

OMAN

SHORTTAKES



OMAN TO EXPERIENCE LONGEST DAY TODAY

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will experience the longest day today (Sunday), with approximately 13 hours, 35 minutes and 33 seconds long as the country is to witness the summer solstice and the beginning of the Khareef Dhofar Season on Sunday, June 21.

The phenomenon of the longest day of the year occurs when the sun's rays are perpendicular to the Tropic of Cancer at an angle of 23.5 degrees north. However, there will not be any change in the temperatures as these solstices and equinoxes do not necessarily mean a direct correlation.

Usually, the summer solstice always occurs between June 20 and June 22, and during 2024, which is a leap year, it always falls on 20 June. The exact date shifts each year slightly because the calendar year does not match exactly the time it takes the Earth to orbit the Sun.

Because the Earth's orbit takes slightly longer than a calendar year of 365 days, the solstices occur slightly later each calendar year, until a leap day re-aligns the calendar with the orbit.

Although the solstice ushers in some of the most intense summer heat for the majority of the Sultanate of Oman, the Dhofar Governorate simultaneously begins to enjoy cooling mists and monsoon rains.

WAKAN TO HAVE BETTER ROAD ACCESSIBILITY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

JUST 35 DEGREES Celsius at 2 pm in June, and this is why Wakan Village in the Wilayat of Nakhal is known to be so popular. Now, a project to develop a road leading to Wakan is to be implemented.

Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, affirmed that the project to develop the road leading to Wakan Village is considered one of the vital projects that represents a qualitative and important addition to the road network in the governorate, pointing out that this project comes within the framework of ongoing government efforts to enhance infrastructure and improve its efficiency in a manner that serves various development sectors.

He said that the implementation of such projects translates the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who places great emphasis on developing infrastructure across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and on achieving comprehensive and



The project includes the construction of a main road with a length of 6.5 km, in addition to a 2.2-kilometre link road.

sustainable development that addresses citizens' needs and aligns with their aspirations.

In the press statement, he pointed out that the government is committed to implementing further development projects that enhance the quality of life and elevate service standards.

The implementation of the road development project comes as part of efforts aimed at strengthening infrastructure and connecting mountain villages. The project was recently awarded at a total cost of RO 6.9 million, in a step expected to support tourism and development activity.

The project includes the construction of a main road with a length of 6.5 km, in addition to a 2.2-kilometre link road connecting the villages of Wakan and Al Qawrah, bringing the total road length to 8.7 kilometres.

The project also includes a comprehensive package of construction and service works, most notably the installation of 260 street lights and the construction of 27 box culverts to manage water flow from wadis. This will help reduce the risks associated with water runoff and ensure the road's sustainability and operational efficiency throughout the year.

The Governor explained that the project will directly contribute to strengthening connectivity between mountain villages and residential areas, which will facilitate daily mobility for citizens and residents, reduce the time required to reach various destinations, and elevate road safety levels on this vital route. He indicated that improving the road network in such mountainous areas is an essential element in achieving balanced development, due to its role in mitigating the geographical challenges that residents may face.



1201-1400



A'Sharqiyah University Achieves International Milestone with Entry into the QS World University Rankings 2027

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) has achieved a significant international milestone by securing its first-ever position in the QS World University Rankings **2027**, marking a new chapter in the University's journey toward international recognition, academic excellence, and enhanced global competitiveness.

In its inaugural appearance in this global ranking, ASU was placed within the **1201–1400** band globally, joining a select group of higher education institutions worldwide recognized for their performance across key indicators, including higher education quality, research impact, internationalization, employability, and sustainability.

The significance of this achievement becomes even more evident when considering the scale of competition and the breadth of the ranking. The **2027** edition evaluated **8,808** higher education institutions from **106** countries and territories worldwide, while only **1,504** universities were included in the published results.

The University demonstrated outstanding performance in the International Faculty indicator, achieving a global rank of **218**, reflecting its success in attracting highly qualified academic talent from diverse international backgrounds and strengthening a rich multicultural learning environment. The University also achieved a ranking of **701+** in both Academic Reputation and Employer Reputation, confirming its growing standing among academic communities and employers alike. In addition, the University attained a ranking of **801+** across several important indicators, including Faculty-Student Ratio, Citations per Faculty, International Research Network, International Students, Employment Outcomes, and Sustainability.

This achievement represents an important milestone in the implementation of A'Sharqiyah University's Strategic Plan **2026–2030**, reinforcing its ambition to expand its international presence, strengthen its global competitiveness, and enhance its position as a university with growing academic and research impact at the international level.

 [asu.edu.om](#)  [AsharqiyahUni](#)

Apply preventive health protocols as temperatures rise

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) stressed the importance of adhering to preventive health protocols to reduce the risks of heat strain and sunstroke as temperatures continue to surge.

Dr Shamsa bint Ahmed al Harthy, Head of the School and University Health Department at the Ministry of Health, said that those most vulnerable groups to heat strain and sunstroke include the elderly aged 65 and above, infants and children under four years old, outdoor workers and those working in enclosed, non-air-conditioned environments, as well as pilgrims performing Haj and Umrah.

She added that several symptoms entail immediate medical attention and hospitalisation, including excessive sweating, general fatigue, headache, nausea or vomiting, dizziness, extreme thirst, muscle cramps, rapid pulse, body temperature between 38 and 39.5 degrees Celsius, skin redness, warmth, or a cool, clammy, and pale complexion.

She emphasised the importance of drinking water regularly throughout the day, at a rate of two to four cups per hour in hot weather, while avoiding caffeinated and sugary drinks. She also stressed the need to replenish lost salts after physical exertion in the sun.

She called for avoiding strenuous outdoor activities between 10:00 am and 4:00 am, and taking breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas when working in hot environments. She emphasised the importance of wearing loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing, using hats, sunglasses, and appropriate sunscreen, staying in air-conditioned



The Ministry of Health called on members of the community to adhere to preventive guidelines and monitor health indicators.

spaces during peak hours, and closing windows and curtains during the day to minimise heat entering homes.

She stated that the recommended daily fluid intake in air-conditioned spaces ranges from 3.5 to 4 litres for men and 2.5 to 3 litres for women. She advised those exposed to direct heat or engaging in physical activity to drink one to two glasses of water every 15 to 20 minutes.

Children, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses require special care during heat waves. Children should be given fluids regularly and protected from direct sunlight during peak hours, while the elderly need continuous monitoring to ensure they drink water even if they do not feel thirsty, she said.

Regarding workers in outdoor locations, she recommended wearing appropriate protective clothing, drinking water regularly, avoiding carbonated drinks and caffeine, not ignoring the initial symptoms of heat exhaustion, and immediately reporting any unusual symptoms to supervisors. She urged employers to

strengthen preventative measures by training employees to recognise the symptoms of heat exhaustion, monitoring temperature and humidity levels in work areas, and providing awareness materials and emergency plans for handling medical emergencies.

Concerning first aid for suspected heatstroke, she explained the necessity of immediately moving the affected person to a shaded or air-conditioned area, keeping them lying down with their feet slightly elevated, removing excess clothing, and cooling the body using cool water or damp cloths. She also advised applying cold compresses to the armpits, groin, and sides of the neck until medical assistance arrives.

The Ministry of Health called on members of the community to adhere to preventive guidelines and monitor health indicators during periods of extreme heat, stressing that prevention and health awareness represent the first line of defence to reduce diseases associated with high temperatures. — **ONA**

DHOFARCALLING

As Khareef begins today, Dhofar gears up for visitors

FROM PAGE 1

For hotels, apartments, cafés, restaurants, food vendors, transport providers, tour guides and home-based businesses, Khareef is not simply a busy period. For many, it is the commercial season that can shape the outcome of the year.

Ali al Balushi, operations officer at a tour operating company, said inquiries about Dhofar had already started to increase, particularly from visitors asking about hotels, tourist sites and organised trips.

“We are receiving many inquiries about tourism options, accommodation and tour arrangements,” Al Balushi told the Observer. “The numbers usually begin to improve with the start of Khareef, but the peak period normally begins from mid-July and continues until shortly before students return to school.” A tourism sector specialist, who declined to be named, said hotel occupancy was expected to be strong this season despite wider regional uncertainty.

“We still expect a good season and strong demand from visitors, whether from Oman or neighbouring countries,” the specialist said. “Dhofar remains one of the most suitable destinations for family tourism. The cultural environment is familiar to many visitors from the region, and based on previous seasons, many say they do not feel like strangers here — they feel as if they are among their own people.” Dhofar Municipality has announced a broad events programme for the 2026 season, featuring 125 cultural, artistic, sporting and entertainment events across Salalah and other wilayats. Major venues include Ittin Square, the Modern Waterfront, Al Murooj Theatre, the Health Park at Salalah Public Park and the Children’s Time zone at Awqad Public Park, with activities extending to Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah.

The wider distribution of activities is significant. If managed effectively, it can reduce pressure on traditional hotspots such as Wadi Darbat, Al Mugh sail and Ittin, while giving smaller communities and local entrepreneurs outside central Salalah a better chance to benefit from visitor spending.

Air connectivity will also play a larger role this season. The Civil Aviation Authority has said Oman Air is expected to provide about 330,000 seats during Khareef 2026, compared with 313,000 last year, while SalamAir is expected to offer 190,844 seats.

Oman Air is expected to carry about 298,000 passengers during the season, while SalamAir is expected to carry around 166,393 passengers. The expanded aviation plan is expected to improve access to Dhofar, but it will also place additional pressure on airport services, taxis, car rentals, hotels, apartments and city traffic during the peak weeks.

Road movement remains equally important, as the majority of visitors traditionally enter Dhofar by land. For families travelling from Muscat and other governorates, the long road south is part of the Khareef experience, but also one of its main safety challenges.

Long distances, driver fatigue, changing weather, construction activity on parts of the national road network and heavy seasonal movement require clear traffic management and stronger public awareness.

The central question for Khareef 2026 is not whether visitors will come. Dhofar has already proven that. The real test is whether the governorate can absorb higher demand, protect the visitor experience, support local businesses and turn a short seasonal rush into deeper economic value.

‘SUMMER OF ARTS’ PROGRAMME FROM JUNE 22

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth will hold ‘Summer of Arts’ programme, which includes 18 training sessions on different forms of art from June 22 to August 18 2026.

The programme is in pursuance of the Ministry’s efforts to optimise the use of the summer vacation in a manner that benefits the target group. It seeks to engage the students in cultural and social activities through activities that suit their capacities, develop their innovative abilities and refine their



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artistic talents.

The programme includes workshops on writing artistic content, theatrical performance (drama), Arabic calligraphy, digital arts, photography, drawing, painting, sculpture and other skills related to visual arts.

The programme also includes interactive courses in the field of musical arts using artificial intelligence, in addition to practical training on playing the piano, the violin, the lute and other musical instruments. — ONA

Expansion, new projects to ease traffic in Muscat

SUHAIL BIN NASSER AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

MOTORISTS AND passengers heading to their destinations in Muscat Governorate face daily suffering as traffic congestion worsens with every passing year with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology devising short-term and long-term plans to implement appropriate solutions to the issue.

The daily commute experienced by thousands of employees, students, visitors and workers begins in the early morning hours as vehicles crawl to their destinations across the governorate.

Eng Hamdan bin Amer al Issai, Head of the Roads Design, Research, and Development Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, affirmed that the ministry is working in coordination and integration with relevant authorities to study and analyse current and future traffic patterns and develop infrastructure projects that support smooth traffic flow. This is being achieved through the implementation of several strategic projects, most notably the Muscat Expressway expansion project and the Al Mouj area development project and its associated roads.

Al Issai noted that the most prominent challenges are the rapid growth in population and vehicle numbers over the past years, in addition to the concentration of many residential, commercial and service activities and workplaces in specific locations. He explained that the relevant authorities are implementing a package of integrated solutions that include developing main roads and intersections, improving connectivity between entrances and exits, addressing traffic bottlenecks, utilising intelligent traffic management systems, and supporting public transport projects.

Al Issai noted that the ministry, in coordination with relevant



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The ministry oversees several important strategic projects, most notably the Muscat Expressway expansion project, the Al Mouj development project and its associated section of 18 November Road, and the Burj Al Sahwa roundabout development project and its associated roads.

authorities, is adopting an integrated approach that combines immediate solutions with long-term strategic solutions to address the traffic congestion issue in Muscat Governorate. In the short term, several traffic and engineering improvements are underway to enhance the efficiency of the existing road network.

In the long term, the ministry continues to implement and develop strategic road projects that accommodate anticipated urban and population growth. This includes supporting and developing the public transport system and enhancing its integration with the road network, promoting sustainable transport solutions, and aligning urban planning with future transport needs.

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and its associated roads. These projects aim to increase the capacity of the road network and improve connectivity between main thoroughfares and residential, commercial, and service areas. The ministry has also adopted a partnership approach with the private sector by introducing a number of investment projects, most notably the Bausher-Al Amerat-Al Taiyeen Tunnel Project and the Al Maabilah-Thumayd Road Project. These projects would provide alternative routes and distribute traffic on the road network more efficiently, thus reducing traffic congestion and raising the level of service.

Al Issai said that addressing traffic congestion requires continuous integration and coordination among various relevant government agencies, given its connection to several aspects including urban planning, road infrastructure development, traffic management, public transportation, and the distribution of activities and services within the governorate.

Road to Dhofar enters busiest season amid upgrade works

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 20

As Dhofar prepares to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors during the Khareef season, Oman’s most important north-south road corridor is undergoing one of the largest infrastructure upgrades currently under way in the country.

A field journey by the Oman Observer from Muscat to Salalah found extensive construction activity across multiple sections of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road dualisation project, particularly along the Haima-Maqshan-Dawkah-Thumrait corridor, where contractors are working to

complete the final 400 kilometres of dual carriageway linking Al Wusta and Dhofar. The journey highlighted both the scale of the national investment and the challenges facing motorists travelling south during the construction phase.

Heavy equipment, construction vehicles, earthmoving works and road preparation activities were visible along various stretches of the route. While traffic continues to move normally across most sections, motorists are sharing parts of the corridor with ongoing construction works, temporary traffic arrangements and frequent truck movements associated with



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the project. The observations come as Dhofar enters the final stages of preparation for the annual Khareef season, one of the Sultanate’s largest tourism events. Visitor numbers are expected to increase this year, with many travellers choosing to drive from Muscat and other governorates, while substantial numbers of GCC visitors are also expected to enter the governorate by road.

For many families, the journey to Dhofar is more than a means of transport. It is an integral part of the holiday itself, often involving long-distance travel across desert terrain before reaching the green mountains and cooler climate of southern Oman.

That makes road safety a critical consideration as traffic volumes begin to rise. Some active construction zones will benefit from additional warning and directional signage to provide motorists with greater advance notice of work areas, lane adjustments and heavy vehicle movements. Enhanced temporary safety measures will be particularly beneficial for first-time visitors unfamiliar with the route.

The Sultan Said bin Taimur Road remains one of the country’s most strategic transport corridors, connecting northern Oman with Al Wusta and Dhofar while supporting tourism, trade and development.

SPOTLIGHT



Al Qayth season marks the ripening of summer fruits, strengthens traditions of sharing and supports farming communities

A SEASON OF HARVEST AND HERITAGE

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI

FOR many visitors to Oman, summer may appear to be a season defined by soaring temperatures and long sunlit days. For Omanis, however, the arrival of summer signals something far more meaningful: the beginning of Al Qaydh, a traditional harvest season that has shaped agricultural life, social customs and community relationships for generations.

Al Qaydh marks the period when dates, mangoes and other seasonal fruits begin to ripen across Oman. The season usually starts in May with the appearance of Tabasheer Al Rutab — the first ripe dates of the year — and continues throughout the summer months. For farming communities, these early fruits are more than a sign of harvest; they signal the arrival of one of the most anticipated times of the year.

Unlike in many parts of the world, where intense summer heat is often viewed negatively, Oman’s farmers have long associated rising temperatures with abundance. The summer sun plays a vital role in ripening dates and mangoes, transforming them from green fruit into sweet produce that fills homes, markets and family gatherings across the country.

The harvest begins with early date varieties such as Naghal and Salani. According to Nasser al Sawafi, educator and social commentator, the Salani variety is among the first to ripen and is

“Harvest inspires people in northern Oman to send fresh dates to loved ones in Dhofar. Such gestures, help bridge geographical distance and reinforce feelings of affection, unity and shared identity among communities.”

MAJID AL MARHOON
Social media activist



known for its pleasant flavour and relatively low sugar content. As the season progresses, other varieties, including Hilali and Khasab, begin to appear, each carrying distinctive colours, tastes and characteristics familiar to generations of Omanis.

Water availability remains central to the success of the season. Dr Ali al Hamdi, CEO of Arz Engineering and Investment Holding and Chairman of the Food Security Committee at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s Al Batinah North branch, highlighted the importance of water resources in sustaining agricultural production.

Referring to the early signs of harvest in Wadi Hibi, he noted that abundant water supplies, supported by a key groundwater recharge dam serving the area, have contributed to expectations of a promising agricultural season.

Yet Al Qaydh represents far more than agriculture. Its significance extends beyond farms and orchards into the social fabric of Omani society. For generations, families have shared fresh dates and seasonal produce with relatives, neighbours and friends, continuing traditions that strengthen social bonds and reflect deeply rooted values of generosity and

hospitality. Social media activist Majid al Marhoon explained that the arrival of the harvest often inspires people in northern Oman to send fresh dates to loved ones in Dhofar. Such gestures, he said, help bridge geographical distance and reinforce feelings of affection, unity and shared identity among communities across Oman.

For farmers, the season carries both emotional and economic importance. Farmer Abdullah al Battashi described Al Qaydh as far more than a period of harvest.

“Al Qaydh is a season we eagerly await throughout the year because of the blessings and abundance it brings. As the dates begin to ripen, farms become lively again and social gatherings increase. The season is deeply connected to traditions and cultural heritage rooted in Omani society,” he said.

Al Battashi added that Omani dates are not merely an agricultural product but an essential part of the country’s identity and daily life. The season provides opportunities for families to gather, exchange produce and strengthen social ties, while also generating important economic returns for farming communities.

As summer unfolds across Oman, the spirit of Al Qaydh can be seen in farms, markets and homes alike. The season remains a cherished part of Omani life, bringing with it the simple pleasures of fresh harvests, shared gifts and treasured moments of togetherness.

SHORTTAKES

RESEARCH
EXAMINES ROLE
OF AI IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

MUSCAT: A research project led by Dr Alsaeed Saad Alshamy from Sultan Qaboos University has been awarded the National Research Award 2025, organised by the Research and Innovation Authority in the Education and Human Resources field under the PhD category, recognising its significant contribution to



DR ALSAEED
ALSHAMY

understanding the growing role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education.

The study, titled “Perceptions of Generative AI Tools in Higher Education: Insights from Students and Academics at Sultan Qaboos University,” examines how emerging AI technologies, including tools such as ChatGPT, are perceived and utilised within academic environments.

According to Dr Alsaeed, the research applies the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explore key dimensions including actual use, ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived challenges and intention to use.

It draws on data collected from 555 students and 168 academics, offering comprehensive empirical insights into both the opportunities and challenges associated with adopting generative AI tools in higher education.

The findings reveal notable differences between students and academics in their use and perceptions of these technologies.

Students tend to use generative AI tools primarily to support their academic work and learning processes, while academics are more likely to use them for teaching-related tasks.

At the same time, academics expressed higher levels of concern regarding potential risks such as plagiarism, academic misconduct and over-reliance on AI tools.

Despite these concerns, the majority of both groups indicated a strong willingness to continue using generative AI tools responsibly, reflecting a growing acceptance of AI within the academic community.

The study emphasises the need for structured and forward-looking approaches to integrating AI into higher education.

Dr Alsaeed highlights the importance of developing clear institutional policies and regulatory frameworks to guide AI use, alongside targeted training programmes for both students and academics.

He also underscores the need to integrate AI-related skills into university curricula and to expand professional development opportunities for academic staff to ensure ethical, responsible and effective adoption of these technologies.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Al Sharqiyah South Governorate has reviewed a digital platform for investment opportunities developed in-house as part of its ongoing efforts to advance digital transformation and support economic development across the governorate.

The platform was presented by the Executive Team for Digital Transformation in collaboration with the Planning and Investment Department, under the chairmanship of Eng Abdullah bin Saif al Araimi, Head of the Executive Team for Digital Transformation, and in the presence of officials and specialists from relevant departments.

Designed to serve as a unified investment database, the platform aims to identify, document and showcase investment opportunities across the governorate’s wilayats. It provides investors, decision-makers and stakeholders with access to accurate and regularly updated information, contributing to a more attractive and transparent investment environment.

During the presentation,



The initiative forms part of a broader digital transformation programme aimed at enhancing public services.

participants were introduced to the platform’s key features, technical capabilities and operational mechanisms, including data management processes and content updating procedures. The platform also highlights the governorate’s economic strengths and competitive advantages, helping to promote its potential to local and international investors.

The initiative forms part of a broader digital transformation programme aimed at enhancing

OMAN CINEMA MAKES PRESENCE AT INT’L FILM FESTIVAL

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

The Omani cinema made its presence felt at the 15th International Environmental Film Festival in Chefchaouen, Morocco, which brought together a distinguished group of film-makers, researchers and those interested in environmental issues and sustainable development from around the world between

June 17 and 20. Omani director Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, a member of the General Union of Arab Artists, was a member of the jury for the international amateur and educational film competition in the festival, which is organised by the Talasemtane Association for Environment and Development.

The jury was chaired by Moroccan film critic and writer Mohammed Abed and included Al Ajmi himself, as well as Spanish

researcher and writer Javier Saura, a specialist in environmental and sustainability issues.

Al Ajmi said environmental cinema has become an effective tool for raising awareness about sustainability issues and conveying environmental challenges to the public.

He also highlighted the importance of specialised festivals in encouraging film productions that address environmental issues

and foster dialogue about future solutions. He also participated in the international symposium titled ‘When Cinema Imagines Cities Before They Are Built: Foresight Laboratory for Smart Cities,’ featuring researchers and specialists from Morocco, Spain, and India and discussed the role of cinema in envisioning the future of cities and raising awareness of environmental and developmental issues.

AI ethics a key pillar in
preparing national talent



The summit brought together a number of academic leaders, and representatives from the public and private sectors.

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

THE UNIVERSITY of Technology and Applied Sciences recently participated in the Employers Summit 2026, organised by Muscat University under the theme “Workforce Transformation in the Age of AI: Aligning Engineering, Business and Logistics Skills with Industry Expectations”.

The university was represented by Dr Musab al Rawahi, Director of the ISESCO Chair for AI Ethics, who took part as a speaker in one of the summit’s panel discussions.

The summit brought together a number of academic leaders, representatives from the public and private sectors, experts, and decision-makers to discuss the future of jobs and the skills required amid rapid digital transformation and the growing adoption of artificial intelligence technologies.

During the panel discussion, Dr Al Rawahi emphasised the importance of promoting awareness of AI ethics and embedding the principles of responsible AI use within higher education institutions. He noted that artificial intelligence has become a major driver of transformation across various sectors, requiring universities to rethink how students are prepared and equipped for the future labour market.

He explained that the challenge lies not only in teaching AI tools, but also in empowering students to use them ethically and responsibly in ways that enhance their professional capabilities and improve their employability.

He stressed the importance of integrating digital literacy and AI ethics across all academic disciplines.

Dr Al Rawahi highlighted the role of the ISESCO Chair for AI Ethics at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in supporting higher education institutions

through raising awareness of AI ethics, building national capacities, and delivering specialised training programmes and workshops that promote the responsible use of emerging technologies.

He also called for stronger collaboration between universities and the public and private sectors institutions to ensure academic curricula remain aligned with the evolving needs of the labour market, while providing practical training opportunities and joint projects that enable students to acquire relevant workplace skills.

The participation of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the summit reflects its ongoing efforts to support digital transformation, develop national capabilities, and advance the principles of responsible artificial intelligence, contributing to the preparation of qualified talent capable of competing in the digital economy and supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Sharqiyah South reviews investment opportunities

THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tender Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites tender for the following:-

Tender Reference	Subject	Grade	Tender Document Fee (Non-refundable)	Submission Date
04/2026	Supply of Tyres for the Year 2027	II & above	SME R.O 10/- L.O R.O. 25/-	27 th July 2026

Specialized companies registered in the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with the above-mentioned Grade and the Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Guard of Oman, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Sunday 21st June to Thursday 25th June 2026.**

Wax-sealed Tenders addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 1200 hours on the submission date along with a Tender Bond the name of the Royal Guard of Oman equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the Tender from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman,. The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

No Tender will be accepted after the submission date. The Royal Guard of Oman reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender without giving reasons.

Tender Committee
PO Box 381, C.P.O
Postal Code 111

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A child plays in a fountain during a heatwave in Lyon, south-eastern France. — AFP

RED HEAT ALERT ISSUED FOR THIRD OF FRANCE

PARIS: France issued a red heatwave alert across more than a third of the country for Sunday as a ferocious heatwave dug in. The prolonged heatwave, which began earlier this week, has disrupted the country, forcing the cancellation of dozens of trains and the suspension of classes. Authorities are also concerned about how the annual Fete de la Musique celebrations will unfold across the country on Sunday when musicians take over the streets with free performances and revellers party into the night. “Very high temperatures are settling in for the long term across the country,” Meteo-France said as it announced the highest heatwave warning for 35 of France’s departments, or administrative regions, for Sunday. Much of Western Europe was sweltering in a gruelling heatwave on Friday with the mercury expected to continue rising in the coming days, likely shattering yet more temperature records. Across the continent, authorities were ramping up warnings of extreme weather. German forecasters said parts of the country needed to be on alert for thunderstorms, hail and heavy rain over the weekend. — AFP

AROUND 15 MIGRANT BODIES WASH ASHORE IN EASTERN LIBYA



Crew launches a rigid-hulled inflatable boat in the search and rescue zone in the central Mediterranean, off Libya. — Reuters

BENGHAZI: The bodies of at least 15 migrants including a girl have washed ashore along Libya’s eastern Mediterranean coast over the past week after their boat was believed to have capsized, security, navy and medical sources said on Saturday. The vessel was carrying around 61 people, according to 10 survivors, a navy source said. The bodies were recovered from several places along the coastline of Tobruk, a city near the Egyptian border, the sources added. Two security officials said the remains were badly decomposed and warned that more bodies could still be found. Images posted on Facebook by the Tobruk Red Crescent showed volunteers in white hazmat suits recovering bodies from rocky shorelines and placing them into white plastic bags. Libya has become a transit route for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty to Europe via dangerous routes across the desert and over the Mediterranean. The Libyan economy is also a draw for impoverished migrants seeking work. Separately, the Emergency Medicine and Support Centre in Khumas city, which operates under the health ministry in the capital Tripoli, said its medics treated 13 migrants after their boat capsized off the coast. — Reuters

SEABED TREMORS

Earthquakes shake the Greek island Crete



Two earthquakes measuring magnitudes of 4.6 and 5.3 struck, within minutes of each other, the holiday island of Crete around midday on Saturday, the media reported. The epicentre of the quakes was around 14 kilometres deep under the seabed near the small island of Gavdos south of Crete. The earthquakes were clearly felt across the island, including in the cities of Rethymnon and Chania, the Cretalive online portal reported. Greek police carried out patrols but found no damage. — dpa

BANGLADESH PM TO VISIT MALAYSIA, CHINA ON FIRST FOREIGN TOUR

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is set to visit Malaysia and China on his first trip abroad since assuming office, the foreign ministry said on Saturday, bypassing neighbouring India as his inaugural destination. Rahman will visit Malaysia on Sunday before travelling to China the following day, Dhaka’s state-run BSS news agency reported, citing foreign ministry officials. In Beijing, trade and infrastructure projects will be

on the agenda, according to the officials. Those could include Chinese support for the long-delayed Teesta project, a plan to restore and manage a key Bangladesh river through dredging, embankment construction and irrigation. “The visits are being viewed as a major diplomatic initiative aimed at strengthening Bangladesh’s economic partnerships,” BSS reported, citing the foreign ministry. Malaysia has an estimated

800,000 Bangladeshi workers, more than a third of its foreign workforce. Bangladesh is largely encircled by land by India, but relations have been strained since a 2024 uprising toppled the government of then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Ties improved after Rahman won elections and took over in February from the interim administration that had led the country of 170 million people since Hasina’s ouster. She has been hiding in India since the revolution. — AFP

Congo displaced camp shows 30 deaths of Ebola

AT LEAST 30 people have died since the start of May in one camp for displaced civilians in northeastern Congo, a death rate that camp officials said was unprecedented, with some confirmed to have died from Ebola in a sign the disease could be spreading fast there. It was not possible to confirm the causes of all the deaths because patients or their relatives in Kigonze camp in Bunia — the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak in Democratic Republic of Congo — had until Thursday refused testing, a camp spokesperson and aid organisation Caritas said. However, all had symptoms including headaches, fever and vomiting, which are associated with Ebola, a camp spokesperson, a bereaved father, three aid sources and a civil society leader said. “People didn’t just die like this before,” camp spokesperson Desire Grodya Bapi said. The deaths in Kigonze, which has more than 15,000 residents, raise fears that Ebola may be circulating undetected among eastern Congo’s over 5 million displaced people, with resistance to testing compounding the challenge posed by severely limited sanitation measures. Camp President Dz’djo Ndrutsi Etienne said 10 people were buried this week alone. Grodya said the camp typically recorded between one and three deaths per month. Justin Zanamuzi, director of Catholic aid organisation Caritas, which



Teams from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies prepare for burial in Bunia. — AFP

Footage shared by the civil society leader showed health teams in hazmat suits disinfecting more bodies and preparing tiny coffins next to a crucifix as mourners wailed. The outbreak in the country was first declared by Congolese officials on May 15, but the officials said the deaths had begun earlier in the month.

helps Kigonze’s residents, said his team on Wednesday saw several bodies covered in sheets, including a pregnant woman and children. Footage shared by the civil society leader showed health teams in hazmat suits disinfecting more bodies and preparing tiny coffins next to a crucifix as mourners wailed. “Our team tried to persuade people to accept doctors to inspect the bodies. They completely refused,” Zanamuzi said. The outbreak in the country was first declared by Congolese officials on May 15, but the officials said the deaths had begun earlier in the month. Grodya, the camp spokesperson, said health workers had taken samples from five victims, some of which had come back positive for Ebola. Three aid sources also

confirmed on Saturday that the test samples on some of this week’s victims had come back positive for Ebola, without specifying the number. Camp resident Kato Lonu, 47, lost two children, including a 6-month-old. “These are conditions that no human being should have to live in. If you look around, people are dying one after another,” he said. Four aid workers said the spike in deaths highlighted how communities were now more exposed to diseases such as Ebola as donors, including key contributor the US under President Donald Trump, have cut funding for water, hygiene and sanitation, which is essential in fighting a disease that spreads through bodily fluids such as human waste. In Kigonze, large families share the same plastic tents spaced less than a metre apart and children wander its dirt alleyways barefoot. There are toilets marked USAID — Washington’s international aid agency dismantled by Trump — and an aid source said the agency helped fund their construction. However, Grodya and the aid source said there were not enough toilets and they often overflowed. “The latrines, they fill up very quickly, and people have to empty them themselves, with their bare hands,” Grodya said. Washington has been the top supporter of WASH services in Congo, and provided over \$60 million in WASH services in 2024 to reduce the spread of diseases. — Reuters

ISRAELI STRIKES KILL FIVE IN GAZA, INCLUDING CHILDREN

GAZA: Gaza health officials said Israeli strikes on Saturday killed five people, including four members of the same family, in the latest violence to rock the Palestinian territory despite a ceasefire. An overnight Israeli air strike on an apartment building in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City killed four members of the Al Safadi family, including the husband, wife and their two daughters, according to the civil defence agency, a rescue service that operates under Hamas authority. It said the strike also injured 12 others. Gaza City’s Al-Shifa hospital confirmed receiving the bodies of four members of the Al Safadi family, including two children. “Around 2 o’clock, my cousins were asleep when a missile struck them. They have no connection to Hamas, nor are they involved in anything. They’re just innocent children,” said Nael al Safadi, a relative. Footage from the scene showed an exterior wall of the apartment blown off, exposing rubble, clothes, mattresses and other household belongings strewn across the shattered interior. — AFP

FAKE MESSAGES

Brazil cites cyberattack behind false alerts



Brazil’s Civil Defense authority said it had disabled its mobile phone emergency alert system after the latter suffered a possible cyberattack resulting in false messages being sent overnight. “The message sent was an Extreme Alert and contained the word ‘misanthropy,’ meaning hatred of humanity. It was probably a hacker attack,” the Civil Defense said in a statement. Brazilians on social media reported being woken up by the loud sound of the alerts. — AFP

REPORTED EXPLOSIONS

Roadside blasts in northwest Pakistan kill 7



Twin roadside blasts killed at least seven people in Pakistan’s northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. “A private pickup truck carrying passengers was targeted with a remote-controlled IED,” said Yasir Afridi, a police officer. “... the injured were being transported to the hospital in a car for emergency treatment when a second IED exploded,” he said, adding that three people were wounded. Pakistan PM Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif expressed his sorrow over the casualties. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (L) holds hands with his wife Begona Gomez. — AFP

COURT BANS SPANISH PM'S WIFE FROM LEAVING COUNTRY

MADRID: A Spanish court has ordered the wife of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Begona Gomez, to stand trial by jury for corruption and banned her from leaving the country, according to a court order released on Saturday. The case is one of several corruption affairs that have embroiled the Socialist leader's family and former allies, threatening to topple his minority coalition government.

Judge Juan Carlos Peinado ordered Gomez to hand in her passport and to appear before the court twice a month until a verdict is reached in the case. The court said, "Instructions shall be issued to all border posts and civilian and military airports" to ensure Gomez complies with the ban on leaving the country. No date for the politically explosive trial has been set.

Peinado formally charged Gomez with embezzlement, influence peddling, corruption in business dealings and misappropriation of funds. He opened the investigation in April 2024 to determine whether Gomez had exploited her position as Sanchez's wife for private gain, which she and the prime minister deny. — AFP

TRAIN COLLISION KILLS DRIVER



UK accident investigators were probing the cause of a train collision north of London which killed a driver and injured scores of passengers, nine critically. The crash near Bedford involved two London-bound trains on the same track. Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said it was "too early to speculate" on the cause of the crash while vowing "a thorough investigation... to ensure that lessons are learnt". British Transport Police Chief Constable Lucy D'Orsi said in an update on Saturday near the scene that more than 80 people had been treated for injuries in hospital and 28 remained there. — AFP

UN RIGHTS CHIEF TROUBLED BY NEW EU MIGRANT RETURN RULES

GENEVA: The UN rights chief said on Saturday that he deeply regretted the European Union's new migration rules, which allow much broader detention powers and the creation of deportation centres outside the bloc. The rules, approved on Wednesday, enable the 27 EU nations to open "return hubs" outside the bloc's borders, where they can send asylum-seekers and migrants to whom they do not grant the right to remain.

Volker Turk, the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the EU and its member states must ensure the rules fully comply with international human rights and refugee law. "EU states cannot simply outsource their human rights obligations to third states in this context," he said in a statement. "Detention and return of vulnerable people, including children, to other countries is a particularly sensitive exercise of the state's power and carries a high risk of human rights violations. "There must be front-and-centre emphasis on human rights protection and dignity throughout — in fact and in law," Turk insisted.

European governments have sought a tougher stance on

immigration, which has become a hot political topic used by far-right parties to make electoral gains across the continent. With asylum-seeker arrivals down in 2025, the focus in Brussels has turned to tightening up the repatriation system.

Currently, fewer than 30 per cent of people who are ordered to leave are returned to their country of origin. "International human rights law and refugee law are very clear — no one should be returned to a place where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations or other irreparable harm," said Turk. — AFP

Bolivia declares emergency, deploys military forces

BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL and social crisis intensified on Saturday as President Rodrigo Paz declared a state of emergency, enabling wider military deployment to clear blockades and restore order amid protests that have brought the economy to a halt over the past 50 days. Addressing the nation early on Saturday morning, Paz said anti-government blockades were no longer a social protest but an organised attempt to destabilise Bolivia's democracy. "There comes a moment when failing to act ceases to be prudence and becomes irresponsibility. And that moment has arrived," Paz said, promising the measure would protect citizens and ensure the flow of essential goods, while warning that those continuing disruptions would face legal consequences.

Protesting groups, many allied to former leftist president Evo Morales, have cut off key roads, stranding trucks and choking supplies of food, fuel and medicines to many areas, including La Paz, Bolivia's administrative capital. At least 200 police officers wearing tactical gear and carrying canisters of tear gas gathered in the streets surrounding a police headquarters in El Alto, a major city that borders La Paz, in the early morning hours of Saturday.

Some opposition lawmakers have warned the emergency measure could further ratchet up tensions, while analysts and legal experts have also said the emergency powers could deepen unrest if they lack public support and fail to address underlying causes of protests. Paz made the announcement just hours after he unveiled a deal struck on Friday with the main union, the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB), that aimed to ease tension.

However, many roads connecting the South American nation's main production centre are under the control of rural associations aligned with Morales, who were not a part of the negotiations and are continuing to protest mainly in the area of Cochabamba. Congress cleared a path for the emergency declaration in May when it repealed a law that



Military Police stand guard outside the Quemado presidential palace in La Paz. — AFP



Bolivia's President Rodrigo Paz speaks on the day he signs an agreement with the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB) union in La Paz. — Reuters

had set limits on the executive branch's use of emergency orders and was seen as favouring labour unions and social organisations.

While the order goes into effect immediately, the president must notify Congress of the state of emergency within 24 hours of issuing the decree, which then has up to 72 hours to approve or reject the measure. "This is not a state of emergency to restrict people's lives... It is a state of emergency to give freedom back to the people, to free Bolivia from those who use political conflict to block roads and harm the

population," Paz said.

The conflict initially erupted after Paz abruptly cut long-standing fuel subsidies to shrink the deficit, amid a worsening dollar crunch and talks with the International Monetary Fund. Despite later steps to stabilise fuel prices and reverse unpopular land reforms, protests intensified into broader discontent, with unions demanding wage increases, an end to fuel and dollar shortages, and Paz's resignation.

Paz has been in power for just seven months, after nearly two decades of governments under the leftist Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), headed by Morales, who governed Bolivia from 2006 to 2019. Under Bolivian law, a president can be subject to a recall referendum after completing two and a half years in office.

Paz, who took office with the backing of President Donald Trump as part of a broader strategy to increase US influence in the hemisphere, has blamed Morales — a towering figure of the left who governed for nearly 14 years — for stoking the unrest. Morales has backed the protest movement, called for early elections and cast the unrest as resistance to Paz's economic policies.

In an exclusive interview with Reuters this week, Morales denied any role instigating dissent, saying the "indigenous rebellion" was driven by economic hardship. — Reuters

Top Ukrainian officials return Polish awards in WWII row

KYIV: Top Ukrainian officials said on Saturday they were returning Polish awards after President Volodymyr Zelensky was stripped of Warsaw's top order, in a row between the allies over WWII massacres. Zelensky infuriated neighbouring Poland this month by naming a military unit after the nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) that took part in massacres against Poles in WWII. On Friday, hard-right Polish President Karol Nawrocki stripped Zelensky of the Order of the White Eagle — the highest honour in Poland — despite requests from both Kyiv and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

On Saturday, Zelensky's top aide and Ukraine's ambassador to Warsaw followed Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga in saying they were relinquishing awards bestowed by Poland as a way of showing solidarity with the president. They argued the move by Nawrocki benefited Russia, whose war with Ukraine is now in its fifth year. "This

Polish President Karol Nawrocki stripped Zelensky of the Order of the White Eagle — the highest honour in Poland — despite requests from both Kyiv and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. On Saturday, Zelensky's top aide and Ukraine's ambassador to Warsaw followed Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga in saying they were relinquishing awards bestowed by Poland.



Poland's President Karol Nawrocki (R) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky address a joint press conference following their talks. — AFP file photo

is a gift to the Moscow aggressor, who will certainly use it against both of our countries," Zelensky aide Kyrylo Budanov said on social media. He said he was returning the Gold Officer's Cross of the Polish Order of Merit.

Ukrainian Ambassador to Warsaw Vasyl Bodnar said on Saturday he was

relinquishing his Knight's Cross of the Polish Order of Merit, describing Nawrocki's move as a "gesture directed at the entire Ukrainian people". Sybiga said on Friday he planned to return an award he received from Poland in 2022 after the "unjustified, impulsive and disrespectful" decision.

"Poland's president has finally stripped (Zelensky) of the Order of the White Eagle," said Russia's former president Dmitry Medvedev, the current deputy chair of Russia's security council.

Between 1943 and 1945, thousands of Polish civilians were killed by UPA Ukrainian nationalist units in Volhynia - a Ukrainian region that was part of Poland before WWII. Nawrocki said Kyiv's "decision to glorify the UPA is not only outrageous" but also "deeply disappointing", undermining "reconciliation" between the two nations.

Tusk — whose government is at loggerheads with Nawrocki — criticised Zelensky's move but said the Ukrainian leader had reassured him he did not want to offend Poles. He appealed to both nations not to lose solidarity and not to let "history ruin our future."

Poland has been one of Ukraine's main allies during the war, taking in hundreds of thousands of refugees and serving as a logistics hub for Western aid. — AFP

OPINION

Can a hobby become an obsession?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

A COLLEAGUE recently told me about his son, a young man in his early 20s who had taken up fishing as a hobby. Initially, his parents were delighted as fishing seemed to offer a healthy escape from work stress. Spending time by the sea, away from screens and deadlines, appeared to be exactly what he needed. Over time, however, the hobby began to dominate his life. He started waking before dawn every weekend to go fishing. Sometimes he would head to the shore before work.

On one occasion, he left at sunset and did not return home until 10 pm, causing considerable concern to his parents. What had started as a leisure activity was beginning to look like something more intense.

This raises an interesting question: when does a hobby stop being a hobby and become an obsession?

Psychologists often distinguish between two types of passion. The first is what researchers call harmonious passion. In this form, a person enjoys an activity and finds meaning in it, but the activity remains in balance with other aspects of life. The hobby enriches life rather than controlling it.

The second type is obsessive passion. Here, the activity begins to dominate a person's thoughts and behaviour. The individual feels compelled to engage in it,

even when it interferes with relationships, work responsibilities, or other important commitments. The activity is no longer simply a source of enjoyment; it becomes a source of psychological dependence.

The distinction is important because hobbies generally offer significant mental health benefits. Studies have shown that engaging in leisure activities can reduce stress, improve mood, enhance concentration, and even lower the risk of depression.

Activities such as gardening, painting, photography, hiking, or fishing provide opportunities for mastery, relaxation, and social connection.

Indeed, one of the most overlooked benefits of hobbies is their ability to bring people together. As we grow older, maintaining friendships becomes increasingly difficult. Careers become more demanding and finding time to meet friends often requires careful planning. A shared hobby can help overcome these barriers.

I have heard people describe how taking up fishing allowed them to reconnect with old friends through a common interest. Whereas they previously met only once every three or four months, they suddenly found themselves gathering more frequently . It became a pleasant and active way to catch up, offering something more meaningful than

Studies have shown that engaging in leisure activities can reduce stress, improve mood, enhance concentration, and even lower the risk of depression

simply meeting in a café or restaurant.

Psychologists have long recognised that social connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of emotional well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction. In this sense, hobbies can strengthen not only individual mental health but also the social bonds that sustain us.

Yet, sometimes hobbies can become difficult to regulate. The sense of achievement from catching a fish, completing a painting, or improving a skill activates the brain's reward system. For some individuals, especially during periods of stress , the hobby can become a refuge from life's challenges. Gradually, they may start relying on it not just for enjoyment but to avoid uncomfortable emotions or unresolved problems.

A useful rule of thumb is to ask three questions. Is the activity harming important relationships? Is it interfering with work or daily responsibilities? Does the person become irritable, anxious, or distressed when unable to engage in it? If the answer to these questions is yes, the hobby have reached unhealthy territory.

The goal is not to discourage passion but to ensure that our passions serve us rather than control us. The healthiest passions are those that help us navigate life, not those that cause us to lose sight of the shore.

SWEDEN’S PRIME MINISTER DODGES SLEW OF SCANDALS

PIA OHLIN

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson has been dogged by scandal throughout his four-year term, wriggling out each time with little consequence and now faces new corruption allegations three months ahead of legislative elections.

Headlines across Sweden in recent days have focused on questionable ethics from Kristersson and his wife, ordained Lutheran priest Birgitta Ed.

Newspaper Aftonbladet reported that a foundation run by Ed recruited volunteers to raise funds and refurbish the foundation's manor house in exchange for a “good network” of contacts and meetings held at the prime minister’s official residence. Two of the volunteers were later appointed to government positions, it said.

In a comment to Aftonbladet, Kristersson rejected the claims as “false accusations”.

“This organisation is run by my wife and has nothing to do with me,” he said.

Aftonbladet’s reporter also said she was able to access Kristersson’s and Ed’s bedroom on the property without a security check.

Aftonbladet further revealed that the general director of Sweden’s Public Health Agency was fired in 2024 after questioning a government directive to prioritise “existential health” — just as Ed started offering retreats for “existential health”.

In another highly publicised case in 2023, Kristersson was heavily criticised for hiring a childhood friend to serve as national security advisor, and adamantly defended him when he left classified documents in an unlocked locker at a Stockholm conference centre. Kristersson, whose right-wing government is propped up by the far-right, also faced heat in 2025 for backing his migration minister when the latter’s 16-year-old son was found to have links to white supremacist groups. He has also faced accusations of conflict of interest in his sister-in-law’s business affairs, and was criticised for allowing his daughter to host a party at the prime minister’s official summer residence. Law professor Olle Lundin at Uppsala University said the slew of scandals were clear-cut cases of corruption.

“Corruption is when someone abuses their public power for their own or someone else’s gain. And you almost have to say that he does that on a continuous basis,” Lundin said. And yet there have been no legal consequences and very few calls for his resignation — in a country ranked the sixth-least corrupt in the world, according to Transparency International. — **AFP**

Prepare students for ASI

ASI IS a theoretical system that will function on an entirely different scale from current AI, operating with a capacity so advanced that it is as far beyond humans as humans are beyond chimpanzees.

It will affect the way we live and work. Geoffrey Hinton, a k a “The Godfather of AI,” is known for pioneering work on neural networks and deep learning. He has spoken publicly about the risks of advanced AI systems. In 2023, he left Google to speak more freely about his concerns, including the social impact of powerful AI technologies. He has warned that AI should be handled with care and not treated as a purely beneficial trend. When asked what job people should train for, Hinton’s advice was blunt: “Become a plumber.”

The point is that many forms of work, especially those requiring hands-on physical skills, are harder to automate than desk-based tasks. Plumbers, electricians, heating engineers, and maintenance workers will still be needed, and health and care work still depends on human judgement and human support.

With the advent of AI/ASI, jobs will not just be about producing results, but making accurate judgements and being accountable for decisions. This should reshape how—and what—universities teach.

Some university courses still train students for tasks that AI can already do more cheaply and quickly. For example, IT courses frequently emphasise writing code, building websites and generating reports. Business Studies often spends too much time on producing charts, drafting marketing copy, or generating routine paperwork. If students are trained primarily to generate results rather than to verify their accuracy, their core skills will not compete with AI/ASI. Routine work is already being replaced by AI automation: driverless or driver-



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More focus needed on decision-making and verification skills

minimal taxi services have begun operating in parts of the world, and supermarket checkout jobs are shrinking as customers increasingly scan and check out themselves.

AI changes the value of human labour: it shifts the emphasis from producing results to checking, approving and taking responsibility for outcomes. Human input is needed to verify the accuracy of AI results and decide whether to accept them. In many subjects — not just in IT and Business Studies — universities need to place more focus on decision-making and verification skills.

There are several ways universities should consider approaching the problem. First, they should train students to verify and audit outputs, not just generate them. Students should be assessed on their ability to ask basic questions of AI/ASI: Is this correct? How do we know? What could go wrong? What evidence would we need before trusting it? Assessment should reward error-spotting and correction, because that is a skill AI/ASI cannot so easily replace. Second, courses should develop decision-making capabilities. Workplace problems are complex and ambiguous. People disagree and plans will have to change rapidly to

meet the ASI revolution. Students who only learn how to finish predefined, routine tasks can struggle when they must decide quickly under pressure. Projects, work placements, and apprenticeships can help students practice making judgement calls in realistic conditions.

Third, knowledge about AI/ASI should be taught as part of everyday work across all degrees, not treated as a separate optional topic. Since students already use basic AI tools on their own, the curriculum must teach the rules: when to rely on AI/ASI, when not to, how to challenge outputs and above all, how to stay in control.

Finally, universities should avoid curricula that primarily train students for work that AI/ASI can or will do more efficiently. The aim should be to build the human skills AI/ASI can't easily replace, on top of whatever it can. If those changes are made, graduates leave with skills that remain valuable as more routine tasks become automated.

If universities do not act, the mismatch between what students are trained for and what the job market demands will grow, including for students graduating soon. ASI is not a distant future and it will transform how we live and work.

Politics in sport: The games people play



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

SINCE TIME immemorial, politics and sport have had a cliched relationship, perpetuated by politicians using sports to propagandise their power, influence, and ambitions, for as Barack Obama, former US president, once remarked, “Politics is a contact sport!” Autonomy in sport disappeared 2,500 years ago in Greece, when top athletes were lauded and sponsored, and 500 years later, Roman gladiators were very well paid for their ‘dog-eat-dog’ bloodletting, created to distract and appease restless citizens, making it a politically inspired art form. It’s fair to say that the same politics apply today, though the restless are more likely to find themselves disappointed, even offended, and rarely sated.

Examples from the last century range from Adolf Hitler promoting his ‘Aryan superiority’ ethos at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which came unstuck when Jesse Owens won his four gold medals, to tragically, the 1972 Munich Olympics, where Palestinian Black September terrorists killed eleven athletes in the aftermath of a hostage drama that simultaneously captivated and horrified the world.

Geopolitically, the Olympics were first boycotted at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, where Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq withdrew over the Suez crisis; the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland also stayed away over Soviet action against Hungary. Twenty-eight African nations gave Montreal a miss in 1976 because

of South Africa’s racial policies. In 1980, the USA led a 65-nation boycott of the Moscow Olympics in protest at the Russian war of Afghanistan, and in a tit-for-tat response, Russia and 14 Eastern Bloc allies boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. The 1988 Seoul Olympics saw North Korea, Cuba, Ethiopia and Nicaragua all stay away, while in 2022 the USA ‘boycotted’ the Beijing Winter Olympics, against “human rights abuses,” and that’s just a few.

The football World Cup has not escaped political nuance either, as the 1930 Uruguayan Cup saw few countries attend due to the difficulties of transatlantic travel at the time. Uruguay boycotted the following event in 1934 in retaliation, and, with Argentina, missed the 1938 version because of the Spanish Civil War. Germany and Japan ‘weren’t allowed’ to play in 1950, over their WWII activities, while more recently, in 2022, Russia was excluded over its actions against Ukraine.

One unique politically volatile event occurred during the 1978 Cup, taking place in Argentina, where the decision by West Germany and Austria, in Spain, 1982, to play out a 1-0 result, which saw Algeria eliminated, when any other result would have seen one of the European teams exit, infuriated African nations, while the Europeans chose to justify their pragmatism. The political perspective? Well, all white Europeans are racist, aren’t they? In December 2010, Qatar was awarded the hosting of the 2022 World Cup over the

Given there are 48 teams instead of 32 this time around, this 2026 World Cup will exceed all earlier profits, so the money will flow, and... In sport, with money comes fame, with fame, power, with power, corruption, and where you find money, fame, power and corruption in sport, you’ll surely find politics and politicians.

USA, and the headlines were merciless... “Death in the Desert,” and “Players will Perish,” read the early headlines, as genuine issues of player welfare emerged in the heat of the Middle East. Then, a week later, “FIFA Sells Its Soul,” and “FIFA Red Card!” hinted clearly that FIFA had been bought with petrodollars. But that couldn’t happen, could it? Maybe once, but not today... there’s too much politics around today.

So, to 2026, hosted by Canada, Mexico and the USA, the most unlikely of bedfellows. It has already been tarred with political bias and opportunism, as President Trump continues his unique crusade towards... ‘IDK,’ but his fingerprints are all over refusing entry to Somalian referee Omar Artan, over “suspected terror links,” preventing entry to Iranian and Iraqi officials, imposing ‘visa bonds’ of \$5000 to \$50,000 on international fans, and immigration enforcement by ICE, which is expected to become “more vigorous.” Given there are 48 teams instead of 32 this time around, this 2026 World Cup will exceed all earlier profits, so the money will flow, and... In sport, with money comes fame, with fame, power, with power, corruption, and where you find money, fame, power and corruption in sport, you’ll surely find politics and politicians.

To think sport and politics are not intertwined, is, according to Olympian Filbert Bayi, “... unrealistic. When I am running, I am an ambassador for my country.”

ONLINE THREATS, INSULTS FUEL SOUTH AFRICA’S EXPAT HATE

Inflammatory social media posts — including of men brandishing a machete or calling foreigners “leeches” — are stoking emotions around an unofficial demand for illegal immigrants to leave South Africa by the end of the month, fuelling a volatile situation, analysts say.

Thousands of foreign nationals — including from Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria and Malawi — have already headed for the borders as fringe anti-illegal immigration groups push their June 30 “deadline”.

The ultimatum has no legal backing but has gained traction through countrywide protests, threats at places where foreigners live or work, and a toxic social media campaign that analysts say has been building for years.

“Every morning, when you wake up, you see a traumatising video telling people that they’re going to kill people before June 30,” said Tino Maclean, an activist helping Zimbabweans to leave. “You know the impact of social media these days: when people say they’re going to kill you, you can’t sleep,” he said.

Social media has also been effective in rallying South Africans behind radical citizen-led groups mobilising against undocumented migrants, experts said. “The best disinformation campaign is to convince a few people that thousands are convinced,” said Aldu Cornelissen from Murmur Intelligence, which analyses online content.

The company has found that a relatively small number of highly active accounts, influencer communities and alternative media networks generate and amplify a disproportionate share of the anti-immigrant content.

Posts have included videos with captions reading “June 30, I can’t wait,” or images of the date pierced by bullet holes.

The inflammatory rhetoric has been accompanied by a wave of disinformation.

AFP Fact Check has debunked numerous videos falsely presented as evidence of attacks on foreign nationals that were in fact filmed years earlier or in other countries. Other posts falsely claimed to show an official government announcement of the June 30 “deadline” using AI-generated notices bearing the national coat of arms.

“It is very clear online that there are groups and organisations and individuals who are happy to light a match on a very volatile situation and then walk away when that fire erupts,” public works minister Dean Macpherson told journalists Friday, calling on police to act. Police spokeswoman Athlenda Mathe said that intelligence officers were monitoring social media and engaging platforms where necessary.

TikTok this week banned the account of one of the movement’s most vocal leaders, Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma, which had more than 378,000 followers, but her other social media accounts remained active. — **AFP**

Iran roared. Don blinked

SURELY SOMETHING about this preliminary agreement between the United States and Iran must have felt familiar to America’s real-estate mogul president. After all, it reads like a real-estate bankruptcy filing — an act of financial capitulation.

It is a measure of how much Iran had Trump over a barrel, and how thoroughly it cleaned his clock, that Iran’s lead negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, told Iranian state TV after the details were announced: “The agreement is a record of US failure. People will see it and judge.”

You don’t need to be a foreign policy expert to see what happened here. You need to be a domestic policy expert. Trump sold out America’s ally in the war, Israel, and the Arab Gulf states for the swing states of Pennsylvania, Georgia and Michigan. Trump knew that the food inflation and high gasoline prices triggered by this war were a prescription for a Republican wipeout in the midterms. He had to stop the war now to get prices down by November, because if the Democrats take the House and Senate, Trump will be looking at endless investigations into how he has used the presidency to enrich himself and his family — and possibly even impeachment.

Let us count the ways it is not perfect. The deal not only puts off the question of the disposal of Iran’s near bomb-grade uranium to future negotiations — negotiations in which the Trump administration has already given up its military leverage — but also, most amazingly, it clearly leaves open the possibility that Iran will be able to charge a toll in the future to any ships that want to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Just read the cease-fire agreement: Upon the signing of this memorandum of understanding, “the Islamic Republic of Iran will make arrangements using its best efforts for the safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge for 60 days only ...”

After billions of dollars of bombs dropped on Iran, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner won from Tehran 60 days of toll-free passage through Hormuz. After that, oil tanker captains, bring your credit cards. Thank goodness we had these crack



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

real-estate negotiators on the case, not wimpy diplomats.

The cease-fire deal not only is silent on any commitments by Iran to curb its development of long-range missiles and its support for proxies undermining the governments of Lebanon and Iraq, but it also makes the 60-day negotiation on Iran’s nuclear future contingent on Israel’s halting its military operations in Lebanon against Hezbollah. If Barack Obama had ever agreed to such a thing, Fox News would have interrupted its regular broadcasting to denounce it.

All of this is the result of the fact that Trump and Netanyahu never took seriously the idea that Iran would do the obvious: close the Strait of Hormuz in response to their attack. So in their attempt to stop Iran from developing a weapon of mass destruction that it was unlikely to ever use — since Israel would immediately use one on Iran — Trump and Netanyahu inspired Iran to develop a weapon of mass disruption, a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, which it can use anytime it feels too much pressure from the United States or Israel.

For all of these reasons, it is simply impossible to listen to Trump and Vance without being reminded of Nick Carraway’s famous observation about Tom and Daisy Buchanan in “The Great Gatsby”: “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy — they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”

Indeed, shortly before Ghalibaf and his Iranian colleagues were boasting that they had imposed a “failure” on the United States, Trump was declaring the Iranian leaders to be “very rational people.” “They were nice to deal with, they were strong people, smart people,” he added. “They are not radicalised and they’re, you know, looking to help their country.” He called them “smarter” than past regime leaders.

Compare this also with how Trump and Vance talked to and about President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine — the leader of a heroic democracy that has been resisting a Russian invasion for four years: “You

don’t have the cards,” Trump told him, urging Zelensky to cut a filthy deal with Vladimir Putin.

Trump and Vance “have no coherent view of US interests, and they have absolutely no core commitment to democratic values of any kind,” Gautam Mukunda, the author of “Picking Presidents: How to Make the Most Consequential Decision in the World,” told me.

That’s the point. Trump loves to wrap himself in the American flag, but he is the least American president, in terms of his core values, in modern times.

“There are two ways to make sure your executive is a good leader — either by selecting people of good character or putting limits on what they can do — and America and Israel today have failed at both,” Mukunda said. “This war is the most perfect example of what happens when you disdain all forms of expertise, knowledge and principles, in favor of gut instincts.” Experts had predicted everything that went wrong in the war.

The whole world is worse off with a stronger Iran, but it will be triply worse off if Trump and Bibi win their elections. Because five more years of years of Netanyahu as prime minister would be the end of Israel as a Jewish democracy. And two more years of Trump controlling the White House, the Senate, the House and effectively the Supreme Court would pose the same danger to American democracy.

Is there any way Trump can salvage a good outcome in Iran? Yes, but it has nothing to do with the fate of its nuclear weapons. In the wake of this war, if there is a diminished threat from Israel and America, that might unlock politics in Iran as well. It might just create the space for an Iranian majority to ask: “What does this regime have to show for 47 years in power besides a multibillion-dollar waste of money to get a nuclear bomb and funding militias around the region with cash we Iranians desperately need for our own development and turning our country into a water-starved environmental disaster?”

Who knows what politics, what pressures for regime reform or regime change, would be unleashed in Tehran if Iranian leaders can no longer distract their people with war?



REFEREES REVIEW KEY GROUP-STAGE DECISIONS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

THE GROUP stage of the Fifa World Cup 2026 has not only delivered thrilling football action and memorable goals but has also generated significant debate surrounding several controversial refereeing decisions. As modern football continues to rely heavily on the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system, discussions regarding the interpretation of the Laws of the Game remain a major talking point among players, coaches, analysts and supporters. To provide a professional assessment of some of the tournament’s most discussed incidents, The Observer spoke to former Omani international referees Hilal al Shraiqi and Majid al Raqadi, who offered their technical opinions on three controversial moments from the opening round of matches.

1. EGYPT VS BELGIUM
One of the most debated incidents occurred during the closing stages of the match between Egypt and Belgium. In the 88th minute, Egyptian attacker Ahmed Sayed “Zizo” advanced into the right side of the Belgian penalty area before being challenged by a Belgian defender. The Egyptian player appeared to be impeded and held while attempting to move toward goal, eventually falling to the ground and immediately appealing for a penalty. The referee allowed play to continue and did



HILAL
AL SHURAIQI



MAJID
AL RAQADI

The Observer spoke to former Omani international referees Hilal al Shraiqi and Majid al Raqadi, who offered their technical opinions on three controversial moments from the opening round of matches.

not award a spot-kick. Furthermore, despite the existence of VAR, no on-field review was recommended. Former Fifa referee Majid al Raqadi said the referee was correct in not awarding a penalty kick. “After reviewing the incident, the contact clearly started outside the penalty area. Therefore, it cannot be considered a penalty. The correct decision should have been a direct free-kick outside the area and a yellow card for the Belgian defender because the foul interrupted a promising attacking move,” Al Raqadi explained. He added that the VAR team likely determined that the point of contact occurred before the player entered the penalty area, which would explain why no intervention was recommended.

2. ARGENTINA VS ALGERIA
Another controversial moment came during Argentina’s match against Algeria when Argentine captain Lionel Messi became the centre of attention for reasons unrelated to his attacking brilliance. Around the 23rd minute of the first half, Messi challenged Algerian captain Aissa Mandi in a duel for possession. Television replays appeared to show Messi stepping on the Algerian defender’s leg with the sole of his boot. Despite multiple replays, Polish referee Szymon Marciniak took no disciplinary action, while the VAR officials did not advise an on-field review. Al Raqadi strongly disagreed with the decision and believes the incident met all the criteria for serious foul play. “When evaluating a potential red-card offence, referees consider several important elements. These include

whether the player’s leg is extended, the distance and force involved, the point of contact, and whether the sole of the boot makes direct contact with the opponent,” Al Raqadi said. “In this incident, all the required criteria for a direct red card were present. Unfortunately, both the referee and the VAR team failed to reach the correct conclusion. In my opinion, Messi should have been sent off for serious foul play.” Al Raqadi noted that such decisions are precisely why VAR was introduced, particularly in situations where player safety is involved.

3. THE US VS PARAGUAY
The match between the United States and Paraguay also produced a controversial VAR discussion during the second half. In the 68th minute, American defender Tim Ream received a yellow card after the referee awarded a foul against Paraguay’s Miguel Almiron. Following a VAR review, officials concluded that Almiron had exaggerated the contact in an attempt to win a free-kick. As a result, Ream’s yellow card was rescinded and Almiron was instead cautioned for simulation. However, former Omani international referee Hilal al Shraiqi believes the original on-field decision should have stood. “Unfortunately, I do not believe the VAR team was correct in recommending a review of the yellow card situation,” Al Shraiqi said. “The replay clearly shows that there was contact and that the defender’s challenge caused the attacker to lose

his balance. The original yellow card issued against Tim Ream was justified and should not have been overturned.” According to Al Shraiqi, the incident highlights the importance of maintaining a high threshold before VAR intervenes in subjective fouls that are already correctly assessed by the referee.

4. SAUDI ARABIA VS URUGUAY
Perhaps the most emotional controversy involving Arab football supporters came during Saudi Arabia’s clash against Uruguay. Deep into stoppage time at 90+4 minutes, Saudi Arabia launched a promising counterattack with one of its attackers advancing into space and moving toward the Uruguayan penalty area. Unexpectedly, Italian referee Maurizio Mariani blew the final whistle while the attack was still developing. The decision immediately sparked frustration among Saudi players, coaching staff and supporters. Many observers questioned why the referee ended the match at that exact moment instead of allowing the attacking phase to conclude. Al Shraiqi believes the referee should have exercised greater flexibility. “When a team is in possession and building a dangerous attacking opportunity, particularly during added time, referees are generally encouraged to allow the move to finish before ending the game. In this case, Saudi Arabia had a promising attacking situation and I believe the referee should have allowed play to continue for a few more seconds before blowing the final whistle.”



Egypt and Belgium



USA and Paraguay match

وزارة الثقافة والرياضة والشباب
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Tender	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
43/2026	Services	Design and Construction of Training Fields at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Bausher	01/07/2026	27/07/2026

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Brazil coach: Neymar will play against Scotland

PHILADELPHIA: After Brazil defeated Haiti 3-0 in their second World Cup match on Friday night, Selecao coach Carlo Ancelotti said he expects Neymar to be available for the Group C finale. Neymar, 34, has been rehabbing a right calf ailment. He last played for Santos in Brazil’s top flight on May 17. The Selecao will oppose Scotland on Wednesday in Miami Gardens, Fla., needing only a win or a draw to advance to the round of 32. “Neymar will be training tomorrow individually, and on Monday, he’s going to be training with the rest of the team,” Ancelotti said in the post-match press conference via an interpreter. “He will be available for the match against Scotland.” Injuries limited



Brazil’s forward #10 Neymar gestures during a warm up. — AFP

Neymar during Brazil’s 2026 qualifying campaign. However, he was influential when he played, scoring twice and contributing three assists in four appearances. Meanwhile, Ancelotti did not commit to continuing with Matheus Cunha at center forward despite the Manchester United player’s first-half brace against Haiti. Cunha started in place of Igor Thiago after coming

on in the 61st minute of Brazil’s 1-1 draw with Morocco in their tournament opener. “He may,” Ancelotti said when asked if Cunha would remain in the center forward role. “I think that Matheus’ position was a good position for creating problems to the defense,” Ancelotti said. “And he filtered his passes very well, and his position was a good position to be

effective at the front. “It can be an option. We discussed this yesterday. I don’t want a clear identity. Maybe we will change this on the next match.” Brazil, on four points, currently lead Morocco on goal-difference in Group C after the Atlas Lions defeated Scotland 1-0 earlier Friday. The Scots could be playing for their tournament lives on Wednesday, but Ancelotti insisted he is focusing on the bigger picture. “We don’t think about knocking out. We think about playing well and improving, and we analyze the match,” Ancelotti said. “If we can reach the first position of the group, that would be important for the future. So we want to prepare well for that match.” — Reuters



SPAIN SEEK YAMAL SPARK TO END DROUGHT

KIERAN CANNING Lamine Yamal is hard to avoid on the approach to Atlanta's futuristic stadium where adverts featuring the 18-year-old adorn the sides of giant skyscrapers, but it is on the pitch that Spain desperately need the Barcelona superstar.

The European champions flunked their opening test of the World Cup, drawing 0-0 against debutants Cape Verde, sparking doubts over their status as one of the pre-tournament favourites.

Yamal was kept in reserve until the final quarter as he is nursed back to full fitness from a hamstring injury that had kept him sidelined for nearly two months.

Even if it did not ultimately break the deadlock, his sheer presence immediately changed the game.

The majority of the 68,000 crowd in Atlanta that had come to see one of the game's biggest stars finally had something to get excited about.

Spain's pedestrian passing game also at last had an outlet to stretch the Cape Verde defence.

"Lamine is undoubtedly a special player. He has great ability to beat his man and disrupt the opposition's defensive shape," said Arsenal midfielder Mikel Merino.

"Given Lamine's quality, he can influence any game at any moment."

Yamal became a household name with his starring role as a 16-year-old when Spain swept all before them to win Euro 2024.

His blend of speed, skill and goal threat on the right was complimented by Nico Williams on the left wing.

Williams' own injury-disrupted season meant he only came off the bench against Cape Verde for the final few minutes plus stoppage time.

Without the direct ability of both to beat a man one against one, Spain regressed to the impotent side that has struggled on the World Cup stage since they lifted the trophy for the first time in 2010.

In the 16 years since, La Roja have won three of 12 World Cup games.

Moreover, they have completed 2,500 passes since they even scored a goal as their dominance of the ball counted for little against Japan and Morocco four years ago, and rarely troubled a Cape Verde side ranked 67 in the world.

"Lamine showed exactly what he's capable of the moment he stepped onto the pitch," said Spain boss Luis de la Fuente.

"He forced the opposition to change their approach, but that was the amount of playing time we felt was right for him."

- 'DON'T HAVE ANY DOUBT'

De la Fuente has stressed the need not to panic.

Spain are unbeaten in 32 competitive games stretching back over three years.

"Don't have any doubt," Yamal wrote on social media despite the disappointment on his World Cup debut.

"We know this is a long competition and the objective is still far off. We will keep working and everything will work out how we want."

The longer format of the first ever 48-team World Cup does allow for the contenders to build into the competition slowly.

One win in their next two games against Saudi Arabia or Uruguay should see them into the knockout stages.

But any doubt over the importance of Yamal to his nation's chance of fulfilling their ambition of a second World Cup victory has been resoundingly answered and not how De la Fuente would have wanted.

The pressure is now on for him to start Yamal, possibly earlier than he envisioned, against Saudi Arabia back in Atlanta on Sunday.

Just days after the Spain boss boasted at the depth of his squad making it "the best" in the competition, La Roja look reliant on their teenage superstar, and him remaining fit, in the gruelling weeks to come.



JAPAN COACH PROUD OF FANS’ CLEAN-UP HABIT



Japan fans clear rubbish from the stands after the match. — Reuters

JAPAN COACH Hajime Moriyasu said Friday he was proud that the country’s fans had forged a global reputation for tidying up after themselves at the World Cup -- as long as it does not put cleaners out of work. Footage went viral online after Japan supporters were seen putting their rubbish in blue plastic bags following Sunday’s 2-2 draw with the Netherlands in Texas.

Fans told AFP it was “Japanese culture” to leave any public place cleaner than when they arrived.

Speaking on the eve of Japan’s second group game, against Tunisia on Saturday in Mexico, Moriyasu said: “I think this is one part of the Japanese culture that we can be proud of in the world.”

It extends to his squad, who left the

changing room at the Dallas Cowboys’ stadium immaculate after the game.

But Moriyasu said there was a possible downside.

“I have met Brazilian players, Brazilian coaches and people from different countries and then they would all point out something different,” he said.

“They said, by picking up people’s garbage it would be clean, but wouldn’t you be taking away the work from the cleaners?”

“So I guess that is one way of looking at it.”

And while images of Japan fans cleaning up gained widespread praise abroad, back in Japan a social media post went viral complaining men rarely do the same at home.

“Japanese men spend among the least time on housework internationally,” read the post.

“Please do it at home,” it added. — AFP



Japan fans clear rubbish from the stands after the match. — Reuters



Japan’s head coach
Hajime Moriyasu.
— AFP

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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Re-exports recorded positive growth.

OMAN TRADE SURPLUS HOLDS AT 1.54 BILLION

MUSCAT: Oman's trade surplus remained broadly stable at RO 1.54 billion in the first quarter of 2026, as a decline in exports was largely offset by lower imports, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The surplus compared with RO 1.53 billion recorded during the same period of 2025. Total merchandise exports fell 8.5 per cent year-on-year to RO 5.3 billion by the end of March, down from RO 5.8 billion a year earlier. Merchandise imports also declined, dropping 11.7 per cent to RO 3.8 billion from RO 4.3 billion during the corresponding period of 2025.

The fall in exports was primarily driven by lower oil and gas export revenues. Exports of oil and gas amounted to RO 3.4 billion during the first three months of the year, down 13 per cent from RO 3.9 billion in the same period last year.

Non-oil exports proved more resilient, edging down just 0.6 per cent to RO 1.61 billion from RO 1.62 billion a year earlier, highlighting the relative stability of the Sultanate's non-hydrocarbon export sector.

Meanwhile, re-exports recorded positive growth. The value of re-exported goods rose 4.6 per cent to RO 367 million by the end of March 2026, compared with RO 351 million during the same period of 2025.

The United Arab Emirates remained Oman's largest non-oil export market, receiving goods worth RO 382 million. The UAE also topped the list of re-export destinations from Oman, accounting for RO 102 million of re-export trade.

Saudi Arabia ranked as the second-largest destination for Omani non-oil exports at RO 201 million, followed by India at RO 156 million. In re-exports, Kuwait followed the UAE with RO 102 million, while Iran ranked third at RO 48 million.

On the import side, the UAE remained Oman's largest trading partner, exporting goods worth RO 1.1 billion to Oman during the first quarter. China ranked second among import sources with goods valued at RO 537 million, followed by Saudi Arabia at RO 308 million. — ONA

Oman targets \$1 billion salt investment drive

OMAN'S salt industry is entering a new phase of industrial development, supported by investments exceeding \$1 billion and a growing focus on value-added manufacturing that could transform one of the country's oldest natural resources into a significant contributor to economic diversification.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals said the sector is moving beyond traditional salt production towards a broader industrial ecosystem that includes processing, manufacturing and downstream industries capable of generating higher-value products for domestic and export markets.

New projects are targeting the production of industrial-grade salt, food-grade salt and a range of chemical derivatives, including bromine, caustic soda, soda ash and polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

These products are widely used in industries ranging from chemicals and manufacturing to water treatment and construction materials.

Officials believe the expansion of these downstream industries will significantly increase the economic value generated from Oman's salt resources while creating new opportunities for industrial investment.

Current production remains relatively modest compared with the sector's long-term potential. Industry indicators show that Oman produced around 40,000 tonnes of salt in 2025, with approximately 30,000 tonnes exported to international markets and around 10,000 tonnes consumed locally.

The figures highlight the importance of exports, which currently account for the largest share of production. At the same time, domestic demand continues to grow, supported by expanding activity in the oil and gas, food processing and chemical sectors.

The sector's future growth is



Oman produced around 40,000 tonnes of salt in 2025.



Oman possesses a number of advantages that strengthen the competitiveness of its salt industry, including extensive coastal areas, strong evaporation rates and easy access to regional and global markets

ENG SAUD BIN KHAMIS AL MAHROUQI

Director-General of Minerals at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals

expected to be driven by large-scale marine salt projects in Al Wusta Governorate.

The ministry has awarded four mining concession areas for marine salt production along Oman's coastline, with total planned investments exceeding \$1 billion.

The projects are expected to deliver combined production capacity of around 5 million tonnes annually, representing a substantial increase from current output levels.

Authorities have also indicated that additional concession areas could be offered in future phases as demand for investment grows.

Engineer Saud bin Khamis al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Minerals at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said industrial minerals, including salt, are becoming increasingly important to regional and international markets.

He noted that Omani salt benefits from several competitive advantages, including product quality, a strategic geographic location and favourable climatic conditions that support natural evaporation processes.

"Oman possesses a number of advantages that strengthen

the competitiveness of its salt industry, including extensive coastal areas, strong evaporation rates and easy access to regional and global markets", he said.

Al Mahrouqi added that the expansion of processing industries linked to salt production will help raise the value of the resource and strengthen its contribution to industrial development.

The industry has undergone significant changes in recent years as investors increasingly adopt modern technologies and engineering practices.

Unlike traditional salt production methods, modern projects rely on detailed scientific studies of coastal environments, seawater characteristics and climatic conditions before the construction of evaporation ponds.

This approach improves efficiency, enhances product quality and increases the economic viability of projects.

Many operators are also integrating sustainability measures into their developments. Several concession holders have adopted renewable energy solutions to power mining and processing operations, helping reduce operating costs and environmental impacts.

OPAZ unveils Al Duqm waterfront master plan

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has unveiled a master plan for the Al Duqm waterfront that aims to transform the area into one of Oman's largest tourism and mixed-use developments, as authorities seek to attract new investment and accelerate economic diversification.

The plan was presented to developers, investors, banks and private-sector representatives during a meeting hosted by OPAZ as part of efforts to promote investment opportunities within the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

Covering an area of 31 square kilometres and stretching along a 15-kilometre coastline, the development is designed to combine tourism, hospitality, residential, commercial and recreational activities in a single integrated destination.

Authorities said the master plan leverages Al Duqm's natural assets, including its beaches, rock formations and coastal landscapes, while incorporating



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), speaks during a meeting with investors and developers on the Al Duqm waterfront master plan.

modern urban planning concepts focused on sustainable tourism and quality of life. Under the proposed development roadmap, the waterfront is expected to feature more than 2,600 hotel units by 2040, alongside over 3,700 residential units and more than 63,000 square metres of retail

space. The project will also include cultural, entertainment and leisure facilities covering more than one million square metres.

Officials estimate the destination could attract around 370,000 visitors annually once key phases of the project are completed.

The development forms part of broader efforts to diversify Al Duqm's economic base beyond heavy industry, logistics and energy. While the economic zone has attracted major investments in petrochemicals, manufacturing, logistics and green energy projects, authorities are increasingly focusing on tourism as a complementary growth sector.

The waterfront development benefits from Al Duqm's strategic location between Muscat and Salalah and from infrastructure investments already completed in the economic zone, including Duqm Port, Duqm Airport and an expanding road network linking the region with the rest of the country.

Investment incentives available within the special economic zone are expected to support investor interest. These include tax exemptions of up to 30 years, 100 per cent foreign ownership and land usufruct rights of up to 99 years.

The tourism sector in Al Duqm has already attracted significant

investment. OPAZ said committed investments in tourism projects within the economic zone exceeded RO 853 million by the end of 2025.

Existing and planned tourism developments include 21 hotels, 10 hotel apartment projects and integrated tourism complexes incorporating hotels, villas and serviced residences.

According to data from the Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm, 16 tourism projects had been completed by the end of last year, while 11 projects were under construction and another five remained in the planning stage.

Officials said the new waterfront strategy represents a shift from building core infrastructure towards creating an integrated destination capable of attracting tourists, residents and investors.

The authority believes the project will help strengthen the contribution of tourism to Oman's economy while creating new opportunities in hospitality, retail, entertainment and real estate development. — ONA

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Bank Muscat named joint global coordinator and issue manager for OMIFCO IPO

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is pleased to announce that it has been appointed as the Joint Global Coordinator and Issue Manager for the Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Oman India Fertiliser Company SAOC (OMIFCO), one of Oman’s largest industrial companies and a leading producer of ammonia and urea in the region. In addition to acting as Issue Manager, the Bank as well as Meethaq Islamic Banking will also assume the roles of Collecting Banks for the offering.

OMIFCO recently announced the offering of 25% of its share capital through the sale of approximately 1.672 billion shares, with a total offering value of around RO 260.9 million at the top end of the price range. The transaction is expected to rank amongst the largest IPOs on the Muscat Stock Exchange in recent years.

Following approval of the prospectus by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), OMIFCO announced that the subscription period for the offered shares will run from June 16 to 25, 2026 for both category I (local, regional and international institutions) and category II (Omani retail investors and residents) investors.

A total of 60% of the offered shares, equivalent to approximately 1.003 billion shares, has been reserved for institutional investors, while the remaining 40%, equivalent to approximately 668.9 million shares, has been reserved for retail investors.

The institutional offering price has been set within a range of 146 to 156 baisas per share, while the retail subscription price has been fixed at 156 baisas per share. Based on the final pricing, the offering is expected to provide an attractive dividend yield to investors of approximately between (7.8% – 8.3%) based on 2026 dividends.

The Company expects base dividend of approximately RO 71.2 million for FY2026, paid in two equal instalments (Sept 2026 and April 2027).

Additionally, along with the first dividend distribution expected to be paid by September 2026, the Company intends to pay a special dividend of RO 9.6 million. In aggregate for FY2026, the Company intends to pay a total dividend of RO 80.8 million.

For FY2027 and FY2028, the Company intends to pay dividends that are expected to be the higher of 90 per cent of net profit or a minimum annual compounded increase of 3 per cent. from the FY2026 base dividend of RO 71.2 million. Before making the investment decision, prospective investors are urged to review the company’s prospectus that is available on the Financial Services Authority’s website ([www.fsa.gov.om](#)).

Lincoln Navigator redefines full-size luxury

FLAGSHIP luxury takes a commanding step forward this season with the debut of the “Lincoln Signature Rewards” summer campaign featuring the magnificent Lincoln Navigator in Oman.

Running from May 14 to July 12, 2026, this high-end initiative complements the vehicle’s artistic craftsmanship with an elite tier of promotional advantages.

Discerning buyers who choose the Lincoln Navigator during this campaign period receive a substantial package of rewards aimed at delivering total peace of mind.

The campaign offers an extensive 5-year or 100,000 km comprehensive service package covering 10 scheduled maintenance intervals, alongside a matching 5-year or 100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty.

The purchase is further enhanced by complimentary one-year registration for private vehicles, premium accessories and a guaranteed 3M “Golden 7” Pack for advanced window tinting and ceramic protection.

The promotional campaign also features exclusive opportunities for clients, including a raffle draw for an iPhone 17 available to test-drive participants and a grand raffle offering buyers a chance to win one of two iPhone 17 units.

As the absolute pinnacle of the brand’s lineup, the Lincoln Navigator showcases a commanding presence anchored by a signature front light bar, a distinctive satin chrome mesh grille and majestic 22-inch wheels.

A standout feature is the class-exclusive Lincoln Split Gate, a highly adaptable two-piece tailgate that opens smoothly for cargo or folds down to provide an upscale seating area for outdoor relaxation. Delivering a driving experience of pure grace, the SUV is powered by a formidable twin-turbocharged



Running from May 14 to July 12, 2026, this high-end initiative complements the vehicle’s artistic craftsmanship with an elite tier of promotional advantages.

3.5L V6 engine that generates a breathtaking 440 horsepower and 691 Nm of torque.

The cabin is meticulously designed as a multi-sensory digital oasis, centred around an expansive 48-inch panoramic display and a crystal-clear 28-speaker Revel Ultima 3D audio system.

Travel comfort is elevated by the innovative Lincoln Rejuvenate feature, which artfully coordinates interior lighting, sound and premium digital scents to offer passengers a spa-like relaxation experience on the move.

Driven by a commitment to complete occupant security, the vehicle incorporates the advanced Lincoln Co-Pilot360 Drive 2.0 safety suite, featuring a 360-degree camera,

Adaptive Cruise Control and Evasive Steering Assist.

With its matchless fusion of artistic design, state-of-the-art safety and premier summer incentives, the Lincoln Navigator stands out as the definitive companion for elegant travel across Oman.

Lincoln Oman invites all to visit the Lincoln showroom in Al Wattayah to explore the Signature Rewards program in person. In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Please log on to [www.lincolnoman.com](#), [www.facebook.com/lincolnoman](#) or [www.instagram.com/lincoln_oman](#) for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Sohar Islamic launches infinite credit card

MUSCAT: Building on its commitment to delivering sophisticated, value-driven financial solutions for discerning clients, Sohar Islamic recently announced the launch of its Infinite Credit Card, a premium offering designed to serve the evolving lifestyle and financial expectations of high-net-worth individuals in Oman.

The introduction of this top-tier card marks a strategic enhancement to the bank’s Islamic retail banking portfolio, reinforcing its focus on exclusivity, service excellence and long-term relationship building within the premium segment.

Commenting on the launch,



The introduction of this card marks a strategic enhancement to the bank’s Islamic retail banking portfolio.

Fahad al Zadjali, Chief Islamic Banking Officer said, “The Infinite Credit Card reflects our deliberate shift towards deeper, more meaningful engagement with high-net-worth customers who seek more than transactional banking. At Sohar Islamic, a premium proposition is defined by relevance, trust and the ability to support a refined lifestyle in a manner that remains firmly grounded in Sharia principles.

This offering has been thoughtfully curated to align with the financial maturity, mobility and expectations of our top-tier clientele, while advancing our broader ambition to position Sohar Islamic as a

differentiated premium Islamic banking brand in the market”. The Infinite Credit Card has been introduced in two distinct formats, each tailored to specific customer profiles. A metal Infinite Card, issued strictly by invitation, is reserved for VVIP clients and represents the highest tier of exclusivity within the bank’s credit card offering.

The plastic Infinite Card, meanwhile, is available to eligible customers based on defined criteria, including income profile, relationship value and creditworthiness, ensuring that access remains selective and aligned with the bank’s premium banking strategy.

MHD Automobiles inaugurates Jetour’s first customer experiential centre

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC proudly announced the official inauguration of the first Jetour Customer Experiential Centre in the GCC at Mall of Oman, marking a significant milestone in the brand’s regional expansion and customer experience journey.

This Experiential Centre, the first of its kind in the GCC, redefines automotive retail through an immersive, premium and customer-centric environment. The centre has been designed to offer visitors a new way to experience Jetour, allowing them to explore the brand’s latest models in an interactive showroom setting that brings customers closer to the brand’s design, technology, comfort and performance-led SUV range.

Located at Mall of Oman, Level 1,



This Experiential Centre redefines automotive retail through an immersive, premium and customer-centric environment.

Zone C/D, the centre reflects Jetour’s commitment to strengthening its presence in the Sultanate of Oman while offering a modern retail concept that enhances customer engagement and brand experience.

The official inauguration was held in the presence of senior leaders from Jetour International and MHD ACERE. The event was attended by Alex Tan, Vice President, Jetour International; Mr Finn Luan, Jetour Deputy General Manager, Middle East and Mr Jin Kai, Jetour Sales Director, Middle East, along with Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE.

Speaking on the occasion, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE, said: “The inauguration of the first Jetour Customer Experiential Centre in the GCC at

Mall of Oman is a proud milestone for MHD Automobiles and a clear testament to our commitment to delivering world-class automotive experiences to customers in Oman.

This premium and interactive centre offers customers a new and engaging way to discover Jetour, explore its latest models and connect with the brand in an environment built around comfort, innovation and customer engagement. We look forward to further strengthening Jetour’s presence across Oman”.

The new Jetour Customer Experiential Centre at Mall of Oman stands as a key milestone in the brand’s GCC journey and reinforces MHD Automobiles’ commitment to delivering innovative, customer-centric mobility experiences in the Sultanate of Oman.

SHORTTAKES

OPAZ strengthens economic, investment ties with OBFA

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held a detailed discussion focusing on strengthening economic and investment partnerships with the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association (OBFA) at the OPAZ headquarters on Thursday.

While OPAZ was represented by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the OBFA was represented by Rudaina bint Amer al Hajri, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association in the presence of several representatives of the Authority as well as the Association's Board of Directors.

The meeting addressed several topics of mutual interest, including ways to strengthen cooperation between OPAZ and the Association; and to expand communication between the business communities of the two brotherly countries. This aims to capitalise on the promising opportunities offered by special economic zones and free zones in Oman and to bolster economic and investment partnerships.

The meeting included a presentation by OPAZ specialists, who reviewed the Authority's responsibilities, the projects it oversees, the competitive advantages and investment incentives offered by special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, as well as the investment opportunities available in various sectors.

The OBFA also gave a presentation outlining its objectives, activities, and programmes aimed at strengthening economic, trade and investment cooperation and consolidating relations between public and private sector institutions in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The meeting also included presentations from several Bahraini companies operating in Oman, showcasing their projects, future plans and opportunities for mutual cooperation and investment.

"This meeting is part of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones' efforts to enhance communication with civil society organisations and the business sector; and to highlight the abundant investment opportunities available in Oman. This initiative supports attracting high-quality investments and aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040", said Al Yousef.

Hynfra advances green ammonia project in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

HYNFRA, a Poland-based developer of large-scale green hydrogen projects, has signed an agreement with US-headquartered Ohmium International Inc covering the design engineering and technological development of a major green ammonia production scheme planned in Al Duqm, southeastern Oman, alongside other ventures in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

In Oman, Hynfra is advancing a 400,000-tonnes-per-annum (tpa) green ammonia project powered by 2.6 GW of renewable energy capacity, with an estimated investment of around \$4 billion.

"Green Ammonia Oman (GAO) stands as Hynfra's flagship venture in the Middle East and the largest production project in the portfolio", the company states on its website.

"The property designated for investment is located near the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), which offers multimodal connectivity, a business-friendly environment, investment incentives, capital and profit repatriation and long-term usufruct agreements". According to Hynfra, the Green Ammonia Oman concept is centred on green ammonia as the primary revenue-generating product. However, the project's proximity to industrial facilities within SEZAD also presents opportunities for additional revenue streams through the sale of electricity, process steam and desalinated water by-products.



PEM-based electrolysers from Ohmium.

Earlier this week, Hynfra signed a master cooperation agreement with California-headquartered Ohmium International, a leading manufacturer of high-efficiency, modular Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) electrolysers, to support green hydrogen projects under development in Oman, Jordan and Mauritania.

Under the agreement, Ohmium will contribute to the Front-End Engineering and Design (FEED) phase of the projects and provide technical expertise in PEM electrolyser technology throughout their development.

The three projects are intended to produce green hydrogen for conversion into green ammonia, helping strengthen domestic clean energy capacity, enhance energy security and reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Ohmium designs, manufactures and deploys

modular, scalable PEM electrolysers that enable cost-competitive green hydrogen production. With manufacturing facilities in India and operations worldwide, the company has built a global project pipeline exceeding 2 GW across three continents.

Hynfra Chief Executive Officer Tomoho Umeda said the company continues to expand collaboration with technology partners across its portfolio of green hydrogen and ammonia projects.

The Ohmium partnership follows Hynfra's alliance with Polish industrial plastics manufacturer and energy integration specialist Promet-Plast, announced in December last year.

The partnership aims to deploy Promet-Plast's renewable energy, storage and hydrogen integration technologies across Hynfra's planned 1.1 million tpa green ammonia project portfolio

in the MENA region.

Hynfra's proposed investment further strengthens Duqm's growing position as a regional hub for green fuels and clean energy development. The most advanced project currently under development in the Special Economic Zone is ACME Group's green ammonia venture.

Its first phase, now under construction, is designed to produce 100,000 tpa of green ammonia with the first export shipment to Europe anticipated by mid-2027.

Building on this foundation, ACME recently unveiled plans for Phases 2 and 3 of the project, representing a combined investment of approximately \$4.2 billion.

The expansion phases will add production capacity of 142,000 tpa of green hydrogen and 800,000 tpa of green ammonia, with commercial operations targeted for 2030 and 2033, respectively.

Asyad revenue climbs to 713 million in decade

MUSCAT: Revenue at Asyad Group has surged nearly sixfold over the past decade, highlighting the rapid expansion of Oman's national logistics champion as it strengthens its global footprint and supports the Sultanate of Oman's ambitions to become a regional trade and transport hub.

The group marked its 10th anniversary this year under the theme "A Decade of Reliability Driving Global Connectivity", celebrating a transformation that has seen revenues rise from RO 123.4 million in 2016 to approximately RO 713 million in 2026.

Dr Musallam bin Mahad Qatan, Chairman of Asyad Group, said the growth reflects the success of a long-term strategy focused on building an integrated logistics ecosystem



The group marked its 10th anniversary this year under the theme 'A Decade of Reliability Driving Global Connectivity.'

capable of connecting Oman with regional and international markets.

Established in 2016, Asyad was created to consolidate Oman's logistics assets under a unified structure and leverage the country's strategic location along major international shipping routes.

Over the past decade, the company has expanded from a predominantly domestic operation into an international logistics group with activities spanning 76 cities across 24 countries.

Its shipping fleet has grown from 51 vessels in 2016 to more than 100 vessels today, while the company has broadened its portfolio to include six ports and terminals. Operational activity has increased significantly across multiple business segments. At Duqm

Drydock, the number of projects handled annually rose from 62 in 2016 to 258 in 2026.

The group's express delivery business has also recorded substantial growth. Average daily shipments increased from 1,035 parcels in 2020 to 9,667 parcels this year, reflecting the rapid expansion of e-commerce and logistics services.

Qatan said the group's recent growth has been supported by acquisitions, strategic partnerships and investments designed to strengthen integration across its logistics network.

Today, Asyad serves more than 90 destinations globally and connects over 200 commercial ports through an integrated network of shipping, ports, warehousing, freight

forwarding and logistics services.

The company has also established 12 cargo consolidation centres in China and India, allowing shipments from multiple suppliers to be combined before export to Oman and regional markets.

The strategy is intended to improve supply chain efficiency, reduce costs and enhance the availability of goods for businesses operating in Oman.

A major milestone during the decade was the public listing of Asyad Shipping on the Muscat Stock Exchange, a move that strengthened governance, transparency and access to capital.

The company is also involved in one of the region's largest transport infrastructure projects — the Oman-UAE railway

SHIPPING FLOWS

Hormuz traffic begins recovery



Oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz increased after the US and Iran signed an interim ceasefire agreement, with tankers gradually returning to the key waterway.

Data showed 25 commercial crossings on June 18, the highest daily count in two months, though still well below pre-conflict levels. Gulf producers are preparing to raise exports as maritime traffic continues to recover. — Reuters

GROWTH STRATEGY

Japan plans \$2.3 trillion investment



Japan is preparing a long-term investment plan targeting 370 trillion yen (\$2.3 trillion) in combined public and private spending by 2040.

The initiative will focus on strategic sectors including artificial intelligence, semiconductors and space development. The government is also considering a multi-year funding framework to support projects linked to economic security. — Reuters

AVIATION RECOVERY

Gulf airlines regain momentum



Major Gulf airlines have restored flight operations to around 82 per cent of pre-conflict levels following the US-Iran ceasefire agreement.

Several carriers, including Gulf Air and Kuwait Airways, have already exceeded their pre-war activity levels, while larger operators have recovered significantly. Analysts said a sustained reopening of airspace could accelerate the sector's recovery. — Reuters

OPINION

Promoting sustainability: Progress, challenges and opportunities



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

BALANCING economic advancement, social development and environmental protection drives many countries’ strategies today. In Oman, sustainability is part of the national development agenda.

Innovation and long-term prosperity are preserved through economic diversification and efficient resource use. Oman is placing sustainability principles in government agencies and private enterprises through Oman Vision 2040.

Implementation of sustainability in Oman combines economic, environmental and social frameworks. Oman Vision 2040 focuses on sustainability in relation to responsible resource use, renewable energy, climate change and equitable economic growth. This pathway supports Oman’s focus on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, while placing emphasis on the needs and potential of Oman.

Some of the most noticeable advancements have occurred in the clean and renewable energy sector. Oman has placed a focus on utilising alternative energy sources and positioning the country to have a diversified energy portfolio through the investment of capital in the development of solar and wind energy.

In addition to the development of other renewable energy sources, hydrocarbon-free hydrogen holds the potential to facilitate

increased foreign investment, create high-value employment and promote the decarbonisation of the world economy.

Environmental sustainability has become a vital element of industrial and infrastructure development. Throughout the various industries, organisations are beginning to adopt Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles to practice sustainability and to be more efficient. Many organisations are implementing energy management systems, reducing waste, conserving water and assessing the carbon footprint to achieve environmental effectiveness and reduce operating costs.

The oil and gas sector is a vital part of the economy of Oman and has invested greatly to ensure sustainability in operations. Energy organisations are investing in technologies to enhance reduced emissions, enable renewable forms of energy, institute water recycling and develop local content. These investments sustain industrial operations and economic growth in the region.

Integrating local content and community development is a major aspect of sustainability in Oman. National programmes facilitate the self-sustained growth of the economy, by encouraging organisations to localise their procurement, develop local suppliers and employ locals. This practice ensures that the economic benefits are preserved within Oman.

Innovation and education fortify the other elements of sustainability. The development of environmental and social solutions

Implementation of sustainability in Oman combines economic, environmental and social frameworks. Oman Vision 2040 focuses on sustainability in relation to responsible resource use, renewable energy, climate change and equitable economic growth.

through the collaboration of universities; and research and innovation centres is increasingly commonplace.

The competitive edge that this collaboration provides is the result of a new focus on innovation management and sustainable, efficient technologies and practices.

After considering the obstacles as well as the achievements, it is evident that organisations face difficulties measuring sustainability performance, gathering trusted ESG data and aligning sustainability with the business strategy.

The difficulty implementing sustainability solutions can be attributed to limited understanding and awareness of sustainability, scarcity of resources and the different levels of maturity within the organisation. Strategies to address these issues will require investment in building capacity, governance and stakeholder engagement, as well as a framework for sustainability and more sustainability reporting.

The future of sustainability in Oman looks good. The spread of ESG, investments in renewable energy and the implementation of circular economy principles and of digital technologies will aid sustainable development in all sectors even more.

Achieving the goals of sustainability in the future will require strong support from the government, commitment from the private sector and the active participation of the public.

Why electrification is becoming the next phase of the energy transition

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

For years, the global energy conversation has focused on one objective: building more renewable energy capacity. Record investments in solar and wind farms have transformed the energy landscape and accelerated the transition away from fossil fuels.

Now, a new chapter is emerging. Attention is increasingly shifting towards electrification, a process that extends beyond producing clean electricity to using it across entire economies.

From transportation and buildings to industrial operations and cooling systems, countries are looking at replacing fossil fuel-powered activities with electricity generated from renewable sources.

The transition represents one of the most significant changes to global energy systems in decades. Rather than viewing renewable energy as a standalone sector, governments are beginning to see electricity as the backbone of future economies.

The shift comes as electricity demand is expected to rise substantially over the coming years, driven by population growth, urbanisation, digital technologies and the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence.

The concept is straightforward. Building renewable energy projects is only part of the solution. The greater challenge lies in integrating that clean electricity into everyday life.

Electric vehicles are among the most visible examples, but electrification extends far beyond transport. Heating systems, industrial processes, ports, airports and even cooling infrastructure are being redesigned to operate on electricity instead of conventional fuels.

This is particularly relevant for countries with hot climates, where air conditioning already accounts for a significant share of electricity consumption. As cooling demand continues to rise globally, improving energy efficiency and powering cooling systems with renewable energy will become increasingly important.

For Oman, electrification presents an opportunity that aligns with the country’s broader economic diversification agenda.

The Sultanate of Oman has already established itself as an emerging renewable energy player through large-scale solar projects and ambitious green hydrogen developments. The next phase could involve expanding how that clean energy is utilised domestically.

Industrial zones could gradually integrate electrified operations, public transport systems could evolve and future developments may increasingly incorporate smart energy management systems designed around electricity rather than fossil fuel consumption.

The ranking is progress. But do Omanis feel it?

A global ranking is announced in Geneva. Its real meaning is tested in Muscat, Salalah, Suhar, Nizwa and Al Duqm — anywhere a citizen waits for a service, a graduate looks for work, or a small business tries to survive its first difficult year.

That is the right way to read Oman’s rise to 25th place in the 2026 IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, out of 70 economies, up three places from 28th in 2025.

The result deserves recognition. It is not a minor move. It signals that Oman’s reform effort is becoming more visible abroad, at a moment when investors are growing cautious, supply chains are shifting and small open economies must prove stability and credibility to stay in the game.

But a ranking is not a trophy. It is a test — and the test is not whether the index moved, but whether the country behind it can turn credibility into outcomes people can feel.

The progress did not appear overnight. It is the result of a six-year correction that began at one of the hardest moments in Oman’s recent economic history. In 2020, the Sultanate of Oman was hit by Covid-19, falling oil prices and a public debt load that had climbed to roughly 68 per cent of GDP.

The government had to cut spending, restructure debt and prove that Oman Vision 2040 was a discipline, not just a slogan.

The numbers since then tell the story. Public debt has fallen to around 34 to 36 per cent of GDP by the end of 2025 — roughly half what it was in 2020.

All three major credit agencies have confirmed the turnaround: Moody’s upgraded Oman to investment grade in mid-2025, Fitch followed in December and S&P held its investment-grade rating steady through the year.

Non-oil growth reached 3.5 per cent in the first half of 2025, led by construction, agriculture and fishing, tourism and logistics. Inflation has stayed low, near 1 per



Total FDI keeps growing, but oil and gas extraction alone accounts for roughly 81 per cent of it.

cent.

These numbers matter because investors do not start with emotion. They start with risk. They ask whether a state can manage its finances and keep its word. On that question, Oman has a stronger answer today than it did six years ago. That is why the IMD ranking matters.

But the citizen does not live inside an index. The graduate does not measure hope by a global score.

The small business owner does not survive on improved perception. The investor tests Oman not through rankings but through licences, land allocation, customs, courts and how long it takes to get something done.

The public reaction to rankings like this should not be brushed aside as negativity. It is a signal. People are not rejecting the progress — they are asking whether it has reached them. That is the gap Oman now has to close.

Competitiveness is not the same as wealth. It is the ability to turn stability into productivity, productivity into real jobs and real jobs into public confidence. It is not enough for government to become more efficient at the top.

That efficiency has to be felt at the counter, on the road, in the port, in the hospital and in the industrial estate.

Reducing debt was essential. Earning back investment-grade



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

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

The result deserves recognition. It is not a minor move. It signals that Oman’s reform effort is becoming more visible abroad, at a moment when investors are growing cautious, supply chains are shifting and small open economies must prove stability and credibility to stay in the game.

status was essential. The harder task now is turning that macroeconomic credibility into something broader: real economic value that reaches ordinary Omanis.

Foreign investment is the clearest example of work still unfinished. Total FDI keeps growing, but oil and gas extraction alone accounts for roughly 81 per cent of it.

Manufacturing has attracted only about RO 2.7 billion and financial services around RO 1.3 billion — both a fraction of the hydrocarbon total. Until that balance shifts, Oman’s diversification story remains incomplete.

The country needs more capital flowing into manufacturing, logistics, tourism, fisheries and export-oriented services — investment that builds supply chains and creates real jobs for Omanis, not just headline figures.

This is where the labour market becomes the real test and where the FDI imbalance turns from a statistic into a human problem.

Oil and gas is capital-intensive; it does not employ many Omanis per Rial invested.

Manufacturing, tourism and logistics do. As long as investment stays concentrated where job creation is weakest, Omanisation by regulation can open positions, but it cannot build careers.

What is needed is capital that follows the sectors where Omanis can actually grow: firms that raise productivity, wages that hold up, training that matches what employers need.

The ranking should now become a management tool, not a public relations line. Every strong indicator deserves a question: what produced it and can it be deepened? Every weak indicator should be assigned to an institution, with a deadline and someone accountable.

Competitiveness cannot sit with one office. It has to become a daily habit across government.

The governorates are central to this. Oman Vision 2040 will not be judged only by what happens in Muscat.

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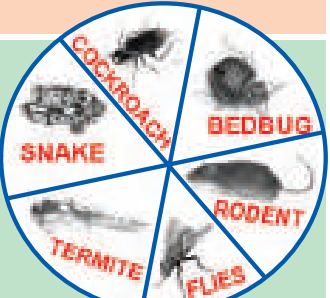
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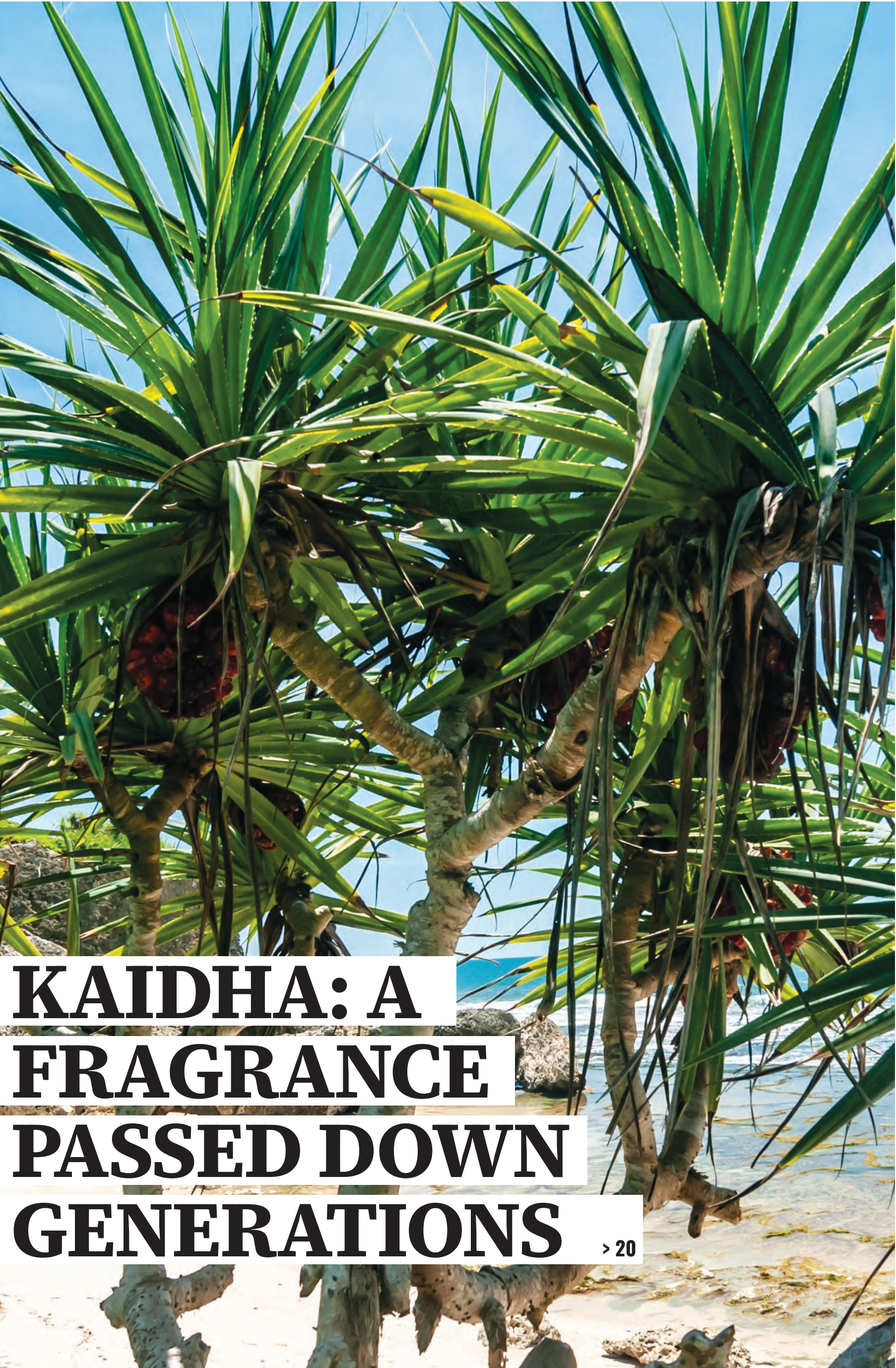


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DON'T WORRY

THE SUN MAY NOT ENGULF EARTH AFTER ALL, SCIENTISTS SAY



A fisherman walks as the sun rises over the beach of Gravelines, northern France. — AFP

PARIS: Need some good news on a Friday after a long week. The Earth may not be engulfed by the expanding fireball of the dying Sun, which has long been assumed to be our home planet's ultimate fate, according to scientists.

Don't worry: this is not expected to happen for another five billion years, long after all life on Earth has been wiped out.

When the Sun burns through all of the hydrogen in its core, it will go through two immense expansion phases: first becoming a red giant, then, when its helium is spent, an "AGB" star.

This fiery death will bring about some significant changes back here on Earth.

As the Sun grows, increasing gravitational forces will pull the Earth towards it.

For the Earth and the Moon, this force creates the push and pull of the tides in our oceans. The energy from these tides, which dissipates at the bottom of the ocean, slows Earth's rotation and gradually pushes the Moon away from us.

As the Sun expands and its blistering surface approaches Earth, intense tidal waves will stir within the star. When they dissipate, it will pull Earth into its doomed embrace.

However, the growing Sun will also lose a lot of its mass due to stellar wind, which pushes our planet further away.

"Earth's fate depends on a delicate balance between these two effects", explained Mats Esseldeurs, the lead author of a study published in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics* on Friday.

"If tidal interactions predominate, Earth is engulfed by the Sun. If the Sun's mass loss predominates, Earth escapes into an orbit larger than the radius of its star", the astrophysicist at Belgium's University of Leuven said in a statement.

Until now, scientists had favoured the first hypothesis.

However, their calculations relied on relatively simple descriptions of tidal dissipation within giant stars.

Advances made in modelling these tides over the last 15 years have enabled the study's authors to show that "the dissipation is lower than previously expected", Stephane Mathis, an astrophysicist at the CEA Paris-Saclay centre in France, said.

To estimate how much mass the Sun could lose, the team focused in particular on a nearby star called L2 Puppis that is like the Sun's "old cousin", the study's co-author said. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

Rings made by recycled jewellery designer and founder of Capobianco, Juliette Moutte, in her workshop and shop, in the Camas neighbourhood of Marseille. — AFP



PHOTOSHOOT

French artist JR and French musician and composer Thomas Bangalter pose during a photo session in the tower of the Institut de France, in Paris. — AFP



HOLLYWOOD

US filmmaker and actor Sean Penn takes part in a master class during the 17th edition of the Lumiere Film Festival in Lyon, central eastern France. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“Little Owl on Air”



“Weathered by time, still reaching for eternity....”

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AL SARKAR: BRINGING OMANI HISTORY TO LIFE

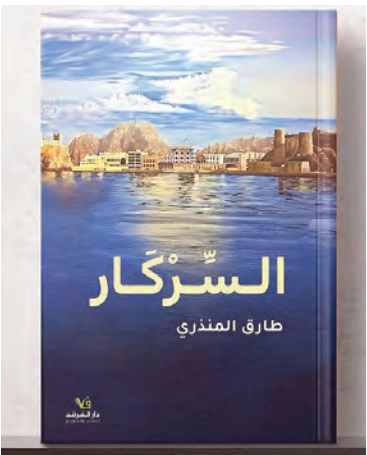
ARWA AL HASHIMI

Historical fiction occupies a unique space in literature, allowing readers to revisit the past through the lens of human experience rather than historical record alone. In *Al Sarkar*, Omani novelist Tariq al Mandhari successfully blends history and storytelling, presenting a narrative that captures both the spirit of a bygone era and the enduring concerns of human nature.

Set against the backdrop of a transformative period in Oman's history, the novel transports readers to a world shaped by political change, social tensions and personal ambitions. Rather than focusing solely on historical events, *Al Mandhari* explores the lives of individuals navigating uncertainty, loyalty and the pursuit of their aspirations. Through these characters, history becomes more than a sequence of dates and facts; it becomes a living, breathing experience.

One of the novel's most notable achievements is its vivid portrayal of place. The cover itself hints at the significance of Muscat's coastal landscape, historic forts and maritime heritage, elements that resonate throughout the narrative. *Al Mandhari* paints a rich picture of old Oman, enabling readers to visualise the setting and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the period.

The author's writing style is both elegant and accessible.



His prose balances descriptive richness with narrative momentum, allowing the story to unfold naturally while maintaining the reader's interest.

Beyond its historical dimension, *Al Sarkar* explores themes that remain relevant today. Questions of identity, belonging, ambition and resilience emerge throughout the narrative, creating a bridge between past and present. The novel reminds readers that while societies evolve, many of the challenges and aspirations that shape human lives remain remarkably constant.

What makes *Al Sarkar* particularly compelling is its ability to transform history into a human story. Historical settings and events provide the framework, but it is the characters and their experiences that give the novel its emotional weight. This approach allows readers not only to learn about a period of Omani history but also to connect with it on a personal level.

Taylor Swift youngest woman in Songwriters Hall of Fame



TAYLOR SWIFT on Thursday became the youngest woman ever inducted into the prestigious Songwriters Hall of Fame, another milestone in the 36-year-old US pop star's record-breaking career.

The female record was previously held by Carole Bayer Sager, who was 43 when she joined in 1987. Stevie Wonder remains the youngest person ever admitted, at age 32 in 1983.

Artists become eligible for the Hall of Fame 20 years after the release of their first commercial track. For Swift, that was “Tim McGraw”, released in June 2006.

Her success since is undeniable: the American artist has recorded 12 albums spanning country, pop and folk, earning her 14 Grammy Awards in the United States, including four Album of the Year trophies — a record.

“Swift’s ability to shapeshift as a songwriter, to inhabit different sonic landscapes and write as credibly in the world of one genre as she does another

Her success since is undeniable: the American artist has recorded 12 albums spanning country, pop and folk, earning her 14 Grammy Awards in the United States, including four Album of the Year trophies — a record.

is part of her superpower as a songwriter”, reads her bio on the Hall of Fame website.

“It also represents the boldness and bravery of her artistry: to explore new frontiers when the most practical next step would be to keep mining the material that has gotten you the success in the first place”.

Swift appeared on the red carpet in New York on Thursday wearing a strapless black dress with floral motifs ahead of the naming ceremony.

GREAT HONOUR

Also inducted on Thursday were Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of KISS, the band behind hits such as “Rock and Roll All Nite” and “Detroit Rock City”.

“It doesn’t suck”, Stanley said when asked how it felt to join the prestigious songwriting ranks.

“It’s really hard to digest the idea. I certainly don’t consider myself in that rarified air of some of the writers, but if you wanna be in that club, I’m there”.

Kenny Loggins, the hitmaker behind movie

soundtrack classics like “Footloose” and “Danger Zone” from “Top Gun”, was inducted into the Hall of Fame as well.

“It’s a great honour and I appreciate it”, Loggins said. “It’s the culmination of a lifetime writing and that’s exciting for me”.

Canadian singer Alanis Morissette, inescapable in the 1990s and American record producer Walter Afanasieff were also among the total of nine songwriters joining the Hall of Fame this year.

Estimates put Taylor Swift’s worldwide sales at over 250 million album-equivalents. Her most recent tour in 2023 and 2024, titled “The Eras Tour”, brought in a record sum of around two billion dollars.

She is also the female artist with the most songs ever to reach the top 10 list compiled by Billboard, the leading US music magazine.

Swift is omnipresent in the media. After unveiling a country track for the soundtrack of the film “Toy Story 5”, she was at Madison Square Garden on Wednesday for a game of the NBA Finals. — AFP

FEATURES



KAIDHA: A FRAGRANCE PASSED DOWN GENERATIONS



Scented beauty products inspired by the unique fragrance of the Kaidha tree

ARWA AL HASHIMI

KNOWN locally in Oman as the Kaidha tree and scientifically identified as Pandanus odorifer, this tree has been cherished for generations as a symbol of beauty, fragrance and cultural identity. Long before modern perfumes and cosmetics became widely available, Omani women relied on the tree's aromatic fruit and flowers to scent their clothing, enhance personal care rituals and preserve traditions passed down through generations.

More than a fragrant plant, the Kaidha tree became deeply woven into Oman's social and cultural fabric. Its distinctive scent inspired stories, folklore and traditional songs, while its presence in homes reflected a close relationship between women and the natural environment. Today, this enduring heritage continues to thrive through individuals who are working to preserve and reimagine its uses for contemporary audiences.

Historical accounts and oral traditions suggest that women were primarily responsible for cultivating and caring for the Kaidha tree. In some communities, the tree was treated with great affection and respect, to the extent that local customs likened its celebration to that of a bride. Such practices reflected the tree's significance in everyday life and its association with femininity and beauty.

The fragrant fruit of the Kaidha tree was widely used to perfume clothing and household fabrics. Women would place the fruit among garments and textiles, allowing its scent to infuse the fabric with a pleasant aroma that lingered for long periods. Others added it to water to impart a subtle fragrance and flavour, making it an integral part of traditional domestic practices.

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Shamsa bint Salim bin Suleiman al Maawali, founder of 'Al Maawaliya for Incense, Perfumes and Cosmetics'

The Kaidha tree also holds a place in Oman's rich folklore. Its distinctive fragrance and cultural value inspired references in traditional songs and oral poetry, where it often symbolised beauty, longing and cherished memories. These artistic expressions helped preserve the tree's legacy and reinforced its role as a cultural icon within Omani society.

Today, efforts to preserve this heritage continue through the work of passionate entrepreneurs such as Shamsa bint Salim bin Suleiman al Maawali from the Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil. Through her brand, 'Al Maawaliya for Incense, Perfumes and Cosmetics', she has transformed a traditional element of Omani culture into a contemporary business while maintaining its authentic roots.

According to Al Maawali, her interest in the Kaidha tree stemmed from a desire to revive traditional practices and introduce them to younger generations. She began experimenting with fermenting the fruit in Hal Haleel, a traditional oil familiar to many Omani mothers and grandmothers. Before the widespread availability of modern cosmetic products, this oil was commonly used for hair and body care.

As she introduced the product to customers, she found that many were eager to reconnect with memories of the past. Some purchased it for their mothers and grandmothers, while others were curious about its traditional benefits and uses. Encouraged by the positive response, she expanded her work to include perfumes, incense and scented beauty products inspired by the unique fragrance of the Kaidha tree.

For Al Maawali, preserving the Kaidha tree is about more than creating products. It is about safeguarding an important part of Oman's cultural identity and ensuring that traditional knowledge is passed on to future generations. She hopes that greater support will be provided to heritage-based businesses that contribute to the preservation and promotion of Omani traditions.

As Oman continues to embrace modernity, the Kaidha tree remains a fragrant reminder of the country's rich cultural heritage. Through stories, songs, customs and contemporary initiatives, its legacy continues to flourish, connecting the past with the present and ensuring that an important chapter of Omani history lives on for generations to come.