

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



ASDS CELEBRATES GRADUATION OF NDC COURSE

MUSCAT: The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS) celebrated on Wednesday the graduation of the thirteenth course of the National Defence College (NDC). The event was held under the auspices of Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs.

Participating in the course were a number of senior officers from the Sultan's Armed Forces and other military and security apparatuses, alongside several officials from ministries, government authorities, and civil institutions.

The ceremony included a visual presentation on the course, highlighting its academic curricula, practical applications, and field visits associated with its programme, in addition to lectures and seminars presented by several specialists and decision-makers. Following this, the chief guest distributed graduation certificates to the course participants. — ONA

Wadi Darbat cabins to launch online booking



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 14

PLANNING

a visit to Wadi Darbat will soon become much simpler, with Darbat Cabins preparing to introduce advance online reservations through an Omani-developed digital booking platform.

For many families and tourists, a trip to Wadi Darbat begins with practical questions: Are cabins available? How much do they cost? Can they be booked before arriving? The new platform is designed to answer these questions by allowing visitors to check availability, view prices, and reserve cabins in advance.

Although the platform is independently developed and not owned by Darbat Cabins, the tourism operator will participate as a service provider, enabling customers to browse available options and complete bookings electronically.

Once operational, visitors will be able to reserve cabins for a specified number of hours or a full day, with cancellations permitted up to 24 hours before the scheduled booking.

The initiative is expected to significantly

enhance the visitor experience, particularly during the khareef season, when Wadi Darbat attracts thousands of families and tourists from across Oman and the GCC. Advance reservations will provide greater certainty for travellers planning long journeys to one of Dhofar's most popular natural attractions.

The project owner confirmed to Observer that the online booking service will be launched shortly in collaboration with Omani technology developers. The objective is to simplify the reservation process while continuing to provide direct customer support before and after bookings.

For the operator, the digital system will streamline reservation management and improve planning for visitor demand. For customers, it offers greater transparency regarding availability, pricing, and booking duration before they arrive.

The move also reflects the growing digital transformation of Oman's tourism sector. Increasingly, travellers expect to research, compare, and book experiences online before they travel, making digital accessibility an essential part of the visitor journey.

The initiative also highlights opportunities

for Omani technology companies to develop practical digital solutions for the tourism industry, enabling smaller operators to benefit from online services without investing in their own booking infrastructure.

The project aligns with the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040 by supporting digital transformation, private-sector innovation, and economic diversification. While modest in scale, it demonstrates how practical technological improvements can enhance visitor experiences and strengthen the country's tourism ecosystem.

Advance reservations will also help operators better anticipate demand, improving operational planning and resource management. Above all, the new system offers visitors something increasingly valued in modern tourism—confidence that their experience has been secured before they begin their journey.

Wadi Darbat's stunning scenery and khareef charm remain the main attraction. The difference is that visitors will soon be able to arrive knowing their place is already waiting for them.

NO OMANIS AMONG BANGKOK FIRE VICTIMS: EMBASSY

MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Kingdom of Thailand said that it is closely monitoring the tragic fire that tore through the club in the Chatuchak district north of the Thai capital, Bangkok.

The embassy said that no Omani citizens were among the victims and that no injuries were reported among Omani nationals. The embassy explained that most of those affected by the fire were Thai nationals. The fire occurred in a residential

area far from tourist hotspots. The embassy expressed its deepest condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to the injured, affirming that it will continue to monitor developments related to the incident.

جهاز الضريبة
Tax Authority

Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers to file their VAT and Excise tax returns for the second quarter of the year 2026 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-service portal.

www.taxoman.gov.om

And attach all required documents to it no later than: **30 July 2026.**

We hope all taxpayers comply with filing their tax returns on the deadline.

taxoman

1020

THREE OIL TANKERS HIT OFF OMANI COAST

MUSCAT: The Maritime Security Centre (MSC) has reported that three oil tankers were targeted in separate attacks off the Omani coast, with one crew member confirmed killed and three others still missing, as authorities continue to monitor the situation and coordinate response efforts.

The first incident involved the Liberia-flagged 'Stolt Magnesium,' which sustained an explosion and fire in its engine room approximately 40 nautical miles off the coast of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, outside Omani territorial waters. — ONA

بركاء
Barka

BARKA WATER AND POWER COMPANY SAOG

TENDER

ANNOUNCEMENT

SALE OF SWRO DESALINATION PLANTS

Barka Water and Power Company SAOG (BWPC) invites qualified organizations, investors, developers, and industry participants to participate in a public tender for the acquisition of two Seawater Reverse Osmosis (SWRO) desalination plants located at its facilities in Barka, Sultanate of Oman.

The tender offers an opportunity to acquire established desalination assets through a transparent and competitive process.

INTERESTED PARTIES ARE REQUESTED TO:

Visit www.barkaone.com/swro-plants

Download the Tender Documents

Review, complete, and sign the Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

Submit the required documentation to swro.sale@barkaone.com

BWPC welcomes expressions of interest from eligible participants and looks forward to engaging with organizations seeking strategic investment opportunities in the water infrastructure sector.

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Barka, Sultanate of Oman

FROMPAGE1

WAR A DISASTER, SAYS FM; ISRAEL’S DECISIONS GREATEST THREAT, NOT IRAN

He pointed out that past decades have witnessed massive military spending, the expansion of US bases in the region, and the entrenchment of a security system dependent on external protection, without this leading to the building of sustainable security or preventing the outbreak of wars and crises. Al Busaidy said that the recent war revealed the extent to which the policy of containment was an illusion, adding that the sources of greatest danger to Gulf security often stem from decisions made outside the region, particularly from Tel Aviv. Al Busaidy raised questions regarding how the Gulf security system could be rebuilt in light of these transformations, emphasising that any future structure cannot exclude any of the eight countries bordering the Gulf, namely the six GCC countries, in addition to Iran and Iraq.

He added that each of these countries has vital interests and responsibilities commensurate with its capabilities and priorities; thus, all of them must participate in designing, implementing, and bearing the obligations arising from the new regional system. He explained that this transition will require frank and perhaps difficult discussions, as well as a review of some of the established norms that have governed regional and international relations for decades, with the aim of distinguishing between partnerships that enhance Gulf security and those that may create vulnerabilities or new sources of tension.

In this framework, he called for a balanced review of relations with international partners, notably the US, pointing out that the goal is not to abandon historic and deep-rooted relations, but rather to rebalance them in a manner consistent with the strategic realities revealed by the war.

The Minister questioned what constructive role friendly nations, including the US, could play if inclusion, rather than containment, becomes the foundation upon which regional security cooperation is built. He also stressed that Gulf security cannot be separated from the northwestern Indian Ocean, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the ports and sea lanes linked to the economic and logistical infrastructure of the region. He said that the peoples of this vast geographical scope would benefit from the establishment of a legal and practical framework capable of protecting trade and navigation, and promoting sustainable stability and prosperity.

Al Busaidy described the war as a “disaster,” noting that it broke out without a United Nations mandate and did not achieve the goals declared to justify it. He concluded his article by emphasising that hope remains that the repercussions of the war will lead to an end to the nearly half-century-old policy of containment, paving the way for a more just, realistic, and effective security system in the Gulf region. — ONA

Programme to empower youth projects launched in Al Batinah North

SUHAR: The ‘Ruwayj’ programme has commenced in the Wilayat of Sohar, organised through cooperation between the Youth Centre and Sohar Port and Freezone.

It is one of the qualitative programmes aimed at empowering owners of small commercial enterprises and youth products in Al Batinah North Governorate by building their capabilities and enhancing their readiness to enter the market.

The programme targets 100 young men and women in the age group of 20 to 34 years within an integrated track that combines specialised training and practical application to develop startups, enhance their competitiveness, and enable participants to transform their ideas and products into projects that are more prepared for growth and sustainability.

The programme



comprises two main tracks: the first is the training and development track, which includes a series of specialised workshops in product building and development, market analysis, marketing, pricing strategies, persuasion and negotiation skills, brand identity design, product packaging, visual marketing, store management via social media platforms, along with the fundamentals of financial management for small enterprises.

As for the practical track, it concludes with the organisation of a mini trade exhibition that allows the best 30 participating projects to display and sell their products and services directly to the public. This provides them with a practical experience in a real market environment, contributes to enhancing their marketing skills, measures the readiness of their projects, and allows them to benefit from direct feedback from customers.

— ONA

Wadi Dayqah Dam opens to drain 15m m³ to recharge groundwater

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JULY 14

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) has opened the gates of Wadi Dayqah Dam in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Muscat Governorate, to release around 15 million cubic metres of stored water from July 5 to 16.

The controlled release aims to replenish the groundwater reservoir



Splendid view of Wadi Dayqah Dam. — Ghaith al Battashi

that supports farms in the Daghamar and Hail Al Ghaf areas, strengthening

water supplies for agricultural activities and sustaining local

farming communities. Standing 75 metres high, Wadi Dayqah Dam is among Oman’s largest and most significant water infrastructure projects.

The MoAFWR has urged residents and visitors to avoid the wadi channels and adhere to safety guidelines throughout the drainage period.

The spectacular flow of water from the dam has attracted widespread attention on social media. Content creator

Abdulaziz described the release as a ‘summer water surprise’ for the people of Qurayat, offering visitors a unique experience while stressing the importance of safety precautions.

Chemical engineer Ahmed al Hadabi shared footage of the water flowing through Al Mazraah village, highlighting the breathtaking landscape and the natural beauty surrounding Wadi Dayqah Dam.

ROP enhances Dhofar security for Khareef

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 14

AS THOUSANDS of visitors head to Dhofar to enjoy the annual Khareef Dhofar Season, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has stepped up security and traffic operations along key routes leading to the governorate, ensuring safer journeys and smoother movement during one of Oman’s busiest tourism periods.

Khareef Dhofar Season is one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most prominent tourism seasons, attracting visitors from across Oman and the Gulf region. The seasonal rise in travel demand requires comprehensive preparations covering security, traffic management, emergency response, and coordination among relevant authorities.

Major Mohammed al Hashami of the ROP highlighted the extensive arrangements in place, noting that security coverage has been reinforced along Sultan Said bin Taimur Road, which links Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with Dhofar Governorate .

“The Royal Oman Police has strengthened security presence along the road from Al Dakhiliyah to Dhofar via Sultan Said bin

Traffic patrols continue to monitor road conditions, helping maintain safe and uninterrupted travel across major routes



ROP attempts to raise road safety awareness through its media channels.

Taimur Road, with six strategically located security checkpoints. This is supported by police stations extending from Al Dakhiliyah to Dhofar, as well as security centres along the coastal route from Wilayat of Al Duqm to Dhofar. Traffic patrols have also been increased, with support from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) and the Military and Security Medical City,” Al Hashami said.

The expanded deployment aims to enhance road safety, provide timely assistance to motorists, and ensure rapid response to emergencies. The network of checkpoints and police stations also provides reassurance to visitors

travelling long distances to Dhofar during the peak season.

Traffic patrols continue to monitor road conditions, regulate traffic flow, enforce safety regulations, and respond quickly to accidents and vehicle breakdowns, helping maintain safe and uninterrupted travel across major routes.

The security plan also involves close cooperation between the ROP, the CDAA, and the Military and Security Medical City to strengthen emergency response capabilities. The coordinated approach enables swift action in medical emergencies, road incidents and other situations requiring immediate assistance.



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tender:-

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
OWW/T/10041/2026	Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) of Twin Rising Mains from Central Pumping Station (CPS) to Al Ansab STP	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in Excellent Grade and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 1000/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	30/7/2026	7/9/2026

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://nws.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.nws.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om



SPOTLIGHT



SURVIVING THE HEATWAVE

Simple steps that can save lives

MOHAMMED AL BATTASHI

OMAN IS EXPERIENCING one of its hottest summers in recent years, with health professionals urging residents to adopt simple safety measures to stay protected during the peak heat season.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre recently recorded dawn temperatures reaching 41°C in Muscat, while forecasts indicate afternoon temperatures could climb to 46–47°C in several areas. Warm conditions are expected to continue through July and August, making heat awareness more important than ever.

Dr Mahmoud al Rahbi, Head of Emergencies at Samayil Hospital under the Ministry of Health, advised residents to avoid unnecessary outdoor activities during the hottest hours of the day. For those who must go outside, he recommended staying hydrated, wearing light and loose-fitting clothing, using sun protection and taking regular breaks in shaded or air-conditioned spaces.

He stressed that children, elderly people and individuals with chronic medical conditions require extra attention during extreme heat. Symptoms such as dizziness, severe headache, nausea, confusion or fainting should not be ignored and require immediate movement to a cooler environment and medical advice.

HYDRATION, FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Dr Sanjay Dalal, Family Physician at Lama Polyclinic Al Khuwair, explained that prolonged exposure to high temperatures causes the body to lose water and salts through sweating, which may lead to dehydration.

“Dizziness, headache, nausea, muscle cramps and unusual tiredness are signs that the body needs rest, shade and fluids,” he said, adding that early action can prevent complications.

Dr Raman, Cardiovascular Surgeon and

Chairman of Al Hayat International Hospital, recommended drinking water regularly throughout the day rather than consuming large quantities at once. He also suggested including electrolyte-rich options such as coconut water, buttermilk, oral rehydration solutions or lemon water with a pinch of salt.

A simple way to monitor hydration, he noted, is by checking urine colour — pale yellow indicates good hydration, while darker shades suggest the need for more fluids.

AVOIDING PEAK HEAT HOURS

Doctors advise residents to limit outdoor activities between noon and 4 pm, when temperatures are usually at their highest. Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist in Internal Medicine at burjeel hospital, recommended covering the head and face, drinking sufficient fluids before leaving home and continuing to hydrate regularly if outdoor movement is unavoidable.

Dr Benny Panakkal, Senior Consultant Interventional Cardiologist at Badr Al Samaa Hospital, also stressed avoiding direct sunlight and seeking immediate cooling if symptoms such as dizziness, severe fatigue, headache, confusion or nausea appear.

For outdoor workers, experts recommend scheduling tasks during early morning or evening hours whenever possible and taking frequent shaded breaks during peak heat periods.

Motorists are also advised to park vehicles in shaded areas, check air-conditioning systems before travelling and allow hot air to escape from parked cars before switching on the cooling system.

Choosing lighter meals and consuming water-rich fruits such as watermelon, pear and guava can also help the body cope with summer conditions.

As temperatures continue to rise, health experts say prevention remains the best protection: stay hydrated, seek shade, avoid unnecessary exposure and listen to the body’s warning signals.



Recall

TOYOTA & LEXUS

TOYOTA: CAMRY, CROWN, HIGHLANDER
LEXUS: LS500/500h

RECALL DATE: 15/07/2026

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	Number of Affected Commodities#
Toyota: Camry, Crown & Highlander Lexus: LS500/500h	2022 - 2024	294

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

The subject vehicles are equipped with a combination meter system where various information is displayed (telltale and indicator lights, vehicle gauges, messages, etc.) in a 12.3-inch display monitor in the instrument panel. Due to improper programming of the combination meter, unnecessary data is repeatedly written to a memory device in the combination meter when the combination meter operates, causing the memory device to deteriorate earlier than intended. If this occurs, the 12.3-in monitor will not be displayed at ignition on and will remain in this state. If the vehicle is driven without a working 12.3-in monitor and certain malfunctions occur during that drive, there is a possibility that indicators for those malfunctions could be missed if the driver does not notice the redundant notification on the center multimedia screen. Depending on the malfunction, continuous driving could lead to an increased risk of a crash or an increased risk of injury in the event of a crash.

Recall Action

To reprogram or replace the combination meter depending on the inspection result.



To check the serial number of the affected items, please visit the Recall and Warning website by scanning the QR code.



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SAUDI CONSUMER PROTECTION AUTHORITY

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Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs



الرقم: 093-03-SOP

الناشر: 04

التاريخ: 15 يوليو 2025

SHORT TAKES



Laila al Hadhrami seen with Yamile Tenorio from Peru

WOMEN FUTURE CITIES LAUNCHES FIRST SOUTH AMERICA CHAPTER

MUSCAT: Women Future Cities (WFC), a global initiative founded in Oman, has launched its first chapter in South America with the establishment of the Peru Chapter during a special ceremony held at the Republic of Peru Pavilion on the sidelines of the World Urban Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The milestone marks a significant step in WFC's international expansion and highlights the growing global momentum to empower women as key contributors in shaping smarter, more sustainable and inclusive cities.

Yamile Tenorio has been appointed as Head of the Women Future Cities Peru Chapter and will lead efforts to engage women from diverse sectors, promoting innovation, leadership, entrepreneurship, sustainability and community development across Peru.

Laila al Hadhrami, Chairwoman of Women Future Cities, said the opening of the Peru Chapter represents a major milestone in creating a global network of women leaders and changemakers.

“The launch of our Peru Chapter is an important milestone in our journey toward building a truly global network of women leaders and changemakers. South America is home to tremendous talent, innovation and potential, and we look forward to collaborating with women in Peru to drive positive impact within their communities and beyond,” she said.

Founded in Oman, Women Future Cities has developed into an international platform focused on women's empowerment, knowledge exchange, leadership development and collaboration to build future-ready communities. The Peru Chapter will focus on WFC's four core pillars: leadership and community development, smart technologies, environment and sustainability, and entrepreneurship.

AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH, OMIFCO SIGN DEVELOPMENT DEALS



SUR: Al Sharqiyah South Governorate on Monday signed two agreements worth RO 310,000 with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to implement development and service projects aimed to realise a tangible economic and social impact and consolidate infrastructure across the wilayats of the governorate.

The two agreements were signed by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, and Eng Khalid bin Mohammed al Fanna, Director of Sustainability and Corporate Communications at OMIFCO.

The first agreement provides for the construction of mountain roads and dykes to the tune of RO 200,000. The project, which aims to boost the readiness of infrastructure and raise safety standards, constitutes an extension of a 2022-2026 joint development programme worth RO 650,000. The second agreement focuses on providing electrical and electronic appliances, worth RO 110,000, in the interest of low-income families in the wilayats of Sur, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Masirah. The initiative aims to enhance a 2021-2025 Social Development Programme worth RO 440,000. — ONA

Riyada launches Future Pioneers Camp 2026

IBRA: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority 'Riyada' in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, launched the activities of the Future Pioneers Camp 2026 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibra, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, with the participation of 100 students from grades seven, eight and nine.

The camp, which runs until July 16, forms part of a series of summer camps organised by 'Riyada' across several governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, aimed at promoting a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation among young people while enhancing their readiness for future skills.

The five-day camp focuses on cultivating entrepreneurial and innovative thinking among participants, familiarising them with the fundamentals of start-up



The camp focuses on cultivating entrepreneurial and innovative thinking.

establishment, and empowering them to transform their ideas into viable projects through intensive training workshops and interactive activities that combine theoretical knowledge with practical

application. The programme encompasses a diverse range of thematic areas designed to build personal and leadership skills, reinforce the values of teamwork and develop problem-solving and

innovation capabilities. Participants are also introduced to mechanisms for developing ideas and converting them into future opportunities and projects. The camp is delivered by a number of trainers and specialists in the field of entrepreneurship, providing a stimulating learning environment that enables students to discover their abilities and refine their entrepreneurial skills at an early age.

The Future Pioneers Camp 2026 represents one of the national initiatives implemented by 'Riyada' to instil a culture of self-employment and innovation among emerging generations, in alignment with the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to prepare an empowered generation capable of contributing to the building of a national economy founded on knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship. — ONA

Info Ministry, AZERTAC sign news exchange MoU

THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, represented by Oman News Agency (ONA) and the Azerbaijan State News Agency (AZERTAC) signed on Tuesday a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the field of news and information exchange. This took place on the sidelines of the Shusha Global Media Forum hosted by the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The MoU was signed on behalf of the Omani side by Ibrahim bin Salim al Salmi, Director-General and Editor-in-Chief of Oman News Agency, while on the Azerbaijani side, it was signed by Vugar Aliyev, Chairman of the Board of the Azerbaijan State News Agency (AZERTAC).

The Memorandum of Understanding aims to strengthen media cooperation between the two agencies, develop professional partnership in the exchange of news and information, serve mutual interests, and contribute to expanding the horizons of media

The MoU comes within the framework of the shared commitment to strengthening media relations between Oman and Azerbaijan



Ibrahim bin Salim al Salmi from ONA and Vugar Aliyev, AZERTAC, signed the agreement

collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The MoU encompasses the exchange of news services, photographs, video footage, and news bulletins in both Arabic and English, as well as the exchange of technical information related to news service transmission and reception methods. It also provides for mutual utilisation of

news content from both parties in accordance with applicable editorial policies, and the facilitation of necessary arrangements for correspondents and representatives of the two agencies.

Furthermore, the MoU stipulates the encouragement of exchange in training courses, expert visits and specialised research in media fields of common interest. This is intended to enhance institutional cooperation between the two agencies, facilitate the exchange of expertise, develop professional performance, and keep pace with rapid developments in the media sector, thereby supporting the expansion of media cooperation avenues between the two countries.

This Memorandum comes within the framework of the shared commitment to strengthening media relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and advancing cooperation between media institutions in both countries, in a manner that serves mutual interests and keeps abreast of developments in media operations. — ONA

Young creatives harness AI for environment

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 14

Artificial intelligence is emerging as more than a technological innovation — it is becoming a powerful creative tool for environmental advocacy. This potential was highlighted during a two-day training programme, 'Environmental Art and Artificial Intelligence,' organised by the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Batinah North as part of its Summer Skills Programme.

The workshop empowered young participants to transform sustainability challenges into compelling digital awareness campaigns by combining artificial intelligence, environmental education and creative expression.

Designed to connect creativity with emerging technologies, the programme introduced participants to AI-powered design platforms and smart creative applications, enabling them to communicate environmental issues through professional visual storytelling. More than 30 original digital



awareness posters were produced, reflecting both artistic creativity and a growing understanding of national and global sustainability priorities.

Beyond teaching graphic design skills, the workshop encouraged participants to explore environmental challenges and examine how technology can contribute to solutions. Through interactive discussions and practical sessions, participants learned about concepts such as the circular economy, renewable energy, green energy, biodiversity conservation, waste

management and recycling, while linking these themes with Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Basma al Muzaini, Head of the Arts Section at the Directorate, said the workshop represents a new approach to youth development by integrating environmental awareness with artificial intelligence and digital creativity.

“Today's young people communicate through visual content. By equipping them with intelligent design tools and encouraging them to address real environmental issues,

we are helping them become creative communicators capable of inspiring positive change within their communities,” she said.

Moosa bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Batinah North, said the Directorate continues to invest in innovative programmes that prepare young people for the future while supporting national priorities.

“Our objective extends beyond teaching technical skills. We aim to empower young people to use artificial intelligence responsibly, think creatively and develop solutions that contribute to environmental sustainability,” he said.

Umm Al Yaman, mother of one of the participants, said the programme had a positive impact on her son's creativity and understanding of sustainability concepts.

By the end of the programme, participants gained deeper appreciation of how AI can amplify environmental messages and transform creative ideas.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Relatives mourn victims killed in a club fire at the Police General Hospital in Bangkok. — AFP

FAMILIES CLAIM BODIES OF BANGKOK FATAL FIRE

BANGKOK: Grieving relatives of the victims of a huge Bangkok club fire claimed their bodies on Tuesday as the death toll rose to 30, even as others held out hope that missing loved ones were alive. Twenty-seven people were declared dead in the early hours of Monday, with another succumbing to their injuries later that day.

By Tuesday morning, Bangkok’s Chatuchak district office put the death toll at 30, with 75 people injured — 24 in critical condition. Relatives of the dead gathered at Police General Hospital on Tuesday to claim the bodies of their loved ones.

At the rear of the hospital, grey coffins with gilded bas-reliefs emerged before the cameras of dozens of journalists. Some coffins were loaded into the back of ambulances to be transported to the home provinces of the deceased. Forensic police have been scouring the wreckage as authorities seek to establish how the fire started and why it was so deadly, looking at a possible electrical fault and also whether emergency exits were blocked.

— AFP

LEBANON, ISRAEL HOLD NEW TALKS ROUND IN ROME



A motorcade arrives on the first day of talks between the Lebanese and Israeli delegations at the US Embassy in Rome. — AFP

ROME: Lebanon and Israel resumed talks on Tuesday in the Italian capital, with Beirut hoping for progress towards securing an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon under a US-brokered deal, although expectations for swift progress were low.

Israel’s military is occupying what it describes as a “buffer zone” about 10 km into Lebanon along the entire length of the Israeli border. Israeli officials say the zone is necessary to protect northern Israeli communities from attacks launched by Hezbollah. A meeting in Washington on June 26 produced an agreement that called for an end to the Lebanon conflict, the disarmament of groups — an apparent reference to Hezbollah — as well as the deployment of Lebanese troops to the south and the progressive withdrawal of Israeli forces. But deadly Israeli strikes have continued and Hezbollah has rejected the agreement as well as efforts to disarm it.

The talks, set to last two days at the US Embassy in Rome, will aim to set out how to implement the framework deal, Lebanese officials said. One of the officials said moving the talks to Italy would make it easier for both countries’ delegations to consult their governments for guidance as they negotiate.

— Reuters

FOOD INSECURITY

Sudan war risks deeper hunger crisis



Sudan risks sliding backwards into deeper hunger as conflict, aid funding cuts and rising agricultural costs driven by disruption linked to the Iran war threaten to reverse gains made after famine took hold in parts of the country, a senior World Food Programme official said on Tuesday. Aid agencies have repeatedly warned of worsening food insecurity and limited humanitarian access. Around 5 million people are facing emergency or catastrophic levels of hunger. — Reuters

DRC EBOLA OUTBREAK TWO TO FOUR TIMES BIGGER THAN OFFICIAL SCALE

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that a deadly Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo could be four times bigger than official figures suggest. According to the DR Congo’s latest official figures, the haemorrhagic fever has infected more than 1,960 people and killed over 700 since it was detected two months ago. But WHO emergencies director Chikwe Ihekweazu told reporters in Geneva that its modelling indicated “the scale of the

outbreak is at least two to four times the number of cases that we have found”.

According to official numbers, this is already one of the largest Ebola outbreaks recorded, with the virus spreading faster than ever seen before.

“This is now the third-largest Ebola outbreak ever, and we’ve seen the fastest growth in a single month since the outbreak started, and of all the Ebola outbreaks that we’ve managed,” Ihekweazu said.

Cases of Ebola, which spreads through close contact and infected bodily fluids, have so far been found in five DRC provinces, as well as in neighbouring Uganda. But more than 90 per cent of cases are still being detected in Ituri, Ihekweazu said.

The outbreak “continues to outpace the response efforts by the national authorities, international partners, including WHO, and the communities most affected”, he said. — AFP

Israeli fire kills nine in Gaza, including a 10-year-old child

AN ISRAELI strike and gunfire killed at least nine Palestinians, including a 10-year-old boy and a senior Hamas police officer, in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Gazan health and police officials said. The deaths add to a toll of more than 1,100 Palestinians killed by Israeli attacks since an October ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took effect, according to health officials in the enclave. The truce halted major fighting but has failed to stop sporadic violence. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza over the same period. Medics said Muataz Abu Shaar, 10, was shot on Tuesday by Israeli gunfire in Rafah, southern Gaza.

In Jabalia, in the north of the enclave, an Israeli air strike on a post of the Hamas-led police force killed at least seven people, including a woman, and wounded several other people, medics and police officials said.

The interior ministry said in a statement that the dead included the head of the Jabalia police force, Colonel Mohammad Marwan Salem, along with other officers.

Israel has stepped up its attacks against Hamas security men and police posts, killing dozens of them since October, according to police sources.

Israel wants Hamas to cede

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A woman reacts during the funeral for several victims in the Jabalia camp in Gaza City. — AFP

control of Gaza and disarm, and while the group said it was ready to relinquish power, it has always resisted calls to lay down arms.

In Khan Yunis, in the south, an Israeli air strike killed a 36-year-old man and left three people wounded, medics said. The Israeli military said it struck a Hamas militant. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on either of the Rafah or Jabalia incidents.

The latest violence comes as Hamas leaders visited Cairo for further talks on implementing the second phase of US President Donald Trump’s Gaza peace plan.

The discussions include Hamas disarmament and Israeli army withdrawals, according to sources close to the talks, who said little progress had been made in the past weeks towards reaching a broad agreement to end the conflict.

Hamas says Israel’s violations of the ceasefire are a key obstacle to implementing the second phase of Trump’s plan. Nearly all of Gaza’s 2 million people, most of whom have been displaced several times, now live on a tiny strip of land along the coast, mainly in makeshift tents or damaged buildings.

— Reuters



FIRE RAVAGES POPULAR FOREST OUTSIDE PARIS

PARIS: Hundreds of French firefighters aided by water bombers on Tuesday battled to control wildfires that have ravaged a hugely popular forest outside Paris. The sprawling Fontainebleau forest, around 60 kilometres southeast of the capital, is a former royal hunting ground that now draws hikers, nature lovers and climbers who come from around the world to tackle its famous boulders.

The fires, which erupted on Sunday, have scorched around 2,050 hectares — an area roughly three times the size of Gibraltar, firefighters said on Tuesday. With around 850 firefighters battling the flames with the help of specialised Canadair aircraft, authorities are hoping to control the fires during the day — France’s national day.

France is sweltering in the third major heatwave in less than two months, with Paris expected to see temperatures of 35C on Tuesday and a slight respite only expected later in the week. Firefighters are battling two main fires, including one in the La Faisanderie area, usually thronged with visitors in summer, not far from the town of Fontainebleau. — AFP

FATALITIES INCREASE

Germany sees spike in deaths over heat



Deaths in Germany spiked 32 per cent during a record heatwave in June compared to levels in the previous four years, official data showed on Tuesday. Nationwide, about 23,900 people died between June 22 and June 28 — an increase of 7,100 compared with the two previous weeks, according to Germany’s statistics agency. The report revised upward revision the agency’s previous estimate of around 6,800 heat-related deaths during the heatwave. — AFP

POWER FAILURES

Cuba’s national electric grid collapses



Cuba’s national power grid collapsed on Tuesday, marking the third major blackout on the island in nine days. The outage left around 10 million people without power amid a US-imposed oil blockade that has crippled the island’s already obsolete generation system. Venezuela was Cuba’s primary fuel benefactor. The chronic power failures fueled rising social tensions, sparking scattered pot-banging protests in Havana last week after the nationwide blackout. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



People participate in a peaceful walking vigil honoring the 26-year-old Colombian man killed in Biddeford. — AFP

US IMMIGRATION AGENTS INVOLVED IN SECOND SHOOTING

BIDDEFORD: A US immigration officer fatally shot a man identified by rights groups as a 26-year-old Colombian, the second such killing by federal agents in less than a week. The shooting happened in Biddeford, a town of 22,000 people in the northern state of Maine, and is likely to fuel criticism of President Donald Trump’s deportation drive and its handling by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). US media identified the victim as Joan Sebastian Guerrero, who reportedly worked as a delivery driver and lived in Biddeford with his wife and three-year-old daughter. An ICE spokesperson said officers had tried to stop a vehicle at around 7:00 am after conducting surveillance of the last known address of a person with a deportation order. A vehicle “attempted to flee the scene and fearing for public safety an officer discharged his weapon. The driver of the vehicle was struck, and emergency services were immediately contacted. He passed away from his injuries,” they said. The FBI earlier said it was also investigating. The Colombian embassy said in a statement it had requested clarification from the Department of Homeland Security over the death of a Colombian national. — AFP

FIRE COSTS SEVERAL DEAD IN BRUSSELS



Several people have died in a fire at a construction site in Brussels on Tuesday, with a search for six missing persons ongoing. An unspecified number of bodies had been found in one of two elevators at the large renovation project on the central Place de Brouckere where a fire broke out early on Tuesday, a spokesman for the local labour inspection service said. The local fire brigade said more than 200 workers had been on the site when the fire broke out and that three people had been taken to a hospital. — Reuters

EU BLASTS THREATS AGAINST ICC AS US TARGETS COURT

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday slammed threats against the International Criminal Court, after the United States vowed a sweeping campaign against the tribunal. “We are strongly committed to international criminal justice and the fight against impunity. Attacks or threats against the court-elected officials, personnel or those cooperating with the court, are simply not acceptable,” EU spokesman Anouar El Anouni said. Washington on Monday menaced the court with further sanctions and other measures, accusing it of posing “an intolerable

threat to US sovereignty.” The Trump administration said it would pressure other countries to withdraw from the court, marking a sharp escalation in the US effort to isolate the Hague-based institution and starve it of political and financial support. The State Department said in a statement that the campaign will “systematically disable the ICC’s ability to operate, target American servicemen or officials, or otherwise threaten American sovereignty.” The US has previously targeted individual court officials it deemed a threat to US interests. In February 2025, shortly after

President Donald Trump returned to office, Washington slapped asset freezes and travel bans on several ICC officials over an arrest warrant issued for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the war in Gaza. The US, like Israel, has not ratified the international treaty that established the ICC and it has rejected the court’s jurisdiction in cases involving the US or Israel. Three ICC judges sanctioned by the Trump administration filed a lawsuit in June against the president and other senior US officials, arguing that the measures imposed on them were unlawful. — AFP

France flaunts firepower, unity in military parade

FRANCE ON Tuesday showcased its military power and unity with allies, holding its largest-ever national day parade with Ukraine’s president guest of honour as European rearmament gathers pace in the face of Russia’s war against Ukraine. The final July 14 parade presided over by President Emmanuel Macron, the event brought together thousands of French troops but also two dozen foreign heads of state and government, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and hundreds of European troops. The parade, which marks the storming of the Bastille fortress in the French revolution, is being held a day after Macron hosted a new summit of Ukraine’s allies some four-and-a-half years into the full-scale Russian attack of its neighbour. Other European leaders witnessing the parade included German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and, on one of his last foreign engagements, British Premier Keir Starmer, who has spearheaded with Macron European efforts to support Ukraine but is now stepping down. With nearly 6,700 troops, 98 aircraft, 31 helicopters, and 315 vehicles, a record number of military personnel were marching the traditional route between the Arc de Triomphe and the Place de la Concorde. The parade was to illustrate “France’s rearmament, France’s strategic autonomy, and Europe’s strategic awakening,” said a French presidential official. “What is marching past is a Europe united and determined to support Ukraine in the

The parade was to illustrate France’s rearmament, France’s strategic autonomy, and Europe’s strategic awakening. What is marching past is a Europe united and determined to support Ukraine in the face of Russia — a Europe confident in itself



Troops march during the annual Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées Avenue in Paris. — AFP

face of Russia — a Europe confident in itself,” deputy defence minister Alice Rufo told RTL radio. Tens of thousands of members of the public braved a scorching heatwave to attend the celebrations in central Paris, having obtained special QR codes to allow them to cross the security perimeter. Some 500 soldiers from the so-called Coalition of the Willing of mainly European nations supporting Kyiv against Moscow were marching. Symbolically, 25 Ukrainian soldiers were following the troops of coalition members. Macron, who has pressed for a strategically autonomous Europe less dependent on the United States, on Monday said Europe would fight for freedom, even if it required its own troops shedding blood. “The message we send to the world is this: Yes, peace is our goal,” he said

in a traditional speech to the armed forces. “Yes, we cherish freedom and the rule of law. And yes, we stand ready to fight to defend them. Always, and at the cost of blood if necessary.” With threats growing to European security and US President Donald Trump regarded as an unpredictable ally, Chief of the Defence Staff General Fabien Mandon described the parade on X “a physical embodiment of the strategic solidarity between our countries.” Mandon caused a storm late last year when he said France must be prepared to “accept losing its children” in a potential future conflict with Russia. Ukrainian pilots trained in France were to co-pilot two French Mirage 2000s, planes transferred to Ukraine to defend its airspace against the Russian drones. — AFP

Russia to redirect ships from Azov Sea over Ukraine strikes

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday it was looking for “alternative shipping routes” and could limit traffic in the Azov Sea due to intensifying strikes by Ukraine which claims to have hit over 110 vessels there in nine days. The Azov Sea lies between Russia, the southern stretch of Ukraine that has been occupied by Moscow’s army and Russia-annexed Crimea. It is an important export route for agricultural products — including grain from occupied Ukraine that Kyiv says is “stolen” — and for supplies to Crimea. The sea strikes come as Ukraine has massively intensified drone attacks deep into Russia, causing nationwide fuel shortages. “Alternative shipping routes are currently being worked

out in collaboration with relevant agencies and the business community,” Russia’s agriculture ministry said in a statement. It insisted that exports will carry on. “The situation in the Azov Sea will not affect the domestic market’s food supply or our country’s export capabilities,” the ministry said. The Russian transport ministry said it was “taking all necessary measures to ensure the smooth operation of freight logistics” as attacks rise. It added that “if necessary”, some “cargo will be redirected to other modes of transport.” The commander of Ukraine’s drone forces said on Tuesday that Ukraine had hit “116 vessels over the past nine days”, including several tankers and cargo ships, in



An artilleryman of the National Guard of Ukraine works with a self-propelled howitzer, near a frontline in Donetsk region. — Reuters

The Russian transport ministry said it was taking all necessary measures to ensure the smooth operation of freight logistics as attacks rise. It added that if necessary, some “cargo will be redirected to other modes of transport.

the Azov Sea. He said the aim was to damage Russia’s “shadow fleet” and to limit Russia’s petrol supplies to Moscow-controlled Crimea. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the Kremlin was working to stop the attacks and — during a Moscow press conference with his counterpart from Chad — said Russia will

continue food shipments to African countries. Asked about the Azov Sea attacks, Lavrov said: “The president (Vladimir Putin) is working for this to stop.” “In any case, we will continue to fulfil all our obligations to supply food to our African friends — both under commercial contracts and as part of humanitarian aid,” he added. Russia and Ukraine are among the world’s biggest grain and wheat producers, vital to global food supply. Lavrov accused European countries of attempting to “steer the United States off course” from finding a settlement to the Ukraine war. US President Donald Trump recently condoned Ukrainian strikes on Russia. “It’s an escalation, but it’s also an escalation that can help

lead to an end,” he said last week. Separately, more civilians were killed in Ukraine in June than in any single month since April 2022, the United Nations said on Tuesday, as Russia escalated long-range missile strikes. Exploiting Ukraine’s shortage of air-defence missiles, Russia has in recent months intensified its bombardments of densely populated urban areas, especially the capital Kyiv. “At least 293 civilians were killed and 1,990 injured in Ukraine in June 2026,” said the UN’s human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine. “The increase was driven largely by long-range attacks by the Russian Federation, which mainly affected urban centres far from the frontline,” the UN added. — AFP

OPINION

What Khareef can teach us



HYESHA BARRETT
The writer is a Master Life Coach and Positive Parent Specialist

EVERY YEAR, as our famous Khareef transforms Salalah into a landscape of mist-covered mountains, flowing waterfalls and endless shades of green, thousands of people begin the journey south of Oman.

Others head overseas in search of beaches, city breaks, or something that promises a change from the demands of everyday life.

Holidays are seen as the reward at the end of the months of hard work, the light at the end of the tunnel, carrying the hope that this will finally be the moment we switch off, slow down and feel like ourselves again.

However, something interesting happens once we arrive. The scenery changes, but we often don't. Many people discover that even surrounded by breathtaking views, their minds are still racing through unfinished conversations, emails waiting to be answered, or the growing list of things waiting back home. Others fill every hour with sightseeing, activities and carefully planned itineraries, returning from holiday more exhausted than before they left.

Somewhere along the way, we stopped seeing holidays as an opportunity to rest and started treating them as another task to complete successfully.

Perhaps the problem was never the

destination. Perhaps it is the way we have learned to live. Modern life has quietly convinced us that slowing down needs to be earned. Productivity is celebrated, busyness is admired and being constantly available has become an unspoken expectation. Many people feel uncomfortable doing nothing for more than a few minutes, as though rest must always be justified by exhaustion first.

Even on holiday, there is pressure to make every moment count, to answer messages and emails, to visit every attraction, to capture every photograph and create memories that somehow prove the trip was worthwhile.

The irony is that the moments we treasure most rarely happen according to plan. They are found in the silence of a sunrise, families laughing, playing jokes on each other, watching clouds drift across the horizon, sharing a hearty meal, listening to music where nobody feels the need to rush to the next destination, and sleepy cuddles at bedtime.

Those memories are rarely expensive or extraordinary. They are priceless and so meaningful because, for those brief moments, we are fully present enough to experience them.

Perhaps this is why Khareef feels so different from the rest of the year. Nature

The real holiday does not begin when we reach the destination, but it begins the moment we stop believing that every second of our lives has to be spent proving we deserve to be there

moves at its own pace. The rain arrives when it is ready, the mist rolls gently through the valleys and the mountains ask nothing of the people standing before them. They offer a quiet reminder that life has seasons. Some seasons are for striving, building and achieving, while others are meant for restoring what constant movement has slowly worn away.

The greatest gift a holiday can offer is not another stamp in our passports or another collection of photographs on our phones.

It is the chance to remember that our worth has never been measured by how much we produce, how quickly we respond, or how efficiently we fill every hour of the day. Rest is not something we have to earn once everything is finished, because for many people, everything is never finished.

As families travel across Oman this Khareef season and countless others head abroad, perhaps the greatest journey is not measured in kilometres at all. Perhaps it is the distance between a life spent constantly chasing the next thing and one that is finally willing to pause long enough to appreciate what is already here.

The real holiday does not begin when we reach the destination. It begins the moment we stop believing that every second of our lives has to be spent proving we deserve to be there.

ARMENIAN APRICOTS SPARK RUSSIA DISPUTE

IRAKLI METREVELI

In Armenia's Ararat valley, where apricots ripen beneath the biblical mountain of the same name, farmer Aramais Kazaryan's harvest has been swept into the centre of a geopolitical battle between Russia and the West.

Angered at Yerevan's pivot away from Moscow, the Kremlin imposed bans and restrictions on the imports of a wide range of Armenian goods, including fruits, vegetables and flowers, ahead of parliamentary elections earlier this month.

Russia said it was for unspecified sanitary concerns, but it is widely seen as an attempt to heap economic pressure on Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to reverse course and turn back toward Moscow.

The 75-year-old farmer's eyes filled with tears as he walked through his orchard in the village of Vosketap, where a breeze from snow-capped Mount Ararat, across the border in Turkiye, dispelled the summer heat.

"The apricot is a symbol of Armenia," he said. "Its taste and aroma are royal. The apricot is a wonder of wonders." Cultivated for millennia, Armenia's famed apricots were known to ancient Romans as the "Armenian apple." Before the ban, the vast majority of exports went to Russia.

Kazaryan planted his orchard in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union when farmland was distributed to private owners.

Within five years, the trees were bearing fruit, and Russia became the natural destination for much of the harvest, trucked north across the border. Russia has also restricted Armenian fish, famed Jermuk mineral water and wine. The move has angered Kazaryan and many of his fellow farmers.

"For decades this trade went on. And suddenly everything changed?" he said. "This cannot be forgiven in any way." Moscow was punishing ordinary workers over the government's European course, despite Russia's claims of historic friendship, he said.

"This is aimed not against Pashinyan or the leadership, it is going against our people." The European Commission has pledged more than €50 million in immediate assistance, along with measures granting nearly 80 per cent of Armenian exports tariff-free access to the EU's 450-million-consumer single market. Armenia's economy could contract by up to two per cent if exporters fail to find new markets, Central Bank Governor Martin Galstyan has warned. — AFP

Preparing teenagers before life tests them

EVERY NATIONAL vision eventually reaches one essential question: are we preparing people early enough for the responsibilities they will soon carry?

Between the ages of 13 and 18, a person is no longer a child, yet not fully an adult. Children are usually protected. Adults are expected to carry responsibility. Teenagers, however, often stand in the middle, gradually expected to manage life without always being given the tools to do so.

Today's teenagers are growing up in a world far more complex than the one many adults experienced at the same age. Academic pressure, social media comparison, peer influence, digital distraction, emotional confusion and uncertainty about the future have become part of their daily environment. When adults see weak motivation, lack of discipline, anger, or careless behaviour, the issue is not always bad character. In many cases, the teenager has not yet been taught how to manage life.

This is where the idea of Teen Management Capability, or TMC, deserves attention.

Management, in this sense, does not mean business management. It means life management: the ability to manage emotions, time, decisions, relationships, responsibilities, money, digital behaviour and future direction. These are not luxury skills. They are basic human capabilities.

A teenager who enters adulthood without these capabilities will still learn, but often through trial and error. Life will become the teacher, and life is not always gentle. A young person may understand the value of money only after debt, the



DR IRAJ SARDARI BAF

The writer is a banker, educator and interested in youth capability and leadership

The future of the country will depend not only on the sectors it develops, the technologies it adopts, or the investments it attracts, but also on the capabilities it builds in its young people

meaning of discipline only after repeated failure, or the importance of emotional control only after relationships have been damaged.

Oman Vision 2040 places human capability, innovation and future readiness at the heart of national progress. This means the future of the country will depend not only on the sectors it develops, the technologies it adopts or the investments it attracts, but also on the capabilities it builds in its young people.

Teen Management Capability can be understood through six practical pillars. Emotional intelligence helps teenagers recognise and manage their feelings while understanding the feelings of others. Many problems in families, schools and later workplaces do not come from a lack of intelligence, but from unmanaged emotion.

Resilience teaches young people to treat setbacks not as final failures, but as learning experiences. A resilient teenager learns how to pause, adjust and continue after disappointment or criticism.

Compatibility develops the ability to cooperate with different people, listen, negotiate and resolve differences. In a diverse society, this skill turns difference into cooperation rather than conflict.

Critical thinking protects young people in a world full of opinions, rumours, advertisements and digital noise. It teaches them to ask better questions, examine evidence and make informed decisions instead of following the crowd or algorithms blindly. Digital and AI literacy is no longer optional. Teenagers need to understand how technology shapes attention, behaviour and self-image. They also need to learn how to use artificial intelligence as a tool, not become controlled by it.

Financial and return literacy teaches young people the basics of saving, spending, budgeting and responsible financial choices. More importantly, it teaches them to understand the return on time, effort, attention, learning and discipline. These pillars are connected. Emotional intelligence supports resilience. Resilience strengthens discipline. Compatibility improves cooperation. Critical thinking protects decisions. Digital and AI literacy protects attention and identity. Financial and return literacy protect the future.

The purpose of TMC is not to make teenagers behave like adults before their time. The purpose is to prepare them gently and practically for the realities of life before life tests them harshly.

Teenagers should not be seen as a problem to be controlled. They should be seen as future partners in national progress. They are tomorrow's employees, entrepreneurs, parents, public servants, innovators and leaders. The gap between academic knowledge and life-readiness deserves serious attention from families, schools, communities and policymakers.

Education systems have done important work in teaching subjects. Mathematics, science, language and history remain essential. But the next step is to help teenagers manage life in which all these subjects will be used.

The next chapter of national progress will belong not only to societies that build advanced systems, but to societies that build people capable of leading them.

The future does not begin when teenagers become adults. It begins while they are still teenagers.

Fill the skill gaps to empower youth for the job market



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

GLOBAL POPULATION dynamics are evolving, with numbers projected to exceed nine billion by 2040. As of July 11, 2026, the global population stands at 8.3 billion. However, beneath this headline figure, the world is undergoing a highly uneven demographic transition.

The latest report from the United Nations Population Fund reveals that the planet is now home to more than 1.9 billion people aged between 10 and 24, of whom over 1.2 billion are between 15 and 24 years old. Most of these individuals live in low- and middle-income countries and constitute a significant proportion of their national populations.

Although today's youth population is the largest in history, job growth is projected to be 0.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries, compared to 3.1 per cent in low-income nations.

This means that, over the next two decades, most countries with large youth populations will face challenges in meeting the basic needs of their citizens, especially given the social volatility often associated with youth bulges.

A report by Employment and Social Trends 2026 describes the global job situation for young people in low-income countries as “daunting.” According to the report, 27.9 per cent are neither in education, employment, nor training.

“Educated youth in high-income countries are not immune to uncertainty. The study warns that AI and automation could make it

harder for them to find work and calls for ‘close monitoring’ of these technologies,” the report points out.

International Labour Organisation report states that global youth unemployment stands at 12.4 per cent, with 20 per cent of young people — around 260 million — are not in education or training.

As young people increasingly seek fairer, more equitable, and progressive opportunities and solutions within their communities, it is essential to address the diverse challenges they encounter in education, health, employment, and gender equality.

In various fields, technology is transforming work methods, including automated factories and the use of artificial intelligence tools. This shift is creating new opportunities but also raising a challenging question: Are young workers prepared for the jobs of the future?

For many, the challenge begins after leaving the classroom. Although millions earn degrees each year, employers consistently highlight a gap between academic qualifications and workplace demands.

Unesco, in its latest report, revealed that the global skills crisis is worsening as the pace of technological change accelerates. Currently, 450 million young people worldwide lack the skills necessary to succeed in the job market.

One in every five individuals aged 15 to 34 is not participating in formal skill development programmes.

Unesco's Global Skills Academy also revealed that approximately 40 per cent of current skill sets no longer align with job market

In multiple fields, technology is altering work methods, such as automated machineries and the use of artificial intelligence tools. The shift is creating new opportunities, but it is also raising a difficult question of whether young workers are prepared for the jobs that are coming

demands. Additionally, the World Economic Forum projects that 22 per cent of jobs will undergo changes by 2030 due to technological advancements.

Research indicates that integrating technical training in classrooms with practical experiences - such as apprenticeships - can increase the supply of skilled workers for employers while also boosting employees' wages.

This underscores the importance of collaboration between the education and private sectors in enhancing employability within the green economy. Such partnerships not only bridge the skills gap, but also foster a supportive environment that cultivates the talents and potential of young people.

In this context, World Youth Skills Day, observed annually on July 15, serves as a powerful reminder of the global commitment to empowering young people through education, training, and opportunities.

With this year's theme, “Youth Skills for Peace and Development,” the message is clear: investing in skills means investing in the future.

This day also signifies that young individuals are not merely the future labour force; they currently play a vital role in today's economy. Their enthusiasm, ideas, and contributions are significant in the present.

Finally, to create a brighter future, governments, educational institutions, and the private sector must collaborate more effectively to establish vocational training programmes, apprenticeships, and support initiatives for entrepreneurship.

RARE SKIN DISORDER RAISES HEAT RISKS FOR SOME SPANIARDS

MARIE GIFFARD

Every summer, Alberto Gomez lives with a fear most people never consider. The 36-year-old Spanish physics and chemistry teacher has a rare genetic skin disorder that leaves him unable to sweat properly - and therefore unable to cool himself naturally during extreme heat.

“If you're having a hard time, imagine what it means for me. My fear is suffering a heatstroke and not being able to recover from it,” he said at a gym near his home in Arroyomolinos near Madrid.

As Spain's increasingly intense summers bring more frequent and prolonged periods of extreme heat, Gomez is among a small number of people living with the condition.

For them, a day that is merely uncomfortable for most people can quickly become life-threatening, forcing them to constantly monitor their bodies and avoid situations that could trigger dangerous overheating.

“When summer comes, we have a series of warning signs telling us something could happen if we don't start regulating our temperature,” Gomez said.

Ichthyosis is a rare inherited disorder that leaves the skin excessively dry, rough and red. Gomez's skin peels from head to toe, while other patients develop sores or blisters. One of the condition's most dangerous consequences is that many patients sweat little or not at all.

“Sweat protects us when it's very hot because through perspiration, we release heat,” said dermatologist Angela Hernandez, an ichthyosis specialist in Spain who estimates around 300 people in the country have the disorder.

“If we cannot release that heat, the body overheats to such an extent that it literally collapses. All the cells are destroyed,” she said, describing the risk as potentially fatal.

Usually diagnosed at birth, the genetic disorder lasts for life, although its severity varies widely. There is no cure.

It affects the skin's ability to shed normally, causing thick, dry scales to build up and making patients more prone to dehydration, infections and painful cracking.

Beyond the immediate threat posed by extreme heat, the condition requires constant care.

Many patients spend hours each day applying moisturising creams to relieve cracked skin, while its visible symptoms can also expose them to unwanted attention and stigma.

Patients must also avoid overheating and prolonged exposure to the sun.

To cope with Spain's increasingly hot summers, Gomez rarely goes outside without a UV-blocking umbrella.

“Caps are useless for me because they trap heat around my head instead of letting it escape,” he said. — AFP

When dubious refereeing grows bigger than football

THE EGYPT-Argentina World Cup match could have been remembered as one of the tournament's most entertaining games.

Instead, it has become a symbol of something much larger: growing distrust in football's governing institutions and the belief among many supporters that not every team enters the pitch on equal footing.

Argentina eventually won 3-2 after a dramatic comeback, but the football itself was quickly overshadowed by controversy. Egypt's players, coaching staff and football federation all questioned several refereeing decisions that they believed changed the outcome of the match. Whether those decisions were technically correct is ultimately for Fifa to decide, but the perception of fairness has become just as important as the laws of the game.

Perception matters because football depends on trust.

The controversy centred around several decisive moments. Egypt believed they should have had a second goal stand after Mostafa Zico found the net, only for VAR to rule it out following a review of a foul in the build-up. Later, Egyptian players appealed for what they believed was a clear penalty involving Mohamed Salah, but the referee chose not to award one before Argentina scored the decisive winner. A succession of yellow cards shown to Egypt further fuelled frustration among players and supporters.

Following the match, Egypt's Football Association formally lodged a complaint with Fifa, arguing that the refereeing had unfairly influenced the result. Coach Hossam Hassan was even more direct: “Perhaps they wanted to keep the world champions in the competition.” It was an accusation reflecting just how convinced many within Egyptian football were that the match had not been officiated consistently.

Fifa, however, rejected suggestions of favouritism.



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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

Football authorities cannot simply insist that supporters trust the process. They must demonstrate why controversial decisions were reached.

Refereeing chief Pierluigi Collina defended the officials and warned that allegations of bias could provoke threats against referees and their families. From Fifa's perspective, controversial decisions should not automatically become evidence of corruption.

Yet this is precisely where the debate becomes more complicated. One can accept that there is no proof of corruption while still recognising that football has a perception problem.

When several contentious decisions all appear to benefit the same team, especially one led by perhaps the greatest player of his generation, supporters inevitably begin asking uncomfortable questions. Lionel Messi is not simply another footballer. He is arguably the face of modern football, a commercial phenomenon whose presence attracts global audiences, sponsorships and television revenue. That does not mean referees intentionally favour Argentina. But it does mean that every controversial decision involving Messi will receive far greater scrutiny than if it involved a less prominent nation.

History shows that perceptions of favouritism are not unique to this World Cup. Throughout football history, supporters of smaller footballing nations have frequently believed that traditional powers receive the benefit of close decisions. Whether discussing Argentina, Brazil, Germany or other football giants, accusations that major nations receive more favourable treatment have repeatedly surfaced after contentious matches.

The Egypt-Argentina match has simply reignited that conversation. What makes this controversy particularly interesting is that it has extended far beyond football.

An opinion article published by Al Jazeera argued that the match became “a referendum on Palestine”, highlighting how discussions online quickly shifted

away from VAR and towards geopolitics. Egyptian supporters, already deeply sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, interpreted the controversy through a broader lens of power, representation and perceived double standards. It is also worth considering the political relationships surrounding the tournament. Argentina's President Javier Milei has a close relationship with Donald Trump, while Trump has also maintained strong ties with Fifa President Gianni Infantino. Both leaders have openly expressed support for Israel, which has further fuelled suspicions among supporters. Sport has always reflected broader political realities. The Olympic Games, the World Cup and international tournaments have repeatedly become stages upon which geopolitical tensions play out. Fans rarely separate football from the world around them, particularly when emotions are running high.

VAR was introduced to eliminate obvious mistakes and increase confidence in officiating. Instead, many supporters feel it has simply transferred controversial decisions from the referee on the pitch to officials sitting in a control room. When supporters do not understand why one incident is reviewed while another is not, confidence inevitably declines.

Football authorities cannot simply insist that supporters trust the process. They must demonstrate why controversial decisions were reached. Publishing VAR audio, providing clearer explanations after matches and improving communication would go a long way towards reducing speculation. Other sports have successfully embraced greater transparency. Football has been slower to follow.

Football is the world's most popular sport because billions of people believe that every team has an equal opportunity to win. When that belief begins to weaken, even without proof of wrongdoing, the damage extends beyond a single match.



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



ARGENTINA 'S WAR

VETERANS URGE FANS TO FOCUS ON ENGLAND CLASH



Argentina's head coach
Lionel Scaloni. — AFP

An Argentine fan holds cardboard cutouts depicting Argentina's Messi. — AFP



Football fans watch a live broadcast



An Argentina fan watches the World Cup quarterfinal

AN Argentine war veterans federation called on soccer supporters to focus on football ahead of their World Cup semi-final against England rather than use the match as a platform to push sovereignty claims over South Atlantic islands.

Argentina and Britain fought a short conflict over the islands known by the British as the Falklands and Argentines as the Malvinas in 1982, in which 649 Argentine soldiers and 255 British combatants died.

The group said on Monday that the match was “not an armed rematch nor historical compensation,” urging fans and the wider public to honour the memory of Argentine soldiers killed in the conflict without promoting hatred or xenophobia.

“Sovereignty is defended in international forums through diplomacy, historical truth and the peaceful, non-negotiable claim enshrined in our national constitution,” the April 2 War Veterans Federation said in a statement.

“We consider it essential to draw a clear and unwavering line between sporting passion and the national cause. “The ball rolls, pride in our colours multiplies, but memory remains

intact.”

Britain claims sovereignty over the islands and maintains a military presence there, while Argentina continues to pursue its claim through diplomatic channels and international bodies including the United Nations.

During the World Cup, Argentina fans and players have been singing a chant referencing the islands, Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi's bid to end his international career with a second World Cup title.

Argentina's players and coaching staff, however, have sought to cool rivalry talk ahead of Wednesday's match, with manager Lionel Scaloni saying there will be nothing more than soccer at stake when the two sides meet in Atlanta.

England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford echoed his words on Monday, saying the semi-final was “just a game of football”.

“It's two proud nations. The football will do its talking,” Pickford told reporters.

Argentina and England share one of international soccer's most storied rivalries, marked by several high-profile World Cup meetings including the 1986 quarter-final that featured Maradona's famous “Hand of God” goal. — Reuters



Spence emerges as England's super sub



A CONTROVERSIAL selection in the World Cup squad and panned for his performance against DR Congo in the Round of 32, Djed Spence has morphed into a key impact substitute for England at the business end of the tournament.

Thrown on in the latter stages of the last-16 victory over Mexico and Saturday's quarter-final win against Norway, Spence has silenced his critics by bringing pace, energy and passion off the bench in impressive cameos.

Unmistakable for the chin strap he wears to protect a broken jaw sustained in a late-season Premier League match with his club Tottenham Hotspur, Spence has played a part in all six of England's matches at the tournament.

England's lack of resources at full back means the versatile defender is likely to again be called upon to play some sort of role against Argentina in Wednesday's semi-final in Atlanta.

"Listen, I just want to make the country proud, the nation proud, my team proud, the manager proud," the 25-year-old said after the win over Norway in Miami.

"When I step on the pitch, I'll

Dutch official removed from WC dies

AMSTERDAM: Dutch referee Rob Dieperink has died at the age of 38, two months after he was dropped from the panel of match officials for the 2026 World Cup following a police case in Britain that was later dropped.

No cause of death has been revealed.

"We are shocked and deeply saddened by the passing of Rob Dieperink. With Rob, we lose a highly valued referee, but above all a kind and dedicated colleague," the Dutch football association said in



a statement.

Dieperink had been selected as part of the video assistant referee (VAR) panel at the World Cup, but was removed in May after he had been arrested the previous month by the Metropolitan Police.

He had been in London to officiate in the Conference League fixture between Crystal Palace and Fiorentina. The case was dropped due to a lack of evidence.

"It saddens me greatly that I have been wrongly

accused," Dieperink said in an interview with De Telegraaf.

"I am grateful for the support I have received from the KNVB and the way in which they have dealt with this case. It is a pity that Fifa has decided not to appoint me for the World Cup anymore, of course, I am disappointed about that."

Dieperink had officiated in the Dutch Eredivisie since 2017 and was a VAR official at the 2024 European Championship.

— Reuters

Tuchel, who, critics pointed out, often targeted Spence with animated blasts from the sidelines.

There was what looked like another heated exchange of ideas when Spence was brought on in the 86th minute of normal time against Norway, but Spence said there had been no problem.

"I think it's just passion," he said. "Just psyching me up to go on the pitch and cause trouble, and, yeah, that's what I did."

Spence's pace was indeed a thorn in the side of the tiring Norwegian side throughout the rest of a match played in stifling humidity, and he would have earned England a penalty had VAR not intervened.

England ultimately progressed courtesy of Jude Bellingham's extra-time winner but the goalscorer was quick to praise Spence, his fellow defensive substitute Dan Burn as well as midfielder Elliot Anderson for protecting the lead.

"Warriors, warriors," Bellingham said. "It's one thing to have quality, which all the lads in this group do, but you don't know how much heart and mentality they have until you're in a situation like that." — Reuters

give 110% for this country, I'm just grateful to do my part."

Spence took a lot of flak from critics after starting at right back against DR Congo, though, particularly after the Africans took

the lead with a goal down his side of the pitch.

Those who felt that England manager Thomas Tuchel had made a huge blunder by not bringing Real Madrid's experienced Trent

Alexander-Arnold to North America felt vindicated, even if Spence was left exposed by his teammates in central defence.

The storm of criticism also led to a focus on his relationship with



PASSION PAINTS THE SEMI-FINAL



France fans gather ahead of Spain match. — Reuters



Spain fans ahead of the match. — Reuters



France fans gather ahead of semi final match. — Reuters



France fans gather ahead of semi final match. — Reuters



Spain fans outside the stadium before the match.



France fans gather ahead of their semi final match.



France fans gather ahead of their semi final match.



Spain fans inside the stadium before the match. — Reuters

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,602.586

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$82.17
BRENT \$86.47
LIGHT \$80.92



SHORT TAKES



The latest price compares with Monday's settlement of \$72.11 a barrel.

OMAN OIL PRICE JUMPS ABOVE \$82 ON GULF TENSIONS

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude for September delivery surged by \$10.06 on Tuesday to \$82.17 a barrel, tracking a sharp rally in global oil markets as renewed tensions between the United States and Iran raised concerns over crude shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

The latest price compares with Monday's settlement of \$72.11 a barrel. The average price of Omani crude for July delivery stood at \$102 a barrel, down \$2.73 from the average recorded for June deliveries.

International benchmark Brent crude climbed 3.81 per cent to \$86.47 a barrel in early trading, its highest level in four weeks, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 2.75 per cent to \$80.29 a barrel.

Oil prices were supported by renewed geopolitical risks after the United States reinstated a naval blockade of Iran and exchanges between Washington and Tehran intensified, fuelling fears of disruptions to energy supplies moving through the Strait of Hormuz.

The waterway is one of the world's most important energy corridors, carrying around one-fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments before the latest escalation.

Market sentiment was also affected by reports that tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz had fallen to its lowest level in two months.

Analysts said the renewed tensions have prompted traders to factor in a higher geopolitical risk premium.

Soni Kumari, an analyst at ANZ, said markets were reassessing the durability of the recent understanding between the United States and Iran. She said further disruptions could keep oil prices in the \$85-\$90 a barrel range.

Citi also said the possibility of Iran stepping away from the memorandum of understanding before the US mid-term elections had increased, a scenario that could support higher oil prices for longer.

Despite the heightened tensions, Mohsen Paknejad, the Iranian Oil Minister, said the country's crude exports continued as normal despite the cancellation of a temporary US sanctions waiver last week. — Agencies

Greater Salalah plan aligns key growth engines

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 14

GREATER Salalah's new structural framework proposes integrating the Port of Salalah, Salalah Free Zone and Salalah Airport into a single economic growth strategy, aiming to strengthen links between logistics, manufacturing, investment and urban development as the city prepares for long-term expansion through Oman Vision 2040.

Presented during a workshop on the final framework of the Greater Salalah Structure Plan earlier this week, the proposal moves beyond treating the three assets as standalone infrastructure, instead positioning them as interconnected drivers of economic activity supported by coordinated land use, transport planning and future investment.

The framework identifies the Port and Free Zone, Airport City Logistics Hub and surrounding urban districts as strategic growth areas intended to work together to generate broader economic value across Greater Salalah.

At the centre of the approach is a recognition that world-class transport infrastructure alone does not automatically translate into wider economic gains.

The framework therefore seeks to strengthen the links between cargo movement, manufacturing, industrial investment, commercial services, employment and urban development so that growth generated by the city's gateways extends across the wider economy.

Planning scenarios presented during the workshop identify the Port and Free Zone as Greater Salalah's largest employment and production centre over the coming decades.

Employment in the district is projected to increase from around 51,600 in 2024 to nearly 87,650 by 2040, while its gross domestic product is projected to rise from approximately RO 1.04 billion to about RO 2.82 billion over the same period.

The framework notes that these



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figures are planning scenarios intended to support long-term development and will depend on investment, market conditions and project implementation.

Alongside the port and free zone, the framework identifies an Airport City Logistics Hub as a strategic investment location designed to strengthen airport-related logistics and support higher-value economic activity.

It also proposes an Innovation District to encourage research and knowledge-based industries, together with a Raysut Pharmaceutical Precinct intended to support pharmaceutical manufacturing and associated logistics.

Rather than functioning as isolated investment zones, the framework envisages these locations operating as complementary economic clusters linked through transport infrastructure, supporting services and coordinated urban planning.

The proposal also calls for a dedicated master plan for the Port and Free Zone to help align future industrial expansion with transport networks, land use, environmental considerations and supporting infrastructure.

Eng Aseela al Busaidy, Technical Director of the Greater Salalah

Structure Plan at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said the framework was designed around an integrated planning philosophy. "We are not dealing with separate projects, but with an integrated system in which every project supports the others and every investment creates added value for its surroundings," she said.

Al Busaidy said the structure plan represents an integrated roadmap to Oman Vision 2040, bringing together economic diversification, transport, infrastructure, environmental sustainability and urban development within a single planning framework.

She added that completing the plan marked the beginning of implementation rather than the end of the planning process, stressing that its success would depend on sustained cooperation among government entities and stakeholders to translate the vision into tangible projects.

If implemented, the framework would represent a shift in the role of Salalah's strategic assets—from transport gateways operating largely as individual facilities towards a more connected economic platform designed to support investment, industry and long-term regional growth.

Technical consultant sought for Oman's 4 GW solar PV programme

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 14

Oman has taken another step towards delivering its largest-ever solar energy programme, with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) launching the search for a technical consultant to support the development of four utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) projects with a combined capacity of 4 GW.

The state-owned power and water procurer, part of Nama Group, has invited consultancy firms to bid for a contract to provide technical advisory services for the planned 'Solar 2030 IPPs' programme, one of the country's most ambitious renewable energy initiatives.

The portfolio comprises four independent power projects (IPPs), each with a capacity of 1 GW, all of which are scheduled to enter



The four projects under the Solar 2030 IPPs programme are scheduled for commercial launch by mid-2030.

commercial operation by mid-2030.

Together, the projects will play a pivotal role in achieving Oman's target of generating 30 per cent

of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, supporting the Sultanate's broader Net Zero and energy transition ambitions.

According to the tender,

Together, the projects will play a pivotal role in achieving Oman's target of generating 30 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, supporting the Sultanate of Oman's broader Net Zero and energy transition ambitions.

issued by Nama PWP on July 13, the successful consultant will provide technical advisory services throughout the procurement and development phases of the programme.

While the tender does not identify the locations of the projects, it confirms that all four plants will be connected to the Main Interconnected System (MIS), Oman's principal electricity transmission network.

Details released recently by the

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), operator of the national grid, indicate that three of the planned 1 GW projects will be located at Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Al Kamil Phase II in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and Mahdah in Al Buraimi Governorate.

A fourth project, expected to serve the MIS, has yet to be officially identified.

The Adam Solar IPP has already entered procurement, with Nama PWP issuing a Request for Qualifications (RfQ) last month.

In addition to 1 GW of solar PV generation, the project will incorporate a utility-scale Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), making it Oman's first large-scale solar-plus-storage development.

Interested consultancy firms have until August 26, 2026, to submit bids for the technical consultancy contract.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The limited-time campaign aims to provide short-term financing options with repayment tenures ranging from 6 to 12 months.

BANKDHOFAR LAUNCHES SUMMER SHORT-TERM LOAN CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of branch network, has announced the launch of a seasonal short-term loan campaign designed to support customers with personal expenses and travel plans during the July-August travel period, offering flexible financing solutions at highly competitive, segment-based interest rates.

The limited-time campaign aims to provide short-term financing options with repayment tenures ranging from 6 to 12 months. The initiative is tailored to meet rising demand for personal and travel-related spending during the summer season, as families and individuals across Oman prepare for summer activities and personal commitments.

Under the campaign, BankDhofar is offering differentiated pricing across three key customer segments. Mass customers will benefit from a special rate of 3.49 per cent, while clients under the Al Rifaa segment will be offered a reduced rate of 3.25 per cent.

The bank's premium Al Riadah segment will enjoy the most competitive rate of 2.99 per cent, reflecting its focus on rewarding high-value and long-standing customer relationships.

The campaign targets a broad base of customers, including individuals planning summer travel, new customers transferring their salaries to BankDhofar and existing clients eligible for fresh personal financing. It also places particular emphasis on premium banking segments, reinforcing the bank's commitment to delivering differentiated value propositions across its customer tiers.

BankDhofar stated that the initiative is part of its broader strategy to enhance customer experience through seasonally relevant financial solutions that align with lifestyle needs. By introducing short-term loans.

For personal expenses and travel during peak summer months, the bank aims to support customers in managing their financial commitments more conveniently while maintaining flexibility.

The offering is poised to appeal strongly to salary earners and families seeking structured repayment options for personal and travel expenses, including airfare, accommodation and seasonal spending, without the need to dip into long-term savings.

The campaign reflects BankDhofar's ongoing focus on innovation in retail banking and its commitment to delivering tailored credit solutions that respond to evolving customer behaviour patterns.

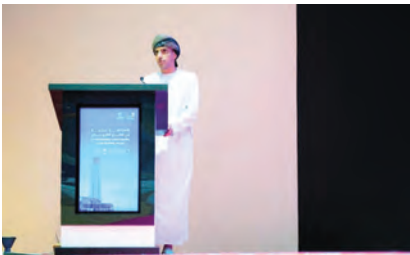
The short-term loan campaign is available for a limited period only during the July and August peak season. Customers are encouraged to visit their nearest BankDhofar branch for more details on eligibility criteria, documentation requirements and loan approval processes.

CAA PROMOTES GREENER AVIATION THROUGH CASCADE PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has launched a new initiative to strengthen environmental sustainability in the aviation sector by introducing the CASCADE programme to students, researchers and industry stakeholders.

The authority organised two workshops as part of its efforts to support the objectives of the National Aviation Strategy 2040 and promote greater awareness of sustainable aviation practices.

The first workshop introduced young participants to environmental challenges facing the



aviation industry and highlighted how the CASCADE programme can support academic research, graduation projects and innovation aimed at reducing the sector's environmental impact.

The programme also provides tools for analysing policies and

technologies that contribute to lowering aviation emissions.

A second workshop, attended by strategic partners, focused on the application of Boeing's CASCADE programme, which models different pathways for reducing aviation emissions by 2050 and assesses the impact of policy measures, technology adoption and investment decisions on achieving net-zero emissions.

The session also explored opportunities for cooperation between the authority and aviation stakeholders in implementing environmental initiatives.

All-new Chery Himla pickup debuts in Oman

MARKING a bold new chapter for the brand in Oman, New World Autos, the distributor for Chery in the Sultanate of Oman, officially unveiled the all-new Chery Himla pickup at its flagship showroom in Al Wattayah.

The launch introduces a vehicle purpose-built to Master the Terrain across the region's diverse landscapes, while elevating the traditional utility truck into a premium lifestyle companion. Distinguished guests and industry partners gathered to witness the arrival of this robust model, which seamlessly bridges the gap between rugged workhorse capability and modern driving refinement.

The event opened with a welcome address by one of the Chery officials in Oman, who spoke about the growing momentum of Chery in Oman and the significance of the all-new powerful Himla as the latest addition to the brand's expanding lineup.

They highlighted the all-new Himla as a vehicle that goes beyond conventional pickup expectations – delivering a driving experience built around boldness, versatility and everyday functionality for both business and leisure.



The all-new Himla series represents a clear evolution in the pickup market.

The all-new Himla series represents a clear evolution in the pickup market, catering to drivers who require a dependable vehicle for both business operations and personal travel.

The pickup features a commanding design with a 3230 mm wheelbase, giving it

a strong road presence. The all-new Himla is engineered to be a versatile partner, shifting smoothly from demanding work roles to weekend family adventures. Performance is central to the Himla's capability, offering a choice of practical powertrains to suit different operational needs.

National Finance continues to support SMEs

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to fostering the Sultanate of Oman's entrepreneurial landscape, National Finance, the nation's leading finance and leasing company, continues to support the growth and resilience of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through a comprehensive portfolio of tailored SME financing solutions.

Designed to address the evolving needs of businesses across diverse sectors, these flexible and accessible offerings empower SMEs to enhance operational efficiency, unlock new growth opportunities and contribute to the nation's broader economic diversification and sustainable development objectives.

As SMEs continue to play a pivotal role in driving innovation, creating employment opportunities and advancing sustainable economic growth, access to flexible and tailored financing solutions remains critical to their long-term success. Recognising the



diverse needs of businesses at every stage of their journey, National Finance offers a comprehensive suite of SME financing solutions, including new and used vehicle finance, equipment and machinery finance, working capital support, warehouse finance and sustainability-linked financing.

Through these customised offerings, the company empowers businesses to secure the resources they need to strengthen operations, pursue expansion opportunities and achieve their strategic ambitions with

confidence.

Commenting on the significance of supporting the SME sector, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance stated, "Omani SMEs have consistently demonstrated remarkable entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and resilience, making significant contributions across a wide range of industries.

As key drivers of economic diversification, job creation and sustainable growth, SMEs play an indispensable role in shaping the nation's future economic prosperity.

At National Finance, we are committed to empowering entrepreneurs and business owners with tailored financing solutions that address their unique needs, enabling them to invest in growth, enhance their competitiveness and build resilient enterprises capable of thriving in an increasingly dynamic and evolving business environment".

Bank Muscat promotes financial literacy across society in Oman

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to supporting community development and promoting financial awareness across society, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised the first session of the financial literacy workshops dedicated to the newlyweds and individuals preparing for marriage.

The workshops, with the first session held in Dhofar Governorate, aim to strengthen participants' understanding of sound financial management, encourage positive financial habits and highlight their role in fostering family stability and building a sustainable financial future.

The workshop forms part of Bank Muscat's



The workshop forms part of Bank Muscat's ongoing community initiatives.

ongoing community initiatives to equip individuals with the financial knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions. Organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, the initiative reflects the Bank's commitment to strengthening strategic partnerships with public and private sector organisations and delivering sustainable community programmes with lasting social impact.

This collaboration is driven by Bank Muscat's belief that financial literacy is a key pillar of improved quality of life and greater economic and social stability for families, particularly during the early years of marriage, when effective financial planning

and responsible money management are especially important. The workshop covered a range of key topics, including the importance of financial literacy in married life, financial partnership between spouses as the foundation of a transparent and collaborative relationship, family budgeting and financial planning, setting shared financial goals, and building a sustainable financial future together.

Participants also explored common financial challenges and mistakes faced by newly married couples and practical ways to address them, in addition to the concept of financial intelligence and its role in strengthening family stability and promoting responsible financial management.

SHORTTAKES



The milestone reflects bank's role in supporting businesses, driving economic growth across Oman.

DEVELOPMENT BANK LENDING PORTFOLIO CROSSES \$1 BN MARK

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 14

Development Bank's lending portfolio has surpassed \$1 billion (approximately RO 385 million), a milestone the state-backed lender says reflects its role in supporting businesses and driving economic growth across every governorate of the Sultanate of Oman.

Announcing the achievement, the bank described the figure as “a billion steps towards a more prosperous economy”, underscoring its mandate to provide development financing in support of Oman Vision 2040 goals of economic diversification, entrepreneurship and balanced regional development.

The industrial sector accounted for the largest share of financing at around \$287.7 million, consistent with the bank's focus on localising manufacturing and strengthening domestic value chains. Tourism followed with \$179.7 million, while the logistics, professional and public services sector received \$172.2 million.

Fisheries, a priority sector for food security and coastal livelihoods, attracted \$135.4 million in financing, with agriculture and livestock rounding out the top five sectors at \$119.1 million. Together, the five leading sectors account for roughly \$894 million — close to 90 per cent of the total portfolio.

Muscat Governorate led with \$260.1 million in financing, followed by Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with \$127.3 million and Al Batinah North Governorate with \$126.3 million.

Dhofar Governorate received \$111.1 million, while Al Batinah South Governorate accounted for \$88.9 million. The bank emphasised that its branch network spans all governorates, “from the north of Oman to its south”, enabling it to reach communities, support businesses and, in its words, empower the future.

Development Bank, established by Royal Decree 18/97 as the successor to Oman Development Bank and Oman Bank for Agriculture and Fisheries (1981), provides subsidised long-term development loans, including interest-free financing of up to RO 15,000 for full-time small investors and loans at 3 per cent for SMEs, with the Ministry of Finance covering interest costs for priority groups.

India opens tariff quotas for Omani exports

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 14

INDIA has formally notified the procedures for implementing tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) under the Oman-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), paving the way for preferential access for a range of Omani exports including dates, marble, aluminium products, copper weld wire and petrochemicals.

The notification, issued by India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) on July 13, follows the entry into force of the India-Oman CEPA on June 1, providing the operational framework for allocating quota-based tariff concessions to eligible imports from Oman.

The move marks another step in strengthening bilateral trade ties between the two countries by translating the trade agreement into practical import procedures for Indian businesses.

Under the new rules, fresh and processed dates from Oman will receive immediate tariff elimination on annual imports of up to 2,000 tonnes.

India currently imposes a 30 per cent import duty on dates, making the concession a significant opportunity for Omani exporters seeking greater access to one of the world's



The agreement also grants preferential treatment to Omani marble exports.

largest consumer markets.

The agreement also grants preferential treatment to Omani marble exports. Import duties on marble and travertine blocks will be reduced from 40 per cent to 25 per cent for shipments valued at a minimum of \$150 per metric tonne, subject to an annual quota of 100,000 tonnes.

Marble slabs will also benefit from tariff reductions under separate quota arrangements. In addition to natural resources, the CEPA provides phased tariff reductions for several industrial products, including aluminium ingots, aluminium billets, aluminium wire and copper weld wire, alongside a wide range of petrochemical products such as ethylene glycol, linear alkylbenzenes, low-

density polyethylene (LDPE), polypropylene, polyurethanes and PVC resins.

Most of these tariff concessions will be introduced gradually over periods ranging from five to 10 years under specified quota allocations.

The DGFT said Indian importers seeking to benefit from the lower tariffs must present a Certificate of Origin issued by the competent authority in Oman when clearing imported consignments through customs.

The tariff quotas will operate according to India's financial year, running from April 1 to March 31.

Applications for quota allocations will be submitted electronically through the

DGFT's Import Management System, while quota authorisations will remain valid for up to 12 months or until the end of the financial year, whichever comes first.

For the 2026-27 financial year, the DGFT said a separate public notice would specify the application window for quota allocations, with eligible quantities to be distributed on a pro-rata basis for the remainder of the financial year following the agreement's entry into force.

The India-Oman CEPA is expected to deepen economic cooperation between the two countries by lowering trade barriers, improving market access and encouraging greater investment and industrial collaboration.

RAYSUT CEMENT RETURNS TO PROFIT

SALALAH: Raysut Cement Company returned to profit in the first half of 2026 after posting a net profit of RO 2.71 million, reversing a loss of RO 2.58 million recorded in the corresponding period last year.

The turnaround was supported by stronger sales and improved operational performance, with revenue rising 26.3 per cent to RO 52.20 million from RO 41.34 million in the first six months of 2025, according to the company's



preliminary unaudited financial results.

Ali bin Abdullah al Zadjali, Chairman of Raysut Cement Group, said the results reflected the company's ability to improve cost

management, expand its revenue base and strengthen operational efficiency.

He said the performance demonstrated the success of the company's financial and operational strategies despite challenging market conditions.

Al Zadjali added that the company remained focused on creating long-term value for shareholders while reinforcing its position in the regional cement industry. — ONA

Refinery production in Oman reaches 89.9 million barrels

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman produced 89.9 million barrels of refined petroleum products during the first five months of 2026, down 6.8 per cent from 96.5 million barrels in the corresponding period last year, according to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Production of regular (91 octane) petrol fell 7.8 per cent to 6.81 million barrels, while domestic sales dropped 22.9 per cent to 6.48 million barrels. Exports, however, rose 21.7 per cent to 1.88 million barrels.

Premium (95 octane) petrol production declined 2.4 per cent to



Jet fuel production bucked the trend, increasing 5.5% to 11.73 million barrels.

5.49 million barrels. Domestic sales fell 20.1 per cent to 6.04 million barrels, while exports dropped 32.8 per cent to 252,700 barrels.

Diesel production decreased 8.1 per cent to 29.92 million barrels. Sales declined 11.8 per cent to 8.15 million barrels and exports fell 11.1 per cent to 23.09 million barrels.

Jet fuel production bucked the trend, increasing 5.5 per cent to 11.73 million barrels.

Although domestic sales fell 20.6 per cent to 1.72 million barrels, exports climbed 20.2 per cent to 9.71 million barrels.

LPG production declined 5.8 per

cent to 4.53 million barrels.

Domestic sales dropped 21 per cent to 1.29 million barrels, while exports edged up 0.5 per cent to 1.37 million barrels.

Naphtha production increased 2.2 per cent to 15.60 million barrels and domestic sales rose 7.6 per cent to 5.95 million barrels, although exports declined 8.1 per cent to 9.26 million barrels.

Production of other refined products fell 19.8 per cent to 15.82 million barrels, while domestic sales dropped 32.4 per cent to 12.17 million barrels. Exports increased 4 per cent to 4.41 million barrels.

In the petrochemicals segment, benzene production rose 11.9 per cent to 83,100 metric tonnes, with exports increasing 10.8 per cent to 80,500 metric tonnes.

Paraxylene production climbed to 272,000 metric tonnes from 224,000 metric tonnes a year earlier, while exports rose 8.8 per cent to 275,400 metric tonnes.

Polypropylene production fell 27.1 per cent to 100,800 metric tonnes. Despite the decline in output, domestic sales increased 15.3 per cent to 15,800 metric tonnes, while exports dropped 29.8 per cent to 77,100 metric tonnes. — ONA

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar steadies before inflation

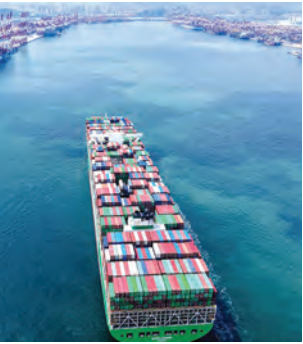


The US dollar held steady ahead of key US inflation data, with investors assessing renewed Middle East tensions.

The dollar index remained at 101.27, while the yen hovered near a 40-year low, keeping markets alert for possible intervention by Japanese authorities. Traders are also awaiting Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh's congressional testimony for policy signals. — ONA

TRADE PERFORMANCE

China exports surge on AI



China's exports jumped 27 per cent year-on-year in June, comfortably exceeding market expectations as demand linked to artificial intelligence boosted shipments of electric vehicles, semiconductors and technology products.

Officials said robust export growth helped offset continued weakness in domestic demand and supported the broader economy. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold hits two-week low



Gold prices fell to a two-week low as renewed US-Iran tensions drove oil prices higher, strengthening the US dollar and raising inflation concerns.

Spot gold slipped 0.2 per cent to \$3,993.83 an ounce after a sharp decline in the previous session. Investors are awaiting US inflation data and Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh's testimony for further guidance on the outlook for interest rates. — Reuters

Carbon credits need accountants, not just environmentalists



DR SUAAD JASSEM

The writer is an Associate Professor of Accounting and Auditing, CBFS

CARBON may soon become more than an environmental number. It may become a financial asset, a tradable credit, a tax consideration, an investment signal and a governance test. As Oman moves forward with its net-zero journey and carbon market framework, the question is no longer only how much emissions can be reduced. The deeper question is how those reductions will be measured, verified, reported and trusted. This is where the discussion becomes interesting. Carbon markets are often presented as environmental tools, but in reality, they are also accounting systems. A carbon credit is not simply a certificate with a green label. It is a claim that one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent has been reduced, avoided or removed. Like any financial claim, it needs evidence, ownership rules, audit trails, verification and transparency. In other words, carbon credits need accountants, auditors and governance professionals alongside environmental experts. Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals has described carbon market development as part of the country's wider net-zero efforts, including project registration, emission-reduction activities, and attracting international finance. The Ministry has also highlighted eligible project areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, nature-based solutions and technology-based solutions. Recently, the Ministry announced a

national regulatory framework for carbon markets, intended to establish clearer rules and streamlined procedures while encouraging participation from the private sector and SMEs. This matters because carbon markets can only work when trust exists. If investors, regulators, companies and the public do not trust the numbers, the market will not create value. A weak carbon credit is not an asset; it is a reputational risk. It can create greenwashing, double counting and false confidence. But a credible carbon credit can attract finance, reward real emissions reductions and support economic diversification. The accounting questions are simple but powerful: Where did the reduction happen? Who owns the credit? Was the reduction additional or would it has happened anyway? Was it measured using an approved methodology? Who verified it? Can it be counted only once? These are not technical details to be left until the end. They are the foundation of market credibility. This is also why carbon markets should not be separated from governance. A carbon credit without governance is just a promise. A carbon market without verification is just a trading platform. And sustainability without accountability is only branding. Oman's green hydrogen ambitions make this discussion even more important. Hydrom's third green hydrogen auction round focuses on Al Duqm region and is part of Oman's effort to strengthen its position in green hydrogen production and export. In Al Duqm, Oman has also attracted significant investment interest, including

As Oman moves forward with its net-zero journey and carbon market framework, the question is no longer only how much emissions can be reduced. The deeper question is how those reductions will be measured, verified, reported and trusted.

agreements reported by Reuters for projects in the Special Economic Zone at Al Duqm, with a \$4.2 billion deal linked to ACME Group's green hydrogen project phases. These developments show that sustainability is no longer only an environmental conversation. It is becoming an investment, industrial and financial conversation. However, major green projects require more than ambition. They require bankable contracts, credible offtake, clear risk allocation, strong disclosure and measurable impact. Carbon credits may support this ecosystem, but only if they are trusted. If carbon becomes a financial asset, then carbon accounting must become as disciplined as financial accounting. This is where accountants, auditors, regulators, tax authorities and finance professionals have a new role to play. They are not outside the sustainability conversation; they are at the centre of it. They can help design systems that measure emissions properly, prevent double counting, verify claims, link incentives to real performance and protect public value. For tax authorities, this is especially relevant. If green tax incentives, carbon credits, or climate-related benefits are introduced, the key question should not be whether a company uses sustainability language. The question should be whether it can provide evidence. A good incentive should be targeted, temporary, measurable and linked to real national value. Otherwise, public revenue may be lost without achieving meaningful environmental progress.

Why buying property in Oman has become more attractive than ever

AYA ALSIYABI

For years, international investors viewed Oman as one of the Gulf's best-kept secrets — political stability, exceptional quality of life and a location connecting the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Today, that reputation is sharpening into something far more concrete. Progressive legislation, investor-friendly policies and ambitious national projects are reshaping how international buyers view Oman. Property ownership is no longer simply an acquisition—it is a gateway to residency, lifestyle and participation in one of the region's most significant urban transformations. Oman's Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) framework allows eligible foreign nationals to own freehold property within designated developments. Beyond ownership, the framework provides long-term residency pathways for eligible investors and their legal family members, in accordance with the applicable regulations. This includes spouses, children — including adult children over the age of 18 — and eligible parents, enabling entire families to benefit from residency rather than the investor alone. Buyers are no longer limited to completed homes in established communities. They now invest at the earliest stages of entirely new destinations, positioning themselves to benefit from phased infrastructure delivery and long-term capital appreciation as communities mature. Recent regulatory developments have further strengthened this proposition. New residency provisions for eligible foreign property owners have eliminated the requirement for a local sponsor, reinforcing Oman's commitment to international investment and economic diversification. For overseas buyers seeking both a lifestyle and financial security, the case for Oman has become compelling. International buyers today are looking beyond luxury alone. They seek legal certainty, transparent regulation, long-term residency options, sustainable urban planning and stable environments in which to live, work and invest. Oman delivers on all fronts—with a reputation for safety, economic stability and measured, purposeful development. The greatest difference today is that investors are no longer buying into individual developments. They are buying into the future of an entire city. Sultan Haitham City represents one of the Sultanate of Oman's most ambitious urban projects and is rapidly establishing the standard for next-generation master-planned communities.

The real AGI race is about institutions

EVERY generation believes technology changes the world. History tells a slightly different story: technology creates opportunities, but institutions decide who turns those opportunities into lasting prosperity. Steam power did not automatically create industrial nations. Electricity did not transform every economy equally. The internet did not reward every country or business in the same way. In every technological revolution, the real winners were those that redesigned their institutions, regulations, business models and leadership around the new technology. Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is unlikely to be any different. If AGI reaches the capabilities many researchers and industry leaders anticipate, it will become far more than another digital tool. It could be the first technology capable of performing complex intellectual work once reserved for highly skilled professionals. That possibility changes the conversation completely. The question is no longer who can build the most advanced AI. The real question is who can build institutions capable of keeping up with it. The pace of change is already extraordinary. According to the Stanford AI Index 2026, global private investment in AI more than doubled during 2025, increasing by over 127 per cent. Around 88 per cent of surveyed organisations now use AI in at least one business function, while generative AI reached roughly 53 per cent population adoption within only three years—faster than either personal computers or the internet achieved comparable levels of diffusion.



DR ZIAD ALZAIDI

The writer is Strategic Management & Organisational Transformation Consultant, UK and Oman alzaidi.z2000@gmail.com

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At the same time, McKinsey & Company estimates that generative AI could generate between \$2.6 trillion and \$4.4 trillion in annual economic value, while the International Monetary Fund identifies AI as one of the most significant drivers of future productivity and economic growth. These figures are impressive. They also expose a new reality. For decades, national competitiveness has been built on infrastructure, investment, education, innovation and access to technology. Those foundations remain essential. Yet in the AGI era, another factor may become just as important: institutional adaptability. Countries with access to similar AI technologies may produce very different economic outcomes simply because their governments, regulators and organisations adapt at different speeds. The next generation of competitiveness may depend less on technological superiority and more on institutional agility. This is where the real challenge begins. Technology is advancing at extraordinary speed, while institutions continue to evolve through structures designed for a much slower world. Government reforms often take years. Regulatory frameworks are intentionally cautious. Organisational restructuring frequently spans several budget cycles. Leadership development still prepares executives for yesterday's problems rather than tomorrow's realities. This widening disconnect can be described as the Institutional Adaptation Gap—the growing distance between the speed of technological progress and the pace at which institutions redesign their governance, regulations, leadership capabilities and operating models. During previous industrial revolutions, institutions had

decades to adjust. In the AGI era, technology may advance within months while institutional reform still takes years. Closing this gap may become one of the defining leadership challenges of the twenty-first century. History offers a valuable lesson. Competitive advantage has rarely belonged to those who simply possessed better technology. It has consistently belonged to those who reorganised their institutions around it. Electricity transformed economies only after factories were redesigned around electric power. Computers delivered their greatest value only after organisations fundamentally changed how they managed information, decisions and workflows. AGI will almost certainly follow the same pattern. Around the world, governments are investing heavily in national AI strategies, digital infrastructure, advanced computing and research. All of this matters. But it addresses only half the challenge. The other half is institutional capability. Can ministries redesign policies as quickly as technology evolves? Can regulators remain agile without compromising accountability and public trust? Can executive teams govern effectively when intelligent systems continuously generate new policy options, economic scenarios and strategic recommendations? Imagine a ministry of finance responding to an economic shock shaped by AGI. An advanced AI system could analyse millions of variables, simulate fiscal scenarios and estimate the impact of policy alternatives within minutes. Yet if approvals, regulations and coordination between public institutions still require weeks or months, much of AI's strategic advantage disappears.

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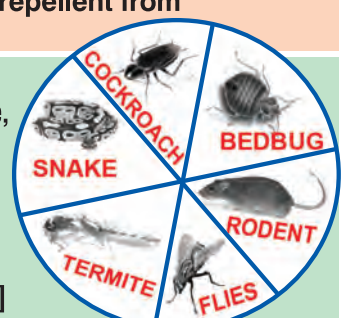
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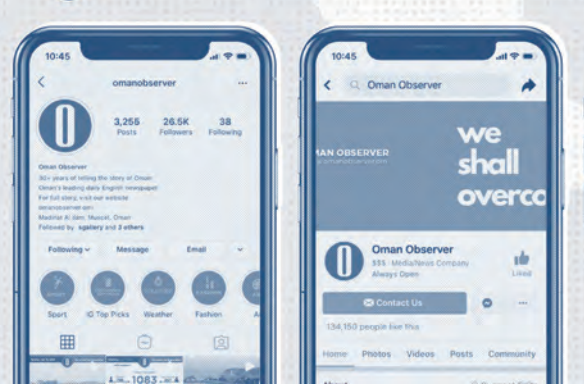
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ART/LIFE



OMAN’S FIRST FEMALE GAME DEVELOPER SECURES PLAYSTATION PARTNERSHIP

> 20

ON SECOND **THOUGHT**

WHEN THE DESERT STARTS GROWING THE IMPOSSIBLE



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

One of the things that stayed with me from a visit to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar wasn’t the breathtaking mountain views. It was walking through a farm where rows of strawberries sat beside grapevines, while nearby were zucchinis and other crops that, years ago, I would never have encountered in Oman.

Standing there, I couldn’t help but think about how much things have changed.

If someone had told me a decade ago that families would one day be driving to Barka to spend the weekend picking strawberries, or that people would be sharing videos of locally grown coffee, jackfruit and pineapples on social media, I would probably have smiled politely and dismissed it as wishful thinking.

From strawberries in Barka to coffee in Dhofar, Oman’s agricultural landscape is entering a new era. A journey through farms that are challenging old assumptions and proving that even the desert can nurture unexpected possibilities.

Back then, the conversations around Oman’s agriculture were very different. The country was rightly proud of its dates, bananas, coconuts and limes, but many of the fruits and vegetables we enjoyed elsewhere simply arrived by ship or lorry. Growing them here on any meaningful scale seemed unrealistic.

Today, every few months brings another pleasant surprise. One week it is strawberries, then someone discovers Omani-grown grapes, another post showcases coffee cultivated in Dhofar. Long time ago, people were talking about jackfruit, heirloom tomatoes, kale and other crops that once seemed completely out of place in a country better known for its deserts than its farms.

This transformation has not happened overnight. Food security has become one of Oman’s national priorities, with investment in modern farming, protected agriculture and smarter irrigation helping local producers grow more while reducing reliance on imports.

What I find even more encouraging is that many of these success stories are not driven by multinational companies. They belong to local farmers willing to take a chance.

Take the strawberry farm in Barka. What began as one entrepreneur’s farming venture has grown into a seasonal attraction where families spend the day picking fruit and seeing Omani agriculture in a completely different light. Farming is no longer something hidden behind a fence. It has become an experience.

It also makes me wonder what we might be talking about ten years from now.

If Oman can successfully grow strawberries, grapes, coffee, pineapples and even jackfruit today, what will tomorrow’s farmers achieve? As greenhouse technology improves and more people experiment with different crops, perhaps the next surprise is already taking root somewhere in the country.

For me, the most exciting harvest is not simply the fruit itself. It is the confidence that Omani farmers continue to experiment, innovate and prove that sometimes the most unexpected things

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



ENTERTAINMENT

US executive producer and actress Reese Witherspoon attends Apple TV Limited Series premiere of “Lucky” at the Directors Guild of America.

— AFP



MUSIC FESTIVAL

Guitarist Simon McBride of the British rock band Deep Purple performs on stage during the 60th Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland. — AFP



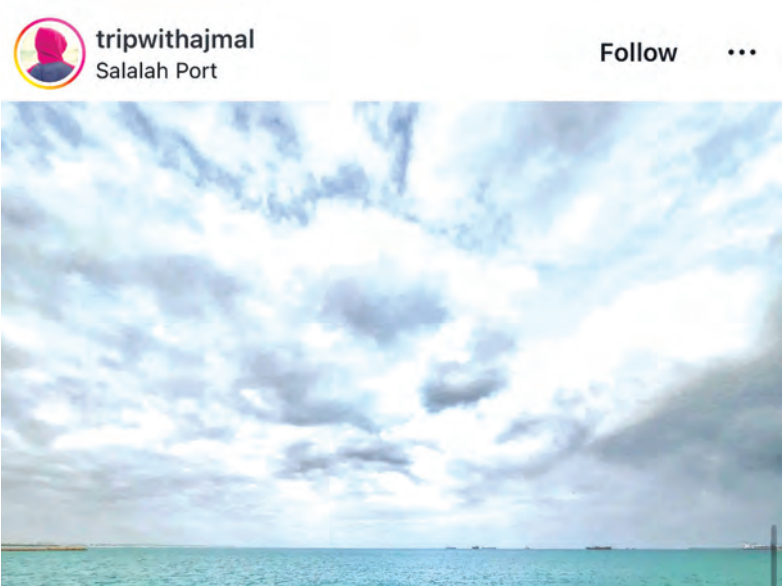
GASTRONOMY

Navy sailors are served ice cream during Sunday breakfast aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt as the aircraft carrier participates in Rim of the Pacific. — Reuters

INSTA PICKS



Rüppell's weaver bird in Salalah



Salalah port moments before rainfall

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ANTHONY HOPKINS, 88, SIGNS RECORD DEAL AS A COMPOSER



Two-time Oscar winner Anthony Hopkins released his first classical music single on Friday after signing a record deal as a composer. “Bracken Road” features on his upcoming “Life is a Dream” album, a collection of orchestral works written over six decades, “revealing a composer whose music shares the same emotional depth and storytelling that define his screen career”, label Decca Classics said. The 88-year-old Welsh-born actor, who won Academy Awards for his performances in “The Silence of the Lambs” and “The Father”, learned to play the piano at the age of four and went on to compose music for local plays as a teenager in the 1950s. “Music was my first desire, my first wish”, Hopkins said in a statement. “I’ve been composing music all my life. Some of these pieces have lived with me for decades and I still find myself returning to them”. “Life is a Dream”, which will be released on August 21, features works Hopkins wrote during different periods of his life that were inspired by his childhood, loved ones and his native south

Wales. It is performed by Grammy Award-winning conductor Gustavo Dudamel and the Philharmonia Orchestra. “It has been a true privilege to collaborate with the distinguished Philharmonia Orchestra and the virtuoso soloists, cellist Gregorio Nieto and classical pianist Sergio Tiempo”, Hopkins said. “My deepest gratitude and respect go to Maestro Gustavo Dudamel, whose artistry is an integral part of this musical journey. With the graceful precision of his baton, he transformed each note with profound and indelible meaning, creating a pictorial landscape that invites the listener to feel and imagine something uniquely personal”. Inspired by the landscape around his childhood home, Hopkins composed “Bracken Road” in 1963 when he was a young actor at the Liverpool Playhouse theatre, improvising on a piano before rehearsals. Another track “My Fatherland”, also pays tribute to Wales, while other pieces draw on loved ones and “the cinema that first caught his imagination”, Decca Classics said. — Reuters



PEOPLE ‘DISDAIN’ AI, SAYS DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

OSCAR winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan believes the type of cinema he is known for — large-scale, big-budget productions filmed largely on location — will continue to survive despite the rapid spread of artificial intelligence, a technology he says many members of the public actively “disdain”.

The director of “Oppenheimer” and “The Dark Knight” was speaking in Paris while promoting his latest blockbuster, “The Odyssey”, an adaptation of the Ancient Greek epic attributed to Homer. “The interesting thing with AI is I’ve never seen a technology that’s been so successfully adopted by Wall Street and by investors and by tech companies that the public has so thoroughly rejected,” Nolan said. “It’s just sort of an odd thing. Young people in particular, they coined this term ‘AI slop’”, he added. “There’s a sort of disdain for things AI”.

Artificial intelligence has become increasingly embedded in business software, online search tools and consumer services, while chatbots such as ChatGPT have attracted millions of users worldwide. Yet the technology continues to face strong resistance within creative industries, including film, music, publishing and visual art. The term “AI slop” is commonly used to describe the growing flood of low-quality AI-generated text, images, audio and video circulating across social media platforms. Nolan said he expected artificial intelligence to produce useful “imaging tools” for filmmakers, but dismissed claims that it could fully replace human creativity. “I think the idea that it replaces human beings wholesale and human creativity, to me it’s a nonsense”, he said. Concerns over AI’s impact on actors, writers and production crews were among the issues behind the major Hollywood strikes of 2023, which halted productions and cost studios billions of dollars. “The Odyssey”, reportedly made



The public has ‘thoroughly rejected’ AI, says Christopher Nolan. — AFP

on a budget of around \$250 million, allowed Nolan to film across several Mediterranean locations. The cast includes Matt Damon as Odysseus, alongside Zendaya, Tom Holland, Robert Pattinson, Anne Hathaway and Lupita Nyong’o. The director has faced criticism from Elon Musk and other right-wing commentators over the casting of Nyong’o as Helen of Troy, a figure celebrated in Greek mythology for her extraordinary beauty. Nolan’s adaptation is expected to combine extensive location shooting with the spectacular practical effects that have become a hallmark of his work. Homer’s “The Odyssey” is regarded as one of the foundational works of Western literature. It follows Odysseus on his 10-year journey home after the Trojan War, a voyage marked by encounters with some of Greek mythology’s best-known



figures, including the one-eyed Cyclops and the deadly Sirens. For Nolan, that appetite for scale remains central to cinema’s appeal in the digital age. — AFP

FEATURES

OMAN’S FIRST FEMALE GAME DEVELOPER SECURES PLAYSTATION PARTNERSHIP



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

FOR most gamers, PlayStation is where unforgettable adventures begin. For Omani software engineer and game developer Eng Sara al Mahrizi, it is where a childhood dream has come full circle. After years of dedication, self-learning and perseverance, Al Mahrizi has secured a partnership with PlayStation, marking a pioneering milestone not only in her own career, but also for Oman’s emerging game development industry.

Growing up in a household where gaming was a shared passion, Al Mahrizi was surrounded by consoles and adventures from an early age. Watching her brothers play PlayStation games sparked more than a love for gaming, it inspired a fascination with how these virtual worlds were created.

“I realised I didn’t just want to play games. I wanted to understand how they were made”, she said.

That curiosity led her to study software engineering before expanding her skills through online learning platforms such as YouTube and Udemmy. Along the way, she discovered that game development demands far more than programming alone, blending storytelling, design, art, psychology and user experience into one creative discipline.

Today, after nearly nine years of working in the field, Al Mahrizi’s persistence has culminated in a landmark partnership with PlayStation, an achievement she describes as a dream come true.

“I grew up loving PlayStation, so reaching a stage where I can partner with a global platform like PlayStation is something I

Omani software engineer and game developer Eng Sara al Mahrizi has reached a historic milestone by securing a partnership with PlayStation, transforming a childhood passion for gaming into a global achievement. Through years of dedication, self-learning and innovation, she is paving the way for Oman’s emerging game development industry while creating experiences that aim to bring Omani talent and storytelling to the world stage

never imagined”, she said. “It represents years of passion, learning and believing in a dream even when the path wasn’t always clear”.

Beyond its personal significance, she believes the partnership sends an important message, Omani developers can compete on the international stage.

“It shows that creativity and technical skills have no boundaries”, she said. “I hope it encourages investors, institutions and young developers to see gaming as a serious industry rather than simply entertainment”.

Although game development is often perceived as a male-dominated field, Al Mahrizi says gender was never the biggest obstacle.

Instead, the greater challenge has been changing perceptions of gaming itself.

“Many people still see games only as entertainment”, she explained. “But game development is about technology, entrepreneurship, design, storytelling and the digital economy. It creates businesses, jobs and intellectual properties”.

Her upcoming title, Ember, reflects that philosophy. Developed through the PlayStation partnership, the story-driven game explores emotional and psychological struggles through the journey of a character battling addiction in its broader sense, not gaming addiction, but deeper emotional and mental health challenges. Rather than focusing solely on action, Al Mahrizi hopes players leave with a lasting emotional connection.

Looking beyond Ember, she dreams of building a world-class Omani game studio producing titles for platforms such as PlayStation and Steam, while showcasing stories rooted in



Oman.

She is already developing another project inspired by a significant Omani historical figure, believing the Sultanate of Oman’s rich heritage offers powerful stories that deserve a global audience.

“My goal is to create games that compete internationally while carrying something meaningful from Oman”, she said.

For aspiring developers, particularly young Omani women, her advice is simple, don’t let fear prevent you from taking the first step.

“The first step is always the hardest”, she said. “Keep learning, keep playing, keep trying and let your passion be stronger than your fear”.

As Oman continues its journey towards a knowledge-based digital economy, Al Mahrizi’s partnership with PlayStation represents more than a personal triumph.

It is a milestone that signals the country’s growing potential to become not only a consumer of games, but also a creator of stories capable of reaching players around the world.