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IN BRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO FRENCH PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan lauded the depth of the strong relations binding the two countries. His Majesty wished France continued stability and prosperity, and the realisation of further achievements. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY SENDS MESSAGE TO KAZAKH PRESIDENT



ASTANA: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries. The message was handed over by Mohammed bin Abdullah al Bahrani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Kazakhstan, when he was received by Alibek Kuantyrov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, at the headquarters of the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Astana. – ONA

OMAN GROWS ITS FIRST PINEAPPLES



Razat Royal Farm's 15-year research yields tropical crop success in Dhofar.

SALALAH: After nearly 15 years of research and agricultural trials, Razat Royal Farm, operating under the Royal Court Affairs, has successfully produced pineapples locally, marking a significant milestone in Oman's agricultural diversification efforts. The pioneering initiative was launched to assess whether Oman's climate and environment could support the cultivation of pineapples, a tropical crop with promising economic and nutritional value.

At Razat Farm in Dhofar Governorate, cultivation techniques progressed from small-scale container experiments to extensive field trials under tree shade and controlled greenhouse conditions. The crop has shown strong adaptability to Dhofar's unique climate, with the growing season extending from July to December, benefiting from the mild temperatures and high humidity associated with the annual Khareef season. The pineapple plant reaches full vegetative growth after about six months, while fruit development requires approximately 12 months before harvest. The fruit is considered ready when its lower section develops a distinctive golden-yellow colour.

Eng Suhail bin Said al Maashani, Senior Agricultural Engineering Specialist at the farm, described the achievement as a landmark development for Omani agriculture. — ONA

Sayyid Shihab conveys HM's condolences to Qatar



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said accompanied by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said offered condolences and sympathies to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar



ON BEHALF OF His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, accompanied by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, offered condolences and sympathies to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on the demise of Shaikh

Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani. HH Sayyid Shihab conveyed the condolences and sympathies of His Majesty the Sultan to Shaikh Tamim, Al Thani family and the brotherly Qatari people on this profound loss, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant the late Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani mercy and forgiveness, and to rest his soul in peace in paradise. Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani expressed his deep

gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for his sincere condolences and sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty, grant him a long life, and bestow upon him good health and well-being. HH Sayyid Shihab was accompanied by an official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of

the Council of Ministers; HH Sayyid Loay bin Ghaleb al Said, Secretary-General of the Diwan of Royal Court; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information; Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of Heritage and Tourism; and Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Qatar. **TURN TO P2**

Oman stresses maritime security at EU-GCC Forum

BRUSSELS: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the third EU-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) High-Level Forum on Regional Security and Cooperation, held in the Belgian capital, Brussels, on Monday. The Omani delegation was led by Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Regional Neighbourhood Department at the Foreign Ministry. He stressed the importance of sustained Gulf-European dialogue and the strengthening

of the strategic partnership between the two sides in the service of shared security, stability and prosperity. He also affirmed the solidarity of the GCC states in confronting current challenges and underscored Oman's vision on the importance of safeguarding regional security and stability, as well as its commitment to freedom of maritime navigation and the safety of international trade routes in the Strait of Hormuz, in line with international law and the law of the sea. He noted that Oman

continues its close cooperation with the International Maritime Organization to enhance the safety and security of maritime navigation and support regional and international stability. The forum addressed a spectrum of regional and international issues of mutual concern and explored ways to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the GCC and the European Union across various fields, contributing to the consolidation of security, stability and sustainable development. — ONA

EU targets social media risks for children

BRUSSELS: Children should have 'phased and gradual access' to social media, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Monday, as experts recommended under-13s only use online platforms under supervision. The European Union has been mulling a social media ban since a push by EU states, including Greece and France, for limiting access, with pressure intensifying for a bloc-wide ban. To help the EU take decisions based on evidence, von der Leyen tasked an expert panel of doctors, academics, youth representatives and parents to give their advice. They delivered their recommendations on Monday.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen holds a copy of the report on children's safety online at a press briefing in Brussels. — Reuters

"What we already have is a consensus that there needs to be a start date for the age children can join social media," von der Leyen said, calling for "age-appropriate restrictions". "This is not about whether children can access social media. It is about whether and when social media can access our children." A legal proposal will come in the second half of the year, von der Leyen added, but she is expected to give an indication of what the restrictions will look like in September. "We need to consider a phased and gradual access for different age ranges," she said, adding children should only be allowed access to "safe" platforms from the age of 13 onwards.

The report by co-chairs child psychiatrist Jorg Fegert and epidemiologist Maria Melchior offered a glimpse of how the EU's proposal could look like. They recommended no screens at all for babies and toddlers, and supervised use of "age-appropriate social media" and devices for children aged between three and 12 by parents or teachers. And for those aged 13 to 18, they advised "evolving autonomous use" of social media and other digital platforms that have "key safety features". Many social media and video sharing platforms, including TikTok and Meta's Facebook and Instagram, are only available to children aged 13 and over. — AFP

OMAN

SAYYID SHIHAB CONVEYS HM 'S CONDOLENCES TO QATAR



FROM P1

Upon arrival at the Amiri Hall at Hamad International Airport, HH Sayyid Shihab and the accompanying delegation were received

by Shaikh Saud bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs, along with a number of senior Qatari officials.
Earlier, on behalf of His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, accompanied by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, along with some Royal

family's members, ministers and senior officials, left from Muscat on Monday afternoon for the State of Qatar to offer condolences and sympathies on the demise of the late Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani. — ONA



Officials pay condolences at Qatar Embassy in Muscat



Excellencies and officials expressed their condolences and sympathies to their brethren in Qatar. — W

MUSCAT: A number of Their Excellencies and officials visited the Embassy of the State of Qatar in Muscat on Monday to offer condolences on the passing of Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani. They were received by Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate of Oman, and embassy staff. Their Excellencies and the officials expressed their condolences and sympathies to their brethren in the State of Qatar, paying tribute to the late Emir's pivotal role in Qatar's renaissance and development, and in strengthening fraternal ties and advancing relations between the two brotherly countries. They affirmed the strength of the historic bonds between the two nations, which continue to deepen

under the blessed leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of Qatar. The Qatari Ambassador expressed his profound gratitude for the sincere fraternal sentiments shown by Oman — leadership, government and people — on the passing of Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, and the deep impact his loss has had on the people of Qatar. At the conclusion of the visit, Their Excellencies and the officials recorded their messages of condolences in the embassy's book of condolences, praying to Allah the Almighty to grant the late Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani vast mercy, to rest him in peace in paradise, and to bestow upon the sisterly State of Qatar lasting security and prosperity. — ONA

The quiet wadi behind Dhofar's most famous landscape

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 13

Wadi Darbat may be Dhofar's most photographed natural attraction, but the story of its waters begins far beyond the viewpoints visited by most travellers. High in the mountains overlooking Taqah, Wadi Ghaydah winds through a rugged and largely untouched landscape that offers a glimpse into the natural processes shaping one of the governorate's best-known destinations. From the upper slopes, the familiar valley of Wadi Darbat lies in the distance, while dramatic escarpments, narrow channels and scattered native trees reveal the terrain through which seasonal rainfall makes its journey. Unlike Darbat, Wadi Ghaydah has no dramatic waterfall or popular viewing platform. Its appeal lies instead in the landscape itself — a living system where geology, water and vegetation work together over time. During the Khareef, rain and mist settle across the mountain plateau before gradually flowing through natural channels and rocky depressions that eventually feed the wider Wadi Darbat watershed. Much of this process remains hidden from visitors, unfolding quietly beyond the roads and tourist lookouts. That makes Wadi Ghaydah significant for reasons that extend beyond scenery alone. Its importance lies in the delicate relationship between rock formations, seasonal watercourses, native vegetation and the communities that have lived alongside this environment for generations. Reaching the wadi is not easy. The route is unpaved, and sections have been eroded by heavy rainfall and past weather systems. Even four-wheel-drive vehicles face challenges where runoff has cut



Wadi Ghaydah has no dramatic waterfall or popular viewing platform but its appeal lies in the landscape itself.

deep channels into the track, prompting many local residents to continue their journey on foot. As the descent continues, the landscape changes gradually. Dense trees provide shade, rocky cliffs narrow the pathway, and caves emerge along the mountainsides. Local residents say some of these caves once served as shelters for families and livestock during periods of severe weather. The rugged terrain also supports one of the area's traditional livelihoods. Beekeepers in Taqah value Wadi Ghaydah because wild bees establish colonies within natural cracks and cavities in the surrounding cliffs. Seasonal flowering plants provide a reliable source of nectar, contributing to the production of the region's highly prized honey.

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SHORT TAKES



The agreements support sustainable environmental development.

EA signs deals to boost inspections, develop Al Saleel Park

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority on Monday signed two agreements to consolidate environmental inspection and develop infrastructure at nature reserves. The agreements stem from efforts to protect the environment, raise the efficiency of field performance and support sustainable environmental development. The agreements were signed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Security and Safety Services Corporation. The first agreement provides for the implementation of environmental inspection and monitoring work in a manner that controls environmental violations in different governorates of Oman, in addition to drafting reports and entering data into electronic systems in accordance with the procedures adopted by the Environment Authority. The second agreement stipulated the implementation of the first phase of Al Saleel Natural Park's development project in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi. The project seeks to promote ecotourism, preserve biodiversity and develop the park's infrastructure and service facilities in a manner that meets the needs of members of the public. — ONA

Al Dhahirah launches Summer Programme to inspire innovation



IBRI: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Dhahirah Governorate has launched the summer programme 'My Summer... Learning and Innovation 2026', with the participation of more than 500 male and female students from schools across the governorate. The programme, part of the Ministry of Education's summer initiatives, aims to make productive use of students' vacation time by enhancing their skills, nurturing creativity and providing a stimulating environment for learning and personal development. Running until July 23, the programme is being conducted at five summer centres across the governorate: Abbad bin Bishr Summer Centre and Tariq bin Ziyad Summer Centre for males and Al Sawader, Al Masarrat and Al Rahab Summer Centres for females. The students were welcomed with orientation sessions introducing them to the programme structure, activities and participation mechanisms. The launch also featured introductory events designed to encourage engagement and teamwork among participants. Hamad bin Salem al Shukaili, Director of the Department of Scouts, Guides and Student Activities and Head of the Local Committee for Managing the Summer Programme in Al Dhahirah, said the initiative offers a wide range of educational, cultural, sports and skill-based activities. — ONA

DHOFAR PROGRAMME BOOSTS FAMILY STABILITY

SALALAH: The marital counselling programme 'Companionship of Life' commenced on Monday at the University of Dhofar. The three-day initiative, implemented by the Ministry of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate, is designed to bolster family stability and enhance awareness of essential life skills for a successful marriage. The programme targets engaged couples and newlyweds, structured around four core pillars, namely the foundations of building a happy



A panel of specialists delivered the training sessions.

and stable family; personality types and understanding one's life partner; communication and harmony in marital relationships; and family planning. The programme features three training sessions delivered by a panel of specialists, covering key topics such as financial planning, family planning, pre-marital medical screening, the fundamentals of a contented and stable family, communication and compatibility in marriage. — ONA

Labour Ministry issues new trade union framework

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

THE MINISTRY of Labour has issued a ministerial decision introducing a comprehensive regulatory framework governing the establishment, registration and operation of trade unions, sectoral general unions and the General Federation of Oman Workers, as part of ongoing efforts to modernise Oman's labour legislation and strengthen the legal framework regulating the labour market in line with the Labour Law. The new regulation establishes a clear legal framework for the formation and registration of trade unions, while defining their rights, responsibilities and institutional roles. It also seeks to strengthen the role of trade unions in representing workers and safeguarding their legitimate interests in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in Oman. According to the ministry, the regulation introduces transparent procedures for the establishment and registration of trade unions and sectoral general unions. It includes detailed provisions governing the work of preparatory and founding committees and clearly outlines the responsibilities associated with each stage of the formation process, culminating in the election of administrative boards to oversee



union affairs. To ensure continuity and institutional stability, the decision stipulates that existing trade unions, sectoral general unions and their current administrative boards will continue to exercise their mandates until the expiry of their legally prescribed terms. This provision is intended to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of trade unions during the implementation of the new regulatory framework. The regulation provides for the establishment of a Legal Protection

Committee for members of trade unions, sectoral general unions and the General Federation of Oman Workers. The committee will examine alleged violations involving members of union administrative boards, the federation, founding and preparatory committees, as well as workers' representatives, thereby enhancing legal protection for those engaged in legitimate trade union activities. The regulation also outlines the mechanism for releasing trade union members from their workplace duties to perform official union responsibilities.

Students gear up for Design Championship in US

MUSCAT: Three Omani students are intensifying their preparations to compete in the Adobe Certified Professional World Championship, set to take place in the United States, where they will face contestants from across the globe. Their participation follows a successful run in the Omani National Championship for Graphic Design from Adobe 2025-2026, which drew overwhelming interest from students and young talents across all educational governorates of the Oman. The national competition registered over 850 participants, with 514 advancing past the initial stages, 113 progressing to advanced rounds, and nine reaching the finals — culminating in the selection of three winners to represent Oman on the world stage. Throughout the national championship, competitors



The training has placed heavy emphasis on proficiency in core Adobe applications

underwent a rigorous series of technical and artistic assessments, including level-determination tests, Adobe-accredited professional examinations, and creative graphic design projects evaluated by a specialised jury against precise artistic criteria. The final round featured a six-hour practical challenge, during which contestants

demonstrated their capacity for creative thinking, mastery of digital tools, time management and the ability to translate concepts into fully realised visual designs. Following their victory, the students have been enrolled in an intensive preparatory training programme aimed at elevating their technical and artistic readiness, while

sharpening their competitive edge for the global arena. The training has placed heavy emphasis on proficiency in core Adobe applications — notably Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe InDesign — alongside practical exercises simulating the scope and complexity of international-level challenges. Participants have been coached on project requirement analysis, creative ideation, selecting appropriate visual solutions and delivering polished work within strict timeframes. The programme is led by a specialist in graphic design, offering the students hands-on practical sessions, continuous assessment and monitoring, regular feedback loops, and targeted identification of strengths and areas for improvement. — ONA

The Development Bank celebrates 50 years since its founding

- One billion dollars in its loan portfolio to serve the national economy
- Four major sectors account for the loan portfolio



Muscat: Development Bank has reached a landmark US\$1 billion loan-book milestone in its 50th anniversary year with OMR387.6 million in outstanding lending supporting 23,892 loans across Oman.

The figure marks a balance-sheet record while the stronger story comes from the businesses behind the number. Development Bank (DB) lending helps fishing businesses buy boats and engines, manufacturers purchase machinery, transport operators finance buses, tourism businesses invest in hotel assets and traders carry inventory while they wait for customers to pay.

For a company, finance can mean the confidence to accept a larger order, replace ageing equipment, improve productivity or manage cash while waiting for payment. In a governorate, the impact can appear through stronger local services, more reliable transport, better food supply, new jobs and more business retained locally. At a national level, the gain comes from more Omani businesses able to support exports, serve investors, hire locally and take part in non-oil growth.

Hussain Al Lawati, CEO, DB, said: “Reaching the US\$1 billion loan-book milestone in our 50th anniversary year is a proud moment for DB because it shows the scale of work being financed across Oman. The portfolio reaches freelancers, start-ups, SMEs, larger companies and working-capital customers in every governorate. Behind those loans are people buying equipment, growing businesses, carrying cash through difficult trading periods and serving local communities. Our role is to keep access to finance open for them, from the smallest firms to larger projects that need patient capital.”

DB's portfolio shows how development finance works on the ground. One borrower may need a new engine to keep fishing, another may need machinery to increase output while others need buses, upgraded hotel facilities, inventory or payroll cover. Across those cases, finance helps turn demand into income and contracts into delivery.

The loan book is tied closely to the sectors supporting Oman's ambitious non-oil growth. Manufacturing accounts for OMR110.6 million of outstanding lending, tourism OMR69.1 million, services OMR66.2 million and fisheries OMR52.1 million. Together, these four sectors account for OMR298 million, 77% of DB's outstanding lending. These sectors connect directly to local production, visitor spending, food supply, supplier contracts and export potential. As Oman grows its non-oil exports and attracts foreign investment more local companies need finance to buy equipment, hold inventory, meet quality standards, transport goods, maintain assets and serve larger customers.

NCSI's May 2026 statistical bulletin places DB's milestone within Oman's wider non-oil trade agenda. By the end of March 2026, non-oil exports stood at OMR1.6 billion with chemical products rising 17.0% and base metals and related articles up 10.8%. Re-exports also increased 4.6% supported by strong growth in transport-equipment re-exports.

Those figures show a market opening but the domestic gain depends on how much of the work around trade and investment can be captured by Omani businesses. Foreign investors and export-facing companies need local suppliers, transport, accommodation, maintenance, catering, packaging, health services, workshops and contractors. More of that spending can remain in Oman when local companies have already financed vehicles, equipment, premises, systems, inventory and people.

The regional spread of DB's lending shows how far the book reaches beyond Muscat. More

than 90% of loans by number are recorded outside Muscat while 74% of outstanding lending by amount is also outside the capital. Export readiness and investor supply chains are built locally before they appear in national trade figures. A fish processor in South Al Sharqiyah, a school transport operator in North Al Batinah, a farm supplier in Dhofar, a clinic in Al Dakhliyah or a manufacturer in Rusayl all need finance before they can buy assets, hire staff, hold inventory or carry the waiting period between delivery and payment.

Across branch and corporate books, four regional portfolios now exceed OMR40 million - Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Batinah and Dhofar. South Al Sharqiyah has 5,877 loans, while North Al Batinah and Dhofar together account for 6,361 loans. The figures show demand coming from governorates connected to fishing, tourism, manufacturing, logistics and local services.

The book is broad by number and deeper by ticket size when projects need heavier assets. Most loans sit in micro and SME products - 23,166 loans, 97% of the loan book by number with OMR219.3 million outstanding. Interestingly, 14,270 - 61.6% - of these loans were disbursed to job seekers, retirees and self-employed individuals. The larger end of the book is carried by 225 corporate loans worth OMR144.1 million. Working-capital lending adds 501 loans and OMR24.2 million.

The average outstanding micro loan is OMR5,300 - the average outstanding corporate loan is OMR640,000. That range represents the bank's economic role - smaller loans help community businesses replace equipment, buy tools, hire staff or improve operations while larger loans finance production lines, tourism assets, processing facilities and heavier machinery.

By loan count, fisheries are the largest sector with 8,921 loans. Marine engines and fishing equipment alone account for 8,414 loans, more than one in three loans in the full DB book. Fisheries, agriculture and livestock, services and manufacturing together account for 21,421 loans, almost 90% of all loans. The mix explains why average ticket sizes differ widely - some borrowers need OMR5,000 to replace equipment while others need hundreds of thousands of rials to build assets that can serve buyers worldwide.

Individual activity data shows how widely loan size can vary. Marine engines and fishing equipment dominate by volume with 8,414 loans across the book, while hotel and resort projects sit at the asset-heavy end at OMR33.9 million across 82 loans. School transport brings another part of the portfolio into view with 1,262 loans and OMR22.7 million outstanding. Mineral water bottling and pharmaceutical preparations add OMR15 million across 75 loans. These loans are not all export oriented but they fund the operating base that export sectors and foreign investors depend on - transport, accommodation, food supply, equipment repair, packaging, health services and local purchasing.

As Oman becomes a larger destination for FDI more commercial spending will sit around major projects and investor operations. NCSI data shows FDI in Oman at OMR31.4 billion end Q4 2025, up 8.1% from a year earlier. The UK and US remained the largest source countries with investment from China increasing 11.2%. Oil and gas remain the largest category but foreign capital is also present in manufacturing, finance, trade, utilities, construction, transport and hotels. Foreign investors bring capital and they also buy services, lease premises, hire contractors, use catering and require transport. More of that spending can remain in Oman when

local companies have financed vehicles, workshops, accommodation, safety systems, inventory and payroll.

The next phase of the loan book will also have to serve new kinds of demand. Under Oman's 2050 Net Zero strategy more businesses will need finance for cleaner industrial processes, energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy. That does not turn DB into a climate bank - the work extends the same development-finance job the bank has carried for 50 years, backing productive assets when private capital alone may not be ready to carry the risk.

Hussain Al Lawati's participation at the recent London Climate Action Week connects DB's next phase to a wider discussion on climate finance. The event brought together finance leaders, policymakers, researchers and development-finance institutions to discuss how national development banks can support new industries and help economies prepare for lower-carbon growth. For DB, that means helping green projects reach the stage where lenders and investors can assess them properly with feasibility work, technical studies, permits, procurement plans and long-term operating contracts in place.

Factories need finance to reduce energy costs, fisheries businesses need cold storage to

cut waste and protect product quality, hotels need solar systems, efficient cooling, water-saving equipment and building upgrades and manufacturers need cleaner machinery, supplier documentation and compliance records as international buyers raise their standards. These are commercial needs linked to cost, contracts, compliance and market access.

Working capital gives the loan book another dimension. A company can have the order, the truck, the workforce and the customer but still need cash to buy inputs, cover salaries, pay suppliers and wait for settlement. DB's OMR24.2 million in working-capital lending supports that gap between delivery and payment, especially for businesses taking on larger contracts or serving new customers nationally and internationally.

As DB marks 50 years, the bank looks to help more Omani businesses use finance to win larger orders, supply major projects, reach export customers and invest in greener operations. The US\$1 billion loan book shows how that work starts - with businesses buying equipment, carrying stock, hiring people, upgrading facilities and managing cash until customers pay. Those steps turn orders into income and importantly help keep more of Oman's growth in Omani companies and communities.

Indicators of \$1 Billion in Loan Portfolio



Outstanding Portfolio

1\$ Billion

387.6 Million

Number of Loans

23,892

Sectoral Concentration

77%

concentrated in the top four sectors.

The Four Major Sectors



Loan Volume

Micro, Small, and Medium Loans

219.3 Million

23,166 Loans - %97 of the Total

Corporate and Large Loans

144.1 Million

225 loans

Working Capital Financing

24.2 Million

501 loans

Geographic distribution

74%

of the outstanding portfolio value

+90%

Number of loans registered outside Muscat Governorate

SHORT TAKES



SIX KARATE STUDENTS TO REPRESENT OMAN AT OKINAWA TOURNEY

MUSCAT: Six students from Bodhi Life and Skills Academy will represent Oman at the third edition of the Okinawa Karate Tournament and World Festival, to be held in Japan from July 29 to August 6, where athletes from more than 80 countries are expected to compete. The Omani contingent will be led by Renshi G Kumar, who said the team is looking forward to testing its skills on the international stage after intensive preparation.

“We will first travel to Chennai, India, to participate in another competition before leaving for Japan. The students have trained rigorously for several months, and I am excited to accompany them to these prestigious events,” Renshi said.

He added that the tournaments will provide valuable international exposure for the young athletes while strengthening Oman’s growing presence in global karate competitions.

As part of this year’s preparations, the students recently showcased their kata techniques before Kiyoshi Serizawa, Ambassador of Japan to Oman, who conveyed his best wishes and encouraged the team ahead of the international competition.

The six students representing Oman in Japan are Pranav V Nair, Gopeshkrithik Parthasarathy, Gunit Chaturvedi, Taha Faris, Maryam Faris, Rudra Vishal.

Al Dhahirah Governorate boosts Oman’s food security

IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governorate is emerging as a promising model in attracting investment and implementing high-quality agricultural, livestock and fisheries projects, driven by close coordination between government entities and the private sector and a clear vision to maximise local production through modern technologies.

The governorate is witnessing accelerated activity through an integrated portfolio of ongoing projects, others completed during 2025, and future projects planned for 2026.

Dr Talal bin Zahran al Busaidy, Director-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah Governorate, said the governorate’s significance extends beyond its agricultural base. It possesses the resources to become an integrated economic hub for food production, built on natural assets, diverse activities and significant infrastructure development in recent years, in line with Oman Vision 2040, cementing its position as a key pillar of the food security system and sustainable development.

In a statement to ONA, he said the governorate is steadily advancing towards greater competitiveness by maximising the added value of its resources, attracting quality investment and fostering a business environment conducive to sustainable development.

The governorate is rich in strategic resources, including fertile agricultural land, available water resources, agricultural expertise, production diversity and a



strategic location that opens wide access to regional markets and supports the expansion of food industries and logistics, he noted.

Government services — including agricultural extension, veterinary care and various support programmes — are a fundamental pillar in ensuring the success and sustainability of investment projects, he said. The total number of investment projects in food security in Al Dhahirah has reached 67 across three wilayats, covering about 9,607 acres, with an investment value of RO 84 million, including the recently signed poultry project with Al Namaa valued at RO 28.85 million.

Ibri accounts for the largest share with 38 investment projects, while Dhank is distinguished as the governorate’s food basket, with promising investment projects supporting self-sufficiency and economic diversification for 2026, he said.

The Directorate is working to achieve its 2026 targets with an investment value ranging between RO 37.5 million and RO 50 million by

introducing new investment opportunities alongside high-quality projects spanning plant, animal and aquatic sectors, supporting production expansion, resource diversification and food security, Dr Al Busaidy added.

The introduction of such projects supports the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources’ targets of localising the second billion and enhancing self-sufficiency rates towards a more sustainable and competitive food system, he said.

Ibri is witnessing a wide range of projects covering agricultural, livestock, manufacturing and service activities, including greenhouse vegetable production, date palm cultivation and date production, fodder projects, livestock and poultry farming, as well as specialised projects such as tissue culture laboratories, water bottling plants, and integrated projects combining agricultural and livestock production. — ONA

Nama Water Services creates 303 new jobs for Omanis

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JULY 13

NAMA WATER SERVICES has announced the completion of the third phase of its Training Linked to Employment programme, creating 303 new job opportunities for Omanis with contracted support companies across ten governorates.

With the latest phase, the programme’s total employment opportunities have reached 1,188, making it one of the largest national initiatives aimed at qualifying and employing Omani talent in the water and wastewater sector.

The announcement was made during a ceremony held at the company’s headquarters in Muscat Grand Mall, attended by officials, partners and representatives involved in the initiative. The event concluded with the recognition of individuals and organisations that contributed to the programme’s success.

Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, Chief Executive Officer of Nama Water Services, said the third phase will increase the Omanisation rate in operation and maintenance contracts to 90 per cent.

He emphasised that the success of any project should not be measured only by the



During the third phase Nama Water Services will increase the Omanisation rate in operation and maintenance contracts to 90 per cent

infrastructure it creates, but also by the positive impact it leaves on communities and individuals.

“Opportunities have been deliberately distributed among governorates where they are most needed, reducing the need for employees to relocate and supporting their stability within their own communities,” he said.

“What we celebrate today is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of a new phase in a continuing effort to build national capabilities,” Al Zakwani added.

The programme provides an integrated pathway covering recruitment, specialised training, practical workplace experience and eventual employment. It

offers opportunities across several fields, including engineering, maintenance, health and safety, business administration and cybersecurity.

The initiative has also provided beneficiaries with opportunities to develop professional skills and gain practical experience in a vital national sector.

Ilyas al Mahruqi, a mechanical technician and one of the programme’s beneficiaries, said working in a sector that directly impacts people’s daily lives motivates him to continue learning and enhancing his skills.

Amna al Zadjali, an electrical engineer, said the practical training provided valuable knowledge and confidence beyond what academic studies alone could offer.

“Do not hesitate,” she advised young Omanis considering joining the programme. “Work hard and make the most of every opportunity, because the first step could be the one that changes your entire future.”

Malak al Maqbali, also an electrical engineer, said the employment opportunity helped her develop discipline, responsibility and a stronger professional outlook.

“The best thing a person can do for themselves is to keep developing,” she said.

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
334/2026	Providing cleaning services for the Ministry's General Office building in the Airport Heights	Companies specialized in the field of Hygiene, washing and pest control registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree.	Monday 20-07-2026 02:00 PM	Thursday 30-07-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
335/2026	Purchase and supply of split unit air conditioners, 2 tons, number (100) air conditioners	Companies specialized in the field of supplying electrical, mechanical and industrial machinery and equipment and spare parts and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Sunday 02-08-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 23-08-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>**). On **Tuesday 14/07/2026**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A woman walks in front of a TV screen broadcasting a news report on the sentencing trial of South Korean former president Yoon Suk Yeol. — Reuters

S KOREA COURT SENTENCES FORMER PRESIDENT TO 2 YRS

SEOUL: A South Korean court sentenced former president Yoon Suk Yeol to two years in prison on Monday after finding him guilty of illegally receiving opinion polling services worth 270 million won (\$179,800) for free from a political broker. The Seoul Central District Court found Yoon violated political funding laws by receiving 14 rounds of polling from the political broker at no cost and later exercising influence over the nomination of a former lawmaker to repay him, according to the ruling.

Yoon had denied the charges, saying he had not requested the polls or promised anything in return. The decision differed from earlier court rulings involving former first lady Kim Keon Hee, which had found there was no quid pro quo in connection with the polling services. Monday’s ruling can be appealed.

Yoon, 65, is involved in eight legal cases. He is currently appealing a life sentence handed down in February after a court found him guilty of masterminding an insurrection tied to his short-lived declaration of martial law in 2024. Other cases include a Supreme Court ruling last week that finalised a seven-year prison sentence for obstructing authorities’ attempt to arrest him.

— Reuters

UN URGES YEMEN DE-ESCALATION AFTER ATTACK



Smoke rises following an air strike at Sanaa International Airport, in Sanaa. — Reuters

DUBAI: The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen on Monday urged the Ansar Allah group and Yemen’s internationally recognised government to turn to diplomacy after the government claimed responsibility for attacks on Sanaa’s airport. “I am actively engaging with all actors and my Office has contacted military representatives from all sides. We are urging them to de-escalate and refrain from any actions that would risk a new cycle of violence in Yemen,” said Hans Grundberg in a post on his office’s X account.

The leader of Yemen’s governing council said on Monday that he would not expand his confrontation with the Ansar Allah after his forces hit Sanaa airport to prevent an Iranian plane carrying a rebel delegation from landing. “I have also ordered that the scope of the confrontation not be expanded in a manner that would achieve Iran’s objective of dragging Yemen and its people into wars,” said Rashad al Alimi, who heads the eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, adding he had called an emergency meeting of the PLC following the flare-up. — AFP



People walk past a billboard with an image of Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. — Reuters

US-Iran war flares as Hormuz dispute deepens

US AND Iranian forces exchanged missile and drone attacks on Monday and clashed over control of the Strait of Hormuz, casting doubt on the viability of an interim deal to halt their war and driving oil prices higher. After Iran’s announcement of the strait’s closure over the weekend, US President Donald Trump said on Monday the United States would probably take over the waterway and should be reimbursed for controlling the vital shipping route. Iran’s top joint military command swiftly rejected Trump’s remarks, saying the United States had no role in determining the future of the strait.

The Revolutionary Guards said on Monday they had targeted US military facilities in Bahrain and Kuwait, and hit fuel tanks and ammunition depots at Prince Hassan Air Base in Jordan in response to US strikes. The US military said it had struck Iranian

The Revolutionary Guards said on Monday they had targeted US military facilities in Bahrain and Kuwait, and hit fuel tanks and ammunition depots at Prince Hassan Air Base in Jordan in response to US strikes. The US attacked military sites in southern parts of Iran, including Qeshm, Bandar Abbas and Abadan.

air defence systems, coastal radar sites, missile and drone capabilities and small boats on Sunday, using aircraft, naval vessels and drones.

On Monday, the US attacked military sites in southern parts of Iran, including Qeshm, Bandar Abbas and Abadan, Iran’s official news agency IRNA said, citing a local official. Bahrain said its air defence systems had destroyed several Iranian missiles and drones early on Monday. The latest exchanges mark an escalation in both the pace and geographic reach of attacks over the past week, throwing into question an interim US-Iranian agreement signed last month to reopen the strait and halt hostilities while the sides pursued a further 60 days of negotiations.

Trump has said he considers the ceasefire over, while leaving the door open to further talks. “We had a deal. It was a done deal, and then they broke it. They always break it. We’ve had 10 deals with

these people, and so we’re just going to hit them very hard,” he said in a phone interview on Fox News’ “Fox & Friends” programme on Monday. Iran’s top negotiator, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, struck a similarly defiant tone, posting on X on Sunday: “The era of one-sided deals is OVER. We told you: keep your word or pay the price. Reality is knocking.”

The war launched by the United States and Israel against Iran on February 28 has destabilised the Gulf and spread across the region, with Iran attacking US bases in multiple countries.

Control of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway for global oil supplies, has become one of the main battlegrounds of the conflict. Iran’s effective blockade of the strait has pushed up energy prices and increased concerns about inflation globally. Brent crude jumped by more than 3% on Monday on fears of disruption. — Reuters



EU DONORS OFFER \$1 BN TO HELP GAZA

BRUSSELS: The EU said on Monday that European donors had put some \$1 billion on the table to help initial recovery efforts in war-torn Gaza.

“We will present the initial package today of almost 900 million euros or one billion dollars,” Dubravka Suica, EU commissioner for the Mediterranean, said ahead of a donor meeting in Brussels. “We now need the conditions on the ground that will allow the support to reach the people in Gaza.”

The funds — which officials said include money already pledged to help Gaza — would be used to clear debris left from Israel’s devastating military offensive and rebuild basic services such as water and sanitation. “The governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank, are participating,” Brussels said.

The EU said Suica had on a recent visit to Israel “reached agreement with the Israeli authorities on next steps for the implementation of two major projects in the areas of waste and water management in Gaza”. — AFP

SEEKING TREATMENT

New US Ebola patient arrives in Germany



An American Ebola patient has arrived in Germany for treatment, the health ministry in Berlin said on Monday, weeks after another US citizen infected with Ebola was treated in Berlin. The patient landed in Frankfurt overnight and was transferred to the city’s university hospital, the ministry said. The head of the World Health Organization said the man was a “humanitarian worker” who had been in Bunia, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). — AFP

NATIONWIDE OPERATION

Türkiye courts order nearly 1,000 arrests



A decade after Türkiye’s failed 2016 coup, prosecutors ordered the arrest of nearly 1,000 suspects linked to an organisation that Ankara holds responsible. Describing the nationwide sweep as part of “the great purification campaign”, Justice Minister Akin Gurlek and Interior Minister Mustafa Ciftci said police were seeking “968 suspects” in order to root out FETO-related elements. “Our nation’s will and the survival of our state are under threat from the treacherous FETO/PDY network”. — AFP

BLAZE ACCIDENT

Thailand probes Bangkok fire that killed 28



Investigators combed on Monday through the wreckage of a huge fire at a Bangkok restaurant that killed at least 28 people. More than 70 people were injured following the blaze on Sunday evening on the outskirts of the Thai capital, officials said, the country’s worst such incident for almost two decades. National police chief Kitrat Panphet said his investigators were hoping to speak to the owner, who is currently in intensive care. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Hungary's President Tamas Sulyok is pictured in front of Sandor Palace in Budapest. — AFP

Hungary parliament passes law to oust president

BUDAPEST: Hungary's parliament has approved a constitutional amendment on Monday to oust President Tamas Sulyok, who Prime Minister Peter Magyar says is a "puppet" of former premier Viktor Orban. The legislation is part of Magyar's drive to dismantle Orban's bastions of power, for which he says he received a strong mandate from voters.

Magyar's centre-right Tisza Party ended the 16-year rule of Orban's nationalist Fidesz party with a landslide election victory in April. "It would be a betrayal of the Hungarian nation if we did not touch this constitution," Magyar told parliament ahead of the vote on the amendment, which passed with 139 votes, and six against in the 199-member parliament. "They (Fidesz) arranged the country in such a way that one man's will became the source of legislative work... The Tisza Party won a clear, huge two-thirds mandate to dismantle this system."

Parliament would elect a new president until a new constitution takes effect, or for a maximum of five years. Magyar said that in the autumn, a "huge joint project" with the Hungarian people would begin to draft a new constitution. — Reuters

WILDFIRE RAGES NEAR PARIS



A wildfire tore through a historic forest near Paris on Monday, forcing highway closures and mobilising water-bombing aircraft, while Spain's death toll from one of its deadliest wildfires rose to 13, as a relentless heatwave scorched much of western Europe. The region is enduring its third heatwave of the summer, with tinder-dry vegetation and high temperatures fuelling blazes from the Iberian Peninsula to France. France deployed hundreds of firefighters to tackle a fast-moving blaze. — Reuters

SPANISH PM URGES BETTER PREVENTION AFTER DEADLY WILDFIRE

TURRE: Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Monday urged Spain to strengthen its prevention measures after one of the country's deadliest wildfires in recent history killed 13 people and razed a huge area. The blaze that broke out on Thursday has transformed picturesque rural settlements into ghost towns and left a trail of destruction in Almeria province, home to many foreign residents near the Mediterranean coast.

Sanchez visited the southern municipality of Turre to meet the emergency services as they work

to extinguish the fire, which has scorched about 7,000 hectares of forest and scrubland. "We must not only react when these fires happen, we must prevent" as climate change makes civil protection emergencies "increasingly frequent", Sanchez said. He cited a better protection of municipalities and training courses for young people on how to react.

The leader of Andalusia's regional government, Juanma Moreno, agreed that "we also need the public as a whole to adopt that awareness and self-protection, which is fundamental." Citizens can respond

more quickly to the sighting of smoke, the "suspicious attitudes" of possible arsonists and the warnings of the authorities, Moreno said.

The inferno spread at up to 100 metres per minute at its peak last week, trapping victims in their vehicles or on foot as they tried to flee. The authorities have spoken of the possibility that some victims did not heed warnings in time. The authorities have cautioned that the number of missing people remains uncertain until autopsies and the identification of bodies are completed. — AFP

Macron urges Europe to defend freedom at all costs

FRENCH

PRESIDENT Emmanuel Macron on Monday said Europe was ready to defend itself and freedom with "blood" if necessary, before a meeting of Ukraine's allies to reaffirm support for Kyiv and step up pressure on Russia. The summit meeting of the Coalition of the Willing — launched by France and the United Kingdom to provide military support to Ukraine after Russia's full-scale attack — will push for a ceasefire and renewed peace talks, the French presidency said on Friday.

At least 25 heads of state, including Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky, will attend the meeting, which comes the day before France's national public holiday Bastille Day. Delivering a traditional speech to the armed forces before the July 14 military parade, Macron said Europe was "in the process of becoming a power" ready to "defend itself". "The message we send to the world is this: Yes, peace is our goal. Yes, we cherish freedom and the rule of law. And yes, we stand ready to fight to defend them. Always, and at the cost of blood if necessary," Macron said.

Zelensky and other leaders are expected to stay for the parade on the Champs Elysees in central Paris, which will highlight support for Ukraine, the presidency said. Macron in his speech also called for more European defence industry partnerships, despite France and Germany last month abandoning a joint fighter jet programme.

Moscow on Monday dismissed the summit as a gathering of leaders who "do not want peace". "This is a coalition of warmongers," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. The summit comes at a "powerful moment of renewed transatlantic convergence and unity", but also of "more favourable developments on the ground" for Kyiv, the Elysee said.

The meeting will "build further on this momentum... to demonstrate that Ukraine's supporters remain firmly committed to standing alongside the Ukrainian people, that there is absolutely no sign of fatigue and



French President Emmanuel Macron gives his address to the armed forces at l'Hotel de Brienne in Paris. — AFP

that Russia cannot count on any such fatigue setting in", an adviser to Macron said.

US President Donald Trump, who has sought to maintain relations with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin while periodically criticising both Moscow and Kyiv, signalled his intention to offer greater support to Ukraine at the June G7 summit in France and the Nato meeting in Türkiye this week. Washington last week also advanced bipartisan legislation targeting countries buying Russian energy — potentially clearing the way for stronger pressure on Moscow. The coalition's leaders are set to focus on cooperation on air and missile defence with Ukraine, including licensed weapons production in the country.

The Multinational Force for Ukraine, which would be deployed once the fighting has ended, is to be officially declared ready at the summit, officials in Paris said and joint military exercises to be scheduled. Launched in February 2025, the coalition has met more than 15 times and in January, in the presence of American envoys, adopted

the Paris Declaration setting out security guarantees to protect Ukraine from a new Russian attack as well as monitoring of an eventual ceasefire.

Washington, which has ruled out any deployment of American ground troops, is not formally part of the coalition but would be involved in ceasefire monitoring. France, Britain and Spain have said they are ready to send troops — something Moscow has warned against, saying any foreign forces would be "legitimate targets".

A ceasefire, however, remains a distant prospect as fighting rages. Ukraine's air defences have come under strain from repeated Russian ballistic missile strikes in recent weeks. Washington this month gave Ukraine permission to build US-designed Patriot air defence systems capable of downing ballistic missiles, but it may be months before they enter production. Zelensky in recent days repeated his plea for allies to send more military aid to help Ukraine fight off the Russian invasion, now well into its fifth year. — AFP

MSF slams Russian destruction of Ukraine's health system

GENEVA: Doctors Without Borders (MSF) on Monday condemned what it called Russia's "deliberate strategy to destroy the healthcare system" in Ukraine, documenting a consistent pattern of attacks throughout the war. Moscow launched its full-scale attack of neighbouring Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

MSF said that between April 2022 and December 2025, it had documented more than 20 attacks on facilities associated with the medical charity. Russia has launched "relentless attacks on healthcare facilities and medical staff in Ukraine", MSF said in a statement. These "appear to constitute a deliberate strategy to destroy the healthcare system and collectively punish the population — rather than being an incidental consequence of Russia's attack", it said.

The World Health Organization recorded 2,815 attacks on healthcare in Ukraine between

the February 2022 Russian attack and the end of 2025, with the vast majority involving violence with heavy weapons, and 2,319 attacks impacting on facilities. The totality of the attacks resulted in 224 deaths and 902 injuries, said the WHO, which records attacks but does not attribute blame.

Meanwhile Ukraine's health ministry says that Russian forces have damaged or destroyed more than 2,500 medical facilities during that same period, with 327 completely destroyed. "These attacks are too consistent, too frequent and too precise to be accidental," Robin Meldrum, MSF's country coordinator in Ukraine, said in the statement. "When hospitals are struck repeatedly, when ambulances are targeted with precision drones, when medical workers are killed whilst en route to delivering medicines in clearly marked vehicles — this is



Firefighters work at the site of a bus parking hit by a Russian drone strike in Odesa. — AFP

no coincidence. "This is a pattern; patterns are driven by intent."

Attacks on medical infrastructure have created a crisis in access to healthcare for people needing non-emergency treatment, or treatment for chronic conditions, MSF said. The medical humanitarian

organisation said this directly translated into suffering and even death from manageable conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and epilepsy.

Healthcare facilities that remain operational are severely understaffed, with the number

of doctors in an MSF-supported hospital in Kherson falling by 66 per cent since 2022. Meanwhile MSF teams in eastern and southern Ukraine are working under the "constant threat" of First-Person View (FPV) drone attacks, which allow operators to identify and strike targets with precision in real time. It said that on September 29 last year, a nurse and a director from an MSF-supported health centre were struck by a Russian FPV drone in Lyman, Donetsk, as they delivered medicines in a clearly marked vehicle.

The non-governmental organisation said its medical staff near the front line were witnessing how drone warfare is rapidly outpacing the medical response. "Whereas injuries were once predominantly caused by artillery, drone strikes now account for a growing proportion of trauma cases," it said. — AFP

OPINION

A bridge of knowledge between Oman and Germany



DR NAJMA
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As I gear up to go back to Berlin for the second half of my fellowship at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) research centre to further explore Omani national identity and social media, I reflect on how the German Embassy in Muscat, under the leadership of Ambassador Dirk Lölke, has helped shape the connections between Germany and Oman. Over the past three years, the embassy's work has demonstrated that diplomacy can be built through steady knowledge exchange: meaningful conversations, supporting scholarship, and cultural engagements. From the onset of Ambassador Lölke's tenure, this approach was visible in literary and intellectual initiatives. At the 2025 Muscat International Book Fair, the embassy supported dialogue with Omani authors and thinkers, featuring Dr Jokha al Harthy. These engagements, which the embassy planned to repeat in 2026, may appear modest, but they elevate Omani literature and establish a practical model of cultural diplomacy in which substance and collaboration come first. The same orientation has guided the embassy's support for academic scholarship. The ambassador's residence became a welcoming venue for German researchers presenting work on Omani history, archaeology, and society. These gatherings brought academics, diplomats, students, and members of the public into the same room, allowing local knowledge and international perspectives to

test one another constructively. For those of us working at the intersection of language, culture, and society, this mattered: rigorous exchange requires hospitable settings, and the embassy consistently provided them. Institutional linkages reinforced these efforts. My own collaborations with researchers affiliated with ZMO sit within a broader ecosystem of German-Omani cooperation that the embassy helped to convene and sustain. When an embassy acts as a connector — introducing scholars, supporting projects, and returning attention to evidence — it influences which questions are pursued, who participates, and how findings circulate to wider audiences. The result is not a single event but a durable network that carries ideas forward. Recent activities published on the embassy's Instagram illustrate how this works in practice. On June 29, Ambassador Lölke met with Munira al Balushi, representing the German-Omani alumni club, to explore ways to deepen cooperation with Omani alumni. Alumni networks turn shared study into concrete partnerships — mentorships, internships, and collaborative initiatives — bridging education and public life. In the cultural sphere, a visit to the Omani Cultural Club advanced cooperation in literature and culture, aligning with the embassy's practice of meeting communities where they already gather to read, debate, and create. Even lighter moments, such as community

Strong international relationships are built not only through agreements and communiqués, but through shared knowledge, mutual respect, and the steady work of bringing people together to listen, question, and learn.

gatherings to cheer the German national football team, broaden participation and build familiarity that formal settings alone cannot achieve. These strands — literary engagement, scholarly exchange, institutional cooperation, alumni outreach, student immersion, and public-facing culture — are not isolated projects. Together, they form a coherent method that has characterised Ambassador Lölke's service: create accessible forums, foreground substance, invite diverse participants, and let conversations inform the next step. In a period marked by polarisation and quick judgments, this patience with dialogue has practical consequences. It builds trust, expands the circle of contributors, and leaves behind relationships that endure beyond any one programme or tenure. As Ambassador Lölke prepares to conclude his time in Muscat, his legacy can be read in the relationships and spaces that now sustain dialogue between Oman and Germany. He leaves more than an official record. He leaves a living network of intellectual engagement and cultural exchange that links people, institutions, and communities across both countries. For those of us who have benefited from these initiatives, the lesson is clear: strong international relationships are built not only through agreements and communiqués, but through shared knowledge, mutual respect, and the steady work of bringing people together to listen, question, and learn.

GERMANY’S CAR CRISIS HITS YOUNG ENGINEERS

LOUIS VAN BOXEL-WOOLF

Despite a year of searching, previous stints at big automotive suppliers and sending out about 50 applications, German software engineer Max Peil is still looking for a job. Trained in computer vision, a critical part of autonomous and intelligent driving systems, Peil could once have expected to sail into a role at one of Germany's industrial giants. But years of stagnant growth in Europe's biggest economy and increasingly fierce Chinese competition are now taking their toll on young engineers like Peil. "Usually you just get rejected straight up," the 30-year-old said in the western city of Frankfurt. "I've had one interview. It was the same with my friends, one has sent over 60 applications." Known the world over for cutting-edge technology and innovative design, Germany's car industry, powered by exports, has so far managed to avoid the drastic decline seen in countries like Britain, France and Italy. But Chinese carmakers like BYD and Xpeng have eaten into German carmakers' sales in the world's largest auto market, leading to painful adjustments at home. "Ten years ago we made about six million vehicles a year and we've now stabilised at about four, 4.2 million," transport economist Thomas Puls of the IW economic institute in Cologne said. "That's good compared to other European countries, but we now need to accept that the golden age is not coming back." In a sign of the times, workers protested at Volkswagen sites across the country over reports that Germany's biggest carmaker is mulling up to 100,000 job cuts. Total employment in the German automotive sector fell eight per cent in the five years to 2025, according to Federal Employment Agency (FEA) data, even as it grew a little over one per cent overall. German industry as a whole is struggling against what some have dubbed the "China Shock 2.0" as the country's firms shift away from low-value production and into making more high-tech goods, often at lower prices. This is pushing German companies out of once-reliable export markets. — AFP

The missing pillar of student wellness

UNIVERSITIES

have long been recognised as spaces that shape not only knowledge and professional identity but also lifelong habits. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to student mental health, with many institutions investing in counselling services and psychological support. While this shift is both necessary and commendable, it has unintentionally overshadowed another equally critical dimension of student well-being: physical health. Today's university students are facing a silent but growing challenge. Sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary habits, irregular sleep patterns, and high academic demands are contributing to early risk factors for non-communicable diseases. These patterns are not unique to one region; they are global. However, in rapidly developing countries, where lifestyle transitions have been swift, the impact may be even more pronounced. Despite this, physical health promotion within universities remains fragmented and often optional. Access to gym facilities, occasional awareness campaigns, or elective sports activities are commonly offered, but these efforts are rarely integrated into a structured, accessible, and student-centred system. As a result, many students graduate without adopting sustainable health behaviours, entering the workforce already at risk of chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. This gap highlights a critical need to rethink how universities approach student well-being. Rather



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In moving forward, universities must ask a critical question: Are we preparing students solely for exams and careers, or are we equipping them with the foundations for a healthy and sustainable life?

than focusing primarily on reactive services, institutions must transition towards a proactive, preventive model, one that integrates physical health promotion as a core component of student support systems. This is where the concept of comprehensive university wellness centres becomes essential. The university wellness centre should go beyond the traditional perception of a gym or fitness space. It should function as a multidisciplinary hub that promotes holistic well-being through accessible and evidence-based services. Such a centre could include structured physical activity programmes tailored to varying fitness levels, nutritional counselling, routine health screenings (such as body mass index, blood pressure, and glucose levels), and health education initiatives that empower students to make informed lifestyle choices. Importantly, these services should not operate in isolation. Integration is key. Wellness initiatives must be embedded within the academic environment, supported by faculty, and aligned with institutional priorities. For example, incorporating health promotion into orientation programmes, linking physical activity to student engagement initiatives, and providing flexible access to wellness services can significantly enhance participation. The benefits of such an approach extend far beyond individual health outcomes. There is growing evidence that physically active students demonstrate improved concentration, reduced stress levels, and better academic performance.

Moreover, universities that prioritise health promotion contribute to shaping a future workforce that is not only professionally competent but also physically resilient and health-conscious. This shift carries broader global significance, as many countries are increasingly prioritising preventive healthcare, population well-being and sustainable development. Universities, as key societal institutions, are uniquely positioned to support these goals. By embedding physical health promotion into campus life, they can play a pivotal role in reducing the long-term burden of non-communicable diseases and fostering a culture of health among young adults. Despite the clear benefits, implementing comprehensive university wellness centres may face several challenges. Limited financial resources, competing institutional priorities, shortages of qualified personnel, and low student engagement can hinder successful implementation. In addition, integrating wellness services across different university departments may require substantial coordination and long-term commitment. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Through strong leadership, phased implementation, strategic partnerships, effective awareness campaigns, and continuous evaluation, universities can successfully overcome these barriers and establish sustainable wellness initiatives that deliver lasting benefits for students and the broader community.

Summer camps for adults: Rediscovering creativity & joy



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

SUMMERS IN OMAN are about late sunsets and early sunrises. We unknowingly smile when the Arabian Sea sends out its breeze. It is a time when people look forward to staying indoors, whether for work or leisure. We learn to appreciate trees, and every inch of shade matters, especially when looking for a place to park.

This is the time when the suggestion to park farther away to increase your daily steps is unlikely to be heeded.

But then I witnessed a sight that caught my attention. I was enjoying the comfort of an air-conditioned café when my eyes fell upon a gentleman who had chosen to sit outside, seemingly unfazed by the blazing midday sun. He was under the shade, of course, but he had opted to enjoy the natural breeze. When he came back indoors, he did not look one bit bothered by the summer heat. Some people adapt with ease, while others break into a profuse sweat.

Look at children — nothing can stop them from running around, no matter what time of the day it is, unless, of course, they are tired and have run out of energy.

Summer is their season. The world over, summer belongs to children. Schools are

closed, and they are full of boundless energy.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the Summer Arts Workshops offered by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. The energy was infectious, and so were the participants' creative expressions. It made me wonder: why are summer camps only for school students? Why not for adults as well? Everyone needs an opportunity to unwind.

Of course, many parents use the summer holidays to take their children on vacation. But it is still not quite like the experience of a summer camp. Children begin the day among unfamiliar faces, only to end it having made new friends and eagerly looking forward to the next day.

You might say that children do not have responsibilities or bills to pay. As adults, however, we are often afraid of being judged. We become more focused on fitting in than standing out, and before we know it, we lose the natural flow of our creativity.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if companies and organisations planned short summer camps — perhaps lasting a day or two — as retreats that reconnect adults with the child within them?

Children are adaptable and possess an incredible ability to bounce back, perhaps because they are mentally and physically

Perhaps it's time for companies and organisations to embrace one-or two-day summer camp retreats —creating spaces where adults can recharge and reconnect with their inner child

agile. It is nature's way of shaping them. That is why parents and teachers have such important roles. The summer programmes organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth deserve appreciation, and the opportunities they offer should be recognised and fully utilised.

Summer also makes us crave water, fresh lime juice, and iced tea — anything to quench our thirst. One often feels even thirstier while on the road. Takeaway drinks may save time, but disposing of used cups and cans properly requires patience and discipline.

One of my pet peeves is finding empty cups and cans scattered across parking areas. When they are left in residential parking lots, or at times in front of someone else's home, they reflect a lack of civic sense.

Respect for others extends to respecting shared spaces. Come to think of it, why should anyone expect someone else to clean up after them? If everyone begins littering parking areas, we will soon find ourselves walking through rubbish.

Perhaps we all need to make a conscious effort to be more aware of our actions and the impact they have on society. Maybe we all need a summer camp — and a refreshing course to revisit the basics.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE SHADOWS BANGLADESH'S NEW GOVT

SHEIKH SABIHA ALAM

Bangladesh's new government won power promising to end political violence, but six months after Prime Minister Tarique Rahman took office, the killings continue.

Rahman, who leads the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), pledged during February's elections to end the state-backed violence that marked Sheikh Hasina's rule before her ouster in the 2024 revolution.

Rights groups say political rivalries, weak law enforcement and a culture of impunity are driving continued violence after the elections brought Bangladesh's first elected government to power since the uprising.

Prominent rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) recorded at least 66 politically related killings, along with 61 deaths in police custody, 11 extrajudicial killings and other alleged human rights abuses over the last six months.

"Deaths in jail and police custody appear to be rising," ASK senior official Abu Ahmed Faijul Kabir said.

The government disputes that. It insists the situation is improving and argues that the increase in reported killings reflects historic cases because surviving relatives only now feel secure enough to report them to police.

"After the current government assumed office, we are in a historically improved position on most indicators," Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed told parliament in late June.

Others tell a different story. In June, 17-year-old Mohammed Suman joined a rally held by Hasina's Awami League.

The rally was banned — Hasina is a convicted fugitive hiding in neighbouring India and facing a death sentence in absentia — and Suman vanished. Three days later, police recovered the teenager's rotting corpse from the Turag River in Dhaka, along with the bodies of two others.

"We were not even aware that Suman was involved in politics," his uncle Jewel Babu said, saying he was a hardworking teenager who worked night shifts at a kitchen market while studying for school. Suman's family said they pieced together what happened from friends, who said police and a mob broke up a flash Awami League rally, forcing them to flee by boat across the river.

"We have heard that, after being chased by local BNP leaders, they crossed the river only to encounter police," said Supreme Court lawyer Arif Sarkar Pavel, who is representing seven men arrested during the same incident and held under anti-terrorism laws.

"Some people also beat them with bamboo sticks after they jumped into the river," he added. "Police are trying to bury the truth."

Police have denied accusations of brutality and said that there was "no incident" of killing.

Police spokesman AHM Shahadat Hossain said authorities were investigating all reported incidents of violence. — AFP

An Athenian view of American democracy

ON THE HEELS of America's 250th anniversary, I felt the curious need to resist my usual penchant for economic and geopolitical analyses of claims made for or against the United States. Instead, I surrendered to an emotional, personal, indeed an Athenian, take on the global hegemon whose development and actions have shaped us all.

My earliest memory of America as a factor in my life harks back to a hot afternoon in early June 1968. A little more than a year after a CIA-backed coup had placed Greece under a fascist dictatorship, my mother and I were strolling outside the revamped ancient stadium where the first modern Olympic Games had been held in 1896. A newsboy suddenly broke the calm, announcing, at the top of his voice, that some American was dead. My mother's eyes filled with tears. "He was our last chance," she said.

The dead American was Robert F Kennedy, on whom my mother had, rightly or wrongly, pinned many hopes, not only for our liberation here in Greece but also for world peace. It would be my crash course in America's significance to us all, as well as to its internal contradictions.

There had, of course, been previous news flashes of soul-crushing American murders, particularly those of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. And in the years that followed, the news featured daily horrors from Vietnam and the intricacies of Watergate. Yet these were balanced by the poignant, nuanced, and aesthetically sophisticated American critiques of it all.

CRIMINAL INSANITY

Is there a better way to grasp the criminal insanity of the Vietnam War than Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now? Or a better exposé of endemic corruption in California than Roman Polanski's Chinatown? Or of Watergate than Alan Pakula's All the President's Men? Or a better depiction of the CIA's weaponisation than Sydney Pollack's Three Days of the Condor? Or a better portrayal of the country's dangerous underside than Coppola's The Godfather or



YANIS VAROUFAKIS

The author is a former finance minister of Greece and Professor of Economics at the University of Athens

Financialisation and, more recently, the rise of cloud capital, Big Tech, and AI, are solidifying the schism within American society that eventually begat Donald Trump's presidency. Consequently, America is now producing mindless, raw power and exponentially

Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver? As I got older and began to read difficult books, it was American authors that opened windows from which I could glimpse America's exhilarating vistas of contradiction. Thorstein Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class gave me a better understanding of American capitalism than any economics text, conventional or polemical.

John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath impressed upon me the dreadfulness of the Great Depression, and an appreciation of the subsequent New Deal, in ways that no economist ever matched.

Turning to music, rock 'n' roll was my gateway into rhythm and blues, which was my tutor into what American freedom — or lack thereof — was all about. Could there be a better summary of how Hegel's dialectical concept of freedom was fused into the American South than the line from that splendid blues song originally performed by Ray Charles and later by Solomon Burke, "None of us are free, if one of us are chained"? Years later, the sculptures of Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, helped me realise the importance of manufacturing in fashioning America's cultural imprint. It was there that I first recognised how the artefacts of American industry — the unadorned facticity of its industrial materials — had shaped our understanding of our surroundings and the interplay of light and volume, even here in Europe.

CREATIVE INTROSPECTION

Those were the times when a communal creative introspection swept across America, redolent of the possibility of catharsis. As Aristotle explained in his Poetics, tragedy was never about entertainment; it was a civic courtroom.

This is what America's authors, musicians, and film-makers were doing: they were putting their deepest anxieties on trial. They recognised that authentic tragic heroes — such as Oedipus, Antigone, and Prometheus — are not inherently good or bad; like most Americans, they acted according to their own profound sense of justice, to a "truth" they felt bound to uphold.

Their tragedy was that the universe, or more likely the polis, turned their actions into opposing, crushing forces. Through witnessing the resulting suffering, the audience's own pent-up pity and terrors are purified and drained away. That is the moment of catharsis that America, in the end, was denied.

What robbed Americans of their catharsis was the economy's violent switch from surplus producer to deficit generator, symbolised by the Nixon Shock of 1971, which killed the Bretton Woods system. By the 1980s, the films and books I loved were replaced with paragons of crass jingoism like Rambo, Top Gun, and Francis Fukuyama's The End of History.

Of course, the capacity for self-reflection was not entirely lost. America's cathartic moment was snuffed out because its elites succeeded in turning US deficits into a source of immense, uncouth strength. As foreign capital enthusiastically poured profits and rents into New York City, Oliver Stone's Wall Street captured the resulting rise of the Gordon Gekkos.

Stone's film came at the start of an era in which the stability of American power has been accompanied by steadily expanding economic precarity — a process that has impoverished many in the US and the rest of the West while enabling owners of substantial dollar-denominated capital to become fabulously wealthy. For more than four decades, a global class war has been waged against working people everywhere, and in the US in particular, preventing a purifying resolution of America's tragedy.

QUITE THE CONTRARY.

Financialisation and, more recently, the rise of cloud capital, Big Tech, and AI, are solidifying the schism within American society that eventually begat Donald Trump's presidency. Consequently, America is now producing mindless, raw power and exponentially growing instability. The possibility of catharsis that characterised America at its bicentennial is hard to envisage a half-century later — to the detriment of us all.

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FIFA President Gianni Infantino. — AFP

NEXT WORLD CUP COULD FEATURE

64

TEAMS

ANY further expansion of the World Cup, increasing the number of teams participating at the finals to 64, will be discussed after this year's edition, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said without providing any details.

The 2026 finals in Canada, Mexico, and the United States have seen 48 teams for the first time, a decision that was heavily criticised but which has not provoked much debate since the tournament kicked off on June 11.

"These are all issues that we will be examining after the World Cup," Infantino, who successfully pushed for the expansion of the finals from 32 teams, told Swiss television outlet Blue Sport.

He did not elaborate, saying only: "I think it is important that when you want to organise a World Cup, you do it for the whole world - not just Europe and South America, but effectively the entire world."

"Every nation should be allowed to dream of participating in the World Cup. You can see that the quality of the teams is extremely high and it's getting higher and higher, all over the world."

"If you don't give smaller countries a chance to participate in the World Cup, they'll lack the

incentive to keep improving."

Infantino hailed the 48-team tournament as a success, saying: "Every team played at a high level. Teams from every continent scored goals and earned at least one point."

"Nine out of 10 African teams reached the knockout stage. At the last World Cup, there were only five teams from Africa. That just goes to show how important it is to include all teams, to give them this opportunity to participate," he added.

The size of the World Cup field was increased to 32 teams in 1998. The next finals in 2030 are to be co-hosted by Morocco, Portugal and Spain, and the 2034 tournament will be in Saudi Arabia.

INFANTINO DEFENDS HYDRATION BREAKS AND TICKET PRICES

Infantino, who rarely gives media interviews and has limited his number of formal press conferences, admitted that introducing hydration breaks during each half, which many have seen as a cynical attempt to help television partners get more advertising revenue, had proved controversial.

"This is a topic that sparks a lot of debate. After all, we don't want to get everything perfect; we like

to give everyone something to disagree with... no, joking aside. Last year, during the Club World Cup in the USA, there were cooling breaks whenever it was very hot.

"These short breaks occurred in about 60% of the matches but not in the other 40% because the temperature wasn't as high."

There were many complaints, as the feeling was that all teams should face the same conditions," he said.

He also defended the high ticket prices at the World Cup, saying: "The stadiums are full; capacity utilisation is at 99.7% and it will likely reach 99.9% by the end."

"Experts determined the ticket prices before the tournament. Our experts worked on that and told us: 'These are the prices you can go with'."

We see the proof now: prices that some people claimed were too high are being resold on the secondary market - which is perfectly legal here - for four or five times the original cost."

Infantino said he expected FIFA to generate a total of 13 to 14 billion Swiss francs (\$16.08 billion to \$17.32 billion) from the 39-day World Cup. "That is quite satisfactory," he said.

(\$1 = 0.8084 Swiss francs)

(Writing by Mark Gleeson in Atlanta; Editing by Clare Fallon)



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



SHORT TAKES



Belgium's goalkeeper #01 Thibaut Courtois. — AFP

GARCIA'S TENURE
IN DOUBT AFTER
COURTOIS
SUBSTITUTION

ATLANTA: Belgium coach Rudi Garcia came under a barrage of fire for replacing first-choice goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois in Friday's World Cup quarterfinal loss to Spain, adding to questions about his future.

Courtois felt he could continue despite a twinge in his leg, but Garcia insisted he come off as he was not 100 per cent fit. Senne Lammens went on as his replacement after 71 minutes but spilt a low strike by Pau Cubarsi, allowing Spain substitute Mikel Merino to pounce in the 86th minute and secure a 2-1 victory on Friday.

Garcia's insistence on taking off Courtois attracted the ire of Belgian analysts, like commentator Peter Vandenbempt.

"You substitute the best goalkeeper in the world during a World Cup quarterfinal because he can no longer kick long balls... astonishing! I simply cannot fathom it," he said on Belgian radio.

"The only explanation is that Garcia clings to rigid principles. Not 100 per cent fit? Then you're out. But surely someone like Courtois knows what he is and isn't capable of?"

Garcia, however, explained his philosophy clearly.

"Since the start of the World Cup, I've said that only players who are 100% physically fit are allowed to play. That applies to Thibaut as well. We needed his long balls - first to Charles (De Ketelaere), then to Romelu (Lukaku). We didn't want Thibaut's injury to get worse. So, I have no regrets about the decision to substitute him."

Garcia's decision is sure to be among the issues discussed when his contract is reviewed before the end of the month, when his deal expires.

The 62-year-old Frenchman, who won the Ligue 1 title with Lille in 2011, was appointed at the start of 2025 and tasked with breathing new life into the team after the tenure of Domenico Tedesco, which was described as toxic and soulless.

GARCIA ACHIEVED HIS OBJECTIVES

Staying in the top tier of the Nations League was Garcia's first task, successfully achieved as was World Cup qualification. The target of reaching the last eight was also a tick behind the coach's name.

Garcia's record in 20 internationals is 12 wins, six draws and two defeats.

Belgian federation officials will have to decide, however, whether Garcia is the right man to continue as they look to create a side to contend for the 2028 European Championship.

There have been many questions about his tactics, substitutions and management style and the disappointment of the narrow loss to Spain did not help his cause. Belgium had an inconsistent World Cup, scrambling more than once to advance to the last eight, drawing with Egypt and Iran before beating New Zealand to top their group. They pulled off a narrow escape against Senegal in the last 32 where Garcia had taken off his leading players with the team 2-0 down, but whether his substitutions, or Senegal's defensive howlers, contributed to their comeback is debatable.

He can also point to highlights, however, like their 4-1 demolition of co-hosts the US and the introduction of players like Nathan Ngoy and Nicolas Raskin who enjoyed impressive tournaments.

— Reuters

ARGENTINA
ARE
BUILT
TO
SUFFER

ARGENTINA

coach
Lionel
Scaloni
said their
3-1 extra-

time victory over Switzerland in the World Cup quarterfinals on Saturday was further proof that his team have grown comfortable operating in challenging situations.

Forced to come from two goals down in their improbable 3-2 round-of-16 win over Egypt, and then pushed to the limit again by a relentless Swiss side, Scaloni's men found answers when the pressure was at its greatest, scoring twice deep in extra time to reach the last four.

For Scaloni, the ability to suffer without losing belief has become one of the defining characteristics of this Argentina squad.

"We knew that we were going to suffer, and this is part of our blood, this is part of our DNA, and this brings peace of mind," the coach said. Argentina's path through the tournament has been far from straightforward. They twice squandered leads to Cape Verde before grinding out a 3-2 victory in the round of 32, and then were 2-0 down to Egypt until the 79th minute before their comeback.

Scaloni believes the experience of Qatar 2022, where they captured the title with a penalty shootout victory over France, has helped his players navigate those difficult moments.

"In Qatar, we were not that experienced, I myself included, and those kind of situations were very difficult," he said.

"However, now we are more experienced because we know what it feels like to be dominated by the opponent, to concede an equaliser, so today we kept our composure. The team knew how to remain calm and, of course, we will never give up."

Switzerland looked capable of derailing Argentina's campaign after they equalised in the 67th minute, but Julian Alvarez and Lautaro Martinez scored deep in extra time to secure the dramatic victory.

"It was a tough opponent," Scaloni said. "It was very difficult for us to win the duels, to put more than five or six passes together. "They were very strong,

and they made that struggle in the one versus one in different areas of the pitch. We suffered quite a lot."

Yet even on a day when Argentina were below their best, Scaloni felt his squad's depth and collective belief carried them through.

"We also have players on the bench who can turn the game on its head, and this is something very good," he said. "Ultimately, we always find the solutions."

The coach repeatedly returned to the theme of unity in his post-game press conference, crediting a group that has bought into his vision during six demanding weeks together at the tournament. "This is thanks to the players because they had to trust in the process," he said. "We are a collective side.

We are together. We are very much united. And this is proof that football is complicated."

Scaloni also highlighted Argentina's improvement on set pieces after midfielder Alexis Mac Allister headed home their opening goal from a Lionel Messi corner.

"Alexis McAllister is one of the greatest. So all praise to him because he's been working very hard," Scaloni said.

The reward for Argentina is a sixth semi-final appearance in their last six major tournaments.

"I hadn't thought about it, but this is something to be very proud of," he said. If Argentina do lift the trophy again, this campaign may be remembered less for flowing football than for the stubborn resilience that has carried them through

"When you reach a semi-final, you need to suffer," Scaloni said. "You need to go through it."

— Reuters





BELLINGHAM SHINES DESPITE TUCHEL SPAT



England's
midfielder
#10 Jude
Bellingham.
— AFP

THERE

WAS a brief moment of tension in the aftermath of England's 2-1 World Cup quarterfinal win over Norway on Saturday when Jude Bellingham pushed back against criticism from manager Thomas Tuchel. "Yeah, well, whatever," the midfielder said after learning that Tuchel had described England's performance as "sloppy" despite their extra-time victory.

Bellingham, whose two goals sent England into the semifinals, was quick to defend his team mates after another gruelling evening in punishing conditions.

The exchange offered a glimpse of the differing perspectives of a demanding coach unwilling to overlook flaws in England's display and a star player focused on the resilience that carried the team into the last four.

Tuchel surprised many with his blunt assessment after England battled past Norway in sweltering Miami conditions. While delighted to reach the semifinals and full of praise for the players' mentality, the German said he was unhappy with almost every aspect of the performance.

"The result is fantastic. We are in the last four. It's

amazing but I'm not happy with the performance," Tuchel said, describing England as sloppy, error-prone and fortunate to progress.

Bellingham, however, viewed events through a different lens.

The Real Madrid midfielder pointed to the draining heat and the quality of Norway's attacking threat, led by Erling Haaland and Martin Odegaard, suggesting the task had been tougher than Tuchel's post-match verdict implied.

"Maybe he doesn't know what it's like to play in those conditions against Erling Haaland, Odegaard, (Antonio) Nusa, (Alexander) Sorloth," Bellingham told reporters. "That's not an easy team to play against."

It is not the first time friction between the pair has become public.

Tuchel caused controversy just over a year ago when he described elements of Bellingham's on-field behaviour as potentially "repulsive" to some viewers while discussing the player's fiery temperament.

The England manager later apologised, insisting the word had been used unintentionally and that there was no hidden criticism of the midfielder.

Questions also surfaced before the World Cup over Bellingham's role after Tuchel suggested places in his

starting lineup were not guaranteed, even for England's biggest names.

Yet any debate over Bellingham's importance has been emphatically settled on the pitch, as England would not be preparing for a semifinal were it not for the 23-year-old.

He has repeatedly delivered in decisive moments, rescuing his side with two goals against both Norway and Mexico, and producing the kind of performances that have underlined his status as one of the tournament's outstanding players.

And Tuchel, despite his frustration with England's overall display, was unequivocal in his praise of Bellingham after the match.

"Enough said. He does it every single match," the coach said. "World class."

England's World Cup campaign continues with a heavyweight semifinal against champions Argentina on Wednesday in Atlanta.

Successful tournament teams do not always need perfect harmony. They do, however, need players capable of deciding matches when everything else breaks down.

England have one in Bellingham, and as they move into the final four, that will matter more than any disagreement with his manager. — Reuters

At 34, Burn emerges as England's unlikely warrior

KANSAS CITY: The bicycle kick seemed destined for the corner of the net, one last desperate swing from a Mexico side roared on by nearly 90,000 fans at the Azteca Stadium. Instead, a towering figure in white rose above the chaos and headed the ball clear.

Six days later, with England clinging to a lead deep in their 2-1 extra-time quarterfinal win against Norway, Dan Burn hurled himself into Leo Ostigard to meet another high ball, sending it to safety with a ferocious header before stepping over the Norwegian defender and roaring towards the crowd.

In those two moments, the 34-year-old centre back announced himself on the World Cup stage.

Burn had been on the pitch only minutes when he was thrown into the heat of England's last-16 clash with Mexico after Thomas Tuchel's side were reduced to 10 men. By

the end of the night he had become a symbol of resistance, repelling Mexico's aerial bombardment as England hung on for a dramatic 3-2 victory.

He carried that same bruising, uncompromising presence into Saturday's win over Norway, helping England to see out a tense extra-time battle and book a place in the semifinals.

Through two games, he has nine clearances and two blocks.

Most World Cup stories begin with wonderkids. Burn's began with rejection.

Released by Newcastle United as a boy, he rebuilt his career through football's back roads, playing for Darlington in the lower divisions before earning opportunities at Fulham, Wigan Athletic and Brighton & Hove Albion.

By the time he returned to his boyhood club Newcastle in 2022,



England's Dan Burn (L). — Reuters

few would have imagined England recognition still awaited him.

Fewer still would have predicted that his first World Cup would arrive at 34.

"If you'd asked us when I was out at Darlington in the Conference and League Two whether I'd be here, I probably would have said no," Burn said after arriving in North America

with Tuchel's squad. "Especially at this age."

RESILIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Yet Burn's age has become part of his appeal. In a sport obsessed with youth, the 6-foot-7 (2.01-metre) centre back represents something different: resilience, persistence and the possibility that careers do not always follow a straight line.

He spent much of the tournament's opening weeks embracing an experience he had once only watched from afar. Burn recalled the 2002 World Cup as one of his earliest football memories and said simply being part of England's squad felt surreal.

He spoke about celebrating victories with supporters, singing Oasis hit "Wonderwall" after England's opening win over Croatia and trying to savour every moment of his first major tournament.

Then came Mexico.

England led 3-2 but were hanging on after Jarell Quansah's red card. And while many supporters may have raised an eyebrow when Tuchel turned to Burn, he trusted the defender to help preserve the advantage in one of world football's most intimidating arenas.

Burn responded with a commanding cameo, winning aerial duels, clearing danger and helping England to survive a barrage of late pressure.

Burn's no-nonsense defending has also turned him into an unlikely social media cult hero. One supporter suggested on X that Burn should have his own dramatic walk-on music complete with light show when he enters a game.

At 34 years and 58 days, he became the fourth-oldest player ever to make a World Cup debut for the England team.

— Reuters

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,616.849

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$72.11
BRENT \$78.56
LIGHT \$73.91



SHORT TAKES



Food and non-alcoholic beverages recorded the largest annual increase among the main consumer price index groups, rising 6.1 per cent compared with June 2025.

FOOD PRICES LIFT OMAN INFLATION TO 2.8 PER CENT

MUSCAT: Inflation in the Sultanate of Oman accelerated to 2.8 per cent in June from a year earlier, driven mainly by higher food, transport and services costs, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Average inflation during the first six months of 2026 also stood at 2.8 per cent.

Food and non-alcoholic beverages recorded the largest annual increase among the main consumer price index groups, rising by 6.1 per cent compared with June 2025.

Miscellaneous goods and services increased by 5.7 per cent, followed by transport at 5.5 per cent, restaurants and hotels at 4.6 per cent and furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance at 3.1 per cent.

Education prices rose by 2.2 per cent, while healthcare costs increased by 1.8 per cent. Recreation and culture recorded a marginal rise of 0.3 per cent.

Prices for communications, tobacco, clothing and footwear were unchanged from a year earlier, while housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels fell 0.6 per cent.

Within the food category, vegetable prices recorded the sharpest increase, rising by 23.6 per cent year on year, followed by fruit at 9.9 per cent and meat at 7.3 per cent.

Prices of non-alcoholic beverages increased 3.6 per cent, while milk, cheese and eggs rose by 2.9 per cent. Sugar, jam, honey and confectionery prices climbed 2.2 per cent, other food products increased 2 per cent, bread and cereals rose 0.9 per cent and oils and fats edged up 0.5 per cent.

Fish prices were the only major food category to decline, falling 1.7 per cent compared with June 2025. Among the governorates, Al Dhahirah recorded the highest annual inflation rate at 3.5 per cent, followed by Muscat at 3.2 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah at 3.1 per cent, Al Wusta at 3.0 per cent and Al Buraimi at 2.9 per cent.

Inflation reached 2.4 per cent in Musandam and Al Batinah South, 2.2 per cent in Dhofar and 2.1 per cent in both Al Batinah North and Al Sharqiyah South. Al Sharqiyah North recorded the lowest inflation rate at 1.9 per cent. — ONA

RO4.3 billion investment plan to reshape Salalah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 13

THE final Greater Salalah Structure Plan has outlined an estimated RO 4.3 billion investment programme through Oman Vision 2040, identifying 261 proposed interventions to support the city's long-term economic, urban and infrastructure development.

Presented on Monday, July 13, during a workshop on the final general framework of the plan, the programme comprises 114 proposed capital projects and 147 technical assessments covering transport, infrastructure, economic diversification, environmental resilience and strategic urban development.

Capital projects account for an estimated RO 4.26 billion, while technical studies and assessments represent approximately RO 59 million. The figures are planning estimates presented under the structure plan and do not constitute approved government expenditure or confirmed investment commitments.

Individual initiatives would remain subject to detailed planning, financing, procurement, regulatory approvals and implementation decisions.

The proposed financing model assumes an almost equal public-private split, with around RO 2.17 billion, or 51 per cent, expected from public investment and approximately RO 2.15 billion, or 49 per cent, from private capital.

The framework proposes implementing the programme in three phases between 2026 and 2040. The first phase, covering 2026–2030, carries an estimated investment requirement of around RO 1.40 billion and focuses on enabling infrastructure and priority development initiatives.

Indicative projects include public transport schemes, renewable-energy facilities, desalination and wastewater infrastructure, waste-to-energy, healthcare and education facilities, tourism clusters, logistics-related studies and



Presented during a workshop the programme comprises 114 proposed capital projects and 147 technical assessments.

Infrastructure systems account for around RO 1.34 billion, while sustainability and climate-related measures are estimated at approximately RO 469 million. Transport initiatives account for about RO 344 million, with further proposed investment in heritage, natural-resource management and programmes supporting economic growth.

coastal-resilience measures.

The second phase, from 2031 to 2035, is estimated at approximately RO 1.25 billion, while the final phase, covering 2036–2040, accounts for around RO 1.65 billion.

Initiatives indicated across the later phases include heritage development, additional healthcare and education facilities, a convention centre and a proposed home-port project.

Strategic spatial development receives the largest proposed allocation at approximately RO 1.89 billion, or about 44 per cent of the overall investment requirement.

Infrastructure systems account for around RO 1.34 billion, while sustainability and climate-related measures are estimated at approximately RO 469 million. Transport initiatives account for about RO 344 million, with further proposed investment in heritage, natural-resource management and programmes supporting economic growth.

The framework also identifies six priority investment locations: the Airport City Logistics Hub, Port and Free Zone, Raysut Pharmaceutical Precinct, Innovation District, Civic Precinct and Taqa Heritage Quarter.

These locations are intended to support activity across logistics, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, research, public services, tourism and heritage-led regeneration.

Planning scenarios presented during the workshop project Greater Salalah's population rising from around 378,500 in 2024 to nearly 613,000 by 2040, while employment could increase from approximately 191,750 to more than 357,000.

The planning model also projects gross domestic product increasing from about RO 3.6 billion to around RO 10 billion over the same period. The figures are scenario-based and would depend on investment delivery, productivity growth, market conditions and private-sector participation.

Eng Aseela al Busaidi, Technical Director of the Greater Salalah Structure Plan at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said the framework brought the city's economy, housing, transport, environment, infrastructure and heritage together within a single spatial system. "We are not dealing with separate projects, but with an integrated system in which every project supports the others and every investment creates added value for its surroundings," Al Busaidi said.

She described the structure plan as an integrated roadmap towards 2040, combining a more diversified economy, a more vibrant city, a more efficient transport network, a more sustainable environment, resilient infrastructure and a firmly rooted cultural identity.

Triple-hub Digital Triangle to anchor Oman's AI ecosystem

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Oman is developing a comprehensive artificial intelligence (AI) ecosystem underpinned by large-scale digital infrastructure, sovereign AI capabilities and innovation platforms, as the Sultanate of Oman positions itself as a regional hub for next-generation technologies.

Speaking on the sidelines of the inaugural UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance held in Geneva recently, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, highlighted Oman's multi-layered approach to advancing AI, including the development of a "digital triangle" designed to support green AI infrastructure.

Dr Al Shaithani said Oman's digital triangle will comprise three digital hubs with gigawatt-scale capacity to host green AI data centres, leveraging the country's strategic connectivity through submarine cable networks and its growing renewable



DR ALI BIN AMER
AL SHAITHANI
Under-Secretary
of the Ministry
of Transport,
Communications
and Information
Technology for
Communications
and Information
Technology

capabilities across the wider technology value chain. At the model layer, the Sultanate of Oman has developed a sovereign national large language model aimed at preserving Oman's language, heritage and culture, while supporting the development of locally relevant AI applications.

energy resources.

"If you look at the infrastructure layer, for example, Oman is developing a digital triangle", he said. "We are developing three digital hubs with gigawatt capacity to host green AI data centres, banking on the richness of the submarine cables that are landing in Oman, as well as the diversity of renewable energy sources".

Beyond infrastructure, Oman is advancing AI

At the application level, Oman has launched an AI Studio, described by Dr Al Shaithani as a "factory for AI ideas", which supports innovators in transforming AI concepts into practical products and solutions.

The country is also establishing an AI economic zone following the issuance of a Royal Decree, creating a dedicated environment to attract entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators to develop AI-based solutions addressing real-world challenges.

"This AI zone will function as a magnet to bring together entrepreneurs, innovators and researchers to build new AI products and solutions to solve real-world problems", Dr Al Shaithani said.

He noted that achieving the full potential of AI requires a balanced approach that combines technological advancement with responsible governance. While infrastructure, models and applications represent the visible elements of AI, he emphasised that governance and trust form the foundation required for sustainable growth.

"When we talk about AI, we often focus on the visible components of AI, like chips, models and applications", he said. "But what's equally important are the invisible components of AI, specifically governance and trust".

Describing governance and trust as the elements that hold the AI ecosystem together, Dr Al Shaithani said: "Governance and trust, although invisible, are the glue that glues together the AI stack." He also stressed that the future development of AI cannot be driven by individual countries alone, highlighting the importance of international collaboration.

In this context, Oman has launched the Green AI Alliance, bringing together government, private sector and academia, both locally and internationally, to develop sustainable AI solutions and create new economic opportunities.

"Governance is mandatory. Trust has to be grounded. Cooperation is essential and AI innovation is inevitable", Dr Al Shaithani said. "These four components have to work together to spread the benefits of AI to the entire humanity".

BUSINESS FEATURE

MAKING CEPA COUNT

WHAT OMAN NEEDS TO DO NEXT

While CEPA will generate significant trade gains for both countries, Oman must take proactive measures to avoid becoming increasingly dependent on Indian food imports and to capitalise on new export opportunities: SQU study



CONRAD PRABHU

RESEARCHERS at the Department of Natural Resource Economics, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) have urged Oman to complement the Oman-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with targeted investments in domestic agriculture, logistics and food supply resilience if the landmark trade pact is to deliver balanced long-term benefits for the Sultanate of Oman.

In a new study titled, ‘Who Gains and How? Agri-Food Trade Outcomes of the Oman-India CEPA’, published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Marine Sciences*, Dr Osman Gulseven, Dr Lokman Zaibet and Dr Ibtisam al Abri conclude that while CEPA will generate significant trade gains for both countries, Oman must take proactive measures to avoid becoming increasingly dependent on Indian food imports and to capitalise on new export opportunities.

Using product-level simulations based on the agreement’s tariff commitments and 2024 trade data, the researchers found that bilateral trade will expand considerably following tariff liberalisation.

However, the benefits are expected to be unevenly distributed.

While Oman’s exports to India are projected to

increase by around \$567 million, these gains remain concentrated in a relatively small number of energy, fertiliser and chemical products.

India, by contrast, is expected to increase exports to Oman by roughly \$657 million across a much broader range of nearly 2,800 product lines, including numerous food products.

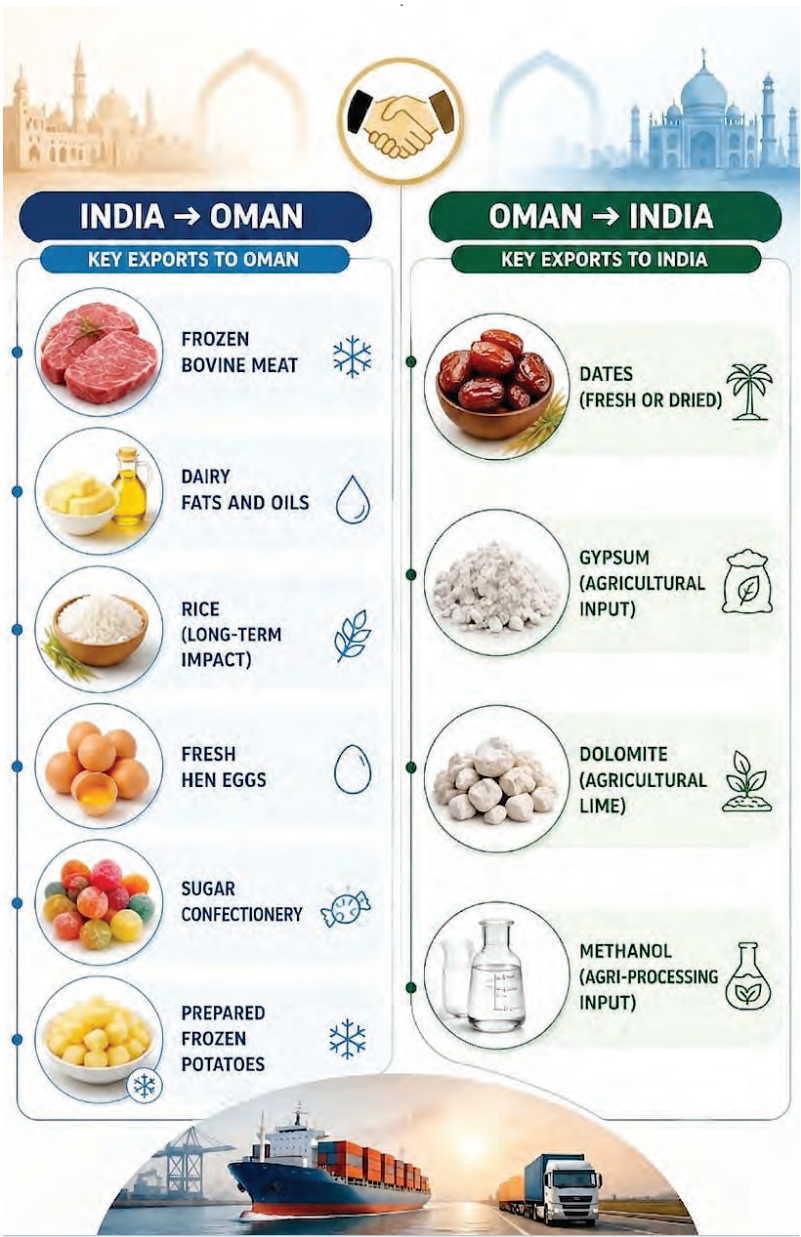
But rather than fundamentally reshaping trade patterns, the agreement is expected to reinforce existing comparative advantages, the paper warns.

For Oman, the study argues, this makes complementary policy interventions essential. Foremost among the recommendations is strengthening domestic agricultural production and supply capacity.

According to the researchers, tariff reductions alone will not enable Omani producers to diversify exports unless they are supported by investments that improve productivity, scale and competitiveness.

The authors also call for greater emphasis on meeting international quality, food safety and phytosanitary standards, enabling Omani producers to take fuller advantage of preferential access to India’s vast consumer market.

At present, dates remain the only food product with significant export growth potential under CEPA, with



Researchers found that bilateral trade will expand considerably following tariff liberalisation.

simulations indicating that duty-free access could substantially boost shipments to India.

Another priority identified in the paper is investment

in logistics infrastructure. Improving cold-chain facilities, storage capacity, transport networks and port logistics would not only strengthen food imports but

also help Omani agricultural producers compete more effectively in export markets, particularly for perishable products. The researchers also recommend closer regulatory cooperation with India, particularly on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, veterinary certification, food labelling and quality assurance.

Such cooperation would reduce non-tariff barriers that frequently constrain agricultural trade even after tariffs have been eliminated, they point out.

PROTEIN PRODUCTS

While CEPA is expected to improve access to protein products, dairy ingredients and processed foods from India, the researchers caution that Oman should guard against excessive concentration of food imports from a single supplier.

Instead of reversing trade liberalisation, they advocate managing concentration risk through supplier diversification, strategic food reserves and stronger resilience planning for critical food commodities.

These measures, they argue, would help protect the Sultanate of Oman against future disruptions to global food supply chains while preserving the benefits of deeper economic integration.

The study notes that CEPA is likely to strengthen India’s position as one of Oman’s principal agri-food suppliers, particularly in products such

as frozen meat, dairy fats, processed foods and eggs.

However, the researchers found little evidence that tariff reductions alone will significantly diversify Oman’s agricultural exports beyond niche products.

“The agreement appears more likely to reinforce existing sourcing patterns than to create a substantially more diversified agri-food trade structure”, the authors observe, arguing that the quality of implementation will ultimately determine whether CEPA contributes to long-term food security and sustainable economic development.

The researchers stress that Oman should view CEPA not simply as a tariff-reduction exercise but as an opportunity to strengthen the country’s food system and export competitiveness.

Strategic investments in agricultural production, logistics, standards compliance and supply-chain resilience would allow the Sultanate of Oman to maximise the agreement’s economic benefits while reducing vulnerabilities associated with rising food import dependence.

Ultimately, they conclude, CEPA’s long-term success for Oman will depend less on tariff preferences themselves than on the complementary domestic policies that enable businesses to exploit new market opportunities and build a more diversified and resilient agri-food sector.

SHORTTAKES



Total electricity generation reached 20,314 gigawatt-hours (GWh) by the end of May, up from 19,027.4 GWh in the corresponding period of 2025.

OMAN POWER
OUTPUT RISES 6.8%

MUSCAT: Electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman rose 6.8 per cent during the first five months of 2026, while water production declined, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Total electricity generation reached 20,314 gigawatt-hours (GWh) by the end of May, up from 19,027.4 GWh in the corresponding period of 2025. Net electricity production, which includes power purchased by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and the Rural Areas Electricity Company, also increased 6.8 per cent to 19,717.5 GWh, compared with 18,457.6 GWh a year earlier.

Meanwhile, total water production fell 3.4 per cent to 201.3 million cubic metres by the end of May.

Muscat Governorate recorded the largest decline, with production falling 6.8 per cent to 78 million cubic metres from 83.7 million cubic metres during the same period of 2025.

In contrast, water production in Dhofar Governorate increased 2.9 per cent to 32.1 million cubic metres, compared with 31.2 million cubic metres a year earlier. — ONA

OMAN CRUDE CLIMBS
ABOVE \$72/BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude for September delivery rose by \$2.82 on Monday to \$72.11 a barrel, up from \$69.29 at the previous trading session, according to official data.

The increase reflects stronger trading in the benchmark used to price the Sultanate of Oman's crude exports. The data also said the average price of Omani crude for July delivery stood at \$102 a barrel, down \$2.73 from the average recorded for June deliveries. — ONA

Vale, SQU study new uses for iron ore by-products

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 13

Vale and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) have completed a two-year research programme that identified potential uses for iron ore by-products in Oman's construction sector, supporting the development of more sustainable industrial and infrastructure projects.

The study comes as Vale advances the Sultanate of Oman's first iron ore concentration plant at SOHAR Port and Freezone, where the company is assessing opportunities to maximise the value of materials generated through future processing activities.

Researchers from SQU's College of Engineering evaluated the suitability of iron ore by-products, known as ore sand, for applications including road construction,

concrete, cement mortars, concrete blocks and interlocking paving units.

The findings showed that the material can be safely incorporated into a range of construction applications while meeting engineering and environmental standards.

Road construction emerged as the most promising application because it can absorb large volumes of the material. The study also found that incorporating iron ore by-products could improve the performance of certain road-building materials, creating opportunities for more efficient road design and construction.

Saleh al Musalhi, Chief Executive of Mega Hubs – Middle East and North Africa at Vale, said that demand for high-grade iron ore



Road construction emerged as the most promising application because it can absorb large volumes of the material.

was increasing as the global steel industry accelerated its transition to lower-carbon steelmaking.

"Our investment in Oman's first iron ore concentration plant is part of Vale's broader strategy to support this transition by supplying high-quality products that help reduce emissions across the steel value chain," he said.

Al Musalhi said the partnership with Sultan Qaboos University also reflected Vale's efforts to identify additional value from iron ore by-products and support a more circular approach to industrial development.

"Through partnerships such as this research with Sultan Qaboos University, we are also exploring innovative ways to unlock additional value from iron ore by-products, supporting a more circular approach

to industrial development while contributing to Oman's long-term economic diversification," he added.

Professor Khalifa al Jabri, Project Lead and Professor of Civil Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University, said the research provided technical evidence on how the materials could be used under Omani conditions.

"What made this project particularly valuable was the opportunity to evaluate these materials within the Omani context and establish a technical foundation that can support future policy and industrial development," he said.

Al Jabri said the project supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by promoting innovation, sustainable industrial development and collaboration between academia and industry.

OIL SURGE

Crude climbs on Gulf tensions



Oil prices rose more than 3 per cent after Iran intensified attacks across Gulf states following US strikes, raising concerns over energy shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

Brent crude climbed to \$78.35 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate reached \$73.62. The escalation also cast doubt on the interim US-Iran agreement aimed at restoring stability to regional oil flows. — Reuters

TRADE GROWTH

Korean exports jump 54 per cent



South Korea's exports surged 53.9 per cent year-on-year in the first 10 days of July to \$29.8 billion, driven by strong overseas demand, according to Korea Customs Service data.

Imports rose 17.4 per cent to \$23.5 billion, resulting in a staggering trade surplus of \$6.4 billion, in the first 10 days of July, compared with the same period last year, Yonhap News Agency reported. — Reuters

GOLD DECLINE

Bullion falls as inflation fears rise



Gold prices on Monday fell more than 1 per cent in Asian trading as rising oil prices fuelled inflation concerns and strengthened expectations of higher US interest rates. Spot gold slipped to \$4,072.78 an ounce, while futures also declined.

Investors are awaiting key US inflation, retail sales and Federal Reserve testimony for signals on the outlook for monetary policy. — Reuters

Nama Water accelerates
Omanisation drive

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 13

NAMA Water Services is stepping up its workforce localisation strategy with a new intake of 303 Omani employees as the state-owned utility moves closer to achieving full Omanisation across its operation and maintenance activities, its top executives said in an interview with *Oman Daily Observer*.

The third phase of Nama's training-for-employment programme will lift Omanisation in its operation and maintenance contracts to more than 90 per cent, while laying the foundation for the company's longer-term objective of reaching 100 per cent national employment in the sector.

Chief Executive Officer Qais bin Saud al Zakwani said the initiative reflects a broader shift in how infrastructure projects are delivered, placing equal emphasis on developing people alongside expanding essential public services.

"Development is not limited to delivering projects. It begins with preparing and empowering people," Al Zakwani said.

"We see our projects as integrated development programmes that strengthen infrastructure while also building national capabilities, supporting the economy and creating lasting value for Omani society."

The latest recruitment round covers permanent positions with supply companies operating water and wastewater facilities across the Sultanate of Oman. More than 300 Omanis will be employed in technical and operational roles distributed across the governorates served by Nama Water Services.

Al Zakwani said assigning employees within their home governorates improves workforce



The programme will lift Omanisation in Nama's operation and maintenance contracts to more than 90 per cent.



**QAIS BIN SAUD
AL ZAKWANI**
CEO, Nama Water
Services



**ENG ABDULLAH
AL NUAIMI**
Operations and
Maintenance Chief
Officer, Nama Water
Services

stability and helps retain skilled professionals in local communities.

"We have aligned employment opportunities with the actual needs of each governorate. This enables beneficiaries to work close to their families and communities while supporting the sustainability of national talent where it is most needed," he said.

Nama's localisation programme has progressed steadily since its launch. Omanisation in targeted operation and maintenance contracts increased to around 55 per cent during the first phase before exceeding 80 per cent in the second.

The third phase is expected to push the figure beyond 90 per cent.

Eng Abdullah al Nuaimi, Operations and Maintenance Chief Officer, said the programme combines recruitment with structured technical preparation to ensure graduates are ready for long-term careers rather than short-term placements.

"We follow a systematic approach," Al Nuaimi said.

"Participants receive technical and administrative training before moving into three months of on-

the-job training. This ensures they are fully prepared before assuming operational responsibilities."

He said Nama also operates a continuous monitoring system to support employees after they join the workforce.

"We closely follow up with every employee, collect regular feedback and take any action required to improve retention and support their continued development within the sector," Al Nuaimi said.

Unlike project-based hiring, the new positions are linked to ongoing operation and maintenance contracts that underpin the country's water and wastewater services. "These are continuous contracts that form part of our daily operations," Al Nuaimi said.

"The jobs therefore become part of the national economy while strengthening the resilience of the sector over the long term."

Nama plans to complete the localisation of its operation and maintenance workforce while improving operational efficiency.

"Our next milestone is achieving 100 per cent Omanisation," Al Nuaimi said.

OPINION

Be careful! AI may use your WhatsApp content



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

A FEW days ago, my friend Fadhil al Rassady, who is passionate about technology and the latest gadgets, called me to share a new AI-related feature on WhatsApp. It immediately caught my attention. I decided to learn more.

The more I read, the more I realised there is a privacy risk many people may not be aware of. Although end-to-end encryption protects our private WhatsApp chats, Meta AI may use our interactions to enhance future AI systems. That was enough to make me review my settings and that is the reason for this week's article.

For years, we have shared photos, messages and ideas online without giving much thought to how our digital content might be used. Today, artificial intelligence is changing that reality.

AI systems become smarter by learning from information, patterns and user interactions. Technology companies continue to improve their AI models to deliver more intelligent, personalised and useful experiences. As AI becomes integrated into almost every application we use, understanding privacy settings is becoming just as important as knowing how to use the technology itself.

Recently, WhatsApp introduced AI-related features that raise important questions about

privacy and content ownership.

The first is Meta AI within WhatsApp. It functions as a virtual assistant that can answer questions, summarise conversations, generate images and help users write or brainstorm ideas.

If you choose to interact with Meta AI, those conversations may be used to improve future AI experiences, depending on your settings and Meta's policies.

Meta states that your regular WhatsApp conversations are not automatically used to train AI and remain protected by end-to-end encryption.

While that provides reassurance today, users should continue reviewing their privacy settings as AI capabilities evolve.

The second relates to AI content creation and sharing. Meta has introduced controls that allow users to manage how content may be used in AI-generated experiences.

As AI becomes increasingly capable of creating realistic images, videos and other digital content, it is important to understand how your online presence and shared content may be reused.

For that, it is important that you review your settings if you wish to know whether your content is open for Meta (the company that owns WhatsApp) to utilise.

1. Update WhatsApp to the latest version.
2. Open Settings.

As AI becomes integrated into almost every application we use, understanding privacy settings is becoming just as important as knowing how to use the technology itself.

3. Review the available Meta AI, privacy, or AI-related options.
4. Verify whether your interactions with Meta AI can be used to improve AI models.
5. Disable any available options if you do not wish to contribute your AI interactions.
6. Review Meta's Sharing and Reuse settings and disable options that allow content to be used for AI-generated creations.

Spending a few minutes reviewing your settings gives you greater control over your digital footprint.

To conclude my article this week, let me emphasise that artificial intelligence is undoubtedly one of the most transformative technologies of our time, creating unprecedented opportunities across education, healthcare, business and innovation.

However, as AI becomes deeply integrated into our daily lives, digital awareness should not be optional but become a new form of privacy protection.

Understanding the settings, the permissions and the content we choose to share empowers us to embrace AI with confidence while safeguarding our digital identity. After all, the future is not about fearing AI. It is about using it wisely and making informed choices. Until we catch up again next week, stay informed and stay vigilant.

STRENGTHENING
WORKPLACE EQUITY
AND BALANCED
DECISION-MAKING

MURTADHA MJ IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

Listening to employees — particularly those in junior positions — is one of the key indicators of workplace quality and management effectiveness.

When recurring concerns arise related to fairness, performance evaluation, conflicts of interest, or compliance with labour regulations and internal policies, such matters require objective review, proper verification and timely corrective action. In this context, the role of the Ministry of Labour remains essential in promoting workplace justice, equal opportunity, transparency and good governance, in a manner comparable to the regulatory role of the Consumer Protection Authority within its mandate.

A key component of modern governance is the adoption of Bottom-Up (Upward Feedback) or 360-Degree Performance Evaluation systems, where employees provide structured and confidential feedback on leadership style, fairness, communication and professional conduct. Such mechanisms strengthen accountability and support leadership development when used as part of a broader performance framework.

Equally important is the implementation of Career Development and Succession Planning (Career & Succession Plans) based on merit, competence and equal opportunity.

These systems help prepare future leaders, reduce conflicts of interest, enhance institutional stability and ensure continuity in organisational performance.

Another important observation in some work environments relates to the movement of senior executives between organisations, often accompanied by members of their previous teams.

While this may be legitimate when conducted through transparent and merit-based processes, it may sometimes limit internal promotion opportunities and affect employee morale, particularly when it reduces the visibility of qualified internal talent. In some cases, experienced professionals may be perceived as overly cautious or as holding “negative” or overly critical views.

However, this perception often reflects a difference in perspective rather than an actual deficiency in attitude. Experienced employees tend to rely on accumulated knowledge, risk awareness and lessons learned from past outcomes, which naturally leads to more analytical and cautious decision-making.

At the same time, organisations sometimes include individuals in senior positions who hold strong academic qualifications — such as doctoral degrees — yet may have limited practical exposure to real operational environments or long-term managerial experience. In such cases, challenges may arise when theoretical knowledge is not fully complemented by applied experience, particularly in complex or dynamic work settings.

The missing corridor

THE Horn of Africa is almost always introduced to the world through the vocabulary of crisis: conflict, drought, piracy, fragile states. The framing is not wrong, but it is dangerously incomplete. Strip away the headlines and a different map appears one of the youngest and fastest-growing consumer markets on earth, holding minerals the global energy transition cannot proceed without, wrapped around the most important maritime chokepoint between Asia and Europe.

The question for economists and investors is not whether this region matters. It is which countries and businesses will help transform its latent resource wealth into sustainable, shared prosperity and on what terms.

Consider the endowment. Africa holds roughly 30 per cent of the world's known critical-mineral reserves and the Horn's share is only beginning to be mapped: potash in Eritrea's Danakil depression, tantalum and lithium in Ethiopia's Kenticha belt, copper-gold-zinc systems across Eritrea and largely untapped rare earths, titanium and iron in Somalia.

These are the raw inputs for batteries, magnets, fertiliser and green steel. Yet Africa refines almost none of what it extracts China alone processes close to 90 per cent of the world's rare earths. Ore leaves the continent; higher-value manufacturing and industrial processing take place elsewhere, where the greatest economic returns are ultimately captured.

Now consider the geography. In 2024 some 4.1 billion barrels of crude and refined products about 5 per cent of global supply moved through the Bab El Mandeb, the strait the Horn shares with Yemen.

Since late 2023, attacks on shipping have pushed much of that traffic on the long detour around the Cape of Good Hope, adding weeks and cost to global trade.

A region this consequential to the world economy should not be this poorly integrated into it. This is where the case for a corridor begins.

The past decade has been defined by corridors the Oman-India partnership, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor; and the reshoring and “friend-shoring” set in motion by the US-China rivalry.



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Oman & the Horn of Africa and the case for a Red Sea partnership the global economy has overlooked.

Each is an attempt to route trade and minerals through trusted, resilient geographies. The Red Sea has no such corridor. It has ports fought over by rival powers, but no neutral platform that converts the Horn's resources into finished value and carries them to market. Creating that missing link is both an opportunity for Oman and a natural extension of its long-standing role as a trusted commercial and diplomatic bridge.

WHY OMAN

Three reasons, each grounded in fact rather than sentiment. First, geography and neutrality. Oman's flagship port and industrial zone at Duqm sits on the open Indian Ocean, outside both the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab El Mandeb the rare Gulf hub insulated from the region's two great chokepoints.

Salalah is already among the world's most efficient container ports, ranked second globally in the World Bank's container-port index. And Muscat's long-standing policy of non-alignment means it is trusted in capitals that do not trust one another a strategic asset that cannot be replicated through infrastructure investment alone.

Second, history. Long before the word “corridor” entered the policy lexicon, Oman ran one. For two centuries an Omani maritime state linked Muscat to Zanzibar, Mombasa and the Swahili coast; Sultan Said moved his capital to Zanzibar in 1840.

That history is complex and parts of it the Indian Ocean slave trade among them must be acknowledged honestly. But it also left durable ties of language, kinship and commerce across East Africa. Oman does not need to invent a relationship with the continent; it needs to modernise one for a new era of trade, investment and industrial cooperation.

Third, industrial pull. Oman Vision 2040 is turning Al Duqm into a green-industrial cluster green steel, green ammonia and a planned hydrogen corridor to Europe, with Oman targeting up to 8.5 million tonnes of renewable hydrogen a year by 2050.

Green steel needs iron ore; ammonia and fertiliser markets need potash and gas. The Horn holds the feedstock; Oman is building the processing capacity, the clean energy and the shipping.

That is the textbook definition of complementary economies creating value through regional industrial integration rather than simple commodity trade.

WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY FLOW

In one direction: unprocessed and semi-processed minerals, iron ore, agricultural commodities and labour. In the other: refining and processing capacity, port and logistics services, green energy and fertiliser, food-security investment, vocational training and re-export access to Gulf, Indian and European markets through Omani hubs.

The prize on the African side is vast. The African Continental Free Trade Area the flagship of the African Union's Agenda 2063 is stitching 1.3 billion people and a market of roughly 3.4 trillion US dollars into the world's largest free-trade zone, with transport, logistics and agro-processing among its priority value chains. Oman Vision 2040 and Africa's Agenda 2063 are, in effect, describing two ends of the same bridge.

None of this is easy and honesty is part of the argument. The Horn's governance is uneven, its conflicts are real and the “resource curse” is a warning rather than a cliché: Sudan's gold output, well above 60 tonnes in 2024, has financed war rather than development. Gulf engagement to date has to

o often been competitive and security-driven, deepening rivalries instead of institutions. And the chokepoint risk is live. A corridor built purely on extraction would simply repeat the region's worst history.

The objective must instead be to build integrated value chains that generate jobs, skills and industrial capacity on both sides of the Red Sea. Which is why it must be built differently and why the economics and the diplomacy belong together.

Across the Red Sea, quiet efforts are already under way to build trust between Gulf and Horn stakeholders around a shared peace and security agenda. Economic integration is the natural partner to that work: shared infrastructure, joint ventures and predictable trade rules give former rivals a concrete stake in stability.

A convener with commercial credibility and no imperial baggage in either camp is precisely what such a process needs.

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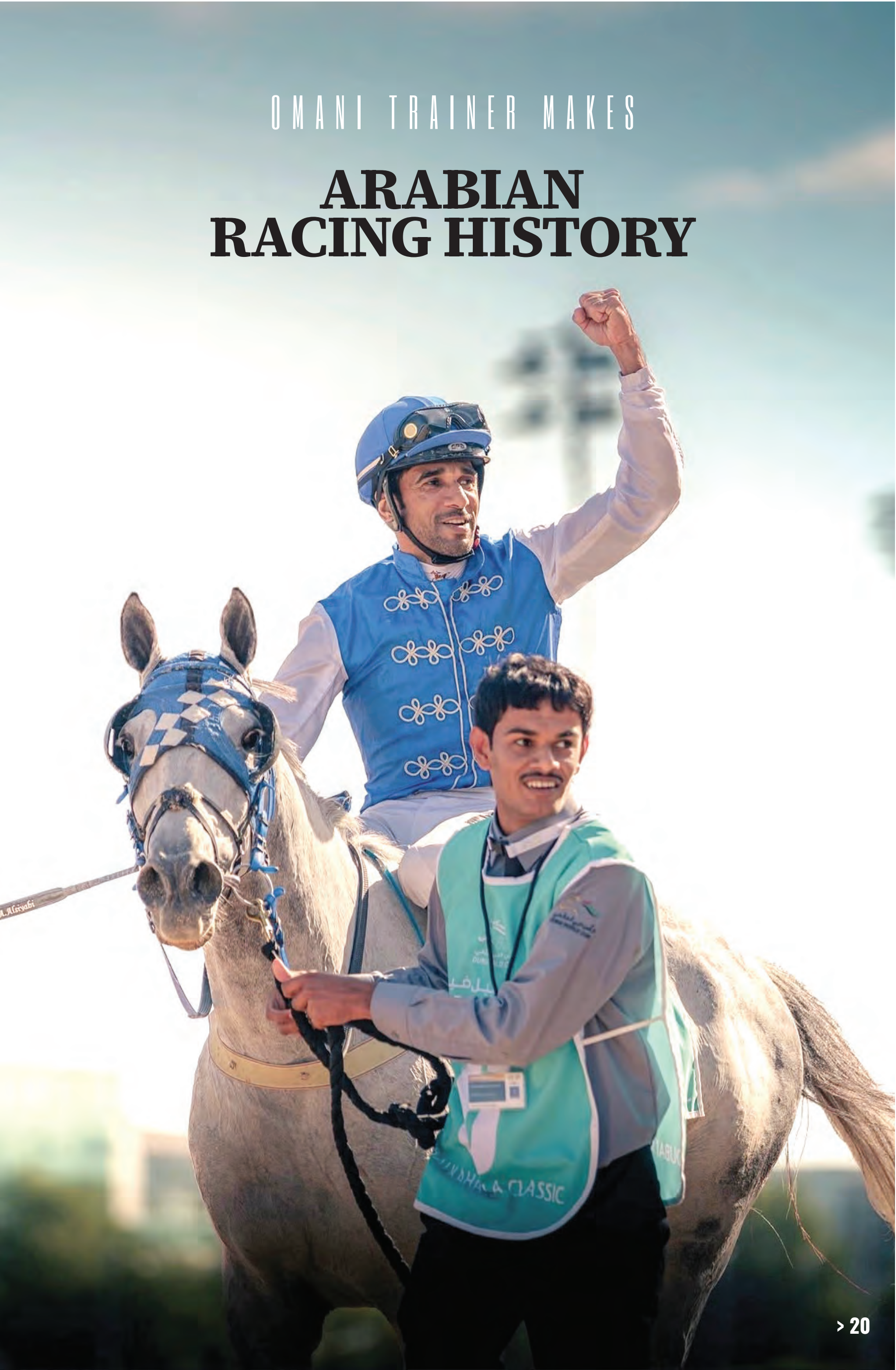
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SCREEN LEGACY

‘JURASSIC PARK’ STAR SAM NEILL DIES AGED 78



Neill’s family said he passed away on July 13, in Sydney, surrounded by loved ones and “with the dignity that characterised his whole life”.

New Zealand actor Sam Neill, best known for his role as Dr Alan Grant in Jurassic Park, has died in Australia at the age of 78, his family announced in a statement describing his death as “sudden and unexpected”.

Neill had undergone treatment for lymphoma in recent years but revealed earlier this year that he was cancer free. His family said he passed away on Monday, July 13, in Sydney, surrounded by loved ones and “with the dignity that characterised his whole life”.

The statement added that Neill had been receiving treatment at St Vincent’s Private Hospital in Sydney but did not disclose the cause of death.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon described Neill as “one of the greats”, praising his contribution to cinema and his role in bringing New Zealand stories to global audiences.

“For more than fifty years he took New Zealand stories to the world,” Luxon said, adding that his work would continue to be watched and loved for generations.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also paid tribute, saying Neill held “a special place in Australian hearts” and praising the actor’s dignity, humour and conviction throughout his life and career.

Born in Northern Ireland in 1947, Neill moved to New Zealand as a child. Originally named Nigel John Dermot, he adopted the name Sam because he felt it suited him better.

He began his acting career in New Zealand films in the early 1970s before moving into larger international productions. His breakthrough came in 1993 with Steven Spielberg’s Jurassic Park, where he played palaeontologist Dr Alan Grant.

Over a career spanning more than five decades, Neill appeared in dozens of films and television series, including The Hunt for Red October, Peaky Blinders and two additional Jurassic Park sequels. He also earned acclaim for his performances in Jane Campion’s The Piano and Taika Waititi’s Hunt for the Wilderpeople.

Neill revealed in his 2023 memoir that he had been diagnosed with stage-three non-Hodgkin lymphoma and was undergoing chemotherapy. He later said he was cancer free after receiving genetic therapy that helped modify his immune system.

Aside from acting, Neill was also known for running vineyards in New Zealand’s scenic Central Otago region, where he spent much of his time. His legacy remains tied not only to his iconic film roles but also to his support for New Zealand’s creative industries. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



ARTISAN

Master Shahzad, a craftsman, makes the traditional music instrument ‘rabab’ at his workshop in Peshawar — AFP



MUSIC

French rapper Jok’Air performs during the 42nd Francofolies music festival, in La Rochelle, western France. — AFP



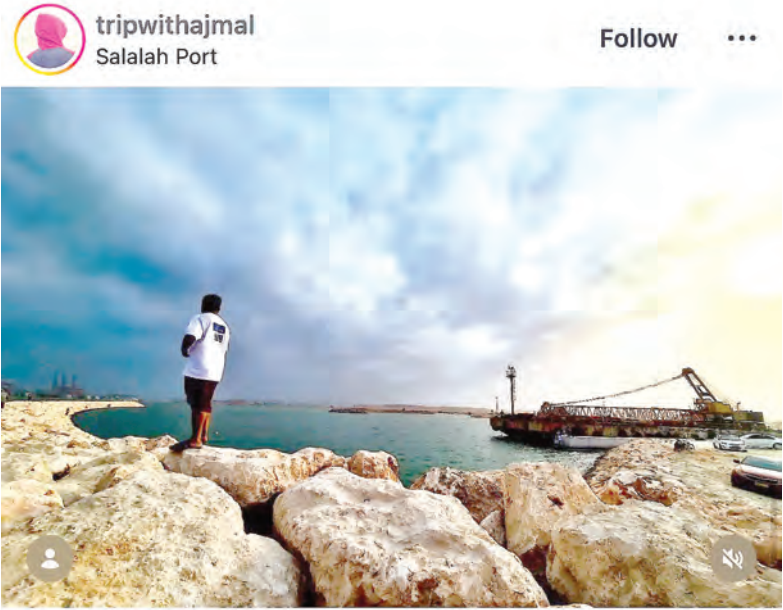
CULTURE

Dancers perform a Yosakoi dance during Remo-Yosakoi Festival in Surabaya, Indonesia. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



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ARTIST SELLS TAYLOR SWIFT WEDDING WASTE



Each object, described online as a “sculpture”, was sealed inside a small plastic cube to prevent smells or leaks.

Taylor Swift fans have paid \$25 for pieces of rubbish collected near the pop star’s wedding to American football player Travis Kelce.

New York artist Justin Gignac gathered the discarded items from streets surrounding Madison Square Garden, where the couple reportedly hosted a glamorous ceremony attended by hundreds of celebrity guests.

The collection included bottle caps, straws, utensils, police caution tape, cigarette butts, ring-shaped sweets and a single left airPod.

All 50 items sold within 24 hours after being listed individually on Gignac’s website, New York City Garbage.

“It’s getting a lot of Swifties who just want a tangential piece of the wedding,” Gignac told AFP. Each object, described online as a “sculpture”, was sealed inside a small plastic cube to prevent smells or leaks.

Gignac said the sales had earned him \$1,250 and that he might offer more items.

The artist, who also sells other pieces of New York rubbish, said he wanted to preserve a moment that attracted worldwide attention.

“I try to commemorate cultural moments in New York City, and this seemed to be a big one,” he said, describing the pieces as small time capsules.

Some items were tied into knots to emphasise the wedding theme.

Gignac stressed that the rubbish was collected outside the security barriers surrounding Madison Square Garden and did not come from inside the venue.

The wedding drew intense interest from Swift’s fans, some of whom travelled to New York hoping to catch a glimpse of the singer. Commentators described the celebrity-filled event as a “royal wedding”. — AFP

FENDI SHOWS HAUTE COUTURE IN ROME WITH NOD TO LAGERFELD

FENDI celebrates the first haute couture show by newly seated designer Maria Grazia Chiuri in its home city of Rome on Thursday, along with a homage to longtime couturier Karl Lagerfeld.

Held in Rome, where Fendi was established in 1925, rather than Italy’s fashion capital of Milan, the show represents not only a love letter to the capital but a tribute to Lagerfeld, the German legend who for more than 50 years was creative director of the house, before his death in 2019.

The National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, venue for the fashion show being held later on Thursday, will also host a reprise of the famous 1985 museum exhibition by Lagerfeld. “After steps through work. Fendi/ Karl Lagerfeld 1985”, which opens Friday to the public and runs through October 25, will highlight the myriad creative processes that make up a haute couture garment.

In 1985, the show held at the very same art museum caused a scandal for daring to bring fashion into the erudite ranks of a museum.

“It caused quite a stir. Great art critics praised it, but at the same time, there were those who could not accept fashion entering the world of art, even sparking a parliamentary debate,” Silvia Venturini Fendi, the brand’s honorary president, told Vogue magazine last year. The practice of museums collaborating with

fashion houses, tapping their archives and presenting their designs, is today widespread, and fashion as a legitimate form of art is now celebrated throughout the world.

Fendi, owned since 2001 by French conglomerate LVMH, hired Chiuri last October, bringing the Roman back to the house where she started her career in accessories under Lagerfeld.

After stints at Valentino and making history as the first woman to creatively head Dior, Chiuri said earlier this year that in returning to Fendi, she wanted to “give back” to those who had inspired her early on -- both the Fendi sisters behind the business, and her mentor Lagerfeld.

The National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art holds the country’s largest collection of Italian and international art from the 19th and 20th centuries, including masterpieces by Giorgio de Chirico, Amedeo Modigliani and others. — AFP



Designer Maria Grazia Chiuri is pictured at the end of Fendi’s first Women Haute Couture Fall/Winter 2026-2027 collection at the National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rome. — AFP

FEATURES

OMANI TRAINER MAKES

RUQAYA AL KINDI

AMID the clatter of horses’ hooves, the scent of stables and the quiet routines repeated each day, victories are forged far from the camera lenses. In this world lives Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi, a speed racing trainer who did not choose coaching as a profession so much as a way of life.

“My journey with horses was not just a job, but a school where I learned patience, discipline and commitment,” Ahmed said. “Every horse I trained left a new lesson within me.”

Since 2010, he has dedicated himself to speed racing, moving between local and international competitions. Today, he supervises the training of around 16 horses, adding to the many that have passed under his care throughout his career.

Ahmed believes every horse presents a different challenge. Success, he said, does not come from following a single training method but from understanding each horse’s personality, abilities and needs.

The defining moment of his career came in 2026 when he made history as the first Omani trainer to win the Dubai Kahayla Classic, one of the world’s most prestigious Group 1 races for purebred Arabian horses, held during Dubai World Cup night at Meydan Racecourse.

Although a race is decided within minutes, Ahmed insists the real

ARABIAN
HORSE
RACING
HISTORY

competition begins months beforehand.

“The preparation programme depends on the horse’s age, experience and physical condition,” he explained. “We start by building basic fitness before gradually increasing the workload until the horse is fully prepared for the target race.”

He added: “The difference between winning and losing can be fractions of a second, so the horse needs complete physical and psychological preparation, while the trainer must accurately understand the horse’s abilities and the nature of the race. In speed racing, every small detail matters.”

When selecting a horse for competition, Ahmed looks beyond pedigree. He carefully evaluates its physical condition, speed, heart and lung efficiency, endurance and, perhaps most importantly, its willingness to compete.

“A trainer may own a horse from the finest bloodlines, but without proper training and management it will never achieve the desired results,” he said. “A champion is made through both genetics and preparation.”

Behind every victory lies a unique relationship between trainer and horse, one built not through words, but through patience, trust and daily interactions. “Horses are affected by the atmosphere around them and respond to the energy of the people they are with,” Ahmed said. “When a horse feels safe and confident, it is reflected in its performance. Before every race, I maintain a consistent routine and avoid unnecessary tensions.”

He applies the same discipline to himself. “I review the training plan and every detail related to the horse and the race, and I remain calm regardless of how important the competition is.”

For Ahmed, the most difficult moments are not defeats but injuries. An injured horse preparing for a major race can mean rebuilding months of

Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi’s journey with horses reflects a world where success is shaped away from the spotlight. Built on discipline, trust and countless hours of preparation, his story reveals the unseen efforts behind every champion and every race-day victory.

planning or postponing a long-awaited dream. Even so, he views losses as opportunities to improve.

“After every race we don’t win, I analyse the performance, identify the reasons and learn from the mistakes. That’s the only way to progress.”

Ahmed believes Omani equestrianism has made remarkable strides in recent years, with stronger horses, owners and trainers earning greater recognition regionally and internationally. He is equally encouraged by the growing interest among young Omanis, though he reminds them that success demands patience, continuous learning and perseverance.

His own journey began in childhood in a family where a love of horses was passed down through generations. The turning point came while accompanying his older brother, also a trainer, to the stables.

“Those daily visits were the beginning of a passion that grew beyond admiration into a constant desire to learn, research and understand this world in all its details,” he said.

