economy itself.

A smaller deficit matters for practical reasons. First, it cuts borrowing. Lower debt means lower interest payments, and every rial saved on debt service can go to schools, hospitals, roads, and the projects outlined

in Oman Vision 2040. Second, it builds credibility. Investors, rating agencies, and businesses track deficits closely. A consistent downward trend signals that Oman is managing its finances and makes the country a more predictable place to invest. Third, it gives policymakers room to manoeuvre. When revenues are stable, spending cuts do not have to be deep or sudden every time oil prices fall.

Higher revenues from taxes also bring responsibility. Citizens and businesses accept VAT and other levies when they see a return in daily life. That return looks like clinics that are staffed and supplied, schools that prepare Omanis for private-sector work, roads that reduce travel time, and support for small and medium enterprises that hire locally. Transparency is essential. When people can see how revenues are spent, taxes stop feeling like a burden and start to look like an investment in shared services.

The challenge now is balance. Raising revenue is only half the task. Spending efficiency matters just as much. Oman has already trimmed wasteful expenditure and re-prioritised projects. That discipline must continue. A narrower deficit should not become a reason to slow diversification. In fact, stable finances are what make diversification possible. Ports, logistics, tourism, manufacturing, and green energy all require funding that is predictable over several years, not budgets that start and stop with oil prices.

Competitiveness is another key

Oman is showing that fiscal reform can be introduced without shock. The approach has been to start low, phase changes in gradually, protect basic goods and services, and link revenues to results people can see.

consideration. Oman's 5 per cent VAT rate is among the lowest in the region. That helps consumers and makes Oman attractive to business. As revenues rise, there will be pressure to increase rates or add new taxes quickly. A more sustainable path is to broaden the tax base and improve compliance while keeping rates low and administration simple.

Small firms in particular need filing systems that are digital, fast, and inexpensive. If compliance is complicated or costly, the informal economy expands and the tax system loses both revenue and fairness.

Oman is showing that fiscal reform can be introduced without shock. The approach has been to start low, phase changes in gradually, protect basic goods and services, and link revenues to results people can see. The deficit is narrowing because revenues are rising, but also because expectations are changing. The goal is no longer just to survive periods of low oil prices. The goal is to build a budget that remains steady through them.

Higher revenues and a smaller deficit are milestones, not the destination. If Oman maintains focus on efficiency, transparency, and protecting the most vulnerable, this tax-driven shift can do more than balance the books.

It can provide the time and confidence needed to complete the harder task: building an economy where Omanis lead the next chapter, with or without oil. That is the real revenue the country should aim for.

AFRICA FACES CHILD SURGERY CRISIS AS ANAESTHESIA RUNS OUT

ERIC RANDOLPH

African hospitals face huge new costs as they scramble to replace the main anaesthetic for child operations that is set to run out in 2027, a charity has warned. Halothane is still widely used across sub-Saharan Africa to put children to sleep for operations, primarily because it can be seven to 10 times cheaper than the newer alternative, sevoflurane.

But the last halothane manufacturer shut down its production line in India in 2023, and stocks are rapidly running out across Africa. “We don’t know exactly when, but I don’t think we will have any halothane left by the end of 2027,” said Elizabeth Igaga, an anaesthesiologist in Uganda. Igaga is senior director for programme safety at Smile Train, a charity that carries out more than 100,000 surgeries each year for cleft lips and palates, 90 per cent of them for children. “This halothane situation is a big deal for us. We are committed to them having safe surgery,” she said.

While high-end hospitals have already switched to sevoflurane, they represent a tiny fraction of health facilities in sub-Saharan Africa. The transition has exposed years of under-funding in anaesthesia systems on the continent, with many discovering that machines need to be replaced at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars each.

The announcement that halothane was no longer being produced “set off nationwide panic” in Zambia, said Sompwe Mwansa, president of the country’s Society of Anaesthetists. “We’re playing catch-up on equipment needs and training needs,” she said. “It’s really been quite a challenging transition period for us, especially for centres that are away from sort of the urban centres.” Across much of Africa, anaesthetics are administered by health workers who are not doctors and will require fresh training for new drugs to avoid expensive wastage, Mwansa added.

The World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists called in 2024 for African governments to urgently budget for the transition. “Unfortunately, that call has not received the response that the timeline requires,” Smile Train said in a statement. Ugandan and Zambian authorities have responded positively. — AFP

De La Espriella win cements rightward shift

ALEXANDER VILLEGAS

COLOMBIA has swung to the right, electing nationalist lawyer and political newcomer Abelardo De La Espriella as president, accelerating a rightward shift rippling across Latin America. In Peru, where authorities have been slowly counting contested ballots from the June 7 presidential runoff, conservative Keiko Fujimori is projected to win by just over 0.2%, securing the presidency after three failed attempts.

Colombia and Peru now join Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia and Panama in moving right, in a stark reversal of the region's so-called pink tide that brought several leftist governments to power in the early 2020s, including President Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first leftist president. Under Colombian law, a final verified count overseen by notaries and judges is required and was nearly complete late on Sunday. It is unclear if it aligns fully with the initial count.

Across the region, including in Colombia, weak economies and rising crime have reshaped voter priorities. Once fringe hard-right candidates have gained traction by promising crackdowns, amid a global rise of right-wing nationalism and a push by President Donald Trump to fight China's growing influence in Latin America and exert more US control over the region. “This is an unusual alignment of the stars for Trump,” said Steven Levitsky, professor of Latin American Studies and



A woman reads a newspaper announcing that right-wing candidate Abelardo De La Espriella won the presidential race in Barranquilla, Colombia. — Reuters

Across the region, including in Colombia, weak economies and rising crime have reshaped voter priorities. Once fringe hard-right candidates have gained traction by promising crackdowns, amid a global rise of right-wing nationalism

government at Harvard University. “Rarely do you see a large number of governments as ideologically convergent as we’re seeing now.”

Over the past year, Trump has ordered strikes killing more than 150 people on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean, launched a right-wing regional alliance dubbed the Shield of the Americas, and captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in a raid on Caracas. Colombia's Petro has been Trump's most outspoken critic in the region, drawing threats of military action and sanctions. De La Espriella, by contrast, is a Trump fan.

A naturalised US citizen who lived in Miami, he has been a vocal supporter of Trump and received his endorsement ahead of the runoff. He has vowed to join the Shield of the Americas, crack down on drug traffickers, ease business regulations, lower taxes and revive oil and gas projects halted

under Petro. His victory comes as Colombia faces gas shortages and global energy markets are upended by the war on Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. With vast oil reserves in Guyana and Venezuela — which Trump has promised to develop — and one of the world's largest shale formations in Argentina, experts say Latin America stands to gain as a global energy powerhouse.

Right-wing leaders in Argentina, Chile, Peru and Colombia have gained support with promises of tax cuts, smaller government and looser mining and fossil fuel rules. However, many face budget deficits, forcing unpopular spending cuts that have triggered protests. Bolivia declared a state of emergency this weekend and began to clear blockades that had paralysed the nation for more than 50 days as labour unions and others protested austerity measures enacted by centre-right President Rodrigo Paz.

In Chile, President Jose Antonio Kast saw his approval rating plummet after the Iran war prompted his government to hike fuel prices, while Argentine President Javier Milei's austerity measures have been met with recurring protests. Security challenges persist despite pledges to be tough on crime. In Ecuador, murders soared 30% last year, with President Daniel Noboa's government blaming it on turf wars between splintered gangs vying for dominance. Murders also surged in Costa Rica under right-wing populist Rodrigo Chaves. His successor, President Laura Fernandez, vowed a war on crime. — Reuters

Out of sight, out of mind



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

IS IT easy to forget or ignore people, objects, or problems when they are no longer in your immediate presence or line of sight? The phrase, out of sight, out of mind, goes back to the 1500s. English poet Barnabe Googe's Eglogs, Epytaphes, and Sonettes (1563) refers to this phrase as “out of sight, out of thought.”

How many times do we keep a book or anything that needs urgent attention around our vicinity so that we remember to read it or take it with us? Have you ever been told you need to focus more? Why is it normal for some to be organised while others forget where they have kept what they are searching for? A systematic approach increases efficiency. But some people tend to end up in chaos no matter what. It might have to do with brain wiring. Could it? We often hear people accusing each other of a lack of thoughtfulness.

Can we blame it on out of sight, out of mind? It is part of our psychology; for instance, when we want to get out of certain habits like consuming chocolates, we want them to be hidden from us so that we can overcome the habit.

WHAT WE SEE PROMPTS US

Did you know that retailers practice this while arranging certain items on the shelves, ensuring that placing the products at eye level could trigger spontaneous purchasing, and they know products that are left on the bottom shelves are often forgotten? Now, of course, this also depends on the height of the individual. We might be criticised

for being impulsive in purchasing, but did we just realise how useful the product is? Anyway, this is consumer behaviour. In the field of marketing, consumer behaviour is an important factor. This helps us to understand brand loyalty.

So is it true that we forget family and friends when they are not near our proximity? Maybe this is why in the past people enjoyed hanging their family photos on the walls of their homes and desks.

According to health experts, for individuals with neurodivergent conditions like ADHD, this phenomenon is strongly tied to working memory and inattention. Apparently, tasks or objects completely cease to exist in their mental workspace if they are not visually present. Maybe this is why the ‘to-do list’ has been so useful.

People get upset when we go into the mode of out of sight, out of mind, because they feel left out, and the other factor is societal expectations. This is where the society expects everyone to fit in. But often, it is the ones who do not fit in who end up being innovative.

Today, thankfully, with societies moving towards inclusiveness and acceptance, we have the opportunity to interact with individuals who might be diagnosed with neurodivergence such as ADHD (difference in attention), autism spectrum, dyslexia (differences in how the brain processes written and reading language), dyscalculia (ability in mathematics), dyspraxia (differences that can be seen in physical coordination), and Tourette syndrome.

According to health experts, for individuals with neurodivergent conditions like ADHD, this phenomenon is strongly tied to working memory and inattention. Apparently, tasks or objects completely cease to exist in their mental workspace if they are not visually present.

The world is seeing the neurodiversity paradigm — this movement shifts the focus from “fixing” an individual to changing their environment. It highlights strengths — such as deep focus, hyper-systemising, or creative problem-solving — while advocating for accommodations.

WHAT ARE THESE ACCOMMODATIONS?

Common accommodations include sensory-friendly spaces, clear written instructions, and flexible schedules to support diverse cognitive styles. It was Judy Singer, in the late 1990s, who promoted inclusiveness and acceptance. In 2026, when we look back, we realise we have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. The digital world has definitely supported the efforts as technology has been developing at a fast pace that can aid inclusivity.

The text-based communication, asynchronous voice notes, and online communities help people build deep connections without the exhaustion of traditional socialising.

The tools built for neurodivergent people — like noise-cancelling headphones, closed captions, and speech-to-text — ultimately improve productivity and life for everyone. Most importantly, it provides hope to develop a fulfilling career.

Maybe this is the reason why the companies should try to shift towards outcome-based tracking instead of the traditional method, because standard workplace evaluations are known to frequently penalise neurodivergent communication styles.

POPE DECRIES LEADERS WHO ‘FEED’ WARS IN HUNGRY WORLD

JOSHUA MCELWEE

World leaders are “feeding” wars instead of the hungry, Pope Leo said on Monday, telling the UN food aid agency that global priorities were badly skewed. Leo, who has been more outspoken on political issues in recent months, urged governments to increase their spending to combat hunger and not subject food aid to limits based on geopolitical concerns.

“Conflicts are ‘fed’ more readily than people are nourished,” the first US pope said in a visit to the Rome headquarters of the World Food Programme (WFP). “This reality reflects not only operational shortcomings but also a fundamental imbalance in political and moral priorities,” he said.

The WFP is the largest provider of food aid worldwide. Its biggest donor is the US, which announced a new \$800 million contribution last week, following earlier cuts by President Donald Trump that more than halved planned US funding.

Leo, who drew Trump’s ire earlier this year after criticising the Iran war, did not mention any specific leaders on Monday.

After his address at the WFP headquarters, the pope also took part in a virtual call with agency workers in several countries, including Venezuela and Lebanon.

The pope lamented in his address that the world’s humanitarian crises were being relegated to a “secondary place among international priorities”. He said that countries “have increasingly allocated their resources towards national security, economic growth and domestic stability, disregarding the close link between these issues and multilateral cooperation”.

Leo was welcomed to the WFP on Monday by Cindy McCain, who resigned as director of the agency earlier this year for health reasons. The WFP, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020, provided 15.6 billion daily rations to 121 million people in 2025, funded by \$6.5 billion in voluntary donations, according to the agency.

The WFP warned last week that acute food insecurity would worsen for millions of people across 13 countries between June and November, with conflict, funding shortages and climate shocks taking their toll.

The agency, which does not receive direct funding from the UN, is seeking \$13 billion in donations for 2026. Leo said that access to food was “a fundamental human right grounded in the dignity of every person”.

He said alleviating hunger not only helped those in need but also addressed the underlying causes of geopolitical instability. “Food security is an essential component of global and integral security,” said the pope. — Reuters

The startup of AI digital transformation in Oman

OVER THE past decade, government institutions and private enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman have invested significantly in digital transformation initiatives, converting many traditional services and processes into digital platforms. This transformation has enhanced efficiency, simplified services, and improved customer experiences. However, the world is now entering a new and more transformative era: the era of AI Transformation.

Digital transformation focused primarily on digitising processes, whereas AI transformation is about reimagining how organisations operate and make decisions. It represents a shift from simply using technology to deploying intelligent systems capable of learning, predicting, and providing insights that enable faster, more accurate, and more efficient decision-making.

In this context, Oman has a remarkable opportunity to transition from digital transformation to AI transformation, building on the progress it has already achieved in digital infrastructure, e-government services, and the ambitious national strategies outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

AI transformation does not mean replacing humans with machines; rather, it is about augmenting human capabilities and empowering people. Artificial intelligence can help government employees analyse vast amounts of data within seconds, assist doctors in diagnosing diseases, enable educators to design more personalised learning experiences, and enhance the efficiency of financial, taxation, and logistics services.

In the public sector, AI has the potential to revolutionise the way government services are delivered through proactive services that anticipate citizens’ needs, intelligent decision-support systems, and more advanced national data analytics. This aligns perfectly with the vision of smart governments, where



By investing in people, encouraging research and development, and creating a supportive regulatory environment, Oman can unlock significant economic and social value from artificial intelligence while creating high-quality jobs for future generations.



DR SALEH AL KHALDI

The writer is an AI expert, entrepreneur, and leadership coach

AI transformation does not mean replacing humans with machines; rather, it is about augmenting human capabilities and empowering people

citizens are placed at the centre of all services.

However, achieving this transformation requires much more than investing in advanced technologies. Successful AI transformation depends on four key pillars: visionary leadership, high-quality data, a skilled workforce, and responsible governance.

Institutional leaders are now expected to develop clear strategies for integrating AI into their organisations to achieve strategic goals. At the same time, data quality has become a decisive factor, as the effectiveness of any AI system depends on the quality of the data it learns from.

Equally important is investing in AI and digital skills development for both young people and professionals to ensure that organisations can fully leverage the opportunities offered by these technologies.

At the same time, strong ethical frameworks must be established to ensure the responsible use of AI, protect privacy, promote transparency and fairness, and keep human values at the centre of decision-making.

Moreover, AI transformation

presents Oman with an opportunity not only to become a consumer of artificial intelligence technologies but also a creator of AI-driven solutions and digital innovation. Emerging sectors such as AI infrastructure, intelligent data centres, smart logistics, healthcare technologies, financial technologies, and smart tourism can become new engines of economic growth and diversification.

Startups, universities, and private sector institutions have a vital role to play in building a thriving AI ecosystem that fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and local talent development.

In addition, regional and international partnerships will be essential to accelerate knowledge transfer, attract investments, and position Oman as a strategic hub for AI innovation in the region.

By investing in people, encouraging research and development, and creating a supportive regulatory environment, Oman can unlock significant economic and social value from artificial intelligence while creating high-quality jobs for future generations.

AI transformation is not a temporary technology initiative; it is a comprehensive strategic transformation that will reshape economies, labour markets, business models, and even the nature of future jobs.

Oman has already laid a solid foundation for digital transformation. Today, it possesses all the ingredients needed to embark on a more ambitious and impactful journey — one where artificial intelligence becomes a partner in development, a driver of productivity, and a catalyst for building a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy.

The age of AI transformation is not a distant vision — it is already unfolding. The decisions we make today will determine how successfully Oman can shape its future in this new intelligent era.



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



SCHLOTTERBECK OUT OF WORLD CUP WITH ANKLE INJURY

GERMANY

CENTRAL defender Nico Schlotterbeck will miss the rest of the World Cup and will be sidelined for several months after picking up an ankle ligament injury in their 2-1 Group E victory over Ivory Coast on Saturday, the team said on Monday.

Schlotterbeck, a starting centre-back, was injured early in the game and was replaced at half-time by Antonio Ruediger. A scan on Sunday revealed the player had torn a ligament in his left ankle.

“Schlotterbeck suffered an injury to the medial collateral ligament in his left ankle ... and will be out for several months. The defender of German runners-up Borussia Dortmund will, for the time being, remain with the team in the USA,” the team said in a statement.

Coach Julian Nagelsmann can no longer call up a player to replace him, with the tournament already under way.

“Schlotti will be greatly missed on the pitch as an outstanding defender, especially his excellent build-up play,” Nagelsmann said. “It could have been his World Cup. Yesterday, we all tried to lift his spirits - fortunately, he is a very positive character who is already looking ahead again.”

“It is a very positive sign that he will initially remain here within the team, because he also has an influence off the pitch. Despite his absence, we are still very well positioned in central defence for the World Cup with Jonathan Tah, Antonio Ruediger, Waldemar Anton and Malick Thiaw,” the coach said.

The Germans, who have secured top spot in their group and have already advanced to the knockout stage for the first time in 12 years, face Ecuador in their final group match on Thursday. — Reuters



Germany's Nico Schlotterbeck during training. — Reuters

Germany's Nico Schlotterbeck receives medical attention after sustaining an injury. — Reuters



Le Roy named new coach of Congo.

VETERAN LE ROY NAMED NEW COACH OF CONGO

CLAUDE LE Roy, 78, has been appointed the new coach of the Republic of Congo, the federation announced on Monday with a brief to take the team, which did not qualify for the World Cup, to the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations. It will be his first head-coaching role since leaving Togo in 2021.

“The meeting room of the Ministry of Sports hosted... the official ceremony for the signing of Claude Le Roy’s contract as expert sports consultant and national coach of the Red Devils,” the Congolese Football Federation wrote on its social media accounts. In Africa, the much-travelled Frenchman, has led Cameroon and RD Congo twice each, as well as Senegal, Ghana and Togo. It will be a second

stint in charge of Congo, who he coached from 2013 to 2015. Under the “White Wizard”, the Red Devils reached the quarterfinals of AFCON 2015, their best result in the competition since 1974. Le Roy, who won AFCON with Cameroon in 1998, is not the oldest current international coach. Dick Advocaat, in charge of Curacao at the World Cup, is five months older.

Former Senegal international defender Omar Daf will work as Le Roy’s assistant. Congo will be aiming for a first AFCON qualification since 2015, after missing the last five editions. Their qualifying group for the 2027 tournament, which is due to be held in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, includes Cameroon, Comoros and Namibia. — AFP



DR Congo coach Sebastien Desabre reacts. — Reuters

DR Congo players pose for a team group photo before the match. — Reuters



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, Rafael Leao, Ruben Neves, Goncalo Guedes, Diogo Dalot and Joao Neves during training. — Reuters

AFTER BLUNT WC START PORTUGAL SEEK FIRST WIN AGAINST UZBEKISTAN

PORTUGAL HAD plenty of the ball in their World Cup opener but little bite and Roberto Martinez's side return to Houston on Tuesday needing a sharper attacking display against Uzbekistan after a frustrating 1-1 draw with Democratic Republic of Congo.

The numbers told a familiar cautionary tale. According to Opta, Portugal completed 783 passes against the Africans, fewer only than Spain's 800 and topped the possession chart with 75 per cent.

Yet all that control produced seven shots and only one on target — Joao Neves's sixth-minute header. For a team carrying high expectations around Cristiano Ronaldo and an array of attacking options, the struggle came not in circulation of the ball but in the final third, where creativity, decision-

making and finishing deserted them.

Portugal's shot count was among the lowest of the opening round, with only five of the 48 teams managing fewer, while Spain, despite being held 0-0 by Cape Verde, attempted 27 shots.

Martinez will hope for a more ruthless display against an Uzbekistan side beaten 3-1 by Colombia in their first-ever World Cup match, a debut marked by nerves and caution.

Uzbekistan coach Fabio Cannavaro said the occasion weighed heavily on his players. "I told them they were too nervous. That's why, in the end, they focused so much on defending," he said.

The Italian, winner of the 2006 Ballon d'Or, believes the pressure of their World Cup bow has now passed and pointed to Uzbekistan's second-half chances against Colombia as evidence they can trouble Portugal.

"We have plenty of quality to be a top Asian team, but of course we have to grow," he added.

Portugal trained in Palm Beach on Sunday, with Benfica centre-back Tomas Araujo again working separately as he continues specific recovery work after starting against DR Congo.

Cristiano Ronaldo, who played the full match in the opener and came in for criticism, remains central to Portugal's story at 41. "Cristiano is an example because of his career, because of the hunger he still has at his age," winger Francisco Conceicao said. "For us and for the new generation, he's a role model."

For Portugal, though, inspiration alone will not be enough. Against Uzbekistan, Ronaldo must step up and do what is expected of him as the target man in his team's attack. — Reuters

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,388.861

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$71.77
BRENT \$80.15
LIGHT \$77.21



SHORT TAKES



Infrastructure received RO 682 million in 2025, or 43 per cent of total development spending.

Oman lifts development spending by 38% as project delivery accelerates

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The numbers in Oman's State Final Account for Fiscal Year 2025 tell a more interesting story than the headline deficit figure. Development spending reached RO 1.577 billion — RO 437 million more than the approved budget allocation of RO 1.140 billion.

That 38 per cent overshoot was not an accident. According to the Ministry of Finance, the increase reflected additional allocations pushed to government units and governorates specifically to speed up the delivery of approved projects. In other words, the government had projects sitting on the books and chose to fund their execution.

Infrastructure received RO 682 million, or 43 per cent of total development spending. This covers roads, airports, seaports, water systems, urban planning and government administration — the physical backbone of economic activity.

Social infrastructure followed with RO 630 million, representing 40 per cent of the total. Schools, hospitals, information systems and cultural facilities sit inside this category — the investment that defines what life actually looks and feels like across Oman's governorates.

The remaining 17 per cent was split between services-producing sectors — housing, electricity, water, commerce and tourism at RO 194 million — and goods-producing sectors covering energy, minerals, agriculture and fisheries at RO 71 million.

Transport, storage sector adds $\text{RO} 2.3\text{bn}$ to economy

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

OMAN'S transport and storage sector contributed RO 2.3 billion to the national economy in 2025, accounting for 3.6 per cent of gross domestic product, as rising cargo volumes, expanding port activity and continued infrastructure investment reinforced the sector's role in the Sultanate of Oman's diversification strategy.

According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology's Annual Report 2025, commercial ports handled more than 143 million tonnes of cargo during the year, while container traffic grew by 22 per cent compared with 2024, reflecting stronger trade flows and increased utilisation of the country's maritime infrastructure.

The sector's performance comes as Oman seeks to position logistics as the second-largest contributor to GDP by 2040 under Oman Vision 2040, leveraging its strategic location and investments in ports, roads and transport networks.

The ministry said road development remained a key area of focus during the year. A total of 357.4 kilometres of roads were completed and opened to traffic in 2025, bringing the cumulative length of asphalt roads across the Sultanate of Oman to 16,680 kilometres.

"The year 2025 represents a renewed milestone in the journey of work and achievement", Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali said in the report, citing continued efforts to modernise infrastructure and improve connectivity across the country.

Maritime activity also expanded during the year. The ministry issued 2,405 navigation permits to foreign vessels operating in



Commercial ports handled more than 143 million tonnes of cargo during the year.



The sector's performance comes as Oman seeks to position logistics as the second-largest contributor to GDP by 2040 under Oman Vision 2040, leveraging its strategic location and investments in ports, roads and transport networks.

ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MAAWALI
Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

Omani territorial waters and granted 1,548 maritime activity licences. The number of seafarers' certificates issued reached 1,928, while 781 ships and maritime units were registered under the Omani flag.

As part of efforts to strengthen the regulatory framework governing the sector, the ministry issued the Maritime Labour Regulations under Ministerial Decision No 313/2025 and amended provisions related to the supply of fuel to ships in Omani ports.

The report also highlighted Oman's efforts to strengthen international cooperation in maritime transport. During the year, agreements and memoranda were signed with several countries, including Morocco, Türkiye and Cyprus, covering maritime transport, port cooperation, logistics infrastructure and mutual recognition of seafarers' certificates.

The logistics sector continued to attract investment. The ministry reported that total investment in logistics reached approximately RO 3.4 billion between 2021 and

2025, while 17 logistics agreements worth more than RO 100 million were signed during the period. Employment generation remained another priority.

More than 7,000 jobs were created through logistics-related initiatives, while Omanisation in the transport and logistics sector reached 21.6 per cent in 2025.

The report said ongoing infrastructure development and regulatory reforms were aimed at improving efficiency, enhancing competitiveness and supporting economic growth across the Sultanate of Oman.

Sustainability initiatives also advanced during the year, with more than 160 electric vehicle charging stations installed across various governorates as part of broader efforts to support low-carbon transport solutions.

With cargo volumes rising, road connectivity expanding and maritime activity strengthening, the transport and storage sector continues to play an increasingly important role in facilitating trade, supporting industrial development and advancing Oman's long-term economic diversification objectives.

North Oman Solar project successfully energised

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The partnership of OQ Alternative Energies (OQAE) — part of OQ Group — and French integrated energy group TotalEnergies — has announced the successful energisation of the North Oman Solar project, marking a key milestone ahead of its imminent commercial launch.

The 105 MW North Oman Solar scheme is a utility-scale photovoltaic plant constructed at Saih Nihayda within the Block 6 concession area of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). When brought online in the coming days and weeks, it will supply clean electricity to support PDO's oil and gas operations as part of the company's decarbonisation efforts.

Announcing the successful completion of the project, Sami al Mazidi, Executive Managing Director (Renewable Energy



Staff of the OQAE — TotalEnergies JV marking the project's successful energisation.

Projects) — OQ Alternative Energy and TotalEnergies JV, said: "I am pleased to share the successful achievement of back-energisation today at the North Oman Solar Project — a critical milestone marking our transition from construction into the final stages

of commissioning and operations".

He added: "This accomplishment reflects the strength of our collective execution and the alignment across all parties involved. It is the outcome of disciplined delivery, effective stakeholder collaboration

and a shared commitment to excellence".

The North Oman Solar project is one of three clean energy ventures being delivered by the OQAE–TotalEnergies JV on behalf of PDO.

Collectively known as the Rawafid Projects, they also include the Riyah-1 and Riyah-2 wind farms currently under construction at PDO's Amin and West Nimr fields in southern Oman, with a combined capacity of 234 MW.

Almoatasem Al Ismaili, Project Manager at OQ Alternative Energy and Deputy Projects Director — Riyah 1 & 2 Wind and North Oman Solar, added: "I am proud to have contributed to this important milestone for North Oman Solar.

Successful back-energisation marks a major step towards COD (Commercial Operation Date).

It was achieved through strong teamwork, close coordination and a continued focus on safe

execution".

Niraj Pandiya, Project Director — TotalEnergies Renewables MEA, added: "This achievement showcases the strength of the partnership between the two sponsors, TotalEnergies and OQAE, whose complementary capabilities have been instrumental to the project's success.

While this marks the successful completion of the construction phase and the energisation of our first renewable energy project in Oman, it is only the beginning of our journey together. We look forward to delivering many more successful milestones and projects in the years ahead".

The North Oman Solar project is slated for commercial operation in Q2 2026, while the two wind farms are scheduled to commence operations in Q4 2026. OQAE holds a 51 per cent stake in the joint venture, with TotalEnergies owning the remaining 49 per cent.

BUSINESS FEATURE

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

THE Sultanate of Oman is poised for a new phase of real estate growth in 2026, driven by economic diversification, modern legislation, and major urban development projects that solidify its position as a promising investment destination in the region. With rising demand for residential, commercial, and tourism properties, the sector continues to attract local, Gulf, and international investors seeking stable returns and long-term growth opportunities.

Indicators from National Centre for Statistics and Information confirm the market's prosperity, with the Oman Real Estate Price Index recording a 15.9% increase during the first quarter of 2026 compared to the same period last year, a clear indication of strong demand and continued investment activity.

Furthermore, the value of real estate transactions rose to RO 678.1 million by the end of March 2026, achieving 18.4% year-on-year growth, reflecting the market's dynamism and investor confidence in the sector's future.

In the residential real estate sector, the index rose by 17.6%, driven by a 21% increase in residential land prices, a 9% increase in villa prices, and a 4.4% increase in apartment prices. Commercial real estate also saw growth, at 10.5%, due to rising prices for industrial and commercial land.



The Omani market is witnessing the launch of several major projects combining residential, hospitality, and smart services. An artist's rendition of the Sultham Haitham City (Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning).

Muscat Governorate led the real estate growth, topping the list of Omani governorates in terms of residential land price growth, registering a remarkable 43.6% increase during the first quarter of this year. It was followed by Al Buraimi Governorate at 25.9%, Musandam at 17.6%, and Dhofar at 10.8%.

This rapid growth reflects the increasing demand for modern residential projects and integrated communities that offer a sophisticated living environment and comprehensive services for citizens, residents, and investors.

The real estate sector is one of the main beneficiaries of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on diversifying the economy and enhancing the contribution of non-oil sectors such as tourism, logistics, and manufacturing. The expansion in these sectors is expected to increase demand for modern offices, commercial facilities, and staff housing, opening up new investment opportunities with lucrative returns.

The Omani market is witnessing the launch of several major projects combining residential, hospitality, and smart services.

These include integrated tourism complexes, Sultan Haitham City, the AIDA project in Yiti, and Wadi Zaha, in addition to

logistics projects linked to special economic zones.

In the Duqm Special Economic Zone, the first phase of the Maysan Square – Duqm Residence project was inaugurated. This phase comprises 104 residential units and 130 commercial units, with investments exceeding 10 million Omani rials and participation from investors from 22 countries.

In a significant step towards developing the real estate environment, Royal Decree No. (56/2026) was issued, promulgating the new Real Estate Registry Law. This law represents a major shift in the sector's digital transformation and enhances investor confidence.

The law grants full legal validity to electronic records and documents and mandates the registration of real estate ownership rights, thereby enhancing transparency, protecting rights, and increasing the reliability of real estate transactions.

The law also allows for the registration of properties in the names of non-Omanis, companies, and legal entities, subject to regulations.

This strengthens the market's attractiveness to international investors and boosts the flow of foreign capital.

Ali al Issai, Secretary of the Real Estate Registry in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, stated during the Ministry's media briefing that the growth witnessed in the real estate and investment sector in the Sultanate of Oman today is a result of the regulatory and planning environment that has strengthened investor confidence and increased the attractiveness of the real estate market.

The Ministry affirmed that the new law constitutes a fundamental pillar for building a more efficient and stable investment environment, supporting real estate development projects, off-plan sales, and future urban expansion.

The Omani government continues to develop the real estate investment system by facilitating ownership procedures for foreigners within integrated tourism complexes and freehold areas.

The market's attractiveness is further enhanced by the absence of capital gains tax on real estate, in addition to residency programmes linked to real estate investment.

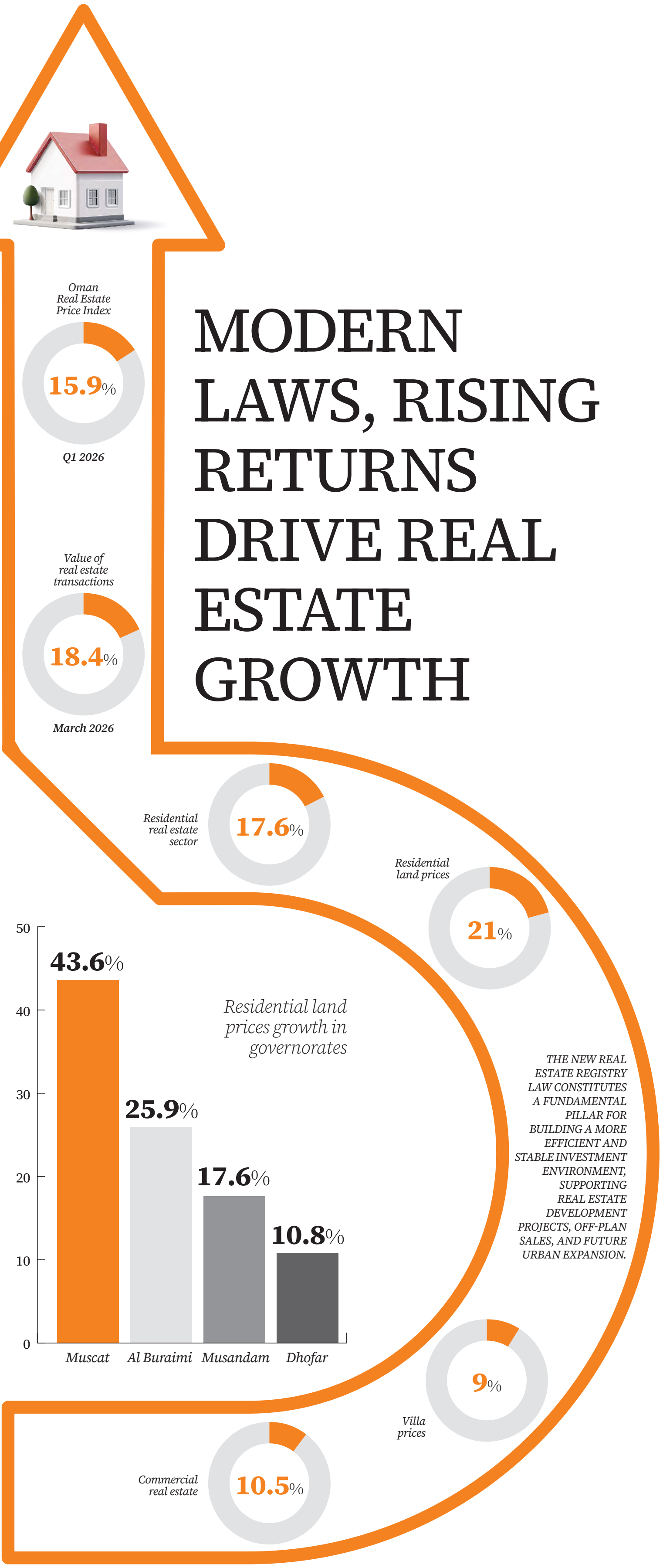
The Omani real estate market is characterised by a diversity of investment opportunities that cater to various investment strategies. Among the most prominent are:

RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND INTEGRATED COMPLEXES: Apartments and villas within integrated tourism complexes are witnessing increasing demand, particularly in modern projects that incorporate smart city and sustainability concepts.

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY PROPERTIES: With the continued growth of the tourism sector, hotel apartments and coastal resorts in Muscat and Dhofar stand out as some of the sectors offering the highest rental returns.

OFFICES AND COMMERCIAL SPACES: The expansion of foreign and local companies is supporting demand for modern offices and commercial spaces in major cities and economic zones.

LOGISTICS AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES: This category benefits from the continued growth in ports and special economic zones, particularly in Al Duqm and Suhar, providing long-term investment opportunities.



SHORT TAKES



202 conformity assessment bodies were registered by the Oman Accreditation Centre during H1 2026.

Oman marks World Accreditation Day with commitment to quality standards

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, represented by the Oman Accreditation Centre, marked World Accreditation Day 2026 on June 22, 2026 under the theme “Innovation, Trust and Sustainability: The Power of Accreditation”. The event drew a number of officials, experts and representatives of government and private bodies, underscoring the importance of accreditation as one of the cornerstones of the quality infrastructure and its role in supporting economic development and enhancing the competitiveness of various sectors.

Through the event, the Ministry affirmed its continued commitment to developing the national quality system and strengthening the reliability of services, products and processes, helping to raise confidence in the results of inspection, testing, examination and certification, support the business and investment environment, and facilitate the flow of trade, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Director of the Oman Accreditation Centre, said the Ministry attaches great importance to the accreditation system as one of the fundamental pillars of the quality infrastructure, noting that accreditation has become a central element in building trust, stimulating innovation and ensuring the quality of products and services in line with international best practice.

He added that the Centre continues its efforts to strengthen its regional and international presence and complete the requirements for international recognition, helping to enhance the international acceptance of the results of national conformity assessment bodies, support Omani exports and attract investment.

Conference showcases supply chain solutions

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

THE first edition of the Resilience Conference for Risk and Crisis Management and Business Continuity opened on June 22, 2026, under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), highlighting the importance of strengthening institutional preparedness and resilience amidst evolving global challenges.

The conference serves as a specialised platform, bringing together leading experts, decision-makers, academics and specialists from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman to discuss the latest global practices in risk and crisis management and business continuity, with a focus on supply chains as a crucial pillar supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of national economies.

Nasser bin Khalid al Yaarubi, CEO of Jabreen Scientific Academy, affirmed that the conference aims to raise institutional awareness of the importance of building effective risk management systems and enhancing business continuity.

He explained that rapid economic and technological developments, coupled with global geopolitical challenges, necessitate that institutions adopt a proactive approach to risk management. This approach ensures business sustainability, protects supply chains and maintains the stability of services and operational processes.

In one of the conference’s main sessions, Dr Moataz Salama, Editor-in-Chief of the Arab Strategic Report at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, reviewed the most prominent geopolitical changes the world has witnessed in recent years and their direct impact



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NASSER BIN KHALID AL YAARUBI
CEO, Jabreen Scientific Academy

on global trade and supply chains. He emphasised that escalating regional and international tensions have made supply chains more vulnerable to cross-border risks and disruptions.

He pointed out that confronting these challenges requires governments and institutions to adopt more flexible and adaptable strategies, diversify supply sources and strengthen risk management and business continuity plans to ensure market stability and the flow of goods and services.

Dr Raed bin Mohammed al Rubaie, CEO of Sohar Freezone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port, highlighted the pivotal role of Omani ports in the regional and international trade system, stressing that they represent a fundamental pillar in supporting the continuous flow of goods and services and enhancing the efficiency of supply chains.

“Enhancing the resilience of supply chains has become a strategic priority for institutions and countries”, Dr Al Rubaie emphasised, adding that Omani ports continue to develop their operational and service capabilities,

contributing to economic growth and strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a regional and global logistics hub.

The official stressed the importance of the land customs corridor in strengthening regional value chains and supporting food security and manufacturing industries by facilitating the movement of goods and vital raw materials during periods of challenges and uncertainty.

In the food supply sector, grains are imported through SOHAR Port and Freezone and redistributed to GCC markets, contributing to regional food security and ensuring the flow of essential goods.

Approximately 30,000 metric tonnes of general cargo and 60,000 metric tonnes of dry bulk cargo are handled weekly.

The corridor also supports the aluminium sector by transporting alumina to smelters in the UAE and Bahrain, thus maintaining the continuity of strategic downstream industries.

Amounts transported to GCC markets reached 123,028 metric tonnes, while total exports amounted to 209,991 metric tonnes.

Franchise model to drive Omani SME expansion

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Franchise Programme, promoted by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), has given rise to a number of laudable success stories, officials revealed at the launch of the fifth edition of the initiative on Sunday.

Notable is the example of Asaad bin Saud al Akhzami, founder of the “Nomad Inn” brand, who thanked the Chamber’s Franchise Centre for its expertise in helping him develop the brand. He explained that the programme helped transform operational expertise into clear work systems and strengthen the company’s readiness for expansion under the franchise model.

Al Akhzami cited the brand’s success in signing three franchise agreements within the Sultanate of Oman, including two in the



The Franchise Programme, in its new iteration, aims to develop 26 Omani brands.

Wilayat of Sur and one in the Wilayat of Nizwa. The target is to reach 15 hotels and resorts

under the “Nomad Inn” brand and expand into international markets, he said.

Syed Iqbal of Shaheen Group spoke about his experience in expanding the Omani brand “Seven Fries” in the United States through a master franchise agreement with Al Saleh Ideal Projects. He emphasised that this experience reflects the ability of Omani brands to compete globally when provided with the appropriate tools for expansion.

The programme, in its new iteration, aims to develop 26 Omani brands. Implementation is scheduled to begin in September 2026 and continue for eight months. This step is expected to open the door to new investment opportunities and strengthen the presence of national brands in local and international markets, making franchising a promising driver for the growth of Omani companies and attracting investors in the coming period.

Earlier, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, affirmed that the programme represents one of the strategic initiatives supporting the competitiveness of the private sector and empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and national brands to expand and achieve sustainable growth.

This is in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to enhance economic diversification and increase the private sector’s contribution to development.

He explained that the programme focuses on qualifying promising brands and transforming them into franchiseable business models.

This will enhance their opportunities to expand into regional and global markets and improve the efficiency of national companies by implementing best practices and international standards.

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil slips on Iran progress



Oil prices fell on Monday after US-Iran talks in Switzerland signalled easing supply risks, with Tehran saying it had secured waivers for oil and petrochemical exports.

Brent crude dropped below \$80 a barrel, while US crude traded near \$77. Analysts said progress in negotiations helped offset concerns over renewed tensions and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. — Reuters

AVIATION INDUSTRY

Airfares may stay elevated



Airlines could save billions of dollars from lower jet fuel costs following the US-Iran agreement, but passengers are unlikely to see immediate reductions in ticket prices.

Limited seat capacity and strong travel demand may carriers to retain higher fares. US jet fuel prices have fallen sharply from April highs, potentially reducing airline fuel bills if the trend continues. — Reuters

TRADE TENSIONS

China expands export curbs



China has imposed export controls on several US entities, including rare earth producers and technology-related firms, in response to recent US restrictions on Chinese companies.

The measures affect dual-use exports and include companies linked to the rare earth supply chain. Beijing warned that the transfer of controlled Chinese-origin goods to listed entities must cease immediately. — Reuters

OPINION

Yes, women can do IT



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

A few months ago, I met for coffee with Anum Kamran and Balqees al Hassani, two of the women who help lead the Knowledge Oman and Tech Oman communities that I founded. I vividly remember that discussion because it took place on March 8, 2026, International Women’s Day. Earlier that day, I had learned a statistic that genuinely surprised me: 91% of IT job seekers in Oman are women. It was an eye-opening moment.

Knowing the incredible talent and potential of women in our technology sector, I couldn’t help but ask myself: If so many women aspire to build careers in technology, why aren’t we hearing more of their success stories? That simple question sparked an idea to create an event dedicated to promoting, recognising and celebrating women in technology under one clear message: “Yes, Women Can Do IT”. Initially, it was just an idea. We debated whether such an event was really necessary. After all, women already participate in conferences, panels and industry events. But the more we discussed it, the clearer the answer became.

Across Oman, women are leading digital transformation in government, telecommunications, banking, education, startups and technology companies. They

manage projects, build innovative solutions, lead teams and shape the country’s digital future. Yet many of these achievements remain invisible to the wider community.

Their stories deserve to be heard — not only to celebrate their accomplishments but also to inspire others.

That conversation quickly evolved into action. We reached out to women leaders from across different sectors and the response exceeded every expectation.

Professionals, executives, entrepreneurs, academics and innovators were eager to participate. Many shared their journeys, the challenges they had overcome, and the importance of encouraging the next generation of women to pursue careers in technology.

The vision also became much bigger than hosting another technology conference. We wanted to build a platform that celebrates achievement, encourages collaboration, creates new opportunities and strengthens the technology ecosystem by making women’s contributions more visible. Last week, that vision became reality.

The Women Leading Technology event brought together women from diverse industries to exchange knowledge, share experiences and inspire others. It featured 12 accomplished panelists and moderators,

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engaging discussions, entertainment, AI-powered performances, awards recognising outstanding women in technology and numerous networking opportunities. More importantly, the event received the support of over 12 organisations, all united behind one powerful message: Yes, Women Can Do IT.

Some people asked me, “Why focus specifically on women in technology?”

The answer is simple. Technology shapes almost every aspect of our lives — from healthcare and education to banking, communication and government services. When women help design those solutions, society benefits from broader perspectives, different experiences and more inclusive innovation.

Research consistently shows that diverse teams are more innovative and better equipped to solve complex challenges. Diversity is not simply about representation; it is about creating better outcomes by bringing different viewpoints together.

Women also become powerful role models. When young girls see women leading cybersecurity teams, developing artificial intelligence solutions, launching successful startups, or driving national digital initiatives, they begin to believe those careers are possible for them too. Visibility creates possibility.

IRAN WAR TRIGGERS GLOBAL RACE TO BUILD OIL RESERVES

RON BOUSSO

Vulnerable countries that paid a high economic price during the Iran war are seeking to build domestic oil and gas storage buffers against future shocks, a drive that could bring roughly half a billion barrels of additional demand down the pike.

While the near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz cut off a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies for over three months — reshuffling energy markets and boosting Brent crude to nearly \$120 a barrel — it could have been far worse.

One key stabilising force was the world’s ability to tap emergency reserves. Early in the conflict, all 32 members of the

International Energy Agency agreed to a record 400 million-barrel release from strategic petroleum reserves (SPRs), with the US contributing the largest share. The draw-down — the sixth since the energy watchdog’s creation — validated a strategy forged after the 1973

While the near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz cut off a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies for over three months — reshuffling energy markets and boosting Brent crude to nearly \$120 a barrel — it could have been far worse.

Arab Oil Embargo, under which IEA members must hold emergency stocks equal to at least 90 days of net imports. China offered a second lesson.

Although not a full IEA member, China has spent years building what is believed to be the world’s largest SPR, holding more than a billion barrels to guard against such a scenario.

With this “rainy day fund”, the world’s largest energy importer reduced crude purchases by more than a third during the war.

It may not have drawn down reserves by as much as the import drop implied, but it signalled a willingness and ability to tap its stockpile.

Stepping away from the market during a period of tight supply and high prices saved Beijing billions of dollars and helped insulate it from the economic distress seen elsewhere in Asia, which relies on the Middle East for roughly 60% of energy imports.

The pain was particularly acute in India, Pakistan, Thailand and other economies with limited domestic reserves.

Lacking substantial emergency stockpiles, governments turned to subsidies, fuel curbs, shorter work weeks and other austerity measures to curb consumption.

Many vulnerable importers are now likely to expand their SPRs where fiscal space allows, while those unable to afford it may strengthen demand-reduction plans instead. — Reuters

The ICV dividend

Every few weeks I sit across from a manufacturer in Suhar, Al Rusayl or Al Duqm who treats In-Country Value (ICV) the way one treats a tax audit — as a cost to be minimised, a box to be ticked, a clause to survive. “ICV is killing our margins”, they tell me. “It is a compliance headache”. I understand the frustration, but I believe it rests on a misreading of what ICV actually is. ICV is not a liability imposed on industry.

Properly understood, it is one of the most powerful economic value-creation and competitiveness tools available to an Omani manufacturer today. Consider the context.

Oman’s manufacturing sector grew 7.2 per cent in 2025 and contributed RO 3.9 billion to GDP, with industrial employment climbing to roughly 248,000 — up from barely 20,000 in 2020. Non-oil sectors now account for more than 73 per cent of GDP at constant prices and non-oil exports reached RO 6.885 billion last year, a 10.5 per cent jump.

Oman Vision 2040 aims to lift manufacturing’s share of GDP from around 5 per cent towards as much as 14 per cent. None of these happens by accident. It happens because spending is being retained inside the country and recycled into local suppliers, local skills and local capacity. That, in one sentence, is what ICV does: it converts domestic expenditure into productive national assets and long-term industrial capability.

The institution that proved this is possible is Petroleum Development Oman. PDO is where the ICV concept in Oman was born and under the stewardship of its Managing Director, Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, it has matured from a procurement policy into a genuine engine of national development.

The numbers tell the story: PDO now retains around 42 per cent of its supply chain spend locally — a figure that stood at just 18 per cent in 2012 — and is targeting 52 per cent by 2030. In a single recent year, it channelled some \$2.5 billion into ICV, including roughly \$900 million to SMEs.

Its ICV programme is credited with helping establish 83 manufacturing facilities, creating more than 17,500 jobs for Omanis and generating an estimated \$4.3 billion in cumulative economic impact. Crucially, PDO has not treated localisation as charity. Through 15 Vendor Development



DR YOUSUF
HAMED AL
BALUSHI
yousefuh@

omaninvestgateway.com

The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

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Programmes and recent supply agreements — for high-voltage cables and locally manufactured ball valves — it has built suppliers capable of meeting international benchmarks.

That is institutional leadership transforming localisation mandates into globally competitive industrial capabilities.

OQ, Oman’s integrated energy group, has carried the same philosophy into the country’s most ambitious industrial frontier at Al Duqm. Between January 2024 and June 2025, the In-Country Value generated by OQ and its partners there exceeded \$1.57 billion, with local spend surpassing \$1 billion — 64 per cent of total expenditure.

More than \$36 million flowed to SMEs and over \$24 million to firms registered under Riyadh.

These are not token gestures; they are the deliberate construction of a local supply base around anchor investments, the kind of backward linkage that economists know is the surest route to lifting the productivity of domestic firms and increasing the domestic retention of economic value.

If PDO and OQ show what scale can achieve, Voltamp Energy shows what ambition can achieve. This is not Oman’s largest company, but in manufacturing depth it is among our most formidable.

From its plants in Suhar and Al Rusayl, Voltamp designs and builds power and distribution transformers and in 2023 it manufactured the first 400 kV, 500 MVA power transformer ever produced in the GCC — a class of technology held by only around 30 countries worldwide.

That capability was not handed to Voltamp; it was built, through engineering investment, technology partnership and a deliberate decision to localise high-value work that others import. Its most instructive move, however, came last month. In May 2026 the company launched “Watenha” — a localisation initiative run with the Authority for Public Services Regulation and the SMEs Development Authority.

The premise is as commercially shrewd as it is patriotic: Voltamp identified ten high-demand components it currently imports and opened them to local entrepreneurs and investors, offering guaranteed purchase agreements, technical support and access to regional markets.

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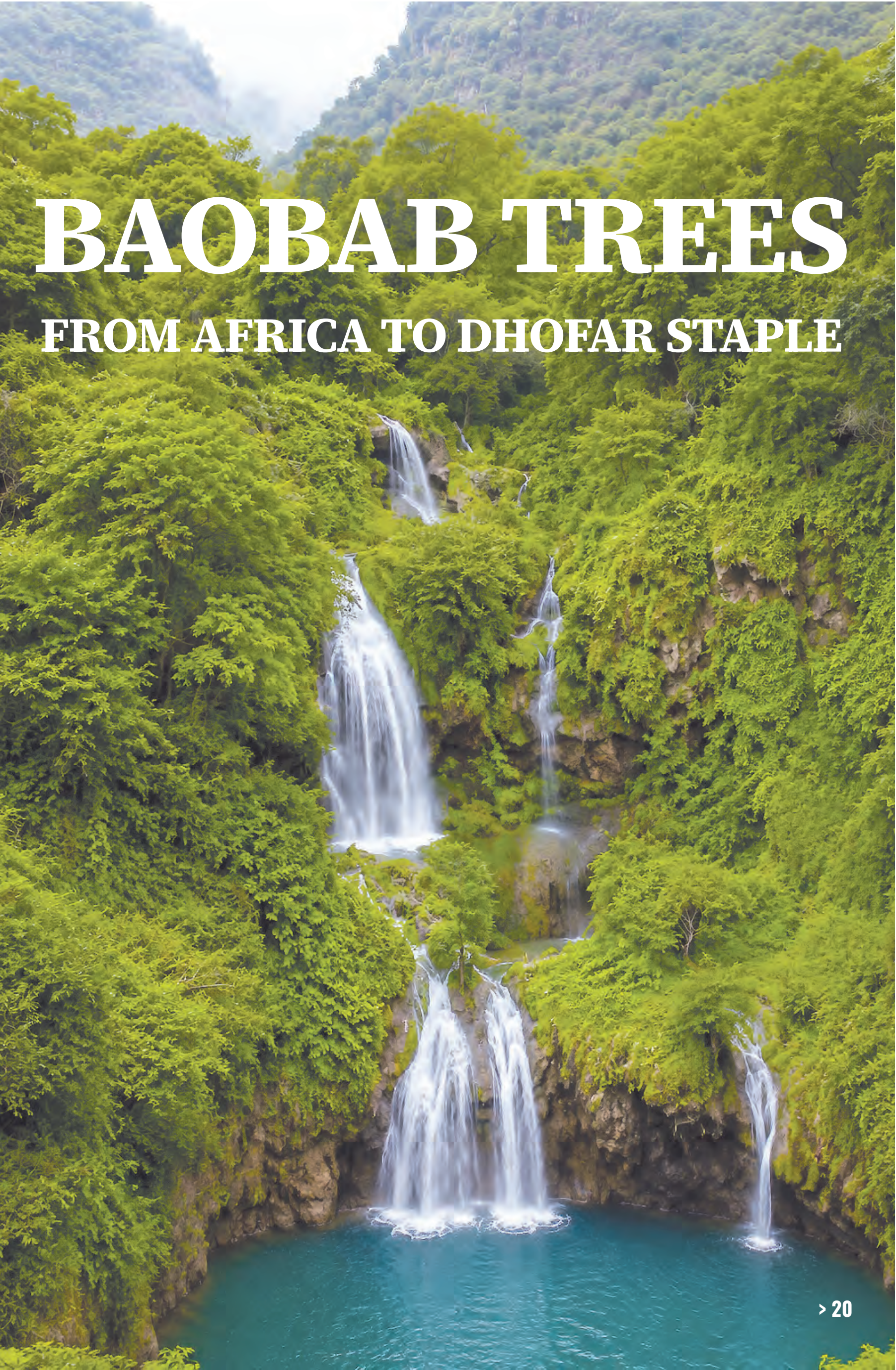
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ART/LIFE



BAOBAB TREES FROM AFRICA TO DHOFAR STAPLE

> 20

VIDEO GAMES

EU CAN'T SAVE DISCONTINUED VIDEO GAMES



Hundreds of online video games have been rendered unplayable at the whim of their publishers, for either technical or economic reasons. — AFP

It's game over for fans of discontinued video games after the EU admitted defeat on Tuesday and said it cannot stop publishers making them unplayable. But the European Union unlocked one potential cheat code by promising voluntary guidelines to manage video games' "end of life".

The EU was responding to a citizens' petition backed by over a million people from across Europe called "Stop Destroying Video Games", asking Brussels to make sure that older games which still have many fans remain available.

For over a decade, hundreds of online video games have been rendered unplayable at the whim of their publishers, for either technical or economic reasons.

Gamers asked the EU to introduce rules that would force publishers to keep the discontinued games active, for example, by allowing them to remain accessible on private servers set up by volunteers.

But the EU executive said "at this stage it cannot propose a legal obligation to keep video games playable after they stop being provided commercially" due to existing intellectual property rights and copyright law.

Rights holders have exclusive rights over their creations, Brussels said.

Instead, the EU will draw up a code of conduct with input from the industry and consumer representatives and will work with consumer groups to ensure gamers' rights are respected, including any compensation they may be entitled to.

The organisers of the petition said they were not giving up and hoped to get the European Parliament to override the commission's decision.

"Our current plan is, with the help of parliament, to get the Digital Fairness Act amended to include the issue of prohibiting publishers from deliberately disabling customer purchases", they said.

"The objectives behind the DFA make our issue an ideal fit for it, since it addresses similar issues of digital rights and lack of clarity from existing laws".

Some 40 lawmakers in the parliament from different political groups last week voiced backing for the petition's goal, in a letter to the commission.

Gamers are also pursuing their goal through the courts.

In France, the UFC-Que Choisir consumer group is suing French game company Ubisoft for halting its race title "The Crew", claiming unfair trading practices and "abusive" clauses in the terms of use. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



CULTURE

Sudanese refugee men play traditional musical instruments during an event marking World Refugee Day at the Ura Refugee Site in Ethiopia. — AFP



MUSIC

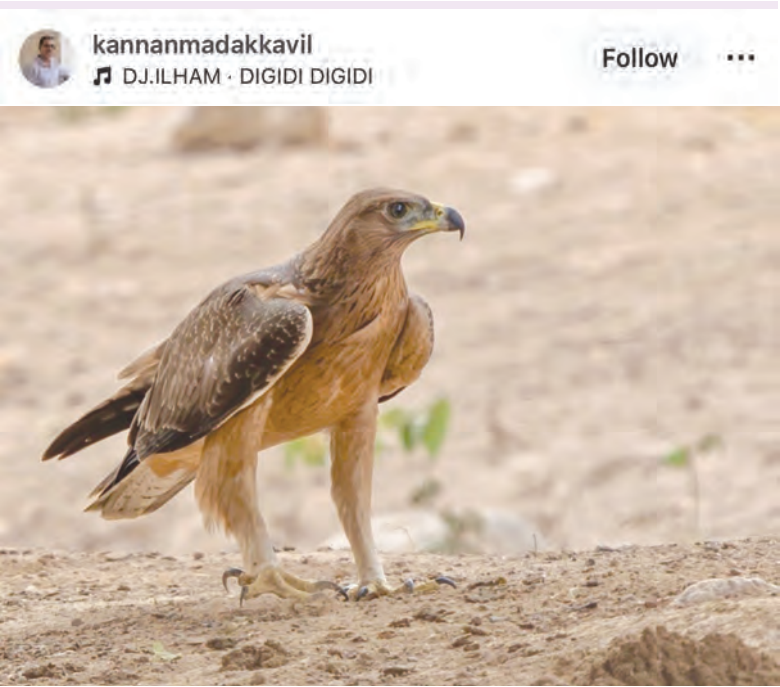
A musician of a brass band takes part in a street parade in Munich, southern Germany. — AFP



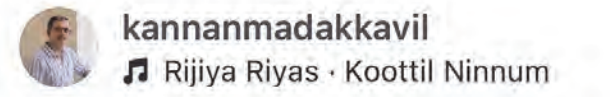
ART

A person interacts with immersive visualisations from the inaugural exhibition Machine Dreams: Rainforest in the Museum of AI Arts, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“Close up of hawk”



“Flying high”

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GRAMMYS TO INTRODUCE 5 NEW CATEGORIES



The Grammy Awards will introduce five new categories at next year’s ceremony, the Recording Academy announced Tuesday, alongside revised rules that could reshape eligibility for the coveted Best New Artist prize.

The 2027 awards will recognise Best Asian Pop Music Performance, Best R&B Collaboration Performance, Best Traditional Pop Vocal Performance, Best Traditional Folk Album and Best Latin Song.

The additions were approved following feedback from Recording Academy members and reflect the expanding range of genres and creative roles represented across the global music industry.

The academy also changed its rules for Best New Artist, increasing the number of times an artist can be submitted for consideration from three to four. The move could open the door for emerging performers who had previously exhausted their eligibility before achieving

wider recognition.

The Best New Artist category has historically helped launch major careers, with recent winners including Olivia Rodrigo, Chappell Roan and Olivia Dean.

“The changes advanced by our Recording Academy members speak to the breadth of today’s music industry and the many genres, crafts and creators shaping it”, said Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason Jr.

“We’re excited to see these updates come to life in the year ahead as we celebrate the music people who are driving music forward.”

The Grammys, widely billed as “music’s biggest night”, are scheduled to return to Los Angeles in February 2027. The ceremony will mark the first edition to include the new Asian pop and traditional folk honours, as the academy continues to broaden recognition for music beyond its long-established categories.

— AFP



RUSSIA’S FALCON DIPLOMACY



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

DIPLOMACY takes many forms, from formal meetings and trade agreements to cultural and environmental exchange. Russia’s “falcon diplomacy” combines all three, using the breeding, conservation and exchange of rare birds of prey to strengthen ties with Middle Eastern, Asian and BRICS countries.

At its centre is the cultural importance of falconry. Across the Arab world, falcons are associated with heritage, pride and status. Russian President Vladimir Putin has gifted prized gyrfalcons from Russian breeding programmes to leaders in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE, gestures that have helped build rapport through a shared appreciation of the tradition.

The initiative rests on diplomatic, economic and conservation pillars. Russia says its breeding centres can support wildlife protection while meeting demand for captive-bred birds, helping reduce pressure on wild populations and illegal poaching.

The Kamchatka Falconry Centre, in the Milkovsky District of Kamchatka Krai, is Russia’s flagship facility. Opened in 2022,

it is the country’s first large-scale centre dedicated to reproducing rare birds of prey. Designed to breed up to 1,000 birds annually, it brings together international expertise in falcon reproduction and conservation, including Russian-Kyrgyz falconry practices.

Building on that model, Russia is developing the International Falconry Centre “Volga” in the Nizhny Novgorod Region. The centre is intended to anchor a broader federal network of breeding and conservation facilities in European Russia. Beyond its scientific role, the project is envisaged as a tourism and events destination, hosting international conventions, exhibitions, sports competitions and cultural programmes.

Russia also uses international forums to expand the initiative. Falcon Day, held annually alongside the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, brings together range states, conservationists and government representatives to discuss biodiversity, ecological tourism and the sustainable use of wildlife.

Delegations have included participants from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India and Afghanistan.

Conservation work extends beyond breeding. In the Republic

of Tatarstan, the Volga-Kama Saker Falcon reintroduction project aims to revive a species that had disappeared from the area. Falcon chicks from established Russian nurseries are raised and acclimatised with support from student volunteers and CCTV monitoring before being released to fly and hunt in the wild.

The Ministry of Ecology of Tatarstan and the Russian Raptor Research and Conservation Network document updates on the project.

Other sites add to the wider ecosystem.

The Russian Falcon Centre in Lipetsk Oblast, near the Galichya Gora Reserve, focuses on rescuing, rehabilitating and conserving birds of prey while offering educational excursions. In Michurinsk, Tambov Oblast, the Falcon Courtyard ethno-park introduces visitors to live birds and their history. Further south, the Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain near Volgograd provides a protected habitat for rare Red Data Book species and is a draw for birdwatchers.

By linking a centuries-old sporting tradition with modern conservation, Russia’s falcon diplomacy presents birds of prey as more than symbols of prestige: they become a route for environmental cooperation and international partnership.

FEATURES

These enormous trees are among the region’s most distinctive landmarks.



BAOBAB TREES: FROM AFRICA TO DHOFAR STAPLE

YERU EBUEN

THESE baobabs stand like giant sentries, guarding a landscape transformed by the khareef. As clouds roll across Dhofar’s mountains and the desert gives way to rolling green hills, visitors arrive annually to witness Oman’s dramatic seasonal transformation. Waterfalls gush from cliffs, valleys fill with mist and roadside viewpoints draw families and visitors chasing the cool weather. Yet beyond the popular attractions lies one of Dhofar’s most extraordinary natural treasures: ancient baobab trees that seem almost impossible to find on the Arabian Peninsula. Scattered across western Dhofar, around Wadi Hinna and the mountains near Dhalkout, these enormous trees are among the region’s most distinctive landmarks. With swollen trunks and skeletal branches reaching skywards, they appear to belong to another continent entirely. In many ways, they do. The baobab in Dhofar, *Adansonia digitata*, is native to Africa. Scientists have long been fascinated by how it arrived in southern Arabia. The answer remains debated, but researchers believe the trees may have reached Oman through ancient ties with East Africa, perhaps aided by maritime trade across the Arabian Sea. Others point to birds, ocean currents or ancient climatic connections. Whatever the route, Dhofar is among the

few places beyond mainland Africa where these trees occur naturally, making them an important part of Oman’s environmental heritage. For visitors, though, science often takes a back seat to spectacle. During Khareef Dhofar Season, baobabs rise from a landscape draped in fog. Their massive trunks glisten with moisture as green hills stretch into the distance. The contrast is striking: one moment, you feel as though you are travelling through Arabia; the next, the scenery evokes parts of East Africa. It is little wonder that travellers describe them as among Oman’s most unexpected and memorable sights. Emerging through the mist, baobabs are often remembered as a defining moment of a Salalah road trip. The fascination extends beyond appearance. Often called the “Tree of Life”, baobabs store vast amounts of water in their trunks, helping them survive prolonged droughts. Across Africa, communities have long used their fruit, leaves and bark for food, medicine and shelter. They are also ecological powerhouses. Their flowers feed pollinators, while branches and cavities provide habitats for birds, insects and other wildlife. In many ecosystems, baobabs play a crucial role in supporting biodiversity. Perhaps most remarkable is their age. Recent studies of the famed solitary baobab

in Dhalkout found that sections of the tree are around 800 years old. Researchers discovered that the giant consists of multiple fused stems, grown together over centuries to form the vast structure visible today. To stand beneath such a tree is to stand before living history. Long before modern roads connected Dhofar’s towns and villages, before international tourists discovered khareef, and before many of the region’s settlements took their present form, these trees were already rooted in the landscape. Yet their future is not guaranteed. Across Africa, scientists are studying the decline of some ancient baobabs, linked to climate change, prolonged droughts and habitat degradation. Dhofar’s baobabs continue to endure, but protecting the ecosystems that sustain them remains vital. The cloud forests, woodlands and seasonal grasslands of southern Oman are among the Arabian Peninsula’s most distinctive and fragile environments. Protecting them means safeguarding not only baobabs, but also the species and natural processes that depend on them. For travellers planning a khareef escape, waterfalls and mountain viewpoints will always deserve a place on the itinerary. But there is something different about a baobab. A waterfall impresses. A mountain inspires.

A baobab invites reflection. Standing beneath one as mist drifts through its branches, it is impossible not to think about the centuries it has witnessed. These ancient giants have watched countless Khareef Dhofar Seasons come and go, standing quietly through changing climates, shifting landscapes and generations. In a season filled with natural wonders, they remain among Dhofar’s most enduring symbols. Perhaps that is why no khareef journey feels truly complete without seeking them out.

