

OMAN

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DAILY

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DIGITAL EDITION

AL AMRI STRIKES TO DRAW 1-1 WITH URUGUAY

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IN BRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETS ICELAND PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Halla Tómasdóttir of the Republic of Iceland on her country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes of continuous progress and development for Iceland. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further growth and expansion on various spheres.

OMAN, PHILIPPINES TO SCALE UP TIES

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Maria Theresa Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, held a telephone conversation during which they reaffirmed their shared commitment to advancing bilateral relations and expanding partnership opportunities across various fields to achieve greater mutual benefit.

The telephone conversation also focused on preparations for the third edition of the Cebu-Oman Investment Forum, scheduled to take place in Manila in July 2026, coinciding with Oman's participation in the Asean ministerial meeting with partner countries. On the political front, the two ministers expressed satisfaction with the positive development of the regional political climate and maritime navigation, in light of the recently reached US-Iran understanding.

HOLY KAABA GETS NEW KISWAH



MECCA: The Holy Kaaba has been draped in its new covering for the year 1448 AH, a majestic visual spectacle that embodies the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's devotion to Islam's holiest site.

A total of 150 Saudi artisans and craftsmen channelled their expertise over 11 months to produce 47 pieces of luxurious black silk, embroidered with 30 verses of the Holy Quran using silver threads plated with 24-carat gold. The Kiswah weighs a total of 1,410 kg. Kiswah's production passed through seven meticulous stages: water purification and silk washing, followed by weaving, printing, embroidery, assembly and inspection, culminating in its transport via a specially designed trailer. — ONA

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS FAREWELL TO THE INDONESIAN ENVOY

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Mohamad Arzan Johan, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the Sultanate of Oman, on the occasion of the end of his tenure, on Tuesday.

The ambassador expressed his gratitude to His Majesty for the support he received during his tenure in the Sultanate of Oman, which



facilitated his work. He wished His Majesty continued health, well-being and long life, and further development and progress for the Sultanate of Oman.

HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his sincere thanks to the ambassador for his dedicated efforts in serving the strong relations between the two friendly countries, wishing him continued success, and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Indonesian people.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the Adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — ONA

Oil falls 5% on hopes of US-Iran deal on Hormuz

OIL prices fell about 5 per cent to a three-month low on Tuesday as traders hoped the US and Iran would agree to end the war and allow oil to flow through the Strait of Hormuz.

Prices, which were already down about 4% on Tuesday morning, extended those losses following a Wall Street Journal report that the US would allow Iran to immediately begin selling oil and fuel under the memorandum of understanding.

Brent crude futures fell \$4.25, or 5.1 per cent, to \$78.92 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate crude fell \$4.80, or 5.9 per cent, to \$75.95.

The drop put Brent on track for its lowest close since March 2 and kept it in technically oversold territory for a third day in a row for the first time since October 2025. WTI was on track for its lowest close since March 4. Oman crude oil for August 2026 delivery settled at \$72.99 per barrel. This represents a decrease of \$3.94 from Monday's price of \$76.93.

Before the Iran war started on February 28, both crude benchmarks were trading around \$65 to \$70 a barrel. Oil prices sank nearly 5% on Monday after US President Donald Trump announced an interim deal to end the US-Israeli war with Iran. Doubts, however, swirled around the interim deal on Tuesday, with warnings that shipping traffic and energy exports could take weeks to recover and details of the agreement yet to be made public. The deal would extend



A man views the site of an Israeli strike in Kfar Sir in the Nabatieh district, Lebanon, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Other factors weighing on oil prices included worries about China's economy, rising global inflation and interest rates, and US calls for peace between Russia and Ukraine

a tenuous ceasefire announced in April by another 60 days and reopen the strait, which Iran has effectively blocked since the US and Israel first attacked Iran. About 20 per cent of global oil supplies passed through the strait before the war. That preliminary agreement prompted investment banks, including Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and Citi, to lower their oil price forecasts.

Other factors weighing on oil prices included worries about

SAYYID BADR, ARAGHCHI VOW TO BOOST TIES

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Abbas Araghchi, Foreign Minister of Iran, held a telephone conversation during which they reaffirmed their shared commitment to advancing bilateral cooperation across various fields, rooted in the principles of good neighbourliness and the historical and cultural bonds uniting peoples of the region.

The two ministers reiterated their countries' adherence to international law regarding the safe and free passage of maritime navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. They expressed hope that the coming period would see serious and sustained efforts by all parties to foster a supportive climate for a constructive political and diplomatic path, safeguarding the region's security and stability. — ONA

China's economy, rising global inflation and interest rates, and US calls for peace between Russia and Ukraine.

In China, the world's second-biggest economy showed increasing unevenness in May. A settlement in the Ukraine war could result in the lifting of some sanctions on Russia, which could allow Moscow to export more oil. Russia was the world's third-biggest crude oil producer behind the US and Saudi Arabia in 2025, according to data. — Reuters

LION PREDICTS WINNERS



Bahati, the lion of Dallas Zoo, predicts that Croatia will win their match with England in the Fifa World Cup match, to be played in Arlington, Texas, on Wednesday. — Reuters

IMF PRAISES OMAN'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

MUSCAT: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has praised the performance of the Omani economy and its capacity to withstand regional geopolitical developments, supported by continued prudent economic and fiscal policies and a firm commitment to advancing

structural reforms.

This commendation came at the conclusion of the meetings between the IMF preliminary mission team and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Fund noted the continued growth of the Omani economy, with real GDP growth reaching 2.4 per cent in 2025, compared to 1.6 per cent in 2024. The IMF projects real GDP growth to reach approximately 3.7 per cent in 2026, driven by increased oil production and sustained momentum in non-oil sector activity. The statement affirmed that fiscal positions and external sector accounts are

poised for further improvement, supported by higher oil revenues, robust non-oil export performance and continued fiscal discipline. Notable surpluses are projected in the fiscal balance and current account, reaching 4.5 per cent and 3 per cent of GDP respectively, while public debt as a share of GDP continues to decline.

The Fund confirmed that Oman's banking sector continues to enjoy high levels of capital adequacy, liquidity, asset quality and profitability, which strengthens its capacity to support economic activity and maintain financial stability. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Rudaina bint Amer al Hajri receives the award in Dubai.

Omani woman bags Gulf-wide honour as Best Woman in ME

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

Rudaina bint Amer al Hajri, President of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, Board Member of Oman Hockey and Head of the Women’s Sports Committee at the federation, has been honoured with the Best Woman in the Middle East in Events and Sports Award for 2026 at a glittering ceremony held in Dubai.

The award was presented by Shaikh Eng Salem bin Sultan al Qasimi, Chairman of the Department of Civil Aviation in Ras Al Khaimah, during a Gulf-wide ceremony attended by delegates, dignitaries and prominent personalities from across the region.

The recognition comes in appreciation of Al Hajri’s outstanding contributions to community service and women’s empowerment, as well as her efforts in organising and managing impactful events and initiatives. It also recognises her role in strengthening women’s participation in sports and supporting their active engagement across various sectors.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Hajri expressed pride in receiving the award, describing it as an encouragement to continue her contributions to society.

She said the recognition reflects the support and empowerment Omani women enjoy under the Renewed Renaissance and helps showcase Omani talent at both regional and international levels.

“This award adds a greater sense of responsibility towards my community work, women’s leadership initiatives and sports. It also reaffirms the status of Omani women and their ability to excel and lead on the international stage,” Al Hajri said.

Oman commemorates Prophet’s Hijra anniversary



The ceremony featured a number of segments that reflect the significance of the Prophet’s Hijra. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, on Tuesday commemorated the anniversary of the Blessed Prophet’s Hijra.

The celebration was held under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and Head of the Basic Services Sector. The event was attended by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, along with a number of officials and esteemed dignitaries.

The ceremony, which took place at the Arab Open University in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, featured a number of segments that reflect the significance of the Prophet’s Hijra. These included a devotional hymn expressing the enduring significance of this occasion, a poetic recitation, and a documentary film presentation detailing the Blessed Hijra, along with the lessons and insights derived from this historic event. — ONA

MOH MARKS WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) organised a celebration on Wednesday marking World Blood Donor Day, observed annually on June 14 and held this year under the theme ‘One Drop of Humanity. Give Blood. Save Lives’. During the ceremony, the Ministry of Health honoured blood donors.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the



Dr Al Lamki honoured 100 male and female donors, including donors with rare blood types. — ONA

Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, and was attended by a gathering of donors, officials and invited guests.

Mohsen bin Saif al Sharyani, Head of the Donor Affairs Section at the Blood Services Department of the Ministry of Health, delivered a speech in which he stressed that the celebration of World Blood Donor Day embodies the highest values of humanitarian giving.

Forum explores citizenship amid rapid transformation

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, in cooperation with the Oman Sociologists Association, on Tuesday held the scientific forum titled ‘Digital Citizenship: A Scientific Reading Between Reality and Future Prospects’, bringing together academics, researchers and specialists to discuss the growing importance of responsible digital engagement in an increasingly connected world.

Held under the auspices of Dr Badr bin Hamoud al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, the two-day forum seeks to strengthen awareness of digital citizenship, examine emerging challenges and opportunities associated with digital transformation, and highlight the role of institutions in fostering responsible digital behaviour while safeguarding national identity and social values.

The opening scientific session, themed ‘The Role of Institutions in Promoting Digital Citizenship’, featured a series of presentations addressing policy frameworks, educational approaches and practical initiatives related to digital citizenship.

Hassan bin Fida al Lawati presented an overview of the National Programme for



The two-day forum seeks to strengthen awareness of digital citizenship and examine emerging challenges.

Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. He noted that the programme focuses on the adoption and localisation of artificial intelligence technologies to support economic and developmental sectors while ensuring human-centred governance.

The programme comprises 32 key initiatives and projects for the period 2025-2027 and had achieved 41 per cent completion by the end of 2025.

Dr Maimoona bint Hamad al Hinai presented a foresight study examining how national identity is reflected in educational curricula

and the factors shaping students’ perceptions of their homeland. She emphasised the complementary roles of families, educational institutions, community initiatives and the media in reinforcing national identity, while calling for the continued development of curricula and the integration of future studies into educational and cultural planning.

Addressing the impact of digital transformation on family structures, Dr Humaid bin Muslim al Saeedi highlighted the continuing role of Gulf and Arab families as the primary institution responsible for nurturing and protecting national identity despite the challenges posed by social

media platforms and rapid technological change. He stressed the importance of policies that support families, strengthen the use of the Arabic language and preserve cultural heritage.

Dr Sabra bint Saif al Harrasi examined the influence of digital transformation on the value system of Omani society, drawing attention to emerging intellectual and ethical challenges in digital environments.

She underscored the role of media institutions and national organisations in promoting positive values and called for a national framework for ethical digital education, as well as the establishment of a dedicated national centre concerned with values in the digital sphere.

Meanwhile, Dr Ishaq bin Hilal al Sharyani showcased the application of digital citizenship concepts in supporting cultural and heritage tourism through the Al Aqr model. His presentation highlighted the role of digital technologies in preserving cultural identity, promoting heritage sites and empowering young people to create digital tourism content and document historical narratives through online platforms.

The forum will continue on Wednesday with a second scientific session titled ‘Digital Citizenship Practices among Individuals, Families and Society’.

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS CYBERCRIME LAW

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

The Government Communication Centre organised an awareness forum for influencers, content creators and news accounts holders with the participation of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The event aimed to enhance awareness of the legal frameworks governing digital publishing and strengthen regulatory integration across relevant sectors. The forum comes as part of ongoing efforts to improve direct engagement with digital actors on social media platforms, while raising understanding of licensing procedures, regulatory requirements, and legal obligations associated with media and digital activities.

Discussions focused on key themes, including institutional regulatory integration, clarification of differences between media and digital licences, and outlining the



The event aimed to enhance awareness of the legal frameworks governing digital publishing and strengthen regulatory integration across relevant sectors.

legal implications of violations, in addition to promoting responsible use of digital platforms.

Khalid bin Saif al Busaidy, Director-General of the Government Communication Centre, said that the “Tajawob” platform serves as the primary channel for receiving reports, feedback, complaints and suggestions related to government services.

“The platform has significantly contributed to accelerating the handling of feedback and enhancing

direct governmental follow-up mechanisms,” Al Busaidy said, adding that the restructuring of the government services system aims to strengthen coordination and oversight by transferring certain competencies to higher levels of governance.

On freedom of expression, Al Busaidy affirmed that the law provides clear space for constructive criticism and opinions on public services, provided that individuals or national symbols are not violated.

“Freedom of expression is guaranteed within a framework

that respects the rights of others and ensures that society is not harmed or exposed to misleading information,” he said.

Mawia bint Ahmed al Kindi, Head of Legislation at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said the amendments to the Cybercrime Law were introduced in response to rapid digital developments since 2011. She stated that the updates aim to “build a safe digital environment that supports the digital economy and protects users’ rights while advancing digital transformation.”

Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Hinai, Director-General of Publications and Artistic Works at the Ministry of Information, said that media licensing represents “a cornerstone for building a regulated and responsible media environment,” stressing that credibility and professional integrity are central to media influence, beyond speed of dissemination.

He noted that licensing enhances professionalism, strengthens public trust in media content and provides a clear legal framework for practitioners.

SHORT TAKES



The programme’s primary objective is to provide financial support to researchers. — ONA

REGISTRATION OPENS FOR SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME 2026

MUSCAT: The Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) announced the opening of registration for the fourth cycle of the Scientific Publication Support Programme 2026, targeting scholarly papers published during the 2025 calendar year, with the registration window remaining open until July 15, 2026.

The launch of this cycle builds upon the programme’s continued success, as the 2025 cycle witnessed significant demand with 217 support applications received, of which 193 papers were approved for funding upon meeting the programme’s rigorous eligibility criteria.

The programme’s primary objective is to provide financial support to researchers, enabling them to disseminate their scholarly output and intellectual contributions in leading peer-reviewed, internationally indexed journals — specifically those ranked in the Q1 and Q2 categories — as well as reputable Arabic-language periodicals. The Authority has established two primary application tracks for interested applicants. — ONA

MoH launches campaign to combat counterfeit products

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Drug Safety Center (DSC), has launched an awareness campaign aimed at monitoring and safeguarding against the risks of counterfeit and low-quality medical products, and raising the efficiency of their safe and responsible use among all segments of society and workers in the healthcare sector.

The campaign comes to embody the pivotal role undertaken by the Drug Safety Center, the regulatory and supervisory authority at the Ministry of Health, to ensure the safety and quality of medical products, and to transform health awareness into a sustainable daily community behaviour based on the principle that the safety of medical products is a shared responsibility.

The launch of the campaign comes in response to several contemporary variables and challenges, most notably: the growth of e-commerce in terms of the expansion of unreliable digital platforms for selling medical products; the exploitation of consumers, as some have been observed rushing after low-cost or quickly accessible products without verifying their safety; and the increasing demand for supplements due to the noticeable rise in the popularity of slimming products, dietary supplements and stimulants, which creates a fertile environment for the circulation of counterfeit and non-conforming medical products.

The awareness campaign to combat counterfeit and low-quality medical products



The campaign comes to embody the pivotal role undertaken by the Drug Safety Center.

targets various groups in society and the health sector, focusing on chronic disease patients, youth and health professionals, alongside educational and media institutions, content creators, and medical product distribution outlets.

The campaign includes a series of awareness, training, and educational programmes and activities, featuring introductory meetings for the Center’s staff and focal points in the governorates, and organising an open day for the public with the participation of various health entities on July 2, in addition to training workshops for medical cadres and medical device engineers.

The campaign also includes the implementation of awareness and media programmes across digital platforms and various media outlets to enhance awareness of mechanisms for verifying medical products, and to combat misleading advertisements and unscientific recommendations.

The Drug Safety Center at the Ministry of Health explained that counterfeit medicines, devices and medical supplies pose a direct threat to patients’

health and safety. Their risks are not limited to poor efficacy or failure to achieve the desired medical purpose, but may also lead to serious health complications due to non-compliance with quality, safety and performance requirements, and may cause delays in treatment, worsen the health condition, or, in some critical cases, lead to death.

The Center emphasises that it possesses a strict regulatory system that begins before the medical product reaches the markets, by registering the product, verifying the manufacturing plants of origin, auditing the raw materials used, and testing storage and manufacturing conditions, up to conducting precise laboratory analyses.

The Center stressed that monitoring the safety of medical products is a continuous process throughout the product’s life cycle, as the Center relies on reports received from community members and medical cadres, in parallel with monitoring warnings issued by international regulatory bodies, to take immediate and decisive decisions to recall any product proven to pose risks.

The Center points out that the real key to the success of this awareness campaign relies on active community partnership, calling on everyone to make conscious health decisions, rely on official sources, and take the initiative to report any suspicious products or practices to safeguard the health of society and ensure the safety of its members. — ONA

Oman-UAE Hafeet Rail Project 40pc complete

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

HAFEET Rail has reached a major milestone in the development of the Oman-UAE railway connection, announcing 40 per cent completion of the cross-border project, underscoring steady progress on one of the region’s most strategic transport and logistics initiatives.

The 238-kilometre corridor, jointly developed by Etihad Rail, Oman Rail and Mubadala Investment Company, is designed to create a high-efficiency transport network aimed at strengthening trade flows, enhancing supply chain resilience and deepening economic integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE.

Construction is currently underway across key locations, including Al Ain, Al Buraimi, Suhar and Wadi Al Jizzi, passing through diverse terrain ranging from urban centres and industrial zones to mountainous regions and wadis. The complexity of the route has required extensive engineering works, including large-scale excavation, bridges, tunnels and integrated flood protection systems to ensure long-



ABDULRAHMAN AL HATMI, CEO, Asyad



AHMED AL HASHEMI CEO, Hafeet Rail

The strategic 238-km railway project advances across key engineering corridors

term operational safety.

So far, more than 27 million cubic metres of earthworks have been completed, alongside over 100,000 cubic metres of concrete works. The project also includes 80 major structures, 900 concrete piles and 130 box culverts, reflecting the scale and pace of implementation.

Abdulrahman al Hatmi, CEO of Asyad Group, said the progress reflects a shared commitment to delivering the project on schedule, adding that the milestone builds on the foundations of Oman’s growing railway sector, with national talent playing a key role in execution.

Work is also advancing on supporting infrastructure in Suhar and Al Buraimi, aimed at enabling seamless connectivity between ports, industrial zones and logistics hubs, and facilitating efficient cross-border freight movement within an integrated regional network.

Ahmed al Hashemi, CEO of Hafeet Rail, said reaching 40 per cent completion reflects the strong foundations of the project. He noted that the next phase will focus on sustaining momentum, strengthening partner collaboration and delivering long-term value in line with international standards.

He also highlighted that the project has recorded 10 million safe man-hours without major injuries,



Hafeet Rail Project 40% complete.

underscoring strong safety systems, effective risk management and a deeply embedded safety culture across worksites.

The railway will feature advanced signalling, control and communication systems aligned with global standards, ensuring interoperability between Omani and Emirati networks while improving efficiency, capacity and operational reliability.

Beyond freight, the project is expected to pave the way for future passenger rail services, enhancing tourism and business mobility and strengthening social connectivity between the two countries. It also supports Oman Vision 2040 and the UAE’s development agenda by promoting economic diversification, sustainable infrastructure and reduced reliance on road transport.

MADINAT AL IRFAN ACHIEVES 1 MILLION SAFE WORKING HOURS AT BUSINESS PARK PHASE 3



MADINAT AL IRFAN has achieved 1 million safe working hours without lost time injury at Business Park Phase 3, marking a major health, safety, and operational milestone within one of Muscat’s largest urban developments.

The milestone was achieved during a major phase of ongoing construction works across Business Park Phase 3, including excavation, shoring piling, concrete works, and extensive heavy equipment operations carried out across multiple work fronts. At peak times, more than 860 personnel operated across the site as part of a delivery programme supported by a rigorous HSE approach that extended beyond site compliance to continuous workforce engagement and operational preparedness. More than 1,500 induction and training sessions, over 2,200 toolbox talks, regular safety briefings, operator assessments, and emergency drills were carried out throughout the project, establishing a strong benchmark for HSE practices across large-scale urban developments.

Eng. Mohammed Abdullah Al Salmi, General Manager of Madinat Al Irfan, said: “This milestone is a testament to the standards we are committed to upholding across every development within Madinat Al Irfan. As the destination evolves, delivering landmark projects safely and responsibly is not only a priority; it is an obligation that stands equal to our commitment to excellence. Surpassing 1 million safe working hours without a single lost-time injury speaks to the operational discipline that forms the bedrock of our development approach.”

Mr. G. Ramasubbu, Chief Executive of L&T Oman, said: “One million safe man-hours at Business Park Phase 3, Madinat Al Irfan, is a testament to teamwork and a robust safety culture. We appreciate the contributions of our client, consultant, project team, subcontractors, and workforce in achieving this milestone, and look forward to their continued support and dedication for the remainder of the project.”

Developed by Madinat Al Irfan, the project’s master developer and a destination of OMRAN Group, Phase 3 forms part of Madinat Al Irfan’s wider Business Park, a growing business district that already includes the headquarters of Omante, OQ, and OQEP. As Oman’s first fully gold LEED-certified commercial hub, the Business Park brings together Grade A office buildings, public spaces, smart infrastructure, and sustainability standards within an integrated business environment in the heart of Muscat. The new phase will add three office towers, a central promenade, and 1,333 parking spaces across a built-up area of 104,000 square metres, supporting the district’s continued growth as a destination for modern organisations.

As Madinat Al Irfan continues to advance across multiple districts and development phases, maintaining consistent HSE standards remains an integral part of how projects are delivered across the city. The milestone at Business Park Phase 3 comes within a broader period of sustained development activity across the wider masterplan, where construction, infrastructure, and commercial projects continue to progress simultaneously.

SPOTLIGHT

WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION GETS A BOOST IN MAJLIS ASH’SHURA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK issued a Royal directive to allocate 11 seats for Omani women to ensure permanent representation of women in Majlis Ash'shura for each governorate. The reservation of the seats comes as a part to enhance the base of community participation, which was received with enthusiasm and motivation. Moreover, this vital step demonstrates HM’s confidence in women’s ability to contribute to the nation’s development.



HH SAYYIDAH HUJAIJA BINT JAIFER AL SAID, Chairperson of the Association for Children with Disabilities, said, “The Royal directive will ensure that women’s voices are heard and represented in the decision-making process.” She added, “I believe this decision will benefit not only Omani women but also Oman as a whole by promoting greater participation, diversity of views, and national progress.”

DR NOOR AL BUSAIDY, President of Oman Diabetes Association, reflected, “This is truly wonderful news and a proud moment for Oman. It reflects the continued commitment of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in supporting Omani women and ensuring their voices are represented in shaping the future of our country.” She said, “Omani women have never been absent from the journey of national development. Over the years, they have proven themselves in every field—education, healthcare, business, research, public service, and many others. We see their contributions every day, and their success has become an integral part of Oman’s progress.”



FATHIYA AL HINAI, former Radio Director, commented, “I am very pleased that they are ensuring women’s presence in Majlis Ash’shura. Because in the last few sessions, there were no women elected and I felt sorry for that. But now this is a good directive and I am extremely pleased.”



SHAMSA BINT HAMED AL HARTHY, Director-General of Dar Al Atta and former official at the Ministry of Social Development, said this is a dream come true. “I highly value His Majesty Sultan Haitham’s directives to allocate an additional seat for women in each wilayat, amounting to 11 seats, while also allowing women to compete for the general seats.” “In other words, women will have one designated seat in each of the 11 wilayats while also being eligible to compete for general seats. This represents a significant qualitative shift in the electoral journey of Omani women.” As a specialist in social and developmental affairs, and someone who has worked extensively on women’s and children’s rights issues, and who has served on both the National Committee for Child Rights and the National Committee for Women’s Rights under CEDAW, Shamsa said that this was a longstanding demand.

BASMA AL RAJHI, Radio broadcaster, expressed, “I was overjoyed by this news. It’s high time there was a mechanism to support women’s presence in the Majlis Ash’shura, a mechanism that will bolster Oman Vision 2040 for sustainable development.” She explained that enhancing women’s political participation will undoubtedly contribute to highlighting issues from a fresh perspective at both the local and national levels, giving women a greater opportunity to participate in decision-making.

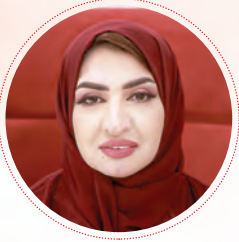


AWATIF AL BALUSHI, media specialist, said it was a moment of pride. “As an Omani woman, I see the Royal Decree allocating 11 additional seats in Majlis Ash’shura as a historic milestone that fills us with immense pride. This visionary step deeply validates our capabilities and empowers us to serve our nation directly from every governorate. It is a powerful testament to our leadership’s belief in our role as equal partners in shaping Oman’s future under “Oman Vision 2040.” The Royal initiative aims to strengthen women’s presence in legislative work and enrich parliamentary deliberations, which marks a new phase in expanding women’s political participation. Consequently, it will lead to highlighting local female leaders and create opportunities for them to contribute significantly in public policymaking. The move is expected to positively stimulate the participation of in future elections, establishing a stronger culture of political engagement and equal opportunities. Most importantly, it will continue the government’s steady development that target investments on human capital to empower national talents, and strengthening the role of Omani women as indispensable partners in shaping the present and building the future.



DR FATEMA BINT YOUSUF AL BALUSHI, Chief Executive Officer of the Omani Women’s Academy and Omani Researcher Specialised in Women’s Empowerment, said the Royal directives represent a landmark national step that reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s enduring commitment to inclusive participation and balanced representation within national institutions, in line with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

“This decision underscores the confidence bestowed upon Omani women and reaffirms the leadership’s belief in their role as active partners in development and nation building. It also recognises the significant contributions made by Omani women across political, economic, social, scientific and professional spheres,” she said. She said that the move is expected to further strengthen women’s presence in legislative work and enrich parliamentary deliberations through greater diversity of perspectives and expertise, thereby contributing to the formulation of more responsive legislation and public policies while reinforcing the principle of national partnership in decision making. “From a research perspective in the field of women’s empowerment, this decision extends far beyond increasing the number of seats. It marks a new phase in expanding women’s political participation and ensuring female representation across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. It will also help highlight local female leaders and create opportunities for the emergence of a new generation of competent women capable of contributing effectively to parliamentary work and public policymaking,” Dr Fatema said.



DR AISHA BINT SAID AL GHABSHI, Member of the State Council, valued the Royal directive issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to allocate an additional seat for women in each governorate (a total of 11 seats that will be added to the general seats available for competition). “This is an indication of the attention that the Sultanate of Oman, led by His Majesty the Sultan, accords to the status of women. It shows appreciation for women’s role in the nation-building process,” she said. Dr Aisha added that the Royal directive embodies a recognition of women’s knowledge, expertise and wisdom that qualify them to participate in decision-making. The move empowers female competencies and contributes to enhancing the role of women in various spheres of development, she noted.



THE RESERVATION OF THE SEATS COMES AS A PART TO ENHANCE THE BASE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, WHICH WAS RECEIVED WITH ENTHUSIASM AND MOTIVATION. MOREOVER, THIS VITAL STEP DEMONSTRATES HIS MAJESTY’S CONFIDENCE IN WOMEN’S ABILITY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NATION’S DEVELOPMENT.



SHORT TAKES



Thamer bin Faiz al Alawi presents credentials to Shaikha Nasser al Nuwais, UNTO.

Oman Ambassador presents credentials to UN toursim organisation

MADRID: Thamer bin Faiz al Alawi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Spain, presented his credentials as Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the UN Tourism Organization to Shaikha Nasser al Nuwais, Secretary-General of the organisation, during an official ceremony held at the organisation's headquarters in the Spanish capital, Madrid.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the existing cooperation relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the organisation, as well as ways to enhance the partnership in the fields of sustainable tourism and the development of the tourism sector to serve mutual developmental goals. — **ONA**

Royal Hospital gains two global accreditations in immunology



The global accreditations highlight the hospital's fulfilment of advanced international standards.

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital has recently set a global medical milestone by obtaining two prestigious international accreditations.

The hospital merited ranking as a centre of excellence in the diagnosis and treatment of immunological and allergic diseases.

The achievement was the outcome of collaborative action and medical integration between the hospital's Clinical Immunology and Allergy Units (for adults and children) and the Immunology Laboratory.

The first achievement was Royal Hospital's ranking as a Centre of Excellence by the World Allergy Organization (WAO), thanks to exceptional efforts made by the clinical medical staff in the hospital's Adult and Paediatric Immunology and Allergy Units, with support from the Immunology Laboratory team.

The second achievement was Royal Hospital's gaining accreditation from the Global

Network of Excellence in Allergy and Asthma (GA²LEN), ranking the hospital as an accredited Centre of Excellence for Atopic Dermatitis (ADCARE).

The ranking was granted to the Royal Hospital after it passed two comprehensive external assessments and audits of medical quality standards, which underscores its dedication to apply advanced and accurate treatment protocols.

Dr Iman Hamed Nasr, Consultant Immunologist and Allergist at the Royal Hospital, said that the global accreditation by WAO and ADCARE highlights the hospital's fulfilment of advanced international standards featuring high quality of clinical care, the accuracy of laboratory diagnostic services, the availability of specialised medical competencies and commitment to evidence-based practices, in addition to excellence in the fields

of education, training and scholarly research.

She explained that these accreditations differ from traditional health rankings, since they are not restricted to the quality of health services and the safety of procedures, but focus on precise, specialised excellence and the institution's ability to integrate advanced clinical care with research, medical education and innovation in accordance with the best global practices. She affirmed that this achievement would reflect positively on patient care in Oman.

Dr Iman Nasr added that the accreditation of the Centre of Excellence in Atopic Dermatitis reflects the availability of advanced standards in the diagnosis and management of this chronic disease through multidisciplinary medical teams, the application of the latest treatment methods and the furnishing of integrated care that includes diagnosis, treatment and long-term follow-up.

She stressed that the next phase would see the development of national competencies, the enhancement of research output and the expansion of specialised education and training programmes to maintain global standards of excellence.

Dr Iman Nasr pointed out that these accreditations enhance Royal Hospital's position as a regional reference centre in immunology and allergy specialties and open up greater vistas for cooperation with international institutions and centres specialised in research and medical education. — **ONA**

GCC YOUTH POPULATION REACHES 23.5 MILLION

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

THE YOUTH population across the GCC countries has reached approximately 23.5 million, accounting for 38.2 per cent of the total population, according to statistics released by the GCC Statistical Centre.

The data, issued on the occasion of GCC Youth Day, observed annually on June 6, show that young people aged 15–34 comprise a significant share of the population, with 15.1 million males and 8.4 million females in 2024.

A United Nations estimate suggests the GCC youth population is expected to rise to 28.6 million by 2050, an increase of around 5.9 million, representing overall growth of 26 per cent. The Centre noted that GCC countries are undergoing demographic changes aligned with global trends. The proportion of youth in the total population has slightly declined from 38.9 per cent in 2010 to 38.2 per cent in 2024. In contrast, the global share of youth declined from 32.8 per cent to 30.3 per cent over the same period.

Meanwhile, the share of the population aged 35 and above has increased, alongside a decline in the proportion of children under

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) estimates put the total population in 2026 at between 5.67 million and 5.82 million, with 56.8 per cent Omanis and 43.2 per cent expatriates.



GCC youth share stands at 38.2pc of the total population, projected to rise to 28.6m by 2050.

15, reflecting improved healthcare outcomes, rising life expectancy and lower fertility rates.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) estimates put the total population in 2026 at between 5.67 million and 5.82 million, with 56.8 per cent Omanis and 43.2 per cent expatriates.

Among citizens, around 64 per cent are under the age of 30, highlighting the growing role of youth in national development initiatives, including the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030).

Youth aged 15–24 make up around 13.77 per cent of the total population, or approximately 740,000 individuals, while those aged 15–34 account for nearly 19 per cent, representing over 535,000 Omani citizens.

The report also shows that employed youth across the GCC reached around 14.2 million in 2025, representing 38.1 per cent of the total workforce, marking a 5.1 per cent increase compared to 2024.

The number of employed GCC national youth stood at approximately 2.5 million, accounting for 43.5 per cent of all employed GCC nationals, with annual growth of 3.1 per cent.

The proportion of young people aged 15–24 not in education, employment or training (NEET) declined from 20.1 per cent in 2010 to 15.7 per cent in 2024, indicating improved youth integration into education and labour markets.

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية

Ministry of Social Development

رؤية عمان 2040

Moving Forward with Confidence

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
273/2026	Equipping the Innovation Room at the National Autism Center in Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of Supplying of Supply of office supplies, sports equipment and furniture registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree.	Monday 06-07-2026 02:00 PM	Thursday 23-07-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
Re-tender 288/2026	Supplying assistive devices for students with visual and hearing disabilities, Braille motion devices and headphones	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of communications and information technology devices registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree	Monday 06-07-2026 02:00 PM	Thursday 23-07-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
Re-tender 289/2026	Supply of assistive devices for students with visual and hearing disabilities. NVDA screen reader program	Companies specialized in the field of Design and installation of information technology systems and programsProjects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree	Monday 06-07-2026 02:00 PM	Thursday 23-07-2026 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 **Wednesday 17/06/2026**.

❖ 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"

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WAR

SHORT TAKES



A man inspects the damage at a mosque in Jibchit, Nabatieh district, Lebanon. — Reuters

LEBANESE LEADERS DISCUSS NEW ROUND OF ISRAEL TALKS

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s president and prime minister on Tuesday discussed preparations for a new round of talks with Israel next week, after the US and Iran announced a peace deal that includes Lebanon. Lebanon and Israel have been holding direct talks in Washington since April, seeking to end hostilities and separate the Israel-Hezbollah conflict from the wider regional war. But the announcement of the US-Iran deal has reshuffled the cards in Lebanon.

The office of President Joseph Aoun said in a statement that he and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam discussed preparations for the fifth round of talks, scheduled to begin on June 22. The pair view the US-Iran memorandum of understanding as “a positive factor in reducing the regional tensions and pushing towards peaceful solutions and an end to the state of war”, according to the statement.

They also reiterated that through the Washington talks, Lebanon continues to seek “a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the lands they occupy, the deployment of the Lebanese army up to the international border, the return of Lebanese prisoners and launching the reconstruction process”. Details circulating of the Iran-US deal fail to mention a withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. — AFP

UN SAYS 2.4 MILLION REFUGEES NEED RESETTLING IN 2027

GENEVA: Almost 2.4 million refugees will need resettling next year, the United Nations said on Tuesday, at a time when a number of countries have slashed resettlement spots. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, warned of a dire shortage of options for such refugees, who cannot return home and face risks in their country of asylum.

“Expanding resettlement is urgent and achievable,” Jackie Keegan, who leads UNHCR’s durable solutions and field protection support service, told journalists in Geneva. “Increased quotas, bringing more countries on board, and accelerating processing will ensure this life-saving tool reaches more of those in need.”

In its annual Projected Global Resettlement Needs report, UNHCR said 2.37 million people from 43 countries of origin and living in 76 countries of asylum would need resettling elsewhere next year. — AFP

PROTECTING SHIPPING

Japan reviews sending military to Hormuz



Japan said on Tuesday it has not yet decided whether its military will join efforts to help the resumption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz after the US-Iran peace deal. “At this point, no decision has been made regarding the dispatch of the Self-Defence Forces,” Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said Tuesday, using the official name for Japan’s armed forces. “We intend to consult closely with relevant countries,” Koizumi said. — AFP

NEW MIDEAST PHASE

Qatar eyes regional security through deal



Qatar, a key negotiator in the deal to end the war between the US and Iran, said on Tuesday it believed the agreement could deliver security to the Middle East. “We are cautiously optimistic that the signing of the memorandum of understanding will lead to the next phase of regional security through the talks that will take place on the nuclear programme and on other issues,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari told reporters. — AFP

PROMOTING EFFORTS

China’s diplomat urges sustained peace



China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi welcomed the first phase of the Memorandum of Understanding between Iran and the US and urged sustained efforts to advance talks and promote peace in the Middle East. Wang made the remarks during a phone call with his Pakistani counterpart. “There must be no turning back, still less a return to the use of force,” Wang told Ishaq Dar, noting that the second stage of negotiations would be more difficult. — Reuters

IRAN TALKS ON FINAL DEAL TO BEGIN

IRAN ON Tuesday said talks with the United States on its nuclear programme and sanctions relief would likely begin later this week, as President Donald Trump’s announcement that the Strait of Hormuz would reopen sent oil prices tumbling. Officials say negotiations over a final deal will take place within a 60-day window after the memorandum of understanding to end nearly four months of war triggered by US-Israeli strikes on Iran is physically signed. “Likely on Friday, at a location to be determined... a new round of negotiations between Iran and the United States to reach a final agreement will begin,” Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said. “In the final agreement, decisions will be made on the nuclear issues and the lifting of sanctions.”

According to Iran’s deputy foreign minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi, the Islamic republic’s top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf will attend the signing in Switzerland, which Bern said would take place at the luxury Burgenstock resort overlooking Lake Lucerne. The mountainside venue “was proposed by Pakistani and Qatari mediators, as well as by the US and Iran,” the Swiss foreign ministry said. The US side will be represented by Vice President JD Vance, who said Trump might also attend.

“At this stage, the signing is scheduled for Friday, June 19, at Burgenstock,” Switzerland’s foreign ministry said in a statement. The uber-plush resort, perched high above Lake Lucerne in central Switzerland, is difficult to access, with water on three sides, and therefore easily secured. The location, the ministry said, “was proposed by the Pakistani and Qatari mediators, as well as by the US and Iran”.

The developments came after Trump said an Iranian blockade on the crucial Hormuz strait oil and gas



An Iranian woman waves a national flag at Valiasr Square in Tehran. — AFP

The developments came after Trump said an Iranian blockade on the crucial Hormuz strait oil and gas route would be fully lifted by Friday, which would be a major boost to the global economy. “Ships are starting to move, many loaded up with Oil, out of the Strait of Hormuz,” Trump said on Monday. Optimism over the reopening of Hormuz has sent the price of the international benchmark Brent North Sea crude tumbling below \$80 a barrel, a three-month low. The US had, in retaliation, imposed its own blockade on Iranian ports.

Iranian state television said Iranian oil tankers and other vessels had resumed shipping following the deal, with Takht-Ravanchi saying the US blockade “has been lifted prior to the formal signing”. Sporadic episodes of violence since an April ceasefire had threatened a deal, but weeks of indirect negotiations mediated by Pakistan and Qatar built momentum for an interim agreement.

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Western sanctions remains elusive. Washington and close ally Israel are pressing to strip Iran of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, said to have been buried by US strikes last year, while Iran has insisted on its right to enrichment. The agreed framework has however paved the way for talks on those key disputes. Asked at the G7 in France when the text would be released, Trump said: “It’s a very powerful document, and I want it to be released. So probably pretty soon.” Iran’s ultraconservative newspaper Vatan-e Emrooz praised the agreement as a “Trump surrender document”.

But Araghchi struck a more cautious note. “We have a history of broken commitments... we have a history of agreements being torn up. All of this is present in our minds,” he said. A senior US administration official, however, said Trump, Vance and negotiator Ghalibaf had already signed the text electronically. — AFP



ISRAEL TAKES TERRITORY, KILLS MORE IN GAZA

GAZA: An Israeli strike killed at least two Palestinians in the central Gaza Strip, health officials said, as residents of an area in the north of the enclave fled their homes after Israeli forces expanded their control in the territory. Medics said an Israeli strike near a residential building in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in the central Gaza Strip, killed two brothers, Ahmed and Mahmoud Abu Heen. The Israeli military did not immediately comment.

Israeli troops still control more than 60 per cent of Gaza’s territory, where they have ordered residents out and destroyed remaining buildings.

On May 28, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed that he had directed Israel’s military to expand its hold and take control of 70 per cent of the enclave. Witnesses in southern Gaza have said Israeli forces have in the past few days expanded the “Yellow Zone” — the areas they control — in eastern Khan Younis and northern Rafah, where new markers and concrete blocks have been placed. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



FBI Director Kash Patel speaks during a round table discussion at the Department of Justice headquarters in Washington. — AFP

FBI disrupted attack plot on White House fight night

WASHINGTON: US law enforcement disrupted a plot to attack the White House during a mixed martial arts event attended by US President Donald Trump and other top officials over the weekend, FBI Director Kash Patel said on Tuesday. “Thanks to the rapid action of this FBI, our partners, and the Department of Justice in a multi-state operation, multiple individuals are now in custody and allegedly planned attacks were stopped cold,” Patel said on X.

His post included a caption of a Fox News headline reading: “FBI disrupts alleged explosive-drone plot targeting White House UFC event, officials say,” and he shared a link to the article in a separate post. Fox News reported that five people had been taken into custody, according to unnamed US officials, with investigators identifying 23 people in a “potential network of plotters.”

The plan involved using drones to hit buildings near the White House during the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) contest and prompt a mass evacuation that would “steer crowds toward a pre-staged sniper team,” Fox News said. There were also plans to storm the White House gates with a “second wave,” the report said. Asked for further details about Patel’s post, the FBI said that “we have nothing to add to the post at this time.” — AFP

TRUMP TO HOST IRAQI PRIME MINISTER



US President Donald Trump will host Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaidi at the White House next month, the Iraqi leader’s office and the US embassy in Baghdad said on Tuesday. “Special Presidential Envoy Barrack conveyed President Trump looks forward to welcoming Prime Minister Al Zaidi to the White House mid-July to discuss the future of this important relationship,” said a joint statement from the Iraqi leader and Trump’s special envoy to Iraq, Tom Barrack, issued by the embassy. — AFP

GERMANY OPENS CENTRE TO COMBAT ‘HYBRID THREATS’

BERLIN: Germany opened a centre to coordinate its defences against “hybrid attacks” on Tuesday as the country is on high alert for espionage, sabotage and disinformation.

“The danger posed by hybrid threats is constantly growing, including for Germany,” Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt told reporters at the opening of the centre in Berlin. “Foreign powers are attacking us through espionage, sabotage, cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns.”

The Joint Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats aims to facilitate coordination between the domestic and foreign intelligence agencies, police, other security services and regional authorities. Dobrindt said the centre would help prioritise “coordination rather than turf wars”.

Like several other European countries, Germany has seen a spate of suspicious drone flights over and near sensitive sites such as military bases, power plants and airports. Tensions with Moscow have

surged as Germany has become a major supporter of Ukraine and moved to massively build up its own defences as part of the Nato alliance.

“Our country is in the crosshairs of foreign powers and our freedom, our democracy and our prosperity are being attacked on an almost daily basis,” Dobrindt said. He foreshadowed reforms for German spy agencies away from pure intelligence-gathering towards a more active role in countering threats to national security. — AFP

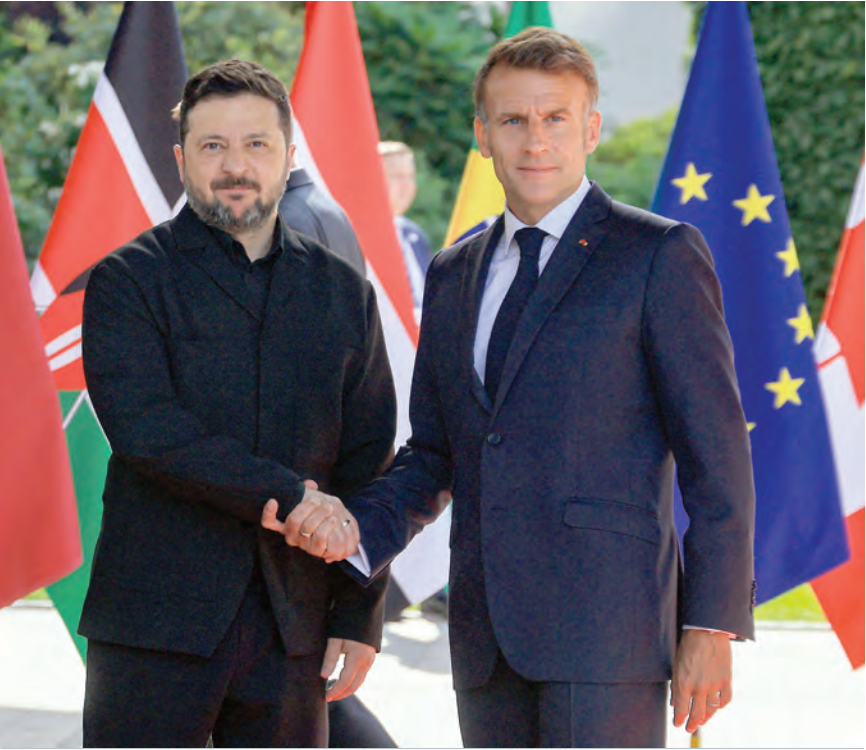
G7 powers push Russia to end 4-year Ukraine war

G7 LEADERS agreed on Tuesday to intensify pressure on Russia to end more than four years of war against Ukraine, with US President Donald Trump saying Moscow should “make a deal”. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky joined the summit at the French resort of Evian-les-Bains, with Ukraine seen as holding up well on the battlefield but its cities still the target of deadly Russian attacks in a conflict that has now lasted longer than World War I.

The summit of the G7 group of world powers notably brought Zelensky face-to-face with Trump, who has sought to reach out to Russian President Vladimir Putin but also showed signs of losing patience with Moscow. “Leaders decided today to increase the pressure on Russia through sanctions on gas and oil,” a French diplomatic source said after the talks.

The leaders also agreed there “is a dynamic on the ground that benefits Ukraine”, added the source, who asked not to be named. Host President Emmanuel Macron has invited Zelensky to stay until the end of the three-day summit on Wednesday so that he can meet Trump and the other G7 leaders.

European leaders will be keen to remind Trump of the importance of pushing Russia to accept peace on Ukraine’s terms, and not pressure Kyiv into making concessions to Moscow. “Russia should make a deal” to end the war against Ukraine, Trump said after meeting Zelensky. He pointed to the high casualties on both sides in the conflict, the deadliest on European soil since World



France’s President Emmanuel Macron greets Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky ahead of the working session with G7 leaders and Ukraine during the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France. — AFP

War II. “The whole thing is ridiculous. So, yeah, I’m going to do whatever I can,” Trump added.

Zelensky said in a post on X after meeting G7 leaders that Ukraine’s priorities were “clear”, including increasing the number of air defence missiles, a winter support package and strengthening pressure on Russia. “It’s great that everybody understands that Russia is not winning, and we have to push Putin to end this war,” the Ukrainian leader said at a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. Zelensky had on Monday urged a “decisive and substantive” response from the G7 leaders after the latest wave of Russian

strikes, which killed at least 11 people and sparked a fire at a landmark Kyiv cathedral. He revealed Putin had rejected an offer of a meeting at the G7 but said he had also suggested to Trump that he could meet Putin in the United States.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the United Kingdom is imposing a raft of new sanctions against Russia, including on tankers that transport LNG, in a bid to pressure Moscow into halting the war against Ukraine. “Working with our G7 allies, we will continue to increase the pressure on Putin and his circle of collaborators until Russia’s war machine is brought to a halt and peace returns to our continent,” said Starmer.

Carney meanwhile said Canada was announcing new sanctions against 160 entities linked to Russia’s so-called shadow fleet, used to dodge Western sanctions on Russian fossil fuels and other goods.

Meanwhile, Turkiye is worried by a recent uptick in attacks on civilians in the Ukraine war, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Tuesday during a visit to Moscow. Turkiye is casting itself as a potential peacemaker between Moscow and Kyiv, seeking to bring the four-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands to a close. “The recent escalation in the Ukraine war and the danger of its geographical expansion are a source of serious concern,” Fidan said at a press conference alongside his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. “In particular, the increase in attacks on targets behind the front lines and attacks threatening the safety of navigation in the Black Sea have effects that harm the interests of third parties. Certain de-escalatory measures are therefore necessary.” He was speaking a day after a Russian missile and drone barrage killed 11 across Ukraine and damaged a cathedral in the centre of Kyiv.

Iran remains a key topic at the summit, with allies eager to question Trump over his deal with the Islamic republic to end the Middle East war.

Trump said the United States was under “no obligation” to invest in Iran after the deal, adding that its main focus was that Iran would not acquire a nuclear weapon and that “all hell” would “rain down” on the country if it did. — AFP

DR Congo Ebola outbreak could last a year: Red Cross

GENEVA: The deadly Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has not yet reached its peak, the Red Cross said on Tuesday, warning it could take a year to halt the spread. Since the outbreak was declared in the DRC on May 15, 808 cases have been confirmed in the country, including 192 deaths, according to the World Health Organization.

Speaking from Bunia, the capital of Ituri — the northeastern province which is the outbreak’s epicentre — a top official from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said the crisis appeared far from over. “Here in Bunia, what I can see is that we did not reach the peak of the epidemic,” Bruno Michon, the IFRC’s operations manager

for the Ebola outbreak, told reporters in Geneva by video call.

Like a number of other organisations working on the Ebola response on the ground, he said the IFRC was concerned about a dire lack of testing capacity, warning: “it’s very difficult to know exactly to what extent the epidemic is spreading”. “The peak is, I think, not beyond us, but in front of us,” he said, adding: “We are afraid that this could last one year” before ending the outbreak. No approved vaccines or treatments exist for the Bundibugyo strain of the virus responsible for the current outbreak, which although centred in Ituri, has also been detected in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces.

The outbreak has also



A volunteer, wearing a protective suit, disinfects the door of the house where a child, presumed dead of Ebola virus, in Bunia. — AFP

spread to neighbouring Uganda, which to date counts 19 confirmed cases, including two deaths. In the DRC especially, Michon warned that reining in the outbreak would require large efforts in gaining the trust of the affected communities. “To

stop this outbreak, we need to invest not only in medical response, but also in trust, local volunteers, community engagement and operational access,” he said. He pointed out that “in recent days, DRC Red Cross volunteers have faced verbal abuse,

threats and even physical attacks while carrying out their work”. “Trust is not a secondary activity in an Ebola response. Trust is central. Without trust, we cannot detect cases early. We cannot ensure safe burials. We cannot protect families. And we cannot stop transmission,” he said.

“Dangerous gaps” remain in efforts to rein in an Ebola outbreak that has killed more than 180 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Doctors Without Borders warned. Despite a massive scale-up in the response to the deadly outbreak declared in the vast central African country on May 15, the medical charity, which goes by its French acronym MSF, said the true scale of the crisis remained

unclear. “One month on, the Ebola disease outbreak is outpacing the response effort,” Kate White, MSF’s emergency medical coordinator in the DRC, said in a statement. “No-one knows the true scale or exactly where the disease is spreading,” she said. “What we do know is that most treatment centres in Ituri province are overwhelmed; many of our patients arrive at a late stage of the disease, and the majority were never identified or monitored as contacts before seeking care.”

So far, 782 Ebola cases, including 181 deaths, have been confirmed in the DRC, according to the latest figures from the World Health Organization. Another 19 cases, including two deaths, have been confirmed in neighbouring Uganda. — AFP

OPINION

The forgotten secret to living longer



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

THERE ARE places in the world where people seem to age differently. Not because they have found a magic supplement, perfect routine, or the latest wellness trend, but because their lives quietly support health, connection, purpose and ease. These places are known as Blue Zones: regions where people are known to live longer, healthier lives, often with more vitality and emotional steadiness than many of us experience in the modern world.

What fascinates me most about the Blue Zones is not just that people live longer. It is how they live while they are alive. Their secret is not extreme discipline, nor obsession. It is not measuring every calorie, tracking every step or punishing the body into wellness. Their secret seems to be that health is woven into the rhythm of daily life. Movement is not something they have to force into a packed schedule. It happens naturally through walking, gardening, cooking, cleaning and using the body the way it was designed to be used.

This makes me wonder how far we have drifted from the simplicity our bodies and nervous systems actually crave. Many of us live in a world where we outsource

movement, rush through meals, eat distractedly, sit for hours, carry stress like a badge of honour, and then wonder why we feel exhausted, disconnected and inflamed. We try to fix the body without looking at the life the body is living. Blue Zones invite us to ask a different question. Instead of “What do I need to add?” maybe we need to ask, “What have I moved too far away from?”

One of the strongest lessons from these communities is the importance of purpose. In Okinawa, it is called Ikigai: a reason to wake up in the morning. This does not have to be impressive; purpose does not always look like changing the world on a stage. Sometimes the purpose is raising emotionally safe children, tending to a garden, preparing food with love, zoning in on a craft, or becoming the kind of person your younger self needed. Purpose gives the nervous system direction. It reminds us that we are not just surviving the day, we are participating in something meaningful.

Another beautiful thread in the Blue Zones is connection. People are not meant to heal, grow, parent or age in isolation. We regulate through safe relationships. We soften when we feel held. We become more resilient when we belong somewhere. In many Blue

Longevity is not only about adding years to your life. It is about adding life back into your years.

Zone communities, people gather often, eat together, check on each other, contribute their time and share life in ordinary ways. This is where Oman already holds something special and beautiful. There is a strong culture of family, hospitality, shared meals, faith and community.

However, many of us live busy but lonely lives, surrounded by people but emotionally unseen, connected online but disconnected in our homes. As parents, this matters deeply. Our children do not only learn about health from what we tell them. They learn it from the atmosphere we create. They notice whether meals are rushed or relational. They notice whether rest is allowed or guilt-ridden. They notice whether the body is treated as a burden or a home, and whether family feels hastened or a place where people can breathe. If we want our children to live well, we have to show them what living well actually looks like.

Maybe the real secret of the Blue Zones is this: longevity is not only about adding years to your life. It is about adding life back into your years. For what is the point of living longer is we are hurried, stressed, disconnected and numb to actually be here for it?

NEARLY HALF THE WORLD’S CHILDREN EXPOSED TO 3 OR MORE CLIMATE RISKS

AMÉLIE BOTTOLLIER-DEPOIS

More than one billion children face at least three overlapping climate hazards, UNICEF warned on Monday, while highlighting the disproportionate impact in some regions of the world.

For the report, the UN agency cross-referenced data showing where the roughly 2.4 billion children on the planet live with the geographic distribution of the eight most common climate impacts. They are coastal flooding, river flooding, drought, tropical storms, heat waves — at least three days above a high temperature threshold, which varies by country — extreme heat, wildfires and sandstorms.

The report primarily focuses on the 1.1 billion children who are exposed to at least three risks, with the most common combination being drought, extreme heat (above 35 degrees Celsius) and heat waves. That combination affects some 296 million children, including 74 million in Nigeria, 34 million in Pakistan and 32 million in India. The number of children in this three-or-more category has increased sharply over the past 20 years.

Almost all children — some 2.3 billion — are exposed to at least one risk. Two billion are exposed to at least two, while 364 million face at least four. Of the 123,000 children exposed to seven or more climate hazards, some 46,000 are in Myanmar.

“Children are at the forefront of the impact of climate change,” said UNICEF chief Catherine Russell. As for the worst place for a child, “there isn’t a super short answer,” one of the report authors, Tom Slaymaker, said.

Countries with large populations of children — including Bangladesh, India, Nigeria and Pakistan — are at the top of the list for the number of children exposed to at least three hazards.

But in sheer percentage terms, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa -- particularly the Sahel -- have the largest proportion of children affected by hazards. The impacts are often exacerbated by governments’ inability to cope with climate hazards.

Chad, for example, faces a humanitarian crisis with limited access to water, electricity and food. According to the report, more than 95 per cent of kids in the country are exposed to at least three hazards — one of the highest proportions in the world.

Other particularly vulnerable countries include 39 island states that face challenges such as limited freshwater, import dependence, and inability to easily shelter elsewhere after a disaster such as a hurricane. — AFP

Beyond the football field

THE World Cup is almost here again, and with it comes one of the strangest transformations in modern life. Perfectly reasonable people suddenly become football experts. Family dinners are rearranged. Weddings are checked against the fixture list. Sleep becomes optional. Somewhere, a sensible adult will decide that watching a late-night match is more important than feeling awake at work the next morning. Nobody questions any of this. It is just what happens.

When I was a child, I thought the World Cup was simply about football. Twenty-two players, one ball, two goals, and the rest of us shouting at the television as if the manager could hear our advice. I was always convinced that I knew exactly what the team should do, despite the small detail that I had never managed a football club in my life. Looking back, I suspect millions of us had the same confidence.

This year’s tournament, which runs from June 11 to July 19 across the US, Canada and Mexico, will be no different. Billions will watch. Millions will celebrate. A similar number will be convinced that the referee has ruined football forever. That is all perfectly normal. The more interesting question is why governments become almost as invested as the supporters. If football is only a game, somebody forgot to tell the politicians.

People often say politics should stay out of sport, but I have never been sure what that really means. The flags are already there. The national anthems are already there. Political leaders attend opening ceremonies, governments compete to host tournaments, and public figures are quick to congratulate the winning team. Politics in sport may be the elephant in the room. Everybody can see it, but every four years, we pretend to be surprised that it is there.

I think instead of asking why politics became interested in football, maybe we should ask why



Iranians watch the 2026 World Cup football tournament match between Iran and New Zealand at Tehran Book Garden in Tehran on Tuesday. — AFP



DR KHALFAN BIN HAMED AL HARRASI

The writer is an academic and researcher

We still call it a game, but one that shapes memories, builds national pride, opens diplomatic doors, and captures the attention of billions of people. Indeed, it is doing an astonishing amount of work for a game

football became important enough for politics to notice. What fascinates me is not the game itself. It is what the game does to people. During the World Cup, people who spend the rest of the year disagreeing about politics, economics, or almost anything else suddenly discover they are all hoping for the same result. Complete strangers celebrate together. The person sitting next to you in a café may be hugging you thirty seconds after a goal. Under normal circumstances, you would probably take a small step backwards. For ninety minutes, though, it all seems reasonable.

That shared feeling helps explain why governments care so much. Creating a sense of unity is difficult. Football seems to stumble into it naturally. A speech may be forgotten by next week, but people remember where they watched a famous World Cup match, who they were with, and what they shouted at the referee. I can still remember some of those moments from my own childhood, even though I have forgotten plenty of things that were much more important.

It also explains why countries work so hard to host the tournament. Spending billions on stadiums, airports, transport, and security for an event lasting only a few weeks sounds slightly mad when you first hear it. Yet countries compete for the privilege because

they are not only organising a football competition. They are introducing themselves to the world. Yes, television cameras show the matches but also show cities, traditions, music, food, and life in the streets. Host countries are rolling out the red carpet. We call that “soft power”, something that sounds as though it was invented at a conference just before the coffee break, but the idea is simple. People are more likely to visit, study, work, or invest in places they admire. The World Cup gives countries a chance to leave a good impression.

The tournament also creates opportunities away from the pitch. While supporters are discussing substitutions and arguing about referees, government officials, business leaders and diplomats are often meeting behind the scenes. I do appreciate that football is not a substitute for diplomacy, but it can help break the ice. Sometimes a conversation starts with a shared love of the game.

The 2026 World Cup will be yet another good example because it is hosted jointly by the US, Canada, and Mexico. At a time when headlines often focus on borders and disagreements, three neighbouring countries are working together to organise one of the largest events on the planet. The teams will compete, the supporters will debate every decision, and somebody will still blame the referee, which is one of the few traditions shared by football fans everywhere.

The older I get, the stranger the whole thing seems. Children kick a ball around in parks every afternoon without giving it a second thought, and somehow that same game ends up being discussed by presidents, economists, historians, and political scientists. I believe that is what makes the World Cup so fascinating. We still call it a game, but one that shapes memories, builds national pride, opens diplomatic doors and captures the attention of billions of people. Indeed, it is doing an astonishing amount of work for a game.

An innovative plan from Muscat to tackle hate speech



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

WE ALL know that the power of language is like a double-edged sword. Words can be used freely and profoundly to establish social connections, inspire and empower both individuals and society. Conversely, they are equally capable of manipulating, dividing and causing harm.

Words can also be wielded as weapons to reinforce prejudices, fuel conflicts and marginalise minority groups. This is what we are currently witnessing — a transition in our everyday language toward hate-filled speeches under the pretext of freedom of speech.

When the right to freedom of speech is used to cause harm, it constitutes an abuse or misuse of that right. Since free speech is not absolute, it is legally restricted when it infringes on the safety, dignity, or rights of others.

Moreover, freedom of speech is never an absolute right. Although it is a fundamental democratic principle, courts and international bodies stress that it does not grant permission to provoke violence, disseminate hatred, or slander individuals.

Although hate speech does not have a universally agreed-upon definition under international law, it encompasses any form of hateful or contemptuous expression that attacks, degrades, or vilifies individuals based on their social identities.

The United Nations defines hate speech as any communication — whether spoken, written or behavioural — that attacks or employs pejorative or discriminatory

language targeting a person or group based on their identity, including religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other factors.

In this backdrop is the Muscat Plan of Action, launched on June 11, 2026, as part of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, initiated by the Secretary-General in June 2019. It aims to tackle hate speech, prevent incitement to genocide and other atrocity crimes, and strengthen peace mediation, dialogue, and local-level peacebuilding efforts.

“Hate speech is a grave and growing threat to peace and security. It divides communities, dehumanises entire groups, and sets the stage for bloodshed. It is also deliberate — a core component in the playbook for virtually every genocide and atrocity crime,” remarked UN Secretary-General António Guterres during the launch of the Action Plan.

The plan is the result of a collaborative process led by the Sultanate of Oman, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. It is co-hosted by the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

“Across the world, we see conflicts raging, inequalities widening, climate chaos worsening, and hate speech spreading faster than ever — amplified by unregulated platforms and intensified by artificial intelligence,” the Secretary-General pointed out. Nations must unite to confront hate speech and uphold human rights and human dignity before it is too late. They have clear

The plan is the result of a collaborative process led by the Sultanate of Oman, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. It is co-hosted by the UN Alliance of Civilizations

obligations under international law to combat incitement to hatred and to promote inclusion, respect for diversity, and solidarity.

For his part, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said that the main message of the Muscat Plan of Action is: “Real peace is not built on fear. It is built through trust, not through exclusion, but through participation. It is not achieved by weakening identities, but by directing them towards serving humanity for the overall good.”

The Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech provides strategic guidance for the United Nations system to address hate speech at both national and global levels. Its objectives are twofold: first, to strengthen United Nations efforts to tackle the root causes and drivers of hate speech; and second, to enable effective United Nations responses to the impact of hate speech on societies.

The strategy and its implementation should align with the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The United Nations supports more speech, not less, as the key means to address hate speech.

Therefore, the Muscat plan is an effective and holistic response to prevent incitement to genocide and other atrocity crimes and promote peace mediation, dialogue and local peace-building.

Obviously, freedom of speech is a fundamental human right; however, if your words are likely to harm others or incite trouble, they should not be expressed.

Social networks, online video outweigh traditional media

News consumers around the world are now turning more to social media and video platforms than traditional outlets for information, a respected report said on Tuesday, warning that old-style business models are under threat.

The year 2026 marks “a significant milestone: for the first time, social media and video network consumption is now ahead of other news sources as the most widely used source of news globally”, at 54 per cent, wrote Jim Egan, lead author of the report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

The annual report from the institute, attached to the University of Oxford, is a closely-watched tracker of trends reshaping the news media.

Researchers based their findings on online surveys of almost 100,000 people in 48 countries, run early this year by pollsters YouGov.

This year’s edition found that 54 per cent of respondents said they got news from social media or video platforms in the week before the survey — rising to 56 per cent if AI chatbots like ChatGPT were included.

That outstripped the 52 per cent who referenced TV news, 51 per cent for newspaper apps or websites, and 21 per cent for radio.

While it was the first time new platforms topped the old in the average of the global survey, individual countries had already passed the turning point. In some countries, though, notably in Europe, traditional media websites and apps remain ahead for now. “It is better to think of this more as a drift rather than a shift, but it is nevertheless an important moment,” Egan wrote.

Across the global survey, three out of 10 respondents said social media or video platforms were their main source of news.

Among 18-24-year-olds, the proportion rose to half. Different social networks also breed different usage patterns.

Most of the respondents visited X or YouTube specifically to find news. But on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, users were likelier to stumble across news while doing something else.

Television remained the leading news source only among 45-54-year-olds and over-55s.

The responses about traditional media apps and websites were also grim reading, with none of the age tranches surveyed saying they were their first port of call for news. “This has obvious implications in terms of prospects for audience reach, engagement, and monetisation potential,” wrote Egan, a former senior executive at the BBC.

The scale of the challenge in finding the revenues to pay for reporting is clear from the fact that just 17 per cent of respondents said they pay for information online.

Meanwhile, Internet giants such as Google and Meta have captured a giant share of the advertising market — at the expense of traditional media. — AFP

The war on Palestine Action raises questions

THE UNITED KINGDOM’S move toward designating Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation raises serious questions about how governments define extremism, political violence and dissent. If the designation is upheld, Palestine Action, a British protest group known for targeting arms manufacturers and companies linked to Israel could find itself legally placed in the same category as organisations responsible for mass casualty attacks against civilians. For many people, that comparison feels extraordinary.

Founded in 2020, Palestine Action has built its reputation on direct action campaigns against companies it believes are facilitating Israeli military operations. British authorities have stated that the group’s activities have caused millions of pounds in damage through occupations, vandalism and disruption of facilities linked to defence contractors. Supporters argue these actions are intended to prevent weapons from being produced or exported. Critics argue that deliberate property destruction crosses a line that legitimate protest should not cross.

Regardless of where one stands on the group’s tactics, the terrorism designation raises a broader question: what exactly constitutes terrorism?

The UK’s Terrorism Act defines terrorism as actions designed to influence the government or intimidate the public for political, religious, racial or ideological purposes, involving serious violence, serious property damage or threats to public safety. Yet many people struggle to reconcile this definition with Palestine Action’s activities. The group has not carried out indiscriminate bombings against civilians, nor has it engaged in mass casualty attacks of the kind typically associated with terrorist organisations. Instead, its actions have largely focused on infrastructure, factories and



For years, campaigners have pointed to what they see as a double standard in how political violence is discussed.



OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration.

The irony is difficult to ignore. Around the world, civilians continue to die in armed conflicts, while those protesting against war or weapons production face increasingly severe legal scrutiny.

companies connected to the defence industry.

For years, campaigners have pointed to what they see as a double standard in how political violence is discussed. When attacks are carried out by individuals associated with Islamist ideologies, the term “terrorism” often appears immediately in headlines. When white extremists carry out school shootings, attack mosques, target racial minorities or murder people because of their religion or ethnicity, the language used can sometimes be more cautious. Public discussion frequently shifts toward mental health, personal grievances or troubled backgrounds.

This perception, whether entirely accurate or not, has created a sense among many activists that the label “terrorist” is not always applied consistently. The Palestine Action case risks reinforcing that belief.

Supporters of the group point to recent actions targeting Israeli linked arms facilities. Their argument is straightforward: if weapons are being used in conflicts that result in civilian casualties, then disrupting their production is an act of resistance rather than terrorism. They argue that damaging a factory is fundamentally different from

deliberately targeting human beings. The British government, however, views the matter differently. Officials argue that repeated attacks on facilities, significant property damage and the potential risk posed to workers and the public justify stronger legal measures.

At the heart of this dispute is a deeper political reality: Palestine remains one of the most polarising issues in contemporary politics. The war in Gaza has generated enormous public mobilisation across Europe, including some of the largest demonstrations seen in decades. Millions of people have marched, protested, and campaigned in support of Palestinian rights. Against this backdrop, attempts to classify a pro-Palestinian activist group as a terrorist organisation are inevitably interpreted through a political lens.

Many activists fear that the designation could create a chilling effect on protest more broadly. They worry that actions once considered civil disobedience or direct action could increasingly be treated as national security threats. Whether those fears are justified remains a matter of debate, but the concern itself reflects growing unease about the boundaries between protest, disruption and criminality.

The irony is difficult to ignore. Around the world, civilians continue to die in armed conflicts, while those protesting against war or weapons production face increasingly severe legal scrutiny. To many supporters of Palestine Action, the focus appears misplaced: attention is directed toward activists damaging property rather than toward the human consequences of the conflicts they oppose.

Others respond that democratic societies cannot allow political causes, however strongly felt, to justify unlawful destruction. They argue that once property damage and intimidation become accepted political tools, the line between activism and coercion becomes dangerously blurred.



New coach of Tunisia national team Herve Renard. — AFP

TUNISIA SACK LAMOUCHI, APPOINT RENARD AFTER HUMBLING BY SWEDEN

TUNISIA have sacked coach Sabri Lamouchi and replaced him with fellow Frenchman Herve Renard in the wake of the 5-1 defeat by Sweden in their World Cup opener in Monterrey on Sunday, the Tunisian Football Federation (FTF) said. Lamouchi, the first coaching casualty of the tournament, was appointed in January on a contract until 2028. He leaves the

post with matches to come against Japan on Saturday and the Netherlands on June 25. Tunisia won just one of their five games under Lamouchi, beating Haiti 1-0 in March, while losing 1-0 to Austria and being thrashed 5-0 by Belgium in a pair of World Cup warm-up matches this month. In a statement on social media on Tuesday, the TFT said Renard would take charge until the end of Tunisia's World Cup

campaign. "The agreement also stipulates that negotiations will be opened after the World Cup campaign to consider a long-term partnership based on specific sporting objectives," it added. The country's state-owned broadcaster Television Tunisienne reported that Renard would arrive in Monterrey later on Tuesday to link up with the squad. Renard, twice an Africa Cup of Nations

winner, coached Saudi Arabia at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and led them to a famous victory over eventual champions Argentina in the group stage. He left to coach the French women's team at the World Cup in 2023 and the Paris Olympics, before returning to Saudi Arabia and helping the men's side qualify for a third successive World Cup. He was then replaced by Georgios Donis in the build-up to the tournament. — Reuters

Tunisia coach Sabri Lamouchi reacts. —Reuters



Tunisia's forward Sebastian Tounekti reacts after losing the 2026 World Cup Group F football match between Sweden and Tunisia at the Monterrey Stadium in Guadalupe. — AFP



Iran forward Torabi could miss World Cup matches over invalid visa



IRAN

may have to do without forward Mehdi Torabi for their next two World Cup group matches after the 31-year-old's visa was declared invalid, the Iranian state news agency IRNA reported on Monday. Torabi did not play in the side's opener against New Zealand on

Coach Amir Ghalenoi said the team is the "most oppressed" at the World Cup. From a purely sporting perspective, Torabi's absence would probably not be too significant.

Monday, which finished 2-2. While the other Iranian players were issued with visas allowing multiple entries into the US, Torabi was reportedly only granted permission for a single entry for the New Zealand game. The Iranian Football Federation has already applied for a new visa to enable Torabi to take part in the next

two matches. Iran's participation at the World Cup has been hampered by the country's war with the United States. The team was not allowed to stay overnight in the US following their first match in Los Angeles, being forced to return to their base in Mexico. Coach Amir Ghalenoi said the team is

the "most oppressed" at the World Cup. From a purely sporting perspective, Torabi's absence would probably not be too significant. He is at the tournament as a replacement for the former Bayer Leverkusen player Sardar Azmoun, who was accused of unpatriotic behaviour. — dpa



Uruguay's Maximiliano Araujo in action with England's Tino Livramento. — Reuters

ENGLAND'S CHALOBAH TO REPLACE INJURED LIVRAMENTO

KANSAS CITY: Chelsea defender Trevoh Chalobah has been called into England's World Cup squad after a calf injury forced the withdrawal of Newcastle's Tino Livramento. The 23-year-old Livramento suffered the injury in training on Sunday and a scan and medical assessment on Monday confirmed he could not play in the tournament. World governing body Fifa allows teams to make changes to their final 26-man squads up to 24 hours before their first group match in cases of significant injury. England debut against

Croatia in Group L on Wednesday. Chalobah will travel to

the team's base camp in Kansas City, while the rest of the squad will head to Dallas for Wednesday's game, England's Football Association said in a statement. Livramento's place had already been uncertain after he missed the final five weeks of the domestic season with a thigh problem in an injury-filled campaign. He made only 17 Premier League appearances for Newcastle, suffering two knee injuries that ruled him out for two months before a January hamstring injury sidelined him for 15 matches. Livramento made his England debut under Gareth Southgate in November 2024 and has been capped five times under Thomas Tuchel, starting twice. He came on at half-time in a 1-0 warm-up win over New Zealand but did not feature in the subsequent

friendly against Costa Rica. Right-back is already a concern for England, with Reece James also battling fitness issues after an injury-hit campaign. The 26-year-old missed nine games for Chelsea late in the season with a hamstring problem. Djed Spence and Ezri Konsa are also options. Spence, who can play on either side, has made six appearances under Tuchel, while Konsa, who is primarily a centre-back, has 11 caps, including nine starts. Chalobah, meanwhile, has not played for England since featuring in a friendly against Senegal in June 2025, though he was named on the bench for several World Cup qualifiers under Tuchel. An injured player must be replaced by someone from the "provisional release list" of up to 55 players that was named prior to the tournament. — Reuters



PORTUGAL, ENGLAND

SET FOR WORLD CUP OPENERS



Led by captain Cristiano Ronaldo and backed by a squad rich in talent and experience, the Portuguese side enters the tournament as one of Europe's leading contenders

Harry Kane says before the match vs Croatia in world cup 2018 "We know we are just one step away from a historic final. We came here with great belief in our abilities, and we know that the opportunity ahead of us is rare

RİYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadh baluch

FOOTBALL

highly anticipated opening matches in the Fifa World Cup 2026 group stage, as Portugal and England begin their campaigns with high hopes of securing strong starts. Portugal will kick off their Group K campaign against DR Congo at NRG Stadium in Houston, aiming to claim

fans will turn their attention tomorrow to two

all three points and take an early step toward qualification for the knockout stage.

Led by captain Cristiano Ronaldo and backed by a squad rich in talent and experience, the Portuguese side enters the tournament as one of Europe's leading contenders. Meanwhile, DR Congo will be seeking to spring an early surprise and demonstrate their ability to compete against one of the world's top national teams.

Group K also features Uzbekistan and

Colombia, adding further significance to the opening fixture for both sides in the race for qualification.

In another opening match, England will face Croatia in Group L at AT&T Stadium in Arlington in a contest that carries added significance given the history between the two teams in major international tournaments.

England will look to overcome the Croatian challenge and begin their campaign on a positive note, relying on a blend of emerging talent and experienced players. Croatia, for their part, will seek to capitalise on their extensive tournament

experience and continue their strong presence on the global stage.

Group L also includes Ghana and Panama, who will meet in the opening round of fixtures.

Opening matches often play a decisive role in shaping the course of the group stage, with early results proving crucial in the battle for qualification to the knockout rounds.



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CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$72.99
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SHORT TAKES



Sales of regular petrol rise 0.2 per cent and premium petrol sales increase to 6.5 per cent.

JET FUEL OUTPUT IN OMAN RISES 10.9%

MUSCAT: Oman’s refining sector delivered mixed results during the first four months of 2026, with stronger jet fuel output and petrochemical production offset by declines in gasoline, diesel and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Production of regular petrol (91 octane) fell 7.9 per cent year-on-year to 5.33 million barrels by the end of April, while premium petrol (95 octane) production declined 3 per cent to 4.28 million barrels. Despite lower output, domestic demand remained resilient, with sales of regular petrol rising 0.2 per cent and premium petrol sales increasing 6.5 per cent.

Diesel production slipped 3.3 per cent to 23.7 million barrels, while domestic sales dropped sharply by 40.1 per cent to 3.34 million barrels. Diesel exports also declined 9.5 per cent to 18.19 million barrels.

In contrast, jet fuel production climbed 10.9 per cent to 8.86 million barrels, reflecting stronger aviation activity. Jet fuel sales rose 14.8 per cent to 1.43 million barrels, while exports increased 13.4 per cent to 7.32 million barrels.

LPG production fell 4.9 per cent to 3.6 million barrels, with sales and exports declining by 18.8 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively. Naphtha production rose 2.9 per cent to 12.38 million barrels, while domestic sales increased 9.1 per cent. Exports, however, edged down 1.9 per cent.

Among petrochemical products, benzene production increased to 67,700 metric tonnes from 59,500 tonnes a year earlier, while exports rose 10.1 per cent. Paraxylene production also grew to 213,700 tonnes, although exports fell 5.3 per cent.

Polypropylene production declined 25.7 per cent to 76,300 metric tonnes, while exports dropped 21.7 per cent. Despite lower output, domestic sales increased 17.5 per cent, indicating stronger local demand. The data highlights continued strength in aviation-related fuel demand and selected petrochemical products, even as some refined fuel segments faced softer production and export performance. — ONA

Private vehicle inspection station launched in Oman

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

In a move marking a new era for private sector participation in the vehicle transport and technical inspection services sector in the Sultanate of Oman, Al Maha Technical Inspection Company inaugurated its first vehicle inspection centre under its “Tajdeed” brand at the headquarters of the Oman Automobile Association. This initiative is part of a strategic partnership between Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company and the Royal Oman Police.

The centre aims to provide advanced technical inspection services according to the highest standards of quality, efficiency and safety, contributing to enhanced road safety and improved services for the community.

It is the first privately accredited vehicle technical inspection station within an initiative designed to involve private sector establishments in providing technical inspection services, expanding their reach and offering more flexible operating hours.

Yousef bin Salim al Hinai, Head of the Communication and Government Performance Unit at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, affirmed that the centre’s opening represents a pioneering step by involving the private sector in some services previously provided by government entities. This contributes to enhancing service efficiency and improving the user experience.

Brigadier General Jamal bin Saeed al Taai, Director of Financial Affairs at the Royal Oman Police, explained that the opening of the first automated vehicle inspection station was an initiative by the Royal Oman Police to provide an opportunity for the private sector to offer services and invest in this field.

He added that the Royal Oman Police signed an agreement with



The Tajdeed brand is the product of a strategic partnership between Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company and the Royal Oman Police.

“The centre’s opening represents a pioneering step by involving the private sector in some services previously provided by government entities. This contributes to enhancing service efficiency and improving the user experience.**”**

YOUSEF BIN SALIM AL HINAI
Head of the Communication and Government Performance Unit, General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers

Al Maha Technical Inspection Company to establish 12 more stations and also signed similar agreements with other private sector companies.

Eng Hamad al Maghdari, Managing Director of Al Maha Technical Inspection Company, explained that launching the “Tajdeed” brand reflects the company’s commitment to developing vehicle technical inspection services and providing a more reliable and user-friendly experience, keeping pace with the rapid developments in the transportation and technical services sector.

Al Maghdari pointed out that the centre’s operating hours are from morning until 11:00 pm, providing greater flexibility for clients and facilitating easier access to services.

He added that five centres are currently under construction: two in Al Maabela South and Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate, one in Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, one in Salalah in Dhofar Governorate and two in Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate.

He noted that these centres will offer additional services, including vehicle registration issuance and inspection, in accordance with the specifications set by the Royal Oman Police’s General Directorate of Traffic and international standards for vehicles operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

They will also provide a vehicle collection service for those wishing to have their vehicles inspected.

He emphasised that these centres will be staffed by Omani technicians and administrators. He also revealed an expansion plan that includes establishing new centres in the governorates of Dhofar, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Dakhiliyah, with other centres to follow in various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman in subsequent phases.

He noted that the staff working in these centres are Omani citizens, which contributes to providing job opportunities for national technical and administrative personnel.

Omani space tech startup wins FFO backing

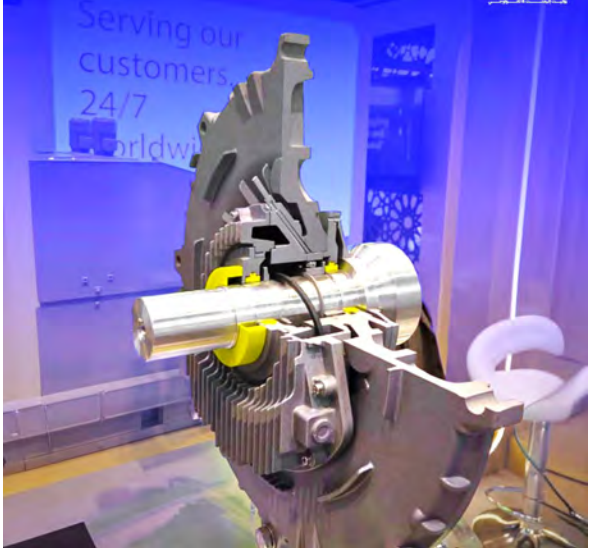
CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

Muscat-based Rocket Elements and Technologies (RE&T), an Omani space technology startup focused on advanced propulsion systems, has secured funding support from Future Fund Oman (FFO), marking a significant endorsement of the Sultanate of Oman’s emerging deep-tech and aerospace innovation ecosystem.

The investment support was announced as part of a broader wave of agreements concluded by Future Fund Oman last week, under which a diverse group of companies and startups across multiple sectors received backing.

Beneficiaries span strategic industries including tourism, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, medical technologies and innovation-driven enterprises — reflecting the fund’s mandate to catalyse economic diversification and attract private capital into high-growth sectors.

RE&T said it was “incredibly proud” to enter into a partnership with FFO, noting that its selection places it alongside a wide portfolio of nationally significant



The Omani startup believes that mastering liquid hydrogen systems unlocks broader applications across cryogenic propulsion technologies.

investments, including those in the aerospace sector. “It was an honour to be featured alongside a diverse portfolio of strategic investments spanning multiple key industries”, the company said in a statement.

The funding represents a major milestone

for RE&T, which is working to develop cost-effective space propulsion technologies with a focus on high-pressure turbopumps — critical components that sit at the heart of liquid and hybrid rocket engines.

The startup aims to reduce the cost of space transportation while strengthening Oman’s capacity to participate in the global aerospace value chain.

Founded by entrepreneur Mohammed al Alawi, RE&T recently graduated from the first national Oman Space Accelerator Programme, held between August and December 2025.

The programme concluded with a high-profile showcase where the startup presented its flagship concept: a high-pressure turbopump designed for next-generation propulsion systems.

Building on this momentum, RE&T has entered a scaling phase, with early-stage interest already emerging from several venture capital firms in Oman. The company is also actively pursuing grant funding to support the prototyping and production of its turbopump technology.

Earlier this year, RE&T further strengthened its technical profile at the Middle East Space Conference 2026

(MESC2026), hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat, where it presented a proof-of-concept 800-bar liquid hydrogen turbopump. The company’s performance earned it first place in the OSAP competition segment.

RE&T’s engineering roadmap focuses on designing and manufacturing high-pressure turbopumps capable of meeting global aerospace demand for reliable and affordable propulsion systems.

The company’s 800-bar liquid hydrogen design is intended to demonstrate state-of-the-art capability, with hydrogen posing unique engineering challenges due to its extreme cryogenic temperature, very low density and complex handling requirements.

The startup believes that mastering liquid hydrogen systems unlocks broader applications across cryogenic propulsion technologies. It is leveraging advanced digital engineering tools, including computational fluid dynamics (CFD), finite-element analysis (FEA) and additive manufacturing, to accelerate development and position Oman as a competitive player in high-value aerospace hardware and innovation-led exports.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The collaboration reflects Bank Muscat’s continued commitment to investing in its people.

Bank Muscat, Skill IQ to strengthen AI-led learning and employee development

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its partnership with Skill IQ to introduce AI-powered coaching into its employee learning and development ecosystem.

The collaboration reflects Bank Muscat’s continued commitment to investing in its people, strengthening workforce capabilities and leveraging innovative technologies to support continuous learning.

Through this partnership, Bank Muscat will integrate Skill IQ’s AI Coach, an AI-powered learning solution designed to provide employees with personalised, interactive and practice-led learning experiences.

The platform enables employees to practice real-world workplace scenarios, receive instant AI-led feedback and strengthen critical skills through conversational coaching and structured skill assessments.

As the banking sector continues to evolve, Bank Muscat remains focused on building a future-ready workforce equipped with the skills required to serve customers, adapt to change and contribute to the Bank’s long-term growth.

Said bin Salim al Aufi, General Manager — Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, said: “At Bank Muscat, we are always exploring advanced solutions that make learning more engaging, data-driven and effective. Skill IQ’s AI Coach stood out for its ability to simulate real-world scenarios, personalise skill growth and deliver measurable learning impact”.

The integration of Skill IQ’s AI Coach will support Bank Muscat’s efforts to make learning more practical, accessible and measurable. By enabling employees to learn through simulated scenarios and real-time feedback, the platform will help strengthen capability building across relevant roles and functions.

The partnership also aligns with Bank Muscat’s broader vision of using technology to enhance employee experience, improve organisational readiness and foster a culture of continuous development.

Arjun Chakraborti, Founder; and Urvi Babla, Co-founder, Skill IQ, said: “Bank Muscat’s adoption of Skill IQ AI Coach reflects its commitment to innovation, employee growth and measurable learning outcomes. We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat as it strengthens employee capability through practice-led, AI-powered learning”.

With this collaboration, Bank Muscat continues to reinforce its position as a progressive institution that invests in both technology and people to drive sustainable growth in the digital era.

Chery Oman launches Tiggo 9 PHEV expedition

CHERY Oman is set to embark on a unique customer-led driving expedition designed to showcase the real-world capabilities of the Tiggo 9 PHEV across one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most iconic long-distance routes.

Taking place on June 18, the Tiggo 9 PHEV Range Expedition will see a convoy of Tiggo 9 PHEV owners travel from Muscat to Salalah, documenting their journey while exploring the vehicle’s comfort, efficiency, technology and long-distance driving performance under actual road conditions.

At the heart of the expedition is a simple yet compelling challenge: to discover how far the Tiggo 9 PHEV can travel on a full fuel tank and a full battery charge in a real-world driving environment.

Unlike traditional manufacturer-led demonstrations, the expedition will be driven entirely by customers using their own vehicles, providing genuine insights into ownership experiences and vehicle performance.

Throughout the journey, participants will share their observations, reactions and experiences while travelling through some of Oman’s most diverse landscapes.

As interest in hybrid mobility continues to grow across the region, many motorists remain curious about how plug-in hybrid vehicles perform during long-distance travel.

The Tiggo 9 PHEV Range Expedition aims to provide a transparent and real-world demonstration of the vehicle’s ability to combine fuel efficiency, electric mobility, premium comfort and long-range driving confidence in a single package.

“The Tiggo 9 PHEV has been developed



Proud Tiggo 9 PHEV owners to drive from Muscat to Salalah to discover how far their Tiggo 9 PHEV can travel on a full tank and a full charge.

to meet the evolving needs of modern families who seek efficiency, advanced technology, and driving confidence without compromising comfort”, as highlighted by one of the Chery officials in Oman.

“Through this expedition, we want to showcase the vehicle’s capabilities in the most authentic way possible, through the experiences of our customers.

By taking on one of Oman’s most recognised road journeys, they will help demonstrate the practicality and benefits of plug-in hybrid technology in real-world conditions”.

The expedition will be supported by professional content creators who will capture the journey through photography, videography, drone footage and customer testimonials.

Live updates, behind-the-scenes content and progress reports will be shared throughout the trip, allowing audiences to follow the challenge as it unfolds.

Upon reaching Salalah, participants will share their verdict on the vehicle’s performance, comfort, efficiency and overall driving experience after completing one of Oman’s most celebrated road trips.

Through this initiative, Chery Oman aims to reinforce its commitment to innovation and customer-centric experiences while highlighting the growing role of advanced hybrid technology in the future of mobility.

The Tiggo 9 PHEV Range Expedition begins on June 18, with exclusive content and live updates available across Chery Oman’s social media platforms throughout the journey.

Sharakah, Al Zahr Shopping Centre sign financing pact

MUSCAT: Sharakah, Oman’s leading SME development company, has extended a Sharia-compliant working capital facility to Al Zahr Shopping Centre, a business operating in the retail and wholesale trading sector.

The support reflects Sharakah’s continued commitment to enabling SMEs across a wide range of sectors and strengthening their ability to pursue sustainable growth.

Located in Izki, Al Zahr Shopping Centre specialises in household goods, kitchenware and daily-use utensils, offering a broad selection of products sourced from internationally recognised brands.

The business serves local consumers by providing quality products that meet a variety of household and lifestyle needs.

The Sharia-compliant working capital facility will support the purchase of additional inventory, enabling the business to strengthen stock availability, expand its product range and respond more



The support reflects Sharakah’s continued commitment to enabling SMEs across a wide range of sectors.

effectively to customer demand.

Speaking on the support extended, Ali bin Ahmed Muqaibal, Chief Executive Officer of Sharakah, said, “Sharakah remains committed to supporting SMEs across

diverse sectors by providing financing solutions that strengthen operational capabilities and support long-term growth.

Our support for Al Zahr Shopping Centre reflects our continued focus on enabling local enterprises to enhance their competitiveness and meet evolving market needs”.

Khalid bin Sulaiman al Rawahi, owner of Al Zahr Shopping Centre said, “The support provided by Sharakah will help us strengthen our inventory capacity and improve our ability to serve customers with a broader product offering.

This working capital facility supports our growth ambitions and enhances our ability to respond to increasing market demand”.

The support reflects Sharakah’s continued role in empowering Omani businesses through tailored financing solutions that strengthen operational resilience and contribute to sustainable economic development.

Sohar International, OMTC sign 14 million financing agreement

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to supporting strategic sectors that contribute to the Sultanate of Oman’s economic diversification agenda, Sohar International has signed a strategic financing agreement with Oman Minerals Trading Company (OMTC), a subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman (MDO).

The agreement marks a significant milestone in the establishment and operational launch of OMTC, an entity established to develop the marketing, trading, and export of Oman’s mineral resources while advancing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

As part of the agreement, Sohar International has extended a working capital facility of RO 14 million to support OMTC’s commercial operational requirements as it undertakes its mandate of centralising the trade and export of key minerals, including gypsum and chromite ore.

The financing will enable the company to enhance supply chain efficiencies, expand access to international markets, and unlock



The agreement marks a significant milestone in the establishment and operational launch of OMTC.

greater value from Oman’s mineral resources through a more integrated and commercially

driven approach.

Commenting on the partnership, Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: “At Sohar International, we believe that financial institutions play a vital role in enabling strategic sectors that contribute to sustainable economic growth and support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This agreement reflects our commitment to advancing economic diversification, enhancing the contribution of non-oil sectors, and creating long-term value from Oman’s national resources.

As one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most promising growth sectors, mining holds significant potential to strengthen Oman’s competitiveness and unlock new economic opportunities. Through our partnership with Oman Minerals Trading Company, we aim to support the development of a more integrated mining ecosystem, enhance the commercial value of Oman’s mineral resources, strengthen supply chains, and facilitate greater access to

international markets.

This collaboration further underscores our commitment to supporting high-impact investments and sustainable projects that contribute to economic growth, enhance the investment landscape, and reinforce Oman’s position as a regional hub for industry, trade, and logistics.”

Speaking on the partnership, Maan al Salmi, Managing Director of Oman Minerals Trading Company, said: “OMTC was established to create a more integrated approach to the marketing and trade of Oman’s gypsum and chromite resources.

Our partnership with Sohar International provides the financial foundation to support our commercial operations and growth plans. This collaboration will enable us to strengthen our trading capabilities, maximising the economic value of the Omanis minerals, exploring new strategic markets, and attracting foreign investment that is associated with the gypsum and chromite value chain to the Sultanate of Oman”

SHORTTAKES



The meeting examined ways to improve the business environment and attract high-quality investments.

OMAN, SRI LANKA
EXPLORE ECONOMIC
ZONE PARTNERSHIPS

MUSCAT: Oman and Sri Lanka have discussed opportunities to strengthen cooperation in special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, as both countries seek to expand investment ties and promote sustainable economic growth.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), met with Harsha Amarasekera, Chairman of the Port of Colombo Special Economic Zone Commission, to explore potential areas of collaboration and investment.

The discussions focused on partnership opportunities in several sectors, particularly real estate and commercial development, with the aim of boosting investment flows and supporting economic diversification efforts in both countries.

The two sides also reviewed their experiences in the development and management of special economic zones and exchanged views on international best practices that could help improve operational efficiency, strengthen competitiveness and enhance the attractiveness of investment destinations.

The meeting examined ways to improve the business environment and attract high-quality investments, while highlighting the role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic growth and innovation.

Both parties discussed opportunities to benefit from Sri Lanka's SME expertise through the exchange of knowledge, technical know-how and successful development models that could support entrepreneurship and private sector growth.

Officials underscored the importance of continued cooperation and closer engagement between the two countries in areas related to economic zones, investment promotion and industrial development.

The talks form part of broader efforts by Oman to strengthen international partnerships and attract investment into its economic zones and free zones, which play a key role in the Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification strategy under Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Oman real estate deals
near ~~₹~~946 million

THE value of real estate transactions in Oman rose 13.4 per cent year-on-year to RO 945.8 million by the end of April 2026, driven by stronger mortgage activity and higher property sales, according to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total value of sales contracts reached RO 439.6 million across 22,272 transactions, compared with RO 408.5 million during the same period last year. The number of sales contracts increased by 5.6 per cent.

Mortgage activity recorded the strongest growth, with the value of mortgage contracts rising 19 per cent to RO 501.4 million.

The number of mortgage contracts climbed to 9,095 from 7,164 a year earlier.

Swap contracts were valued at RO 4.8 million, up 21.5 per cent from RO 3.9 million during the corresponding period of 2025, although the number of swap transactions fell to 264 from 436.



The total value of sales contracts reached RO 439.6 million across 22,272 transactions.

Despite the increase in transaction values, the number of registered properties declined. A total of 65,530 properties were registered by the end of April, down 10.8 per cent from 73,432 recorded a year earlier.

Property ownership by GCC nationals also fell sharply. A total of 317 properties were registered by GCC citizens during the period, compared with 529 properties in the first four months of 2025, representing a decline of 40.1

per cent.

The figures from NCSI point to continued momentum in Oman's property market, supported by rising financing activity and higher transaction values despite lower overall property registrations. — ONA

TRA seeks views on child social media rules

MUSCAT: Oman's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a public consultation on proposed regulations governing children's use of social media platforms, as authorities explore measures to strengthen online safety and digital protection for minors.

The consultation aims to gather feedback from stakeholders, technology companies, parents and the wider community on legal, regulatory and technical issues related to children's access to digital platforms.

Key areas under review include age-verification mechanisms, safeguards against inappropriate content, responsibilities of social media companies and the role of



The initiative comes amidst growing international efforts to regulate children's use of social media.

parents in monitoring children's online activity.

The TRA said the initiative comes amidst growing international efforts to regulate children's use of social media and address risks associated with digital platforms.

The authority is seeking public input to help shape legislation that is practical, enforceable and aligned with international best practices.

TRA has invited interested parties to participate in the consultation and submit recommendations that could contribute to developing a comprehensive regulatory framework for child protection in the digital environment. — ONA

Duqm power plant secures \$385 million EPC deal

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

Oman's 870-megawatt Duqm gas-fired power plant has secured a \$385 million engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract, advancing one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest new power generation projects.

South Korea's Doosan Enerbility said it had signed the contract with Coastal Power SAOC, the project company established to develop the plant in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. The contract is valued at approximately KRW 530 billion (\$385 million), with construction scheduled for completion in 2029.

The Duqm project is being developed by a consortium comprising Korea Western Power (KOWEPO), Qatar's Nebras Power, EUDC, the development and investment arm of the UAE's Etihad Water and Electricity and Oman's



Steam turbine manufactured by Doosan Enerbility.

Bahwan Infrastructure Services.

Doosan Enerbility will execute the project in partnership with China's SEPCO-3, undertaking the design, procurement and construction of the facility on a turnkey basis. The South Korean company will also manufacture and supply key equipment, including steam turbines and generators.

Located around 550 kilometres south of Muscat, the combined-cycle gas-fired plant will have a generation capacity of 870 MW.

The facility is expected to support growing electricity demand in southern Oman and provide power for industrial developments in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

The project forms part of Oman's broader strategy to expand electricity generation capacity as demand rises alongside industrial and economic growth. Nama Power and Water Procurement awarded the Duqm and Misfah

independent power projects earlier this year under long-term power purchase agreements.

Together, the two projects represent investments of around RO 1 billion and are expected to add more than 2 gigawatts of generation capacity to Oman's electricity network.

"We secured this project based on our accumulated project execution experience and EPC capabilities in the Middle East", Lee Hyun-ho, Head of Plant EPC Business Group at Doosan Enerbility, said in a statement.

"As demand for power plant construction to ensure stable electricity supply is expected to continue across the Middle East, including Oman, we will seek to expand additional business opportunities through the successful execution of this project", he added.

Commercial operations at the Duqm power plant are expected to commence in 2029.

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil prices edge higher again



Oil prices rose modestly as investors assessed uncertainties surrounding the preliminary agreement between the United States and Iran and the timeline for restoring disrupted supplies.

Brent crude gained 0.3 per cent to \$83.42 a barrel, while US crude rose 0.3 per cent to \$81.12. The rebound followed a sharp decline on Monday after news of a framework agreement aimed at ending the conflict. — Reuters

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Rouble weakens against major currencies



Russia's central bank on Tuesday raised the official exchange rates of major currencies against the national currency rouble, signalling a weaker domestic currency. The US dollar rate increased to 72.4513 roubles, while the euro rose to 83.8044 roubles.

The Chinese yuan was also strengthened against the rouble, with the official exchange rate set at 10.7047 roubles. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold steadies after rally



Gold prices stabilised after reaching their highest level in more than a week as investors awaited further details on the US-Iran agreement.

Spot gold edged up in the international market of about 0.2 per cent to \$4,315.87 an ounce, while US gold futures slipped 0.3 per cent. Other precious metals weakened, with silver, platinum and palladium all posting declines in spot trading. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman’s AAM opportunity depends on regulatory readiness



MAHIR IBRAHIM

The writer is AAM senior advisor, Muscat - Oman



WAJDI KAMABAL

The writer is airworthiness & regulatory compliance specialist, Milan – Italy

OMAN’S opportunity in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) extends beyond the aircraft themselves, encompassing regulation, infrastructure, airspace integration, skills development and new service models.

In practical terms, this means the country’s long-term advantage in AAM will depend less on being an early host for a new aircraft platform and more on building a credible environment for safe, scalable and investable operations.

That direction is already reflected in Oman’s National Aviation Strategy 2040. During the 2026–2027 implementation phase, the strategy explicitly calls for establishing a regulatory framework for Advanced Air Mobility, a nationwide UTM platform and AAM sandbox activation. This is a significant policy signal.

It indicates that Oman is treating AAM as part of its future aviation system rather than as a stand-alone technology trend. The regulatory dimension deserves particular attention because AAM is fundamentally a systems and governance issue, not simply an aircraft issue.

Even where capable aircraft exist, market entry still depends on operating rules, airspace procedures, continuing airworthiness arrangements, maintenance capability, infrastructure readiness and institutional oversight being developed in parallel.

Oman’s General Civil Aviation Policy supports this broader view by framing civil

aviation as a sector that requires coordinated national direction, legislation, governance, safety oversight and infrastructure development.

For Oman, the clearest current regulatory benchmark is EASA. Europe has developed the more complete end-to-end framework for manned VTOL-capable aircraft by linking design certification, flight operations and continuing airworthiness.

On the design side, EASA’s SC-VTOL framework provides a dedicated basis for small-category VTOL-capable aircraft.

On the operational side, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/1111 and the related EASA implementing material have established a structured operating environment for manned VTOL-capable aircraft.

On the continuing-airworthiness side, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2025/111 and EASA’s 2026 decisions extended the framework to electric-, hybrid- and other non-conventional aircraft, including maintenance-certifying staff training logic.

In practical terms, Europe is no longer addressing AAM only as a design-certification problem; it is addressing it as an entry-into-service ecosystem.

The FAA offers a different but equally valuable lesson. The United States has made its most visible recent progress in powered-lift operations and pilot certification.

The FAA’s 2024 final rule on the integration of powered-lift established a ten-year SFAR-based framework to support pilot

As Oman advances its national AAM agenda, the decisive question is no longer whether the technology will arrive, but whether the regulatory environment will be ready to support safe, scalable and investable operations.

certification, instructor development and the operational integration of powered-lift aircraft into the US system. At the same time, the FAA continues to rely on 14 CFR § 21.17(b) and AC 21.17-4 as the principal public framework for powered-lift type certification. In effect, the US model shows the value of regulatory flexibility during an early market-building phase, especially where real-world operating experience is still limited.

For Oman, the practical lesson is not to replicate either model in full. A more suitable national approach would be to draw on EASA’s structured architecture while preserving enough flexibility to support phased implementation and controlled testing.

In other words, Oman should aim for a framework that is disciplined enough to create regulatory confidence, but not so rigid that it slows learning or discourages early operational evidence.

This is where the concept of an AAM sandbox becomes important. A sandbox is a controlled regulatory and operational environment in which new technologies or services can be tested under defined conditions before wider deployment.

For AAM, this can allow Oman to assess operational suitability, infrastructure readiness, airspace coordination and oversight responsibilities using real trial activity rather than assumptions alone.

Official reporting from the Civil Aviation Authority also shows that Oman is already moving beyond strategy into proof-of-concept preparation for AAM operations.

CHINA RENEWABLES IPO PLUGS INTO UPSIDES OF A GLUT

HUDSON LOCKETT

Oversupply is usually only a problem for the seller. Buyers, on the other hand, get a chance to score goods on the cheap. In China that means the massive glut of solar panels is music to the ears of power producers.

The chronic oversupply helps explain why largely coal-fuelled China Resources Power is listing its renewable energy business. But it’s not the only reason.

The sale of more than 2 billion shares in China Resources New Energy will raise about 24.5 billion yuan (\$3.6 billion) and set a new fundraising record for the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, per a prospectus filed on Thursday.

That would give the wind and solar energy power generator a market capitalisation of \$22 billion, valuing it at 24 times last year’s earnings.

That’s better than the 15 times multiple Huadian New Energy went public at last year, but below the 37 times its rival now commands after its stock rose more than 80%.

Granted, CRNE is raising about \$1 billion more than Huadian, but arguably is doing so on the cheap. Its net profit in the three months to the end of March may have fallen, at 31%, more from the same period last year than Huadian’s 24%.

But its net margin of almost 28% bested its peer’s 21%. Both can take advantage of the dire market conditions suffered by China’s top-five solar-panel manufacturers, which include Longi Green Energy Technology and Jinko Solar.

They lost a combined 7 billion yuan after tax in the first quarter, per Nikkei Asia, as the industry continued to grapple with oversupply that has sent prices into a nosedive.

But this means proceeds from CRNE’s listing, all of which have been earmarked for planned wind and solar projects, will go that much further.

Moreover, a nationwide shift away from coal is set to accelerate, as is the overhaul of China’s outdated grid — both of which support overall demand and more widespread utilisation of renewable power.

Finally, global oil shortages caused by war in the Middle East this year have further vindicated Beijing’s drive for green, self-sufficient energy production. It all adds up to a solid case for CRNE’s IPO and probably more like it. — Reuters

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The coherent story Oman needs to tell investors

If asked today what Oman truly needs to sharpen its competitive edge in the regional race for foreign direct investment (FDI), my answer would not be laws, incentives or infrastructure.

These elements are undeniably vital and Oman has made monumental strides in developing them over the past few years. Instead, our next evolutionary leap requires something far more profound: a potent, unified investment narrative that our own state institutions fully embody before it ever reaches the global market.

In the modern economic arena, traditional bait like tax holidays, specialised economic zones and streamlined paperwork have become commoditised. They are no longer differentiators; they are merely the baseline entry requirements for any nation seeking to capture global capital.

Today’s ultimate competitive advantage lies in a nation’s capacity to cultivate institutional trust and project a seamless, sophisticated economic story to global markets.

Sophisticated investors look beyond the fine print of statutory laws; they look for strategic predictability, long-term policy stability and cross-institutional harmony.

Consequently, the clarity and caliber of a state’s investment narrative have become just as vital to its core competitiveness as its deep-water ports or legislative frameworks.

FROM MARKETING TO STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This shift from transactional promotion to strategic leadership can be mapped across four distinct operational dimensions (see graph).

Throughout my career in financial and business journalism, covering regional market dynamics and investment flows, I have consistently observed that capital gravitates towards nations that speak a coherent corporate



TURKI AL BALUSHI

The writer is a storyteller, journalist and founder of @alqissahlab

Today’s ultimate competitive advantage lies in a nation’s capacity to cultivate institutional trust and project a seamless, sophisticated economic story to global markets.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: COMMUNICATION MODELS

Dimension	Legacy Communication	Strategic Communication
Core Role	Disseminating routine institutional news	Securing investor trust and accelerating decisions
Message Quality	Fragmented, broad, and general	Precise, evidence-based, and targeted
Execution	A cacophony of differing institutional voices	A unified, cross-sector institutional voice
Outcome	Merely marketing short-term opportunities	Cultivating long-term, high-value partnerships

language.

The global race is no longer won simply by having the best assets, but by having the superior capability to articulate their value proposition.

Oman’s economic profile has already undergone a remarkable transformation. The sweeping fiscal and structural reforms enacted since 2020 have substantially elevated our standing in international benchmark reports.

This was not just a victory of balance sheets, but a masterclass in signalling; it proved to global markets that Oman possesses both a clear economic vision and the political will to execute it.

The next phase demands a total transition from legacy marketing to integrated strategic communication. This does not mean amplifying PR noise or multiplying promotional campaigns. It means enforcing absolute alignment across every state entity that interacts with global capital.

Institutional contradiction is the ultimate repellent of capital. When an investor is greeted with an ambitious, forward-leaning vision by one ministry, only to face archaic bureaucracy or conflicting guidelines at a regulatory body, market trust evaporates instantly.

Conversely, when institutions act as a singular unit, delivering

identical datasets and moving towards shared macro-targets, they eliminate investor hesitation and de-risk the business environment.

At its core, investment is an exercise in trust long before it is a calculation of capital allocation.

Investors seek out empowered public officials who possess deep sector expertise, executive clarity and the ultimate authority to answer complex operational questions in real time.

This direct human interaction dictates an investor’s critical first impression far more than any sleek pitch deck ever could.

Oman holds undeniable macroeconomic advantages: an unassailable strategic location, rock-solid political stability, top-tier logistical infrastructure and a globally respected, balanced foreign policy.

Yet, the true return on these assets depends entirely on our ability to package and present them as a cohesive, friction-free ecosystem. In the modern global marketplace, achievements do not speak for themselves; they must be actively and flawlessly narrated.

The more coherent and synchronised Oman’s voice becomes, the faster we will convert global interest into enduring, high-value economic partnerships.

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of experience in
this field. Seeking
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having 2+ years of
experience
in India accounts
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suitable
placement,
join immediately.
Contact: 76324360

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material, project
sales & Trade
market, deal
with corporate
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looking for a
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gmail.com

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job.
Contact: 92919281

ACCOUNTS/
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male (MBA Fin)
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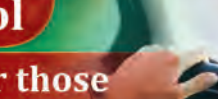
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time Accounts/
Finance job.
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in Muscat. Upto
finalization &
Audit.
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year experience
in Oman as
Coordinator have
Driving licence.
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For working in oil
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Vehicle Driving
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ART/LIFE



ON SECOND **THOUGHT**

HERE’S WHY MY KHAREEF ROAD TRIP IS NEVER BORING



Yeru Ebuén
The writer is a luxury media strategist and a creative director

A lot of us love flying. For Khareef Dhofar Season, it is often the best option — fast, reliable and efficient. But it also cuts you off from some of the most memorable experiences, particularly the sights and stories you would never encounter from 30,000 feet in the air.

I have been to Salalah multiple times over the past 12 years. While the 10-hour drive can feel long and at times monotonous as you pass through seemingly endless stretches of desert, there are stops along the way that make the journey worthwhile.

If you are heading south this season, do not rush.

Take the coastal road and make a stop in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. Look for the villages where the desert has slowly reclaimed parts of the landscape. It is a striking reminder that despite mankind’s efforts to shape the environment, nature eventually wins. Sand dunes creep across abandoned structures, creating scenes that feel frozen in time. It is one of those places that makes you stop and appreciate the power of the land and the stories it holds.

Another worthwhile stop is the beautiful and largely unexplored area of Sarab. Here, sleepy fishing villages offer a glimpse into how Oman’s coastal communities have lived for generations. Search for the remarkable sea cave that opens to the sky above. With crystal-clear water flowing in beneath towering rock formations and sunlight pouring through the opening overhead, it feels almost otherworldly. It is one of those hidden gems that remains etched in your memory long after the journey is over.

Further down the road, take a detour to Ras Madrakah. There are no signposts pointing to some of its most beautiful corners and no major developments competing for your attention. That is precisely its charm. If you happen to meet a local willing to guide you to one of the area’s secret beaches, you will discover stretches of coastline with powdery white sand and turquoise waters that rival destinations far more famous around the world.

When you reach Al Shuwaimiyah, look for its ancient aflaj and one of Oman’s most beautiful wadis. I have always considered this place a hidden paradise. Surrounded by dramatic cliffs and tranquil waterways, it offers a side of Oman that many visitors never see. If you can bring a portable kayak, the experience becomes even more rewarding. The waterways eventually lead towards the open sea, taking you from calm, sheltered waters to the powerful embrace of the ocean beyond.

The rest of the adventure begins when you arrive in Salalah, where much has already been written about the mist-covered mountains and lush green landscapes. What I have learned, however, is that adventure rarely comes looking for you. You have to find it yourself. It means speaking with locals, following a trail simply because it looks interesting, or listening as someone shares stories about the land they call home.

These are the experiences that have made my years in Oman worthwhile. After more than a decade of travelling across the Sultanate of Oman, I still find myself discovering something new. And that is why I never tire of its beauty.

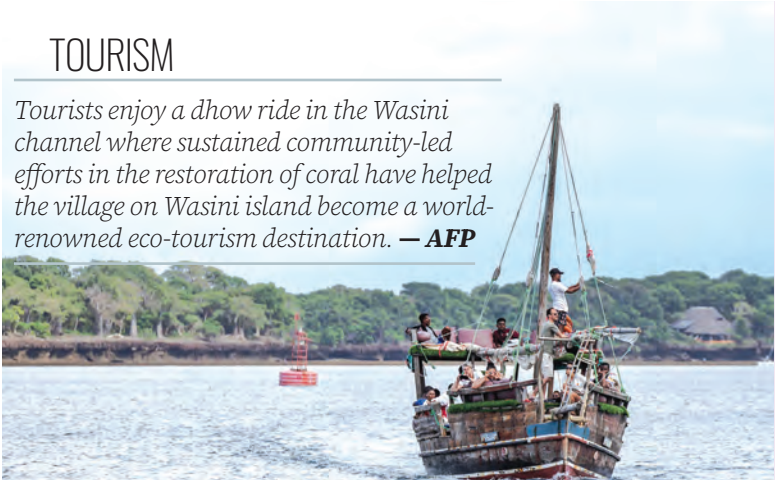
Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



ENTERTAINMENT

Swedish actress and executive producer Rebecca Ferguson attends Apple TV’s “Silo” season 3 at Il Posto, Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles.

—AFP



TOURISM

Tourists enjoy a dhow ride in the Wasini channel where sustained community-led efforts in the restoration of coral have helped the village on Wasini island become a world-renowned eco-tourism destination. — AFP



CINEMA

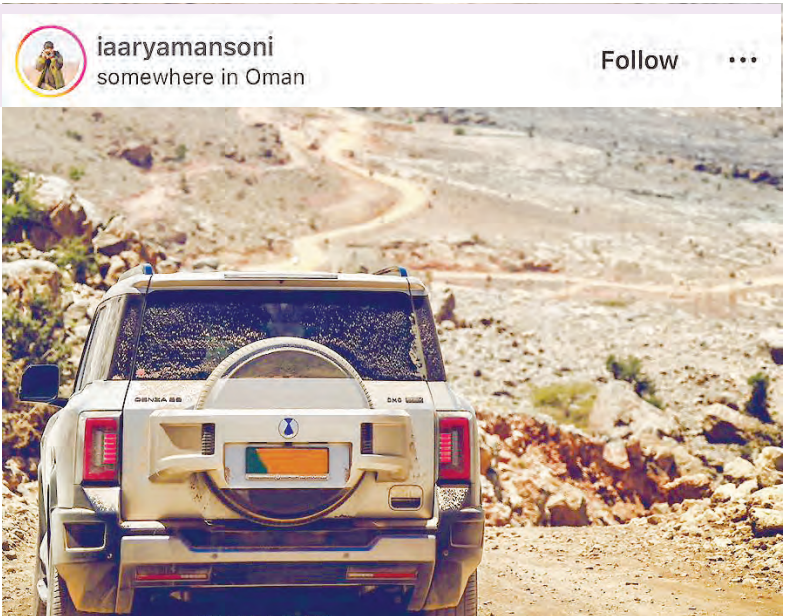
British actor Tom Holland poses during a photocall for “Spider-Man: brand new day” movie in a hotel in Madrid.

—AFP

INSTA PICKS



Drenched and dazzling, grey-headed kingfisher



Experience the beauty of Oman's landscapes on the open road

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

MUSICAL THERAPY:
CLASSICAL CONCERTS IN
NEW YORK FOR DEMENTIA
SUFFERERS



After suffering a traumatic brain injury in his early sixties, Rob Kaufman spent a month in intensive care in a medically induced coma, followed by nine weeks of rehabilitation and speech therapy. Today, the former studio musician, who says he once played alongside Jimi Hendrix, lives with significant short-term memory loss.

Music therapy became an important part of his recovery; and he and his wife, Ellen, now regularly attend a Manhattan concert series designed for people living with dementia and cognitive impairment. The couple recently joined around 100 attendees for the programme's 10th anniversary concert, featuring the Calidore String Quartet at Lincoln Centre.

The series was created after Lincoln Centre noticed longtime patrons were no longer renewing subscriptions because dementia had affected them or their loved ones. "We felt a responsibility to fill that gap", said accessibility director Miranda Hoffner.

Dementia, a progressive condition that affects memory, movement and daily functioning, impacts millions worldwide. According to the

World Health Organisation, around 57 million people were living with dementia in 2021, with nearly 10 million new cases diagnosed annually. As populations age and life expectancy increases, cases are expected to continue rising.

Emily Finkelstein, a geriatrics specialist at New York-Presbyterian, said research consistently highlights the benefits of art, music and dance therapy for people with cognitive impairment. However, such programmes remain limited and difficult to access for many Americans.

Lincoln Centre's free concerts are tailored to people with dementia and their caregivers. The performances are relaxed and interactive, encouraging audience members to sing, move and participate. Workshops led by music therapists and teaching artists follow each concert.

For Kaufman, now 73, the programme offers more than entertainment. "When we're in a community like this, everybody's accepting", he said.

Ellen Kaufman said the programme provides vital support for families facing the challenges of dementia, helping them stay connected and engaged through music. — AFP



AI ROBOT CLEANERS
LEAVE THE LAB FOR
CHINA'S LIVING ROOMS



BEIJING cleaner Lin Meiqiong found her work slightly easier after being paired with an AI-powered wheeled robot in a new human-robot cleaning service launched in China.

The service, offered by platform 58.com in partnership with robotics firm X Square, deploys the Quanta X1 Pro robot alongside human cleaners in homes in Beijing and Shenzhen. Equipped with cameras and mechanical arms, the robot identifies mess, picks up items and attempts basic household tasks like folding clothes.

Lin said the robot "reduced the workload a bit", though she still handled most of the cleaning. In one example, while she scrubbed floors, the robot picked up rubbish and slowly folded clothes left on a sofa, taking several minutes to complete the task.

The service costs 149 yuan (\$22) for three hours and has been booked by around 200 households since launching in March. Users said they were curious to see what the technology could do, noting that while imperfect, it sometimes produced surprising results, such as neatly folding trousers.

The initiative reflects China's growing push into "embodied AI", where robots are trained through



real-world interaction rather than only digital data. Companies argue that deploying robots in real homes helps generate valuable training data, since there is no equivalent of a "robot internet" for learning physical tasks.

Experts say this hands-on approach is essential for improvement, even if current performance remains limited. However, robots still struggle with fine motor skills, particularly dexterity needed for complex household chores. Most systems also require human supervision for safety and emergency control.

Beyond technical limits, concerns remain over privacy, data handling and the lack of clear safety standards. Experts warn that widespread adoption is still far off, describing the technology as being at a "very elementary stage".

Despite major investment in China's embodied AI sector — tens of billions of yuan this year alone — researchers and users alike agree that robots are not yet close to replacing human domestic workers. For now, even participants like Lin view them as helpful assistants rather than replacements, saying simply: "After all, it's a robot". — AFP

FEATURES

THE YOUNGEST OMANI PILOT

A LIFE SHAPED BY FLIGHT



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

FOR many children, airplanes are something to watch through an airport window or point at in the sky. However, for one young Omani thirteen-year-old aviation enthusiast named Imran al Balushi, aircrafts have been a lifelong fascination, shaping his interests, hobbies and dreams from an age when most children were still learning to read.

His love affair with aviation began when he was just four years old. While other children collected toys and cartoons, he was captivated by aircraft, airports and the people who made flight possible. Much of that passion can be traced to his father, whose career in aviation exposed him to the industry from an early age.

Growing up, he watched his father work on some of Oman's most significant aviation projects, including the establishment of SalamAir, the Sultanate of Oman's first low-cost airline, as well as earlier roles with Oman Air and the development of Muscat International Airport. Listening to conversations about runways, terminals and aircraft sparked a curiosity that soon became an obsession.

"I saw how passionate my father was about aviation", he says. "That passion inspired me and made me want to become a pilot one day".

His childhood bedroom quickly transformed into a miniature aviation world. Model aircraft lined the shelves, airport and runway sets covered the floor and airplanes regularly appeared in his drawings. At the age of eight, his father gifted him an Airbus home flight simulator, opening the door to a more hands-on understanding of aviation.

The simulator became more than a game. It allowed him to learn about aircraft systems, cockpit procedures and different types of airplanes while feeding his growing curiosity about how flight works.

His enthusiasm extended far beyond his home. Family trips often revolved around airports and aviation experiences. On some weekends, he persuaded his family to travel simply to visit nearby airports. Whether spending a short trip in Salalah or flying to Doha, every journey became an opportunity to observe aircraft operations and learn something new.

He has also attended aviation events both inside and outside Oman, participating in programmes organised by the Civil Aviation Authority and the Royal Air Force of Oman. A particularly memorable moment came when Oman Air invited him to experience an Airbus flight simulator, giving him a glimpse into the professional world he hopes to join in the future.

Even at home, aviation remains close by. Living near the airport means he can spend hours watching aircraft take off and land. The sound of jet engines, he says, is as enjoyable to him as music. Over time, he became familiar with different airlines, aircraft types and even the schedules of certain flights. Flight-tracking applications have become another favourite tool, allowing him to follow aircraft movements across the globe in real time.

What makes his story remarkable is not only his passion but also his discipline. Despite his deep interest in aviation and content creation, he insists that education comes first. By carefully balancing school responsibilities with his hobby, he continues to learn about aviation while maintaining focus on his studies.

Today, he shares simple and engaging aviation facts with others on his social media page, where he actively promotes aviation content, hoping to make the subject accessible to a wider audience, especially young people. Yet behind every post and every flight simulation session lies a larger ambition.

His ultimate goal is clear: to become a pilot and

proudly represent Oman in the skies. Judging by the determination that has carried him this far, it is a dream already well on its way to taking flight.

