

Observer



HM PRESIDES OVER COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING



FROM PAGE 1

After the Council of Ministers reviewed the results of the performance evaluation of government institutions for 2025 — which, thanks be to Allah, have shown notable improvement since the Government Institutions Performance Measurement Unit began its work in 2022 — His Majesty commended the government entities with the highest performance as well as those that demonstrated the greatest improvement. His Majesty stressed the importance of translating this progress into greater satisfaction among citizens and residents, a more favourable business environment, and the advancement of Oman Vision 2040 indicators.

In light of the rapid proliferation of digital media platforms and their widespread use by a large segment of children, His Majesty has

directed the relevant authorities to examine the issue from its various angles, assess its implications, and formulate the necessary controls and mechanisms to regulate children's use of these platforms. This is intended to assist families in guiding their children and managing their optimal engagement with such media, drawing on leading international expertise in this field.

Driven by the Council of Ministers' steadfast attention to cybersecurity alongside digital economy programmes, emphasis was placed on the necessity for all government entities to accord the requisite priority to cybersecurity projects within their plans and programmes, and to address challenges encountered in this regard on an ongoing basis, in coordination with the relevant authorities. This is to be undertaken in light of the rapid developments witnessed in the

technologies employed in this sector.

Given the importance of establishing a comprehensive institutional framework for the management of government assets to ensure their optimal utilisation, enhance governance and oversight, and transform them into a resource supporting economic development, the Council of Ministers has approved the establishment of the Government Assets Authority. The Authority shall be responsible for the management and investment of the state's fixed assets in accordance with the highest standards of transparency, in pursuit of maximising their investment returns and transforming them into a sustainable economic resource that supports the state's general budget.

The Council of Ministers also reviewed the efforts undertaken by all units of the state administrative apparatus and the private

sector concerning the employment file, commending the national endeavours of both the government and private sectors to advance the national employment programme and related initiatives aimed at providing job opportunities for citizens. The Council further stressed the importance of raising employment targets and redoubling efforts to open wider horizons for securing job opportunities for citizens.

His Majesty having commended the launch by the Sultanate of Oman of the "Muscat Plan" in collaboration with the United Nations — a practical embodiment of Oman's deeply rooted principles reflecting the Omani approach grounded in dialogue, understanding and the building of humanitarian partnerships — the Council affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's steadfast position of respecting state sovereignty, non-interference in the

internal affairs of other nations, and its enduring commitment to good neighbourly relations and constructive cooperation with all countries, as well as its consistent call for recourse to dialogue and diplomacy to resolve disputes, in order to preserve lives and the region's resources.

The Council of Ministers welcomed the understanding reached between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressing its appreciation for the regional and international efforts undertaken, particularly the constructive role played by the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in shielding the region from threats to its security and stability.

In this regard, His Majesty commended the swift response and dedicated efforts of the military and security apparatuses in

defending the nation. His Majesty stressed the importance of constant vigilance to protect security and stability, as well as Oman's neutral and balanced role in upholding the principles of justice and law, and its commitment to the safety and security of maritime navigation and the freedom of passage in its territorial waters in the Strait of Hormuz, in accordance with international law.

In light of the global economic repercussions of recent events, and having commended the efforts and measures taken by the relevant authorities in both the public and private sectors to secure the supply of goods, facilitate transport procedures, and ensure the movement of individuals and trucks, His Majesty affirmed the importance of continuing these efforts and of integrating national and regional work systems, including joint Gulf action among the member states of the Gulf

Cooperation Council.

This is aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of the events and ensuring a high state of readiness for response and coordination in this regard.

His Majesty further directed the provision of a package of support measures to national economic sectors, particularly small and medium enterprises that have been directly affected, in order to alleviate the burden of the aforementioned impacts.

His Majesty also commended the Omani character evident in the proposals put forward by citizens, which best express the poise that distinguishes the Omani personality when addressing various issues.

He further praised the role of Omani media in articulating the Sultanate of Oman's positions on different events and matters, guided by an approach of rationality and

balance in discourse and by the primacy of the national interest.

In the context of reviewing bilateral relations with a number of sisterly and friendly nations, as well as the visits received by the Sultanate of Oman over the past period, His Majesty affirmed the importance of leveraging the Sultanate of Oman's cordial relations with various countries and translating them into enhanced mutual benefits that strengthen economic ties, serve the common interests of all, and help ensure lasting prosperity and stability for the region and all the peoples of the world.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan offered prayers for all, beseeching the Almighty Allah to grant them continued success in all that brings goodness and prosperity to this beloved nation and its loyal people. — **ONA**



OMAN

SHORT TAKES

Omani, French FMs review regional developments

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a telephone call from Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, on Monday.

They reviewed the friendly relations and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic and ways to foster them in various fields to serve the common interests of the two friendly countries.

They also discussed regional and international developments of mutual interest and expressed their hope that the US-Iranian understandings would contribute to enhancing security and stability, supporting the approach of dialogue ,diplomacy and trust-building. — **ONA**

State Council reviews demographics and agriculture studies



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili chairs the State Council meeting

MUSCAT: The Office of the State Council held on Monday its 6th meeting of the third regular session of the 8th term, under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

During the meeting, the Office discussed the study submitted by the Special Committee on 'Demographics and its Impact on the Future of Development in the Sultanate of Oman'.

The Office also reviewed the study submitted by the Special Committee on 'The Agricultural (Plant) Sector in the Sultanate of Oman: Challenges and Solutions'. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Office approved the agenda items for the tenth session of the third regular session of the eighth term, and determined the topics included on its agenda. — **ONA**

Child Protection Committee considers unifying mechanisms



MUSCAT: The Omani Child Protection Committee (CPC) on Monday held its first meeting of 2026, under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Family Affairs and Community Development, Chairman of the Committee. The Committee exchanged views about means of unifying mechanisms regulating the work of child protection committees across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. It laid emphasis on consolidating public awareness and providing professional training for human resources operating in the field. — **ONA**

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs emphasised that the Royal attention received by the 'Muscat Plan' embodies the wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in consolidating the values of peace, understanding and human partnership. It also reflects the position occupied by the Sultanate of Oman in promoting dialogue and

building bridges between peoples and cultures.

Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, expressed his deep thanks and gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan for his continuous support for all initiatives that serve humanity and enhance the message of religion for peace and development.

He stated that the Royal



praise for the 'Muscat Plan' is not merely a tribute to a plan or a project, as much as it is an exaltation of the values upon which Oman was built throughout its history; the values of wisdom, dialogue and peace. He added that it is a testimony to be cherished, as it stems from a leader who has made moderation an approach, understanding a message, and serving

humans a goal, pointing to the continuous support of His Majesty the Sultan for all initiatives that serve humanity and promote the message of religion for peace and development.

He affirmed that the Royal praise is a source of inspiration to continue working so that Oman remains a capital of wisdom and peace. — **ONA**

Royal Directive ensures permanent women’s representation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, affirmed that the Royal directive to allocate a seat for Omani women in the Majlis Ash’shura from each governorate comes within the framework of the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to ensure the permanent representation of women from various governorates in the Council and to actively enhance the base of community participation.

He explained that the most



Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior

prominent regulations and bases that will be adopted to implement the Royal directive consist of allocating 11 seats for women in the Majlis Ash’shura, distributed at a rate of one seat for each governorate, while maintaining women’s candidacy for their wilayats according to the current system as specified by the Election Law. Women candidates whose names are included in the final list will compete on an equal footing with the rest of the candidates to represent the wilayat.

Al Busaidy pointed out that a woman’s win of the additional seat allocated to her at the level of the governorate’s wilayats is calculated based on the candidate securing the highest percentage of votes out of the total number of voters within the scope of the wilayat from which she ran, compared to other female candidates. The woman candidate who obtains the highest percentage of votes in the governorate is considered the winner of the additional seat and represents the wilayat for which she ran. — **ONA**

Dhofar unveils 2026 Khareef season lineup

DHOFAR MUNICIPALITY on Monday unveiled the details of the 2026 Khareef Dhofar Season, which will run from June 21 to September 21, featuring 125 cultural, artistic, sporting and entertainment events across multiple tourist destinations and wilayats of Dhofar Governorate.

The announcement was made at a press conference chaired by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, who reviewed the new programmes, event highlights, and the organisational and service preparations for the season.



Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani addresses details of the Khareef season at a press conference in Salalah on Monday.

This year’s edition introduces a renewed identity for event venues and programmes, aligning with visitor expectations and enhancing the quality of the tourism, entertainment and cultural experience that distinguishes Dhofar during the Khareef season, Dr Al Ghassani said. The new approach gives each venue a unique entertainment and cultural character drawn from its natural surroundings, diversifying visitor experiences across different locations.

He added that key venues include Ittin Square, which in its new format offers a blend of international shows and entertainment and cultural events, and the City Centre area in the Ittin Plain, featuring gardens, markets, live performances and public events, as well as light and spectacular shows.

He explained that other event locations include the Modern Waterfront in the Ittin Plain, the Health Garden at Salalah Public Park, Al Moroof Theatre, and the ‘Child’s Time’ event at Awqad Public Park.

He added that the season also features new and renewed destinations such as the Osara project on Raysut Beach, Nova Entertainment, the Al Gharif event, Raysut Marina

Waterfront, Lamer Al Mughsail, and Samharam Heritage Village. These sites offer diverse entertainment programmes and family activities, along with restaurants, cafes, rest areas and shopping facilities, providing visitors with experiences that blend entertainment and relaxation for all ages and interests.

The Chairman of Dhofar Municipality explained that the ‘Return of the Past’ event embodies Oman’s civilisational and cultural heritage through displays of customs, traditions, traditional arts and handicrafts, reflecting the authenticity of Omani society and its cultural identity.

To highlight the contemporary aspects of the season, he noted that a range of modern events and interactive activities are being held in the Modern Waterfront area in the Ittin Plain of Salalah, which is currently hosting the Salalah Festival for World Cup football fans.

Meanwhile, the Health Garden at Salalah Public Park offers sports, health and awareness programmes targeting various segments of society. Al Moroof Theatre will host a variety of artistic and cultural events, including theatrical performances, concerts and

cultural seminars.

This year, Dhofar Municipality has dedicated a space for children under the title ‘Child’s Time’ at Awqad Public Park, creating an educational and entertainment city that allows children to explore various professions and specialisations through practical applications simulating real work environments. This also includes a ‘Children’s University’ featuring interactive educational activities and specialisations, helping to develop their skills and creative abilities.

On the artistic and cultural front, the programme features a number of musical, vocal and choral performances, including heritage symphonies, as well as choral performances from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt, alongside diverse artistic shows from several countries and improvisational comedy performances with Arab artists.

In the sports domain, the Chairman of Dhofar Municipality said this season’s events include the Dhofar Marathon, the cycling race, the Tour of Salalah, and various races at several locations across the governorate, in addition to the traditional weapons shooting championship at Samharam Village, enhancing the presence of sports activities

within the season’s programme.

He added that the 2026 Khareef Dhofar Season events are not limited to Salalah but extend to the wilayats of Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah, as well as other tourist sites such as Samharam and Al Mughsail, helping to distribute tourist and economic activity across the governorate and highlight its natural, cultural and heritage assets.

Regarding distinctive international events, he noted the second edition of the Dhofar International Theatre Festival, to be held from September 14 to 22, with the participation of theatre practitioners and creatives from around the world.

The festival comprises three main tracks: Elite Performances, Major International Performances and Dhofar Theatre, with prizes of up to \$50,000 for each track, enhancing the governorate’s standing as an international platform for performing arts and cultural exchange.

The Chairman of Dhofar Municipality also highlighted the inaugural edition of the Dhofar International Sculpture Festival, which brings together artists and sculptors from around the world to create works inspired by Oman’s environment and the cultural identity of Dhofar Governorate. The festival aims to enrich the artistic landscape and enhance the governorate’s presence on the global visual arts map.

Ammar bin Obad Ghawas, Director of the Events and Awareness Department, said that the vision for the 2026 Khareef Dhofar Season is centred on delivering an integrated experience that reflects the diversity and uniqueness of Dhofar Governorate. This is achieved through events organised according to specialised themes catering to different interests, with a focus on quality of content and organisation to enrich the visitor experience. — **ONA**

‘Muscat Plan’ strengthens role in humanitarian dialogue

ANNOUNCEMENT

Faiq Money Changers announces that it has ceased its business operations and is currently undertaking the necessary liquidation procedures in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations. The Company extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to its valued customers for their trust and support.

SHORT TAKES



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Brigadier Nasser bin Said al Kharousi.

RGO Technical College celebrates graduation, honours students

MUSCAT: The Royal Guard of Oman Technical College (RGOTC) celebrated on Monday at its headquarters the presentation of graduation certificates to students of the International Technical Education Diploma. The college also honoured outstanding students in the transitional classes for the academic year 2025-2026. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Brigadier Nasser bin Said al Kharousi, Director-General of Administration and Human Resources at the Royal Guard of Oman. On this occasion, a graduating student delivered a speech on behalf of his peers, expressing gratitude to the college administration for providing a comprehensive academic and training environment. He highlighted that this supportive environment significantly contributes to preparing qualified national competencies equipped with scientific knowledge across various specialisations. The event also featured a visual presentation showcasing student activities and events held throughout the current academic year, alongside an exhibition of several student projects. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief guest of the event honoured the outstanding students and dedicated faculty members, and formally handed over the graduation certificates to the graduates. — **ONA**

NRAA documents Omani customs, norms and social character



NRAA's work is part of its efforts to preserve the cultural and social heritage.

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) is documenting, through its field programmes, the customs, norms, social character and authentic traditions of the Sultanate of Oman across various wilayats and governorates. This work is part of its ongoing efforts to preserve the nation's cultural and social heritage and safeguard the components of national identity for future generations. A team of specialised researchers has carried out field documentation of Omani customs, norms and social character in different wilayats and governorates. This is achieved by observing and recording social practices, inherited traditions, lifestyles and community values that distinguish Omani society, as well as documenting social occasions and the heritage associated with them. These efforts reflect the richness and diversity of Oman's cultural heritage across various local environments. The documentation work includes collecting oral narratives and living testimonies from elderly individuals and those with deep knowledge of cultural heritage. It also records manifestations of Omani social character in dress, customs, and social behaviours, in addition to documenting local norms that have historically contributed to strengthening social cohesion and embedding the system of authentic values for which Omani society is known. — **ONA**

INDIAN SAILORS RETURN HOME AFTER OMAN RESCUE OPERATION

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Twenty Indian crewmembers of the MT Jalveer tanker, which was involved in an incident off the coast of Oman last week, have safely returned to India following a coordinated rescue and evacuation operation led by Omani authorities in close liaison with the Embassy of India in Muscat. The crew were evacuated ashore on June 11, in a joint operation involving the Royal Oman Police, Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO),



Indian Ambassador to Oman Prashant Pise with the sailors at Muscat International Airport. and Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). Indian Ambassador to Oman Prashant Pise met the sailors at Muscat International Airport before their departure, interacting

with them and wishing them a safe journey home. The crew members expressed their gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman and the Embassy of India for their swift response and timely rescue operation. “The Embassy has been in continuous contact with the families of the sailors, the ship management company, and all concerned stakeholders. Necessary arrangements have been made for the early repatriation of the mortal remains to India,” the Embassy said in a social media statement.

Digital booking platforms boost Dhofar tourism

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

APPROVED DIGITAL platforms have emerged as a cornerstone in managing the Khareef Dhofar 2026 season amid a steady rise in visitor numbers and growing demand for regulated accommodation and tourism services. With Khareef Dhofar continuing to attract increasing numbers of tourists each year — surpassing one million visitors in recent seasons — authorities are increasingly relying on digital solutions to streamline accommodation bookings, transportation services and tourist experiences while maintaining quality standards and transparency. To strengthen regulation in the tourism rental market, authorities have approved three local digital booking platforms — Sikka, Masarra and Valop — to oversee accommodation reservations during the season. The initiative aims to minimise irregular practices and misleading advertisements that may affect visitor experiences and damage the reputation of the destination. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director of Quality Control at the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said the approved platforms provide a trusted and



Three local digital booking platforms will oversee accommodation reservations during the season.

secure channel for accommodation bookings and rental services. He cautioned that rentals arranged outside the approved platforms may expose visitors to risks, while property owners violating regulations could face legal action, including possible closure of establishments. The move aligns with Oman's broader digital transformation agenda under Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises strengthening the digital economy, improving government service efficiency and advancing tourism as a key economic growth sector. Digital platforms are helping improve tourism market efficiency by directly connecting visitors with service providers, offering

- Authorities aim to curb misleading ads and unlicensed rentals
- Digital solutions support SMEs, improve visitor experience, and boost tourism growth

Musandam boosts food security with investments

KHASAB: Musandam Governorate is continuing to strengthen its position as one of Oman's emerging centres for food security, supported by a growing portfolio of investment projects in fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture and water resources that aim to boost self-sufficiency, diversify the economy, and reinforce sustainable development goals under Oman Vision 2040. According to officials, the governorate is leveraging its natural resources, strategic maritime location along key international shipping routes, and ongoing development initiatives to enhance food and water security systems while expanding opportunities for private investment. These factors are contributing to Musandam's growing role as a regional hub for marine-based food production and supply chain development. The fisheries sector remains a major driver of this transformation, with increasing investments in fish processing, packaging and canning facilities, alongside ice plants for preservation and freezing, fishing gear and equipment services, and



boat maintenance workshops. These developments are supported by infrastructure provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, along with facilitation measures aimed at encouraging private sector participation. Aquaculture is also witnessing significant expansion, particularly in floating cage fish farming projects, supported by Musandam's natural advantages, including sheltered bays, creeks, and extensive marine areas. Technical surveys have identified more than 30 suitable sites across the governorate for fish farming development, further strengthening its potential as a leading aquaculture destination in the Sultanate of Oman. Several high-value investment

projects are already underway in the governorate. These include a floating cage fish farming project in Khasab valued at over RO 10 million, a veterinary quarantine and laboratory project worth RO 2 million, and a table egg production project exceeding RO 2.6 million. Additional initiatives include the management and operation of Khasab fishing port with an investment of 8 million rials, water purification and bottling facilities in Khasab and Dibba, a fish freezing and packaging plant in Dibba, and greenhouse-based agricultural projects, alongside tourism-linked food sector developments. The ministry has also launched new investment opportunities through the ‘Tatweer’ platform during

2025, with projects exceeding 10 million rials across the governorate. These include cattle farms, seasonal fodder cultivation, and dairy production facilities in Bukha; wild tree cultivation, beekeeping, and agricultural nurseries in Madha; and similar projects in Khasab focused on beekeeping and native vegetation cultivation. In Dibba, planned initiatives include fish salting, drying and freezing factories, along with finfish farming projects that aim to strengthen fish-based industries and enhance the value chain of marine products. Officials say these developments are expected to significantly increase local production capacity while supporting food processing industries. Looking ahead, Musandam's 2026 investment pipeline—estimated at RO 16.6 million —includes additional projects in water bottling, beekeeping, palm cultivation and date production, integrated agriculture, oyster farming, marine fishing port operations and maintenance, broiler chicken production, fish storage and cooling facilities, and other modern food production systems. — **ONA**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The event was held under the auspices of Governor of Al Batinah North.

Science and Innovation Center opens in Suhar

SUHAR: A ceremony was held on Monday to inaugurate the Science and Innovation Centre at Al Batinah International School in the Wilayat of Suhar. The centre was established with the support of Sohar Aluminium as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes.

The event was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North.

Spanning an area of 570 square metres, the centre comprises three fully integrated scientific laboratories equipped with the latest technologies for Physics, Chemistry and Biology. In addition to service facilities and storage spaces, the centre provides a modern educational environment that actively supports research and innovation.

The centre aims to achieve several key objectives, namely developing students’ skills in critical thinking, analysis, problem-solving and research; instilling a culture of innovation and exploration; enhancing students’ interest in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), as well as healthcare and preparing qualified national cadres to support the national transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar Aluminium, stated that the centre stems from the company’s firm belief in the importance of investing in education as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development. — **ONA**

Seminar highlights Oman–India economic agreement benefits

SALALAH: Salalah Free Zone, in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), organised on Monday an awareness seminar on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Oman and India, with the participation of a number of investors and representatives of companies operating in Salalah Free Zone. The seminar began with an introduction to the CEPA between Oman and India, its importance in enhancing trade and investment relations between the two countries and its role in opening new horizons for investors to benefit from the competitive advantages provided by the agreement.

The seminar featured a review of three main themes covering the most prominent clauses of the agreement and its regulatory framework, the preferential advantages it offers, including customs tariffs and trade facilitation. — **ONA**

Oman at Riyadh meeting of GCC legislation dept officials

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Monday in the 30th meeting of the GCC Standing Committee of Officials of Legislation Departments, which was held at the Secretariat-General’s headquarters in Riyadh.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the meeting was headed by Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khusaibi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

The meeting discussed a number of topics on the agenda, most notably the work strategy of the Standing Committee of Officials of Legislative Departments in the GCC



Oman at Riyadh meeting of GCC legislation dept officials.

countries for the years 2026–2028, in addition to the outcomes of the meetings of the committee of experts and specialists from the legislative departments.

It also deliberated on the draft unified law for the GCC countries regarding controlled

substances under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and their alternatives, the draft amendment to some provisions of the executive regulations of the pesticides law for the GCC countries, the draft unified law for organic inputs and products of the GCC and the draft executive regulations of the unified law for the management of plant genetic resources for the GCC.

Furthermore, the meeting discussed the work of the team tasked with compiling legislative principles issued by legislative departments in the GCC countries. — **ONA**

Sultan Haitham City tenders government school complex

SULTAN HAITHAM CITY, represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP), has floated two tenders for the construction of a Government School Complex and a Cultural and Social Centre. These tenders are floated in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), as part of ongoing efforts to develop educational, cultural and community facilities that support the city’s quality of life.

The Government School Complex is located in Al Wafa District. It stands as one of the city’s vital projects aimed at providing a modern, multi-use educational environment. The complex includes a boys’ school for the second and third cycles, a girls’ school for the second and third cycles, in addition to a mixed school for the first cycle, along with a multi-storey vehicle parking building.

The project has been designed according to an integrated community concept that allows its facilities to be used beyond school hours. Dedicated spaces include innovation labs, workshops, multi-purpose halls, and community activity facilities, thereby reinforcing its role as a centre for learning and social interaction.

The project features advanced urban and climate-responsive solutions that respect the local environment. Key highlights include a central green pedestrian corridor connecting the schools to adjacent facilities, the provision of green spaces and open gardens and natural cooling systems that improve thermal comfort and enhance the quality of the urban environment.

The project also adopts environmental sustainability principles by integrating green roofs, solar panels and open learning gardens. These elements contribute to improved energy efficiency and greater utilisation of renewable energy sources within the school campus.



The project has been designed according to an integrated community concept that allows its facilities to be used beyond school hours. — **ONA**

On the mobility front, the project offers a safe pedestrian environment through the complete separation of vehicle traffic from student pathways. Independent bus routes and a secure internal movement network connect the various facilities within the complex.

In the same context, the City has launched a tender for the construction of the Cultural and Social Centre in District No. 9, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. This centre is designed to become one of the primary community and cultural landmarks within Sultan Haitham City.

The project benefits from its location within an urban area planned to accommodate approximately 100,000 residents, thereby reinforcing its role as a key destination for cultural activities, social events, and community interaction, capable of hosting various programmes and events throughout the year.

The centre consists of interconnected facilities and buildings arranged around an open central square, ensuring ease of movement and connectivity between different spaces. Its peak-time visitor capacity ranges between 1,200 and 1,500 guests.

The project adheres to the highest environmental sustainability standards through climate-responsive design, the use of central cooling systems, smart energy and water management solutions and locally sourced, low-carbon building materials. These features support the City’s broader sustainable urban development objectives.

The centre also offers a flexible operational model that accommodates diverse cultural, educational and community uses. It enhances opportunities for public-private partnerships, cementing its role as a platform for community engagement and cultural innovation within Sultan Haitham City. — **ONA**

OPFA formed to boost bilateral ties between Oman, Pakistan

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The first Oman–Pakistan Friendship Association (OPFA) was formally launched on Sunday, marking a new step in strengthening the long-standing friendship, cooperation and cultural ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by senior Omani officials, diplomats, as well as representatives from Pakistan and other nationalities, along with members from both government and private organisations.

During the event, a Board of

Directors was also elected to oversee the future activities of the association.

Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Founder and President of the Oman–Pakistan Friendship Association, said the establishment of the body represents a new chapter in bilateral relations and aims to further enhance cooperation between the two countries.

The not-for-profit association seeks to promote friendship, cultural exchange, economic cooperation and people-to-people engagement between Oman and Pakistan. It will also work to support both governments in strengthening ties across trade, economic, cultural, educational, scientific and



The ceremony was attended by senior Omani officials, diplomats, and others.

technological fields.

Speaking at the inauguration, Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to the Sultanate of Oman, said bilateral trade between the two countries had exceeded \$1.5 billion in the early months of this year, highlighting strong potential

for further growth.

“It reflects a collective commitment to building stronger relations founded on mutual respect, cultural understanding, trade partnerships, and community engagement,” he said.

The association will also organise cultural events, educational programmes, business networking forums and youth-focused initiatives in the coming period.

“These activities are aimed at deepening mutual understanding and strengthening relations between the people of the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” Syed Fayyaz Shah added.

Redha Juma Al Saleh,

Board Member of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Board Member, OPFA, emphasised that the association will serve as an active platform to enhance economic, cultural and social cooperation. It will significantly contribute to building bridges of communication among businessmen, academics, intellectuals, and youth in both countries.

In his speech, Al Saleh added that the Oman–Pakistan Friendship Association plans to organise a variety of future activities aimed at fostering relations and mutual understanding between the peoples of Oman and Pakistan.

SHORT TAKES



US President Donald Trump disembarks Air Force One after landing at the Geneva airport. — AFP

TRUMP FACES G7 SUMMIT OVER IRAN ACCORD

PARIS: US President Donald Trump arrived to attend a G7 summit in France, with allies hoping his outline deal with Iran translates into a swift reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Air Force One carrying Trump touched down at the airport in the Swiss city of Geneva, from where Trump was to transfer to the nearby French spa resort of Evian for the summit.

Flush from celebrating his 80th birthday by watching MMA cage fighting at the White House the previous night, Trump had proclaimed “let the oil flow” after announcing the framework Iran deal — a “memorandum of understanding” — had been clinched. But allies will have a list of questions for the US leader, notably on whether Iran plans to charge ships for transiting the Strait.

A parade of world leaders will take place over the next three days, with France keen to expand the reach of the G7 beyond its membership. The European leaders and Canada will also be keen to remind Trump of the importance of pushing Russia to accept a peace on Ukraine’s terms, more than four years after the attack of its neighbour.

— AFP

DISPLACED LEBANESE WARNED NOT TO RUSH HOME



Displaced people make their way back to their homes in southern Lebanon. — Reuters

BEIRUT: Fighting in southern Lebanon eased on Monday after the US-Iran deal to end the wider conflict was announced, but an Israeli drone strike killed one person and authorities warned displaced people not to rush home as Israel said it would keep troops in the south. Lebanon has suffered the deadliest spillover of the conflict between the US and Iran, with nearly 3,800 people killed and some 1.2 million people uprooted by an Israeli offensive against Hezbollah, which opened fire on Israel in support of Tehran on March 2.

Pakistan, a key mediator between Tehran and Washington, announced that a deal was struck early on Monday local time that called for “the immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon”. The declaration brought relative calm to southern Lebanon, according to Lebanese and foreign security sources. An Israeli drone strike on a car in the southern Lebanese town of Kfar Tebnit killed the driver, a Lebanese security source and Lebanese state media said. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the strike. The local and foreign security sources earlier said Israel had significantly reduced its attacks, though some artillery fire was reported in southern Lebanese towns and a drone was heard above Beirut and its southern suburbs.

— Reuters

MARITIME FEES

Macron warns against imposing Hormuz tolls



French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday warned Iran against imposing tolls on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, saying “everything” should be done so fees are not charged for passage through the key bottleneck. “We defend international law and we will do everything in our power to ensure there is no toll,” Macron said. Macron said a joint France-UK mission to ensure the Strait opens was prepared to deploy “very quickly.”

— AFP

SUPPLIES CONCERN

IMF chief warns world energy recovery



The International Monetary Fund chief on Monday welcomed the ceasefire agreement between the United States and Iran, but warned it would take time for energy and other supply disruptions to dissipate. “As we have said before, much depends on the duration and intensity of the energy supply shock,” Kristalina Georgieva said. “The sooner it is resolved, the better — especially as supply will take time to recover given the significant infrastructure damage.”

— AFP

FRAGILE MOMENT

UN human rights chief urges restraint



GENEVA: The United Nations’ human rights chief welcomed the peace deal between the United States and Iran, urging maximum restraint on all sides so a lasting agreement could be reached. “I welcome the announcement that the United States and Iran have agreed on a peace deal. At this fragile moment, it is clear all sides need to exercise maximum restraint and work to implement the agreement reached quickly and in good faith,” Volker Turk said.

— Reuters

Iran, US agree to halt war

SHIPPING STILL MOSTLY HALTED IN HORMUZ

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remained virtually at a standstill on Monday, tracking platforms indicated, despite US President Donald Trump’s claim that crossings were resuming.

OIL PLUNGES, STOCKS JUMP ON PEACE DEAL

Oil prices dropped towards \$80 a barrel and stocks rallied on Monday after Washington and Iran reached a deal to end the Middle East war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

‘DEEP MISTRUST’ IN US REMAINS DESPITE DEAL

Iran’s foreign ministry said that “unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that Iran’s deep mistrust of the United States stems from long history of wrongdoing by American leaders.

IRAN TO SEEK UN RATIFICATION

Iran said on Monday it would seek ratification from the UN Security Council after it negotiates a final agreement covering its nuclear programme with the United States.



A woman walks past a billboard with a picture of the late Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, Iran. — Reuters

THE US and Iran said they have agreed terms to end their war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, news that brought relief to markets worldwide, although the pact may hinge on events in Lebanon and defers tricky talks on Tehran’s nuclear programme. The framework deal marks the biggest breakthrough towards resolving a war that began with joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February before escalating into a wider regional conflict that has killed thousands, upended energy markets and stoked recession fears for the global economy. “The Deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran is now complete,” US President Donald Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform at around 5:30 pm in Washington on Sunday.

The memorandum of understanding is scheduled to be officially signed on Friday in Switzerland. Leaders around the world welcomed the announcement on Monday as details of the terms began to emerge. Though the text was not yet published, its apparent call for hostilities to cease more broadly could be tricky for Israel, which was not part of the negotiations and has been waging war in Lebanon against Hezbollah. “Lebanon is an integral part of the agreement to end the war,” Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson

The framework deal marks the biggest breakthrough towards resolving a war that began with joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February before escalating into a wider regional conflict that has killed thousands, upended energy markets and stoked recession fears for the global economy

Esmaeil Baghaei said, adding the text calls for an end to war on all fronts, as well as the respect of Lebanon’s territorial integrity. Leaders of the Group of Seven wealthy nations, including Trump, are due to arrive at a French lakeside resort on Monday.

While the US and Iran had largely ceased hostilities in early April to engage in negotiations, fighting has not ceased in Lebanon, where Hezbollah opened fire on Israel in support of Tehran on March 2 and Israel responded with an air campaign and ground invasion that has uprooted some 1.2 million people.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said there must be a complete halt to Israeli attacks against Lebanon and wrote on Telegram that the US bears responsibility for implementing the framework deal. Hezbollah welcomed the deal and said the inclusion of Lebanon reflected Iran’s commitment to securing a halt to the war and preserving Lebanon’s rights.

After the deal was announced, the pace of Israeli attacks in Lebanon decreased dramatically, Lebanese and foreign security sources said. Earlier, a Hezbollah official said that the group has not carried out any operations since the deal was announced and that its position on the ceasefire was linked to Israel’s adherence to it. Trump said before the memorandum was announced

that there should be no more Israeli attacks on Lebanon or Hezbollah attacks on Israel.

Trump said the Strait of Hormuz, a major shipping route for global oil and gas supplies that Iran has effectively shut for months, would open on Friday, and that he had ordered the end of a US blockade of Iranian ports. “Ships of the World, start your engines. Let the oil flow!” he wrote on Sunday. On Monday he said traffic was already resuming: “Ships are starting to move, many loaded up with Oil, out of the Strait of Hormuz.”

Oil prices fell, though shippers remained cautious and ensuring the waterway is clear of mines could take weeks. Brent crude futures fell some 5 per cent on Monday while stock markets jumped. France and Britain are ready to lead a mission in the strait, with the support of the Netherlands and Italy, to help reopen the sea lane after the deal becomes a reality, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday.

US Vice President JD Vance said he hopes the text of the agreement will be released this week, as negotiations over the deal’s details were set to continue. “Our expectation is that the Strait is going to be opened in a toll-free way for the long-term,” he told CNBC. “That’s the sort of thing that we’re going to figure out in these technical negotiations.”

— Reuters

Focus on coordination and inclusive governance



IF THE Sultanate of Oman’s future is to be judged, the measure lies in institutions, not just plans.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s directives to create an Economic Coordination Council and to add one more seat for women in the Majlis Ash’shura signal more about the next phase of Oman Vision 2040 than any speech. These are not administrative tweaks but rather the corrections that Oman requires.

The Economic Coordination Council addresses Oman’s central bottleneck: execution. The Council aims to harmonise government policies with the needs of the private sector, anticipate global economic trends, foster the growth of economic sectors, maximise the private sector’s contribution to economic growth, and ensure that public policies are directed towards a more diversified and balanced development model.

The Ministry of Finance plans budgets. Investment agencies court capital. Labour regulators set employment rules. Infrastructure bodies design projects. Each works with purpose, yet they often operate apart.

The consequence is misaligned policy: a tax designed for revenue can constrain business growth; a training programme can miss the skills a new factory actually needs. Strong intentions, weak alignment.

The significance of the Council appears in three areas. Speed: approvals and data in one room reduce bureaucratic lag. Coherence: fiscal, labour and industrial

policies stop pulling in opposite directions.

Accountability: a single forum tracking results makes it easier to identify what works and end what does not, protecting public funds and private confidence. Yet a council is only as effective as its authority. Without real-time data and the power to resolve disputes, it risks becoming another talking shop. With His Majesty’s agenda driving it, the Council becomes Oman’s economic command room.

The second directive — an additional Majlis Ash’shura seat for women — carries equal weight for different reasons. This is a principle, not a quota.

Majlis Ash’shura reviews laws, budgets and national issues that affect every household. When the experience of half the population is absent from that table, legislation carries blind spots.

Omani women are no longer on the margins of economic life. They run businesses, lead in education and health, and increasingly enter finance, engineering, and technology. That perspective changes the questions raised in parliament. Will a labour law account for childcare? Can vocational training reach women in remote wilayats? Are financing rules practical for female entrepreneurs? These are economic questions because they affect GDP, household income and productivity.

The significance of this seat extends beyond representation. Practically, diverse input produces sharper laws with higher compliance because they reflect real household and business conditions.

Oman’s next phase requires better systems and broader participation. Coordination without inclusion yields efficient but narrow policy

Economically, it increases labour force participation. When women see their concerns reflected in policy, more enter the workforce, directly expanding Oman’s productive base. Culturally, representation shifts expectations.

Some argue that one seat is insufficient. That concern is valid, and it should not be the endpoint. Institutions evolve by precedent. This directive establishes that women belong in Majlis Ash’shura as decision-makers, not guests. If that seat demonstrates its value through better legislation and oversight, the case for further expansion will strengthen on its own merits.

Taken together, these directives reflect one conviction: Oman’s next phase requires better systems and broader participation. Coordination without inclusion yields efficient but narrow policy. Inclusion without coordination yields good intentions without results. The Council provides alignment. The Majlis Ash’shura seat provides perspective.

His Majesty’s approach remains measured: define the structure, state the principle, then let results speak. The test now begins. The Council must prove it can unify policy and reduce delays. The Majlis Ash’shura seat must prove that new voices lead to stronger laws.

Oman does not lack talent or ambition. What is needed is alignment between them. With an Economic Coordination Council at the centre and wider representation in Majlis Ash’shura, that alignment is now possible. The remainder depends on execution, honest debate and contribution from every Omani.

OLDER VOTERS, CITIES REJECT SWISS POPULATION CAP

DAVE GRAHAM

Older voters and city dwellers were instrumental in defeating a right-wing proposal to cap Switzerland’s population at 10 million, data from Sunday’s referendum showed, as the government and business leaders expressed relief at the outcome.

Following a close campaign that pitted fears of uncontrolled immigration against the threat of Swiss isolation in Europe, voters ultimately rejected the initiative by a margin of 55 per cent-45 per cent.

Championed by the Swiss People’s Party, the proposal that could have ended free movement of labour between Switzerland and the European Union tapped into concerns that overcrowding is stretching public services, fuelling crime and pushing up rents.

The Swiss People’s Party is the largest party nationwide, and despite the cap’s rejection, it pledged to keep up the pressure on immigration. Polling data indicated younger voters were more enthused by the population cap than older ones.

Voters aged 65 and above were most sceptical of the proposal, with 60 per cent of them against the cap, as were 57 per cent of those aged 50 to 64, figures published by Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger showed.

By contrast, the group most in favour were those aged 35 to 49, with 51 per cent of them backing the proposal. Among those aged 18 to 34, 48 per cent supported it, according to data obtained for online news site 20 Minuten/Tamedia by pollster Leewas.

Cloe Jans, a political scientist at pollster GFS Bern, said that while there was support for the proposal’s aims, the public did not want rigid limits enshrined in law.

“In geopolitically uncertain times, people aren’t keen on experiments and burning bridges unnecessarily,” she said.

The referendum was held after a challenging 2025 for Switzerland, which was saddled with the highest US tariffs in Europe when President Donald Trump pressed the wealthy country to cut its trade surplus with the US.

Switzerland is in the process of trying to ratify an accord with the EU that would deepen economic ties. — **Reuters**

Why emotional distance fails in modern football



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University



I WROTE this while watching Brazil play Morocco at the 2026 World Cup, which ended in a draw (1-1). I planned to watch without getting emotionally involved, but that was difficult once the match began.

Even when I tried to focus on writing, a quick attack or a strong tackle pulled my attention back to the screen. This situation highlighted a basic point about watching major sports: it is hard to remain neutral because the format invites reactions.

The last World Cup I watched was in 2022 in Qatar. The event was significant for two reasons. First, it was historic because it was in a neighboring Arab country. Second, I was active in researching memes, stereotypes and hate speech at the time. Many memes from Saudi and Qatari accounts were creative and fast-moving.

They were often funny, but they also showed how simple jokes can both create community and spread stereotypes, good or bad. From a research perspective, thus, the 2022 tournament became a practical case study.

This background affects how I approached 2026. I did not plan to watch much, but I returned to it anyway. Part of the reason is support for Arab teams from the region. Another part is long-standing respect for traditional football powers such as Brazil and Germany, and a general interest in South American football. These preferences formed when I was younger. I remember a Brazil defeat that left me in tears. I do not recall the year or the opponent, but I remember the feeling clearly.

Going into the Brazil vs Morocco match, I told myself to keep a

The World Cup is designed to create shared emotional peaks and valleys. Even when we plan to just observe, we often end up participating as fans

professional distance. That plan did not hold. The crowd noise, the pace of play, and the visible effort from the players created tension, especially when it was Brazil facing an Arab giant. This was not ideal for blood pressure, but it also explained the appeal. The World Cup is designed to create shared emotional peaks and valleys. Even when we plan to just observe, we often end up participating as fans.

There is a famous argument by the Roman poet Juvena that mass entertainment can distract the public from important issues. This caution is reasonable. Large events can become a substitute for civic attention.

However, it is also true that shared entertainment can serve a healthy social function. Sports provide a structured setting for collective feeling. People experience excitement, frustration, and relief together, and then the game ends. Enjoyment can be a break that supports, rather than replaces, serious engagement with

other parts of life.

The online dimension remains central. No matter who wins, the conversation continues through highlights, commentary, and memes. Some will be harmless and witty; others may carry stereotypes or encourage hostility.

For anyone studying online discourse, this is both a risk and an opportunity. It is important to document how narratives form and spread, and to separate normal fan banter from content that targets groups unfairly. Effective analysis now requires attention to both the match itself and its digital afterlife.

Watching Brazil versus Morocco at the 2026 World Cup, therefore, brought together several threads: regional loyalty, respect for established football traditions, personal memories from earlier tournaments, and an ongoing interest in how online culture shapes public reaction. The outcome is not the only measure of value.

Climate Week drives green shift from football focus



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

THE WORLD has football on its mind right now, and it looks like it could be a perfect platform to talk about climate change and what the common people could do to overcome the challenge.

Climate change presents a fundamental threat to human health, says the World Health Organization. WHO pointed out that it affects the physical environment as well as all aspects of both natural and human systems – including social and economic conditions and the functioning of health systems. It is therefore a threat multiplier, undermining and potentially reversing decades of health progress.

This week, the Environment Authority held an Ambassadors’ Gathering to introduce the Oman Climate Week that is to be held from September 14 to 16, 2026.

Oman Climate Week is about investing in a green future. It seems like there is no other way because the world is going through changes; as they always say, the environment knows no borders.

According to EA, Oman Climate Week 2026 serves as a critical regional platform for climate cooperation, technology adoption and investment activation. Positioned at a moment where global action must move into execution, this event links policy, industry, technology and funding in one environment built for tangible outcomes.

For Oman, some of the major concerns of climate change are intensified droughts, extreme flash floods and rising sea levels.

Droughts are a concern for agriculturists, as they can affect groundwater and, subsequently, the traditional irrigation system – the aflaj networks.

The increase in adverse weather systems also causes flash floods that can be damaging to the infrastructure. When we think about the rising sea levels, what comes to mind are the beautiful coastlines of Oman and the turtles that depend on them as much as the ocean.

The Arabian Sea is currently preparing to bring in the monsoon to the coastal areas of Dhofar, which has been the norm. But the Arabian Sea has also been experiencing more frequent and intense storms and heavy rainfall.

The coastal cities know the differences. The changes, whether in the form of frequent storms or sea level, are highly significant because we have something precious in the coastal areas – desalination plants that provide drinking water.

Oman has prioritised carbon neutrality and sustainable transitions under Oman Vision 2040. And what will be discussed at the conferences as part of Oman Climate Week will be highly significant.

We are used to the high temperature in the summer, but we dare it with our air conditioners. But there is an impact on this factor too.

A major concern in the world has been the acidification of the oceans, and we have seen it in the difficulties faced by coral reefs and shellfish in parts of the world.

Oman Climate Week is about investing in a green future. It seems like there is no other way because the world is going through changes; as they always say, the environment knows no borders

According to the experts, the primary solution to ocean acidification is drastically reducing global carbon dioxide emissions and transitioning to clean energy.

Because the ocean absorbs about 30 per cent of atmospheric carbon dioxide, curbing emissions directly reduces the chemical shifts that make seawater corrosive to marine life.

We need global, broad systemic changes as well as local actions. The world is taking the initiative towards renewable energy. Can we as individuals make a difference?

Of course, we will need to continuously find ways for carbon removal processes and capping greenhouse gas emissions.

I was recently at a restaurant that had a pretty outdoor setting. Sitting out there, I realised the heat from the air conditioner was more than the summer temperature.

And we need to protect ‘blue carbon’ ecosystems, and that is by conserving and restoring marine vegetation like kelp forests, seagrass beds and mangroves. Oman has been taking immense measures to enhance the coverage of mangroves in different parts of the country.

And why footballers?

The footballers – they spend a lot of time outdoors.

They are known to log 15 to 25 hours weekly on the pitch for training and matches, and they are also known to prefer outdoor activity during their break time. When they are professionals, they travel too and play outdoors in many countries.

EU ADVANCES UKRAINE MEMBERSHIP BID

MAX DELANY

The EU is due to move Ukraine’s bid to join onto the next stage after a long delay - but that doesn’t mean Kyiv’s path to full membership is getting easier.

Foreign ministers from the 27-nation bloc will formally kick off negotiations with Ukraine and neighbouring Moldova on aligning with a first ‘cluster’ of EU laws.

Ukraine’s progress was stuck for some two years as Hungary’s nationalist leader Viktor Orban vetoed all progress, but his election defeat by rival Peter Magyar in April opened up the way.

EU enlargement commissioner Marta Kos called it a “mega Monday” and said Ukraine and Moldova would be taking their biggest step forward since they were formally made candidates to join in 2023.

“They have delivered and it was really time for us to do this,” she said at a meeting in Luxembourg.

But despite the fanfare - and Kyiv’s pleas for quick progress four years after it applied for membership in the wake of Russia’s war - that doesn’t mean the war-torn country is going to join the bloc any time soon.

In purely practical terms, a mammoth workload still lies ahead to align Ukraine’s laws, institutions and standards with the EU’s - despite major strides already made by Kyiv, even as it battles Russia.

That involves negotiating through 35 “chapters” covering everything from the environment and agriculture to justice and security - grouped into six “clusters”.

But, as ever in the EU, the question is also deeply political, and there are myriad points at which any member state that wants can slam the brakes on Kyiv.

“This is a long process. Ukraine is at war. It has organised crime issues to solve. It would be the third biggest country in the EU,” a European diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Hungary’s Magyar, for one, has pledged a referendum on Kyiv joining if Ukraine completes all the negotiations “within the next 10 to 15 years”.

Beyond that, there seems to be a broader willingness to temper Kyiv’s ambitions - and growing talk of possible alternatives.

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said that other countries reluctant on enlargement had been hiding behind Orban.

“Now Orban is gone, so quite many have come out from Orban’s shadow, and let’s see whether we have this unity about enlargement,” he said.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in April that it was clear to everyone that the “immediate accession of Ukraine to the EU is, of course, not possible”. — AFP

LinkedIn connects Lopes to Cape Verde WC journey

WHEN ROBERTO LOPES was originally contacted by the Cape Verdean football association on LinkedIn, he did what many people do with unsolicited messages on the professional social media platform - he ignored it, almost costing him the chance to play at the 2026 World Cup.

The teak-tough, Irish-born central defender thought the message in Portuguese was spam and did not bother replying. It was only when he received a follow-up message in English that he realised it was an offer to play international football for Cape Verde, who take on Spain in their opening World Cup group game on Monday.

“Nine months later, they messaged me back in English asking if I had thought about the proposal, and it was only then that I did what I should have done originally and Google-translated the original message asking if I would be interested in declaring for Cape Verde,” a laughing Lopes said in a telephone interview prior to the tournament.

“It was a weird angle to come at (via LinkedIn); it was explained to me afterwards that they had difficulty contacting my club, but when I saw the opportunity was there in front of me, I was 100 per cent behind it from the minute one, and we got working on getting all the necessary documentation across.”

Known universally in the game by his nickname of “Pico”, the 33-year-old has played his entire career in the League of Ireland for Bohemian FC and Shamrock Rovers and, with very few players from that league making it to the international stage, never mind the finals of a major tournament, he was sure his experience at that level was going to stay as one U19 cap for Ireland.

Instead, the message saw him link up with the country of his father’s birth, making his debut in a 2-0 win over Togo in 2019 and going on to



PHILIP O’CONNOR

The writer is a Reuters reporter

It was only when Roberto received a follow-up message in English that he realised it was an offer to play international football for Cape Verde, who take on Spain in their opening World Cup group game



Roberto Lopes also known as Pico, is a professional footballer who plays as a centre-back for Shamrock Rovers. Born in Ireland, he represents the Cape Verde national team.

become a linchpin in the defence of a team that quickly began punching above their weight, eventually qualifying for the World Cup with a 3-0 win over Eswatini in October.

“When I came into the squad in 2019, I felt there was a great group of players there. The goal at the time was to get to the AFCON (African Cup of Nations), which we did, and we were mixing with some of the best teams in Africa,” Lopes explained.

“Through that, we gained a lot of confidence within our group and some more lads with dual nationality declared, and it just kind of bolstered our squad as well.”

After narrowly missing out on the 2022 World Cup, Cape Verde topped their group ahead of Egypt at the 2023 AFCON tournament and were knocked out by South Africa in the quarterfinals.

“We just felt like we were up there with some of the best teams in Africa; we could definitely mix with them on their day. With the new format that Fifa introduced and more teams in Africa that can qualify for the World Cup, the extra little bit of motivation was there for us to say, ‘let’s do everything we can

to qualify and create history,’” Lopes said.

Their reward for that successful qualifying campaign is a spot in Group H with Spain, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay, and Lopes and his team are relishing the opportunity to pit themselves against the best the world has to offer.

“I think we have to try and get out of the group; that has to be the goal. You can’t really say you want to get to the final, I think the first hurdle is trying to get out of your group, trying to stay there a bit longer,” he said.

“We know it will be difficult, we’re in a tough group, but we have to believe we can do it - we got here on merit, and we have to be competitive now.”

Meanwhile, facing the might of Spain is a “dream come true” said Cape Verde coach Bubista as the African island nation prepares for its World Cup debut on Monday.

Blessed with what Spain boss Luis de la Fuente boasted is the “best squad in the tournament” in his opinion, the European champions are among the favourites to win the competition for a second time.

— Reuters



Spain stunned in 0-0 draw with World Cup debutants Cape Verde



Vozinha

CAPE Verde pulled off a World Cup shock by holding Spain to a 0-0 draw in the opening game of Group H on Monday, where the European champions and one of the tournament favourites could find no way past the debutants and their keeper Vozinha.

Despite dominating possession, Spain's first real threat came late in the opening half when Ferran Torres somehow smashed a close-range shot off the bar and Cape Verde keeper Vozinha tipped over Mikel Oyarzabal's header from the rebound.

Vozinha also denied Torres and Aymeric Laporte to keep the game goalless at the break and even the introduction of winger Lamine Yamal failed to inspire Spain to victory.

A dogged Cape Verde side held on for a famous point in their first-ever World Cup game and even created late chances of their own as they threatened to cause an even bigger upset. The other two teams in Group H, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay, meet in Miami later on Monday.

— Reuters





SHORT TAKES



Former manager Juergen Klopp takes a selfie with fans after the match. — Reuters

KLOPP APOLOGISES TO NAGELSMANN FOR GERMAN TEAM SELECTION JOKE

HOUSTON: Former Liverpool boss Jürgen Klopp has apologised to Germany boss Julian Nagelsmann for his poorly received joke on team selection. Long tipped to manage the national side, Klopp is working as a pundit at the World Cup for broadcaster Magenta TV alongside ex-Germany star Thomas Müller and joked during the opening match on Thursday that Nagelsmann picks the team “for now.”

The remark was roundly criticised in subsequent days in German media, while Nagelsmann initially declined to comment in a press conference, saying he did not think it was appropriate to discuss the matter. Following Germany’s impressive 7-1 opening win against debutants Curaçao in Houston on Sunday, Klopp addressed the comments in an interview with Nagelsmann on the pitch. “I could have smacked myself in the face for that, but it was already too late and I was on TV. It just slipped out without thinking,” he told Nagelsmann.

“It’s completely irrelevant. I hope everyone out there understands that,” continued Klopp. “What I’ve realised is that I’ll be 59 the day after tomorrow and I’m still stupid. But it just happened.” Klopp, who works as head of global soccer at Red Bull after leaving Liverpool in 2024, emphasised that he and Müller were on Nagelsmann and the team’s side. He further called his comment the “un word of the year,” a reference to a well-known annual selection in Germany of terms deemed to be discriminatory.

The two managers clasped hands before Nagelsmann left the interview. Müller had also responded to the criticism of the comments. “Of course we discuss things passionately; our aim is to convey our enthusiasm,” said the former international, who now plays for Vancouver White caps in Major League Soccer. He said he and Klopp are “huge fans of the team” and of the tournament, adding that there is “always a bit of banter involved.”

The pundits’ aim is to support the team and “keep the mood light. — dpa



Germany’s Kai Havertz scores their seventh goal. — Reuters

Bayern set to sign Morocco’s World Cup star Saibari from PSV



Ismael Saibari has made

29 international appearances for the Moroccan national team

Saibari has scored

9 goals for the national team

INTERNATIONAL CAREER: He began his international journey through Morocco's youth levels (U20 and U23) before being called up to the senior squad, where he has become a key player in midfield and attack.

INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

- AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS (AFCON): Won the title with the Moroccan national team in 2025.
- U-23 AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS: Won the title with the Moroccan Olympic team in 2023.
- INDIVIDUAL HONORS: Named in the Team of the Tournament for the 2023 U-23 Africa Cup of Nations.

ACHIEVEMENTS WITH CLUBS (PSV EINDHOVEN)

Saibari has had a distinguished career with PSV Eindhoven, winning several major domestic titles, most notably:

- EREDIVISIE (DUTCH LEAGUE): Won the title for three consecutive seasons (2023–24, 2024–25, 2025–26).
- KNVB CUP (DUTCH CUP): Won the title twice (2021–22, 2022–23).
- JOHAN CRUYFF SHIELD (DUTCH SUPER CUP): Won the title 3 times (2022, 2023, 2025).
- INDIVIDUAL HONORS: Awarded the title of Best Player in the Eredivisie for the 2025–26 season.

BAYERN Munich are on the verge of signing Morocco's World Cup star Ismael Saibari. Media outlets including Bild and Sky, as well as transfer expert Fabrizio Romano, reported on Monday that the German champions have reached an agreement with Dutch club PSV Eindhoven for a fee of around ?55 million (\$64 million).

The midfielder is said to have agreed a contract with the Munich side running until 2031. Saibari's medical is reportedly set to take place in North America while the World Cup is under way, with Bayern doctor Jochen Hahne already in the United States with the German national team.

The 25-year-old has already made headlines in the tournament with his goal in the 1-1 draw with Brazil in Group C.

He was named Eredivisie Player of the Year after playing a key role in PSV's third consecutive league title, while he was in the Morocco side that was controversially crowned as Africa Cup of Nations champions in 2025 after Senegal's victory in the final was overturned.

Born in Spain, Saibari moved to Belgium as a child and played for the youth teams of Anderlecht and Genk before joining PSV's reserve side in 2020 and emerging into the first team in 2022. The Morocco star is not the only World Cup debutant set for a lucrative transfer to Bayern Munich. Germany left-back Nathaniel Brown is also expected to join the German champions from Eintracht Frankfurt for a similar fee of around 55 million. — dpa



Kylian Mbappe



Sadio Mane



FRANCE AND SENEGAL

A CLASH THAT REVIVES THE 2002 WC UPSET



RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbhaluch

FOOTBALL

fans are eagerly anticipating the upcoming encounter between France and Senegal in Group I of the 2026 Fifa World Cup, a match that rekindles unforgettable memories between the two sides.

France enter the match aiming to reaffirm their status as one of the tournament's leading contenders, while Senegal seek to replicate their historic achievement and demonstrate their ability to challenge football's elite, the only previous World Cup meeting between the two teams dates back to the opening match of the 2002 Fifa World Cup in South Korea and Japan, when Senegal, making their tournament debut, secured a historic 1-0 victory over defending champions

France through a goal scored by Papa Bouba Diop in the 30th minute.

The result remains one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history and paved the way for Senegal's run to the quarter finals.

Twenty four years later, the rivalry is renewed as Les Bleus face the Lions of Teranga in a contest expected to showcase European experience against African ambition. The match will be played in June 16 at New Jersey Stadium.



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,618.285

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$76.93
BRENT \$82.95
LIGHT \$80.23



SHORT TAKES



A series of upgrades introduced over the past year helped secure the rating.

SALALAH AIRPORT RETAINS SKYTRAX FIVE-STAR STATUS

SALALAH: Salalah Airport has retained its five-star Skytrax rating for a second consecutive year, reinforcing its position among a select group of airports recognised globally for excellence in passenger experience and service quality.

The accolade reflects continued investment in facilities, operational efficiency and customer service as the airport prepares for another strong tourism season in Dhofar.

Oman Airports said a series of upgrades introduced over the past year helped secure the rating, including the opening of the new Majan Lounge, expanded family and children's facilities and a broader range of retail offerings featuring Omani brands and products.

The airport has also implemented improvements to operational processes and passenger services aimed at reducing waiting times, streamlining procedures and enhancing overall travel comfort.

The recognition comes as Salalah Airport intensifies preparations for the Khareef Dhofar Season, a period that typically drives a significant increase in passenger traffic and airline activity.

Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Oman Airports, said the renewed five-star rating reflects the organisation's commitment to delivering a world-class travel experience built on quality, innovation and customer satisfaction.

He said the achievement highlights the success of ongoing efforts to upgrade facilities, improve operational efficiency and meet the growing demands of tourism and aviation in Oman.

Al Sharji added that Oman Airports will continue investing in passenger-focused initiatives and airport readiness to support the country's tourism ambitions and strengthen the international standing of Omani airports.

Zakaria bin Yaqoub al Harasi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Salalah Airport, said maintaining the five-star rating for a second year demonstrates the success of continuous improvement programmes aimed at enhancing services and facilities.

He noted that the recognition reflects a long-term strategy centred on passenger satisfaction, operational excellence and innovation, supported by close collaboration among airport stakeholders.

— ONA

Oman aviation gears up for Khareef flights

OMAN'S aviation sector is gearing up for a busy Khareef Dhofar Season, with airlines increasing flights and seat capacity to accommodate growing demand for travel to Salalah between June and September.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it has completed preparations for the 2026 Khareef Dhofar Season through a coordinated operational plan with airlines and aviation stakeholders aimed at boosting connectivity, expanding capacity and ensuring a smooth travel experience for visitors.



The CAA has completed preparations for the 2026 Khareef Dhofar Season through a coordinated operational plan with airlines and aviation stakeholders.

Under the plan, Oman Air will operate up to 13 daily flights between Muscat and Salalah during peak periods, compared with 12 flights last season, while some peak days will see services increased to 14 flights in response to demand. SalamAir plans to operate up to 10 daily flights on the route.

SalamAir will operate 984 flights during the season, up from 962 flights in 2025, reflecting higher capacity and stronger operational readiness.

Mohammed bin Ahmed al Yafei, Director-General of Civil Aviation in Dhofar Governorate, said the authority is working closely with airlines and relevant entities to enhance operational efficiency, improve passenger services and ensure flexibility in responding to demand surges during peak travel periods.

He said continuous monitoring of airline operations and airport

Under the plan, Oman Air will operate up to 13 daily flights between Muscat and Salalah during peak periods, compared with 12 flights last season, while some peak days will see services increased to 14 flights in response to demand. SalamAir plans to operate up to 10 daily flights on the route.

readiness will help maintain service quality and support the growing popularity of Dhofar as one of Oman's leading tourism destinations.

Oman Air is expected to offer around 330,000 seats during the season, up from 313,000 a year earlier, while SalamAir will provide about 190,844 seats.

Passenger traffic is also projected to rise. Oman Air expects to carry around 298,000 passengers during the season, compared with 277,000 last year, representing growth of about 8 per cent. SalamAir forecasts more than 166,000 passengers, slightly higher than the previous season.

The CAA said Oman Air will continue to offer discounted fares for Omani citizens, maintaining ticket prices introduced in 2024 at RO 54 for return journeys and RO 32 for one-way travel. SalamAir

will continue offering flexible fare options, with one-way fares starting from RO 9.99 for early bookings.

International connectivity is also being strengthened. SalamAir will operate direct flights to Salalah from Dammam and Baghdad, while Oman Air will launch a Dubai-Salalah service on July 3 with three weekly flights.

Around 18,000 seats will be allocated on routes linking Salalah with GCC destinations between July and September, with additional capacity scheduled on high-demand travel days.

Salalah Airport is expected to welcome 68 weekly flights by foreign carriers during the season, including services from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and India, further enhancing access to one of the region's most popular summer tourism destinations. — ONA

OMAN HOTEL REVENUE HITS ₹ 96.2 MILLION BY APRIL

MUSCAT: Revenue generated by Oman's three- to five-star hotels reached RO 96.2 million by the end of April 2026, while total guest numbers stood at 696,911, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The figures showed Omani nationals remained the largest group of hotel guests, with their numbers rising 3.5 per cent year-

on-year to 246,934.

European visitors ranked second at 220,015 guests, followed by Asian travellers at 106,189. Visitors from GCC countries totalled 40,322, while guests from other Arab countries reached 25,714.

The number of visitors from the Americas stood at 23,992, while guests from Oceania and Africa reached 7,083 and 5,054 respectively.

Hotel occupancy across three- to five-star establishments averaged 50.2 per cent during the first four months of the year.

Despite the increase in domestic guests, overall hotel activity declined compared with the same period of 2025. Total guest numbers fell 15.9 per cent from 829,052 recorded a year earlier, while hotel revenues dropped 12.2 per cent from RO 109.5 million. — ONA

OMIFCO eyes decarbonisation, low-carbon ammonia production

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) is examining multiple pathways to develop low-carbon ammonia, a product increasingly sought after as global industries and energy markets accelerate efforts to decarbonise supply chains.

The initiative, disclosed in the company's prospectus for its initial public offering (IPO), forms part of a broader clean energy transition and decarbonisation strategy intended for phased implementation over the medium to long term.

OMIFCO said it has already undertaken a series of studies focused on decarbonisation and clean energy integration, aligned with national climate and emissions reduction targets.

These include the OMIFCO Roadmap on Decarbonisation & Clean Energy, a carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) pre-feasibility study and the Sur Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster pre-feasibility study. All initiatives remain under evaluation as the company assesses



While market exploration for carbon utilisation is ongoing, a feasibility study for carbon sequestration has also been completed: OMIFCO

technical and commercial viability.

The OMIFCO Roadmap on Decarbonisation & Clean Energy serves as a foundational study for the company's transition towards cleaner energy systems.

It evaluates a full spectrum of available technologies, including renewable energy integration, green hydrogen and green

ammonia production routes, CCUS solutions and other low-carbon opportunities relevant to the company's operations. The study was conducted by Norway-based AKSO, with the final report submitted in the third quarter of 2024.

Separately, the CCUS pre-feasibility study assessed technologies for capturing, storing and utilising carbon dioxide emissions from the flue gas stacks of OMIFCO's ammonia plants. The work was carried out by Italy's Casale, which recommended a suitable carbon capture technology based on technical and operational considerations.

While market exploration for carbon utilisation is ongoing, a feasibility study for carbon sequestration has also been completed. However, implementation would require the development of dedicated CO₂ transport infrastructure to move captured emissions to end users or storage sites.

The Sur Hydrogen and Energy Transition Cluster study expands the scope beyond OMIFCO to a broader industrial ecosystem in the Sur region, including other energy participants such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) operations.

A pre-feasibility assessment was completed in 2023, identifying potential cluster-level synergies for hydrogen and low-carbon energy development. Participating stakeholders have since signed a memorandum of understanding and agreed on a scope of work, with a joint tender process for a detailed feasibility study expected to follow.

In parallel, OMIFCO is also assessing specific pathways for low-carbon ammonia production. These include the integration of green hydrogen, sourced either externally or produced in-house and the use of renewable energy such as solar and wind to power plant utilities and auxiliary systems including compressors and pumps.

The company is additionally evaluating the use of renewable electricity supplied through the national grid, depending on the pace of infrastructure expansion and supplier-side decarbonisation.

Together, these measures form a phased strategy aimed at reducing the carbon intensity of production while maintaining operational reliability and export competitiveness in global fertiliser markets.

BUSINESS FEATURE

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

AS Oman’s Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) steps up efforts to enhance export readiness and develop the competitiveness of Omani enterprises, industry leaders from across sectors are engaging in workshops and dialogue aimed at positioning the Sultanate of Oman more decisively in global markets.

The *Observer* spoke with two Omani exporters — Abdullah al Qulaibi, a veteran electrical transformer manufacturer and Abdulrahman al Harousi, Omani Farmers Association — to understand what export success actually looks like on the ground, what stands in the way and what Oman must do differently to compete.

Both interviews reflect a broader truth emerging from MoCIIP’s export readiness efforts workshop: Oman has genuine competitive strengths — in manufacturing heritage, in agricultural quality, in its geographic position — but converting those strengths into sustained export growth demands infrastructure investment, institutional coordination and a generational commitment to quality standards.

The conversation is encouraging and the hard work, as both exporters acknowledge, is only the beginning.

WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT

Abdullah al Qulaibi, veteran electrical transformer manufacturer

Your company has been exporting for nearly four decades. What does that longevity tell us about the state of Omani manufacturing exports?

It suggests that Omani manufacturers can compete in regional and international markets when they maintain consistent quality and respond to changing customer requirements. Long-term success in exporting depends on understanding market needs, meeting industry standards and adapting to changes over time.

You have said that the main challenge is not exporting itself, but keeping pace with market developments. What exactly is changing, and are Omani companies keeping up?

Export requirements are constantly evolving. Technical standards, documentation, compliance requirements and customer expectations can change from one market to another and often become more demanding over time.

Energy efficiency standards, for example, are becoming increasingly stringent in many countries. Manufacturers need to stay informed about these developments to remain competitive. Industry workshops and training programmes can help companies understand new requirements and prepare for them.

Should Omani companies prioritise direct or indirect exporting when entering new markets?

Both approaches have advantages. Direct exporting allows companies to maintain closer relationships with customers and greater control over pricing and branding.

Indirect exporting, through distributors or agents, can help businesses enter unfamiliar markets where they lack established networks or local knowledge. The most suitable approach depends on the company’s size, experience and target market.

Is e-commerce relevant for industrial manufacturers?

For large industrial equipment, online sales platforms are generally not the primary sales channel because products often require customised specifications,



to the process. We can look at what European markets need, what diaspora communities are buying, what prices are holding, and then coordinate production accordingly.

The farmer gets a guaranteed buyer. We get consistent supply. The buyer gets reliable quality. When people hear about Omanis’ products quality they start looking at all products, rather than only ours.

You mentioned that once buyers hear about Omani product quality, it becomes easier for other Omani products to enter those markets. But how do you protect that halo effect?

One exporter sending substandard product can damage the reputation of all Omani exporters.

This is exactly right and it is one of my genuine concerns. The reputation of ‘Made in Oman’ in European agricultural markets is still being built. It is fragile. One bad actor, one shipment of produce that does not meet quality standards, creates a negative association that is very difficult to reverse.

This is why coordination among Omani exporters and between exporters and government, is so important. There needs to be quality enforcement before products leave the country. The export certificate is not enough. The product must actually meet the standard it is certified to. That requires investment in inspection capacity, in cold-chain integrity and frankly in a culture among exporters of taking quality seriously as a collective responsibility.

On direct versus indirect exporting, what is better for agricultural products?

For agricultural products we prefer direct exporting because the profit will be higher at the same time you build a brand for the future and for Oman. We began exporting to Europe two years ago; however, we started to export 13 years ago to Japan, but stopped after Covid-19.

The European markets focus a lot on the quality, that’s why we try to build our brand in the European markets based on quality.

Finally, on e-commerce in agricultural markets — you mentioned digital auction platforms. Is this the future of agricultural trade?

It is certainly part of the future. Digital auctions are already operating for some commodity categories — buyers log on, see available quantities and specifications, and bid competitively.

technical assessments and contract negotiations.

However, digital platforms remain important for marketing, customer engagement and sharing information about products, services and industry developments. A strong online presence can also help companies reach potential customers and build brand awareness in international markets.

QUALITY ENFORCEMENT IS KEY

Abdulrahman al Harousi, Omani Farmers Association

“We believe that, as a company working closely with Omani farmers, we have created this channel to help them generate sustainable income. We are proud of Omani farmers and the quality of Omani agricultural produce.

We are now exporting Omani fruits and vegetables to Germany and the United Kingdom, having pivoted towards European markets, particularly targeting Asian diaspora communities that are familiar with the types of products we grow.

The key insight is that you do not need to convert the entire European consumer market. You find your niche, a community, a distribution channel, a set of buyers who already understand the value of what you have and you build from there.

This session is excellent to build knowledge that will guide us to build a new roadmap for spreading our business to new markets in Europe.”

You described this season as excellent and praised Omani farm quality. But is that optimism fully warranted? What are the hard structural challenges that don't disappear in a good season?

Contract farming brings planning

”
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ABDULLAH AL QULAIBI
Veteran electrical transformer manufacturer

”
There needs to be quality enforcement before products leave the country. The export certificate is not enough. The product must actually meet the standard it is certified to.

ABDULRAHMAN AL HAROUSI
Omani Farmers Association

SHORTTAKES



To build investor interest, OMIFCO is staging a series of roadshows across Oman.

OMIFCO TARGETS UP TO 8.3% DIVIDEND YIELD AS IPO SUBSCRIPTION OPENS

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) is offering investors a dividend yield of between 7.8 and 8.3 per cent for 2026, the company has disclosed ahead of an initial public offering (IPO) that opens for subscription on Monday.

The fertiliser producer expects to pay a minimum dividend of 12.1 baisa per share, equivalent to RO 80.8 million, for the year ending December 2026, according to details released by the company. Of that total, 6.8 baisa per share is due to be paid in September 2026. The indicated yield is based on an IPO price range of 146 to 156 baisa per share.

The listing is one of the most significant on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in recent years and forms part of the wider divestment programme being pursued by Oman Investment Authority.

OQ Group is selling down its stake alongside fellow shareholders KRIBHCO and IFFCO, the Indian fertiliser cooperatives that co-own the venture. Bank Muscat is acting as issue manager, with Muscat Clearing and Depository handling settlement.

To build investor interest, OMIFCO is staging a series of roadshows across the Sultanate of Oman. The campaign begins in Sur on June 16 at the Grand Sur Hotel, followed by Nizwa on June 17, Salalah on June 21, Suhar on June 23 and Muscat on June 24. Each session runs from 5 pm to 6.30 pm, with the final event held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

OMIFCO operates a world-scale fertiliser complex at Sur, benefitting from competitive natural gas pricing under its supply agreement with Integrated Gas Company. Its prospectus places the company in the second quartile of global urea exporters on cost competitiveness.

Oman economy to grow 2.4% in 2026: World Bank

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

OMAN'S economy is projected to grow by 2.4 per cent in 2026 despite a sharp slowdown across Gulf hydrocarbon exporters, according to the World Bank's June 2026 Global Economic Prospects report. The forecast is 1.2 percentage points lower than the Bank's January projection.

The outlook contrasts with a challenging regional environment. GCC growth is projected at 1.3 per cent in 2026, down from 4.5 per cent in 2025, while hydrocarbon exporters across the Middle East are forecast to grow by just 0.3 per cent this year, a downgrade of 4.3 percentage points from the World Bank's January estimates.

Oman is expected to outperform several GCC peers. Kuwait's economy is forecast to contract by 6.4 per cent in 2026, while Qatar is projected to shrink by 5.7 per cent, representing downward revisions of nine and 11 percentage points, respectively, from January forecasts.

Bahrain is expected to grow by 1.3 per cent, while the UAE is forecast to expand by 2.4 per cent and Saudi Arabia by 3.1 per cent.

The World Bank attributed Oman's relatively moderate slowdown to its port geography, noting that the country "is less exposed to the conflict primarily because its major ports are located outside the Strait of Hormuz".

While regional shipping routes have faced disruption, Oman's ports at Salalah, Al Duqm and Suhar have helped



Oman's ports at Salalah, Al Duqm and Suhar have helped maintain the flow of trade and cargo.

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By comparison, several Gulf economies have faced greater exposure to disruptions affecting energy exports and maritime traffic. The report also cited Saudi Arabia's ability to reroute oil exports through the

East-West pipeline as a factor supporting its growth outlook.

The World Bank noted that limited ship transit through the Strait of Hormuz and damage to energy-related infrastructure have affected oil and gas production in parts of the region.

Rising food prices and higher shipping costs are also expected to add inflationary pressures this year.

On the fiscal side, the World Bank warned that economic slowdowns in Kuwait and Qatar are likely to be accompanied by worsening fiscal and current account balances due to lower hydrocarbon revenues and higher defence spending.

The World Bank expects Oman's growth to strengthen to 3 per cent in 2027 and 3.4 per cent in 2028 as hydrocarbon output recovers, infrastructure

investment continues and non-oil sectors maintain their expansion.

Inflation is projected to ease as trade conditions improve and transport costs moderate. Fiscal balances are expected to improve as higher hydrocarbon production boosts revenues, while current account surpluses are projected to narrow amidst lower energy prices.

For the wider Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan region, growth is forecast to slow to 1.6 per cent in 2026 from 4 per cent in 2025.

The World Bank expects regional growth to recover to an average of 4.5 per cent during 2027 and 2028, assuming conflict-related disruptions begin to ease by the end of this year, although it cautioned that the outlook remains subject to significant uncertainty.

Al Suwaiq Industrial City courts investors

AL SUWAIQ: Madayn has stepped up efforts to attract investment to Al Suwaiq Industrial City, showcasing opportunities in the emerging industrial hub as part of Oman's broader drive to diversify the economy and expand industrial activity.

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) hosted an introductory meeting with investors and business owners to highlight the advantages and incentives available at the industrial city, which was launched in 2024.

Covering more than 12.2 million square metres, Al Suwaiq Industrial City is being developed across four phases and will eventually comprise 1,430 investment plots catering to industrial, logistics and service-sector activities.

Hamoud bin Abdullah al Balushi, Assistant General Manager of Al Suwaiq Industrial City, said the project was designed to provide a modern investment environment supported



Madayn hosted a meeting to highlight the advantages and incentives available at the industrial city.

by integrated infrastructure and a business ecosystem capable of supporting long-term industrial growth in Al Batinah North Governorate.

He noted that the city has already begun attracting investment projects worth more than RO 2.1 million, reflecting growing investor interest in the development.

The industrial city includes 1,172 industrial plots and 258 logistics plots, offering a range of options for businesses seeking expansion opportunities.

During the event, officials highlighted the city's strategic location on the Al Batinah Expressway, which provides direct access to ports, airports and major domestic and regional markets.

The location is expected to strengthen supply chains and improve the movement of goods across Oman.

Madayn said the city is targeting investments in petrochemicals, construction

materials, recycling and environmental industries, logistics; and food and agricultural processing.

To attract early investors, the industrial city is offering a package of incentives, including a full rent exemption for the first two years and a 50 per cent discount for the following three years.

Officials said infrastructure preparations are progressing according to schedule, with detailed designs completed and tenders issued for development works. Construction of roads, utility networks and support facilities is expected to begin later this year.

Madayn said the long-term vision for Al Suwaiq Industrial City centres on attracting high-value local and international investments, supporting industrial expansion, creating sustainable employment opportunities and strengthening Oman's industrial ecosystem in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

— ONA

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil prices drop on Iran deal

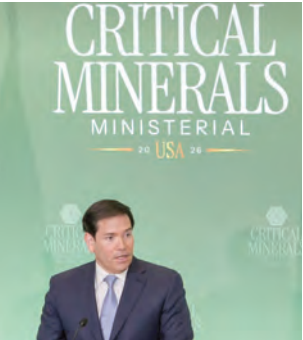


Oil prices fell to their lowest levels in three months after the United States and Iran announced a preliminary agreement to end hostilities and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Brent crude dropped nearly 5 per cent to \$83 a barrel, while US crude fell more than 5 per cent to \$80.34. Analysts said oil flows through the strategic waterway could take weeks or months to return to pre-crisis levels. — Reuters

TRADE POLICY

US minerals plan faces resistance



The US proposal to support critical minerals production through price mechanisms and trade measures is facing resistance from G7 allies and divisions within the mining industry.

The initiative aims to reduce Western dependence on China for minerals used in semiconductors, batteries and defence equipment. Concerns remain over the cost, governance and potential subsidies. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold price jumps after accord



Gold prices rose more than 2 per cent after the US and Iran announced a framework agreement to end their conflict and restore regional shipping.

Spot gold climbed 2.5 per cent to \$4,322.87 an ounce, while US futures gained a similar amount. The agreement pushed oil prices and the US dollar lower, boosting demand for bullion. Silver, platinum and palladium also posted strong gains. — Reuters

OPINION

Degrees are not enough in the age of AI



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

AS part of my regular engagement with academia, I recently found myself listening to a group of students discussing their future after graduation. The conversation was both encouraging and concerning at the same time. Some students were excited about entering the workforce.

Others spoke proudly about their degrees, academic achievements and professional certifications they had earned along the way.

Listening to them, I could not help but wonder whether they were preparing for the jobs of today or the jobs of tomorrow.

The reality is that, with the rapid infusion of artificial intelligence (AI) into almost every industry, the answer is becoming less clear by the day. The world has changed and whether we like it or not, careers, businesses and the entire industries will never be the same. Artificial intelligence is transforming the workplace much faster than many of us anticipated.

Tasks that once occupied junior employees for hours can now be completed in minutes. Reports can be summarised instantly. Presentations can be drafted automatically. Data can be analysed at remarkable speed.

In some cases, AI can even write software code, generate marketing content and respond to customer inquiries with little or no human intervention.

Think about that for a moment. If AI can perform many of the tasks traditionally assigned to entry-level employees, what skills will make fresh graduates valuable? More importantly, are our academic institutions preparing students for this reality?

These are questions that academia needs to address, not only through curriculum development but also through extracurricular activities, industry engagement and practical learning experiences. Producing graduates with excellent grades remains important, but academic achievement alone is no longer enough.

As parents, educators and employers, we share a collective responsibility to prepare the next generation for a future that is still evolving before our eyes. Technology has always been an enabler of progress, but artificial intelligence is not simply another technological advancement.

It is a fundamental shift that is redefining how work is performed and how value is created.

If you ask me, I believe graduates from every discipline and not just information technology or computer science, need to develop a basic understanding of AI and learn how to work alongside it effectively.

The graduates who will thrive in the AI era are those who develop capabilities that include being fluent with AI, being

The reality is that, with the rapid infusion of artificial intelligence (AI) into almost every industry, the answer is becoming less clear by the day. The world has changed and whether we like it or not, careers, businesses and the entire industries will never be the same.

judgemental, having domain expertise and finally, having interpersonal skills.

AI fluency means understanding the tools available today, how they work and how they can be used responsibly to improve productivity and outcomes. Graduates do not need to become AI experts, but they should be comfortable using these technologies in their chosen fields.

Judgement is equally important. AI-generated outputs should never be accepted blindly. The ability to question, validate, verify and critically assess information will become one of the most valuable skills in the workplace.

Domain expertise remains essential. Regardless of how advanced AI becomes, individuals must still possess a strong understanding of their profession.

After all, if someone lacks subject matter knowledge, how will they know whether the AI-generated response is accurate, relevant, or even appropriate?

Finally and perhaps most importantly, graduates must strengthen the skills that make us uniquely human. Communication, leadership, empathy, collaboration, creativity and relationship-building remain areas where people continue to excel.

While AI can generate content, it cannot replace genuine human connection, trust and emotional intelligence.

China bonds emerge as surprise haven as Iran war reshapes portfolios

LI GU

Global asset managers have been adding Chinese government bonds to their portfolios since the Iran war broke out, drawn not by yield but by their near-zero correlation with Western markets.

Amidst a global rout in sovereign debt since March that has sent benchmark yields soaring between 35 and 60 basis points (bps) in the US, Britain, Europe and Japan, yields on equivalent CGBs have declined 8 bps.

The striking outperformance has caught the attention of real money investors — from sovereign funds and central banks to insurers — prompting a re-assessment of portfolio construction even as it pushed Chinese yields to the lowest outside Switzerland.

Chinese debt is attracting investors with a “preservation mandate”, offering regional portfolios a low-volatility counterbalance to riskier, higher-yielding assets, said Wei Li, head of multi-asset investments at BNP Paribas Securities.

“Attractiveness is judged on a risk-adjusted footing. China delivers exceptional price stability”. The market has stood out all the more as other, more traditional havens have faltered. Bullion, for example, is down some 25% from its January highs.

The Guotai 10-Year China Treasury ETF has returned 1.26% so far this year, against a 2.57% fall for the US-focused iShares 7-10 Year Treasury Bond ETF and a 1.23% decline for Invesco’s equivalent Euro bond ETF.

“If you look at correlations between CGBs and European rates, it’s close to zero. That has its attractiveness”, said Matthias Dettwiler, head of active fixed income at UBS Asset Management. For investors whose goal is capital preservation or portfolio diversification, “I would even go as far as to say the absolute yield doesn’t matter so much”, he said.

Insulating China’s debt market from the turbulence wrought by the Middle East oil shock are the country’s ample energy reserves, a relatively dovish central bank and structurally low price pressures from persistently sluggish consumption.

A glut of household savings that banks are channelling into the bond market is also acting to pin down yields. “Liquidity plays a big part in driving the CGB markets and liquidity conditions have remained extremely abundant”, said Jerome Tay, investment manager at Aberdeen.

Chinese 10-year yields at 1.75% are now about a percentage point below Japan’s, flipping a dynamic in place until late 2025, where Japan was the rock bottom of the rates market.

However, unlike in Japan, where yield destruction from a decade of massive central bank stimulus and two decades of deflation before that sent capital pouring overseas, China’s tight capital controls are keeping money within its borders.

— Reuters

Oman unlocks new Uzbekistan trade route

A MAJOR, yet unheralded, logistics deal in June 2026 has successfully bridged the gap between the Central Asian steppe and the Arabian Sea. By acquiring a controlling stake in Uzbekistan’s Universal Logistics Services and Highway Logistics Centre, Oman’s Asyad Group — alongside Orient Group and UzOman — now commands facilities that process nearly a quarter of Uzbekistan’s rail containers and dominate its premium storage space.

This strategic acquisition effectively hands a country sitting 2,000 kilometres inland a direct link to global shipping lanes, simultaneously granting Oman a lucrative entry point into a high-growth emerging economy. It is the culmination of a partnership that has shifted from mutual agreements into hard, operational infrastructure.

WHY CENTRAL ASIA, AND WHY NOW

The numbers make the urgency plain. Uzbekistan’s economy expanded by 7.7 per cent in 2025 and the World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank all project growth between 6.4 and 6.8 per cent for 2026 — placing it among the five fastest-growing economies across Europe and Central Asia, a region otherwise expanding at barely 2 per cent.

Inflation eased to 7.3 per cent, unemployment fell to 4.8 per cent and international reserves climbed to roughly \$70 billion by January 2026. The national poverty rate was nearly halved in a single year, from 8.9 to 5.8 per cent. These are not the statistics of a frontier curiosity; they are the markers of a market coming of age.

Central Asia as a whole — a young, reform-minded region of more than 80 million people — is rerouting its trade and seeking reliable, neutral gateways to global markets. That is exactly the role Oman has spent much of the past decade preparing to play.

A LEGACY ALREADY BUILT

The Oman–Uzbekistan relationship



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The Oman–Uzbekistan relationship is far from new. The Uzbek–Oman Investment Company was established in 2009 as a partnership between Uzbekistan’s Fund for Reconstruction and Development and the Oman Investment Authority, with committed capital of \$500 million and over \$300 million in assets under management.

is far from new.

The Uzbek–Oman Investment Company was established in 2009 as a partnership between Uzbekistan’s Fund for Reconstruction and Development and the Oman Investment Authority, with committed capital of \$500 million and over \$300 million in assets under management.

It ranked among the earliest foreign direct investors in Uzbekistan and has since channelled around \$200 million into strategic developmental projects.

That foundation is now scaling quickly. Around ten companies with Omani capital operate in Uzbekistan today and nearly twenty further joint projects worth an estimated \$3.2 billion are under active development across petrochemicals, energy, mining, agriculture, textiles, food processing and tourism.

The fifth session of the Omani–Uzbek Joint Committee, held in Tashkent in 2025, expanded air-transport rights and committed both sides to re-exporting Uzbek goods through Omani ports.

The relationship is set to gain further momentum with Oman Air’s new direct Muscat–Tashkent service, commencing on July 3, 2026.

More than simply adding another route to the airline network, the direct connection creates a practical bridge for investors, business delegations, tourists and entrepreneurs, accelerating face-to-face engagement and making partnerships easier to build and commercial opportunities faster to pursue.

Business forums in Muscat and Tashkent have drawn leading names — Suhail Bahwan Group, Sohar International Bank, Oman Cables, Asyad and MB Holding — into strategic development projects across multiple sectors of the economy.

THE CORRIDOR AS A VALUE CHAIN

The Asyad acquisition draws these threads into a single, coherent logistics spine.

Cargo originating in Tashkent can now flow through an integrated multimodal network to Oman’s ports at Suhar, Salalah and Al Duqm

— and onward to the Gulf, Africa, South Asia and Europe.

Crucially, Al Duqm and Salalah sit beyond the Strait of Hormuz, offering shippers additional routing resilience and reduced exposure to one of global trade’s most sensitive chokepoints.

The economic logic runs both ways. The corridor aligns squarely with Oman Vision 2040 and the Oman Logistics Strategy 2040, which seek to convert the Sultanate of Oman’s geography into a diversified, non-oil engine of growth.

The Duqm Special Economic Zone alone — 2,000 square kilometres with 100 per cent foreign ownership, multi-decade tax holidays and zero re-export duties — has already attracted over \$14 billion in committed investment.

For Uzbekistan, the corridor connects to its own mega-projects, from the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway to the proposed Trans-Afghan route, thereby multiplying the economic value of every new logistics link and every additional kilometre of connectivity.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR BUSINESS

For investors and entrepreneurs, the opportunity is strikingly concrete. Omani manufacturers and traders gain access to a market of nearly 38 million consumers with rising incomes at the heart of Eurasia. Uzbek producers gain warehousing, port access and a re-export platform to reach buyers they could never serve alone.

The opportunities, however, extend well beyond trade in goods. Tourism, professional services, education and hospitality stand to benefit from the direct air link, which can bring Uzbek visitors to Oman while encouraging Omani and Gulf travellers to explore Uzbekistan as one of Central Asia’s most compelling cultural and historical destinations.

The most exciting space lies between the giants: small and medium enterprises in logistics services, cold-chain and food processing, textiles, fintech, halal products, construction materials and tourism can plug directly into a corridor whose hard infrastructure is already being laid.

CLASSIFIEDS

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SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

SENIOR Accountant: Indian male 20 years experience in Oman, shipping & logistics, Trading & contracting upto finalisation, cont: 95915852

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

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

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

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LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman. Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

LOOKING for part time or full time Accounts/ Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. Contact: 95645241

SALES Executive required For working in oil and gas / building materials industry Vehicle Driving license preferred Email: kirit@bustaninternational.com Mobile: 95544641

SIT. WANTED

PROJECT management professional with 20+ years' experience in tendering, business development, business systemisation, ISO QMS, planning and procurement. Possesses managerial and team lead skills. Seeking an opportunity. Contact: 91799438

EXPERIENCED accounts & finance professional with 7+ years of experience seeking suitable opportunity. Contact: 75177637



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ART/LIFE

CANVAS CONVERSATIONS

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN VISUAL DIALOGUE



> 20

CULINARY REACH

MICHELIN GUIDE CHIEF ON EXPANDING INTO NEW CULINARY TERRITORIES



Founded in 1900 by French tire makers, the Michelin Guide began as a practical handbook for motorists before evolving into a global benchmark for gastronomy and hospitality.

In an interview, Michelin Guide international director Gwendal Poullennec said the guide has transformed from a travel aid into a “lifestyle reference” that now shapes culinary trends and tourism worldwide. The famous star system, introduced in the late 1920s, has become one of the most influential ratings in global dining.

Poullennec said the guide’s reach has expanded significantly as new food scenes emerge across the world. He noted that Michelin now operates in more than 70 countries and sees food as a key driver of cultural identity and economic development.

He highlighted Thailand as an example, where Michelin’s entry 10 years ago began with Bangkok and even included street food vendors. This, he said, helped elevate local cuisine onto the global stage and supported the growth of a more high-quality restaurant scene across the country.

Describing the guide’s impact, Poullennec said earning a Michelin star can be “life changing” for chefs and can also boost entire destinations by influencing travel patterns. He added that food culture plays a major role in shaping tourism flows.

Addressing its portrayal in popular culture, he acknowledged the mystique around Michelin inspectors, describing the system as operating “like an intelligence service” due to its anonymous evaluations designed to ensure fairness and consistency.

He also said the guide continues to serve as a form of French cultural influence abroad, with French gastronomy still strongly represented among Michelin-starred restaurants globally. However, he stressed that the guide increasingly embraces diverse food cultures by training inspectors in regional cuisines and adapting to local contexts.

Responding to criticism that a single global standard might not fit all cuisines, Poullennec said Michelin combines international expertise with local knowledge to fairly evaluate different food styles. He added that diversity in restaurant offerings has grown significantly as global culinary scenes continue to expand.

On expansion, he said Michelin only enters new regions when the culinary landscape is mature enough, with sufficient quality, creativity and dynamism. He noted that while some countries still lack Michelin coverage, including India, their food cultures are already recognised through chefs abroad.

Poullennec suggested that more regions, including parts of Africa and India, are likely to be added in the future as Michelin continues to expand its global map. — Reuters



MUSIC

Members of the Nortenos del Rio Bravo music band perform at the Fan Fest in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon state, Mexico during the Fifa World Cup 2026. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actress Kareena kapoor attends the celebration marking 25 years of Aamir Khan's production house in Mumbai. — AFP



CULTURE

The Tao (Yami) indigenous rowers launch a traditional wooden canoe called Ovayan (Golden Friendship) for its voyage to Philippines' Batanes Islands. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Twilight colours at Al Seeb Beach



Bee-eater frolicking on tree branch

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SPRINGSTEEN MUSIC CENTRE SET TO OPEN IN NEW JERSEY

A new museum dedicated to rock legend Bruce Springsteen and the history of American music has opened in Long Branch, New Jersey, near Asbury Park, the coastal town that helped shape the musician's career.

The Bruce Springsteen Centre for American Music celebrates both Springsteen's legacy and the wider story of American music. Spread across two levels, the museum explores genres including blues, country, jazz and hip-hop, while highlighting influential artists who used music as a form of social commentary and protest.

Visitors are welcomed by a short film in which Springsteen reflects on his role in a long tradition of musical storytellers. The museum's design was inspired by themes found in his autobiography, *Born to Run* and throughout his songwriting.

Among the exhibits are a gold jacket once owned by Elvis Presley, a saxophone played by John Coltrane, a guitar belonging to Eddie Van Halen and a cap worn by Chuck D. Many items were loaned by artists or their estates.

The \$53 million museum, largely funded by donations from Springsteen supporters, will also house the artist's archives. Interactive displays, listening stations and touchscreens allow visitors to explore a wide range of musical styles and eras.

The upper floor traces



Springsteen's career, from his early performances at Monmouth University and the formation of the E Street Band to his breakthrough in the 1970s and the success of his landmark 1984 album, *Born in the USA*.

A major section examines the album's title track, often misunderstood as a patriotic anthem despite its criticism of the treatment of Vietnam War veterans. Visitors can also explore a virtual library featuring books that influenced Springsteen and experiment with music production in a replica recording studio.

The museum will also launch a temporary exhibition, *Chimes of Freedom: Politics, Protest and the Power of Song*, exploring the relationship between music, activism and social change.

— AFP



LET'S READ COMPETITION RECOGNISES YOUNG LITERARY TALENT



HIBBA AL KINDI

DAR

Al Atta'a Association announced the winners of the 20th edition of the Let's Read Writing Competition on June 15, in Muscat.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Family Affairs and Community Development. It was attended by Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali, Founder and Chairperson of Dar Al Atta'a Association, along with board members, distinguished guests and parents of the winning students.

Speaking to *Observer*, Dr Shamsa al Harthy, Director General of Dar Al Atta'a Association, said: "The Let's Read Writing Competition is now in its 20th edition and has long encouraged children and schools to participate in creative writing in both Arabic and English. Submitted works are reviewed and shortlisted before being presented to a judging committee, after which the winners are announced".

She highlighted the importance of the competition in nurturing young talent.

"The competition plays an important role in enriching children's writing culture and



highlighting young talent from an early age. This year saw strong participation and a high number of entries, with winners selected across three categories. The competition was highly competitive, as many of the submitted works stood out for their quality, language and storytelling", she said.

According to organisers, this year's competition attracted more than 300 participants from schools across the Sultanate of Oman.

In the Arabic-language category, Malak bint Mohammed al Riyami won first place in the 8-10 age group. In the 11-14 age group, Rahaf bint Salim al Jamoudi secured first place, Fatima bint Mohammed al Majini

came second, while Homam bin Abdulaziz al Balushi placed third and Maryam bint Yaqoub al Abri received a joint third-place award. In the 15-18 age group, Salma bint Mohammed al Araimi won first place, while Maryam bint Nasser al Nabhani secured second place.

In the English-language category, Kamila al Hadhrami won first place in the 8-10 age group, followed by Akra Choudhary in second place and Nafisa Shahab in third. In the 11-14 age group, Mohammed Luqman claimed first place, Mohammed Noor Moula came second and Musoma Shidi placed third. In the 15-18 age group, Janan al Hinai won first place, Harthik Sunil came second and Malak al Abri secured third place.

Dr Al Harthy also highlighted the wider role of the Let's Read programme in promoting literacy among children through reading initiatives, storytelling activities and community engagement programmes.

She noted that the initiative includes a children's library, storytelling sessions, book discussions and a mobile library that visits schools across Oman.

The programme continues to encourage children to engage with printed books and develop a lifelong love of reading and creative expression.



C A N V A S C O N V E R S A T I O N S

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN VISUAL DIALOGUE



SIHAM AL SAIDI

SOME conversations take place through words. Others unfold through colours, shapes and symbols. At a recent art exhibition organised by the General Directorate of Social Development in Al Batinah North, visitors discovered that a canvas can be a powerful space for dialogue, one that speaks directly to the realities of family life and the challenges facing modern communities.

The exhibition brought together a diverse collection of artworks exploring themes of family cohesion, social responsibility, intergenerational relationships and community belonging. Rather than presenting idealised images, many of the pieces reflected familiar realities, inviting viewers to recognise themselves within the stories told through these art pieces.

One painting portrayed a

As a collection, the artworks seemed to engage in a visual conversation about a central question: How can families preserve their bonds in a rapidly changing world?

Several artists employed symbolism to communicate their messages. A recurring image of roots and branches appeared throughout the exhibition, representing the family as the foundation from which individuals grow.

family gathered in the same room but emotionally separated by digital devices. The muted colours and fragmented composition suggested a quiet tension that many families experience today. Nearby, another artwork offered a contrasting vision expressing a circle of hands painted in vibrant tones, symbolising communication, support and the strength that emerges when family members remain connected.

As a collection, the artworks seemed to engage in a visual conversation about a central question: How can families preserve their bonds in a rapidly changing world?

Several artists employed symbolism to communicate their messages. A recurring image of roots and branches appeared throughout the exhibition, representing the family as the foundation from which individuals grow. Other works addressed community issues such as social isolation, the pressures faced by young

people and the importance of collective responsibility in nurturing future generations.

What made the exhibition particularly compelling was the interaction it created between the artwork and its audience. Visitors did not simply observe; they reflected, interpreted and responded. The gallery became a meeting point where artistic expression and social awareness converged.

“I found myself thinking about my own family while looking at the paintings”, said visitor Salim al Anbouri. “Some artworks highlighted problems we often ignore, but they also offered hope. They reminded me that strong families are built through understanding and communication”.

Another visitor, Fayza al Balushi, noted that the exhibition transformed complex social issues into something accessible and relatable. “The artists spoke about family challenges without judgement. The paintings encouraged discussion rather than criticism

especially when children are making problems and struggling, which made the messages more powerful”.

From university, Hasan al Maani, highlighted that the exhibition demonstrated the role art can play in community development. “Art has a unique ability to start conversations that people might otherwise avoid. It allows us to think about our responsibilities toward our families and society”.

Beyond its aesthetic value, the exhibition highlighted the growing role of art as a tool for social dialogue. By addressing everyday concerns through creative expression, the artists encouraged visitors to consider the relationships that shape their lives and communities.

In the end, the exhibition was more than a display of artistic talent. It was a reminder that every family has a story, every community faces challenges and every meaningful conversation begins with the willingness to listen — even when the voice comes from a canvas.