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Visit comes within the context of enhancing bilateral relations between Oman and France

HIS MAJESTY ARRIVES IN PARIS

THIS VISIT COMES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EXPANDING THE HORIZONS OF COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP ACROSS VARIOUS FIELDS, IN A MANNER THAT SERVES MUTUAL INTERESTS AND BENEFITS THE PEOPLES OF BOTH NATIONS

AN OFFICIAL RECEPTION CEREMONY WILL BE HELD TODAY (MONDAY) AT LES INVALIDES ‘THE HOUSE OF INVALIDS’ IN PARIS TO MARK THE AUSPICIOUS VISIT OF HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK arrived in Paris on Sunday, on an official two-day visit to the French Republic.

Upon His Majesty’s arrival at Orly International Airport in Paris, he was received at the foot of the ramp by Roland Lescure, Minister of Economy, Finance, Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of the French Republic, Nabil Hajlaoui, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Araimi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the French Republic, Amna hint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to the Unesco, a number of senior French military officers and members of the Sultanate of Oman’s Embassy in the French Republic.

An official reception ceremony will be held today (Monday) at Les Invalides ‘The House of Invalids’ in Paris to mark the auspicious visit of His Majesty the Sultan.

This visit comes within the context of enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries and



HIS MAJESTY’S VISIT SIGNALS NEW MOMENTUM

WHEN His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visits France, it is more than a diplomatic formality. It is a chapter in a relationship that has quietly matured over five decades into one of Oman’s most balanced European partnerships.

In a region where alliances often shift with geopolitics, the Oman-France bond stands out for its consistency, its focus on practical cooperation, and its refusal to be reduced to transactions alone.

SEE P8

expanding the horizons of cooperation and partnership across various fields, in a manner that serves mutual interests and benefits the peoples of both nations.

Earlier on Sunday in Muscat, His Majesty was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, Shaikh Al Fadhil bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers...

TURN TO P3

IN BRIEF

COMMEMORATIVE ANNIVERSARY COINS

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the issuance of a commemorative set consisting of 5 commemorative coins, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of its establishment (1975-2025).

This edition embodies a distinctive period in the journey of the Central Bank of Oman and documents its fundamental contributions to strengthening the pillars of the national economy and developing the banking sector.

The commemorative set is a tribute to the journey of giving and an affirmation of the Central Bank of Oman’s pioneering role in the economic development of the Sultanate of Oman for five decades. — ONA

The commemorative coins can be purchased from CBO offices or through the Oman Post at the Opera Galleria from July 19.

Oman condemns military attacks on Kuwait

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its condemnation of the military attacks on the territory of the State of Kuwait on Sunday. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman affirmed its full solidarity with the State of Kuwait.

It renewed its rejection of all acts that threaten the security and stability of the region, calling for restraint and the prioritisation of dialogue and diplomacy in a manner that contributes to containing escalation and enhancing regional security and peace.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said on Sunday that it carried out strikes against Kuwait and Bahrain in retaliation for US attacks on Iranian territory, warning any further aggression would be met with a “crushing response”.

Iran and the United States have both accused the other of violating their fragile ceasefire, straining negotiations meant to end the Middle East war.

The Guards “destroyed eight important US military facilities at the Ali Al Salem base in Kuwait and at the Fifth Fleet naval base in Port Salman in Bahrain,” they said in a statement.

“Any enemy aggression, whatever the pretext, even against insignificant targets... will have a crushing response,” the Guards added.

The ‘Al Rigga’ oil tanker sails in the Arabian Gulf waters, off the coast of Kuwait City. Kuwait came under attack from missiles and drones, the country’s army said on June 28. — AFP

A memorandum of understanding was reached in mid-June under Pakistan’s mediation, aimed at putting a lasting end to the war. The text signed by the United States and Iran said both countries, and their respective allies, were “not to initiate any war or any military operation against each other and to refrain from the threat or use of force against each other”.

The US military bombed Iran for a second consecutive day on Saturday, in what it said was retaliation for an Iranian attack on a tanker in the vital Strait of Hormuz.

The Guards said on Sunday that measures had been taken to control traffic through the strait and that violating ships would be dealt with more firmly than before. — Agencies

OMAN AND FRANCE TIES BUILT ON MUTUAL TRUST, RESPECT



PARIS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq arrived in Paris on Sunday on an official two-day visit to the French Republic. Upon His Majesty's arrival at Orly International Airport in Paris, he was received at the foot of the ramp by Roland Lescure, Minister of Economy, Finance, Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of the French Republic, Nabil Hajlaoui, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Araqi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the French Republic, Amna bint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to the Unesco, a number of senior French military officers and members of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in the French Republic. — ONA



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq left here on Sunday heading to the French Republic on a two-day official visit, in response to an invitation by President Emmanuel Macron. This visit comes within the context of enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries and expanding the horizons of cooperation and partnership across various fields, in a manner that serves mutual interests and benefits the peoples of both nations. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY ARRIVES IN PARIS FOR TWO-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT



FROM PAGE 1

... Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabri, Minister of Health, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, Air Vice Marshal Khamis

bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman and Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaoub, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force. During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of

the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority; Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; and Ahmed bin Mohammed al Araqi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the French Republic. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The programme aims to build qualified national cadres in the field of home care and upgrade the quality of health services.

Home care programme to ease pressure on health facilities

IBRA: The Ministry of Health celebrated the launch of the activities of the second edition of the first national training programme, ‘Training of Trainers’ (TOT), for home care services.

The programme, which is implemented by the Ministry of Health for the governorates of Muscat and Al Sharqiyah North with the support of Shell Oman, aims to build qualified national cadres in the field of home care and upgrade the quality of health services provided to beneficiaries in their home environments, thereby contributing to achieving sustainability and easing pressure on health facilities.

Dr Ahmed bin Said al Saidi, Director-General of Health Services in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, said, “This programme stems from the Ministry of Health’s keenness to invest in human capital and build qualified national cadres who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to lead training programmes and transfer expertise.

This supports the expansion of the implementation of home healthcare services and enhances the quality of healthcare provided to beneficiaries in their homes, in accordance with the best professional practices.”

He added that the selection of the training-of-trainers methodology reflects a strategic vision aimed at preparing an elite group of national competencies capable of transferring knowledge and unifying practices. This contributes to the sustainability of the programme.

Nahed al Jamil, Head of the Home Care Services Department, Ministry of Health, explained that the programme represents a qualitative leap in qualifying national trainers capable of transferring knowledge and unifying practices, noting that the national toolkit will serve as an essential reference to ensure the quality. — ONA

MUSCAT AIRPORT FOILS ILLEGAL ATTEMPT TO SMUGGLE RARE OMANI LIZARD

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

A smuggling attempt involving the rare Oman Spiny-tailed Lizard was foiled at Muscat International Airport, the Environment Authority confirmed, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The suspect was intercepted while attempting to illegally transport the species, which is considered one of the rarest and most endangered



Omani Spiny-tailed Lizard

reptiles in the world.

The lizard is native exclusively to the Sultanate of Oman, making Oman its only natural habitat. It is also listed under the Convention on

International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and Omani law strictly prohibits its trade or harm.

Experts note that the Oman Spiny-tailed Lizard is distinct from the larger Egyptian spiny-tailed lizard, being significantly smaller — about the size of a human palm — with unique colouring and a short, rounded tail. Demand for the species in international markets is reportedly high, with prices reaching up to RO 3,000 per specimen in Europe and the United States.

Summer programme boosts student skills and creativity

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION will implement the Summer Initiative in the coming period, supervised by the Directorate-General of Scouts, Guides and Student Activities.

This initiative aims to invest time optimally for the benefit of students and ensure the continuity of educational care within a safe and stimulating environment. It offers innovative activities that align with contemporary changes and meet the growing aspirations of students.

The programme targets students in grades 5 to 11, as well as students from the scout and guide units. The programme encompasses social, voluntary, artistic, cultural, literary, sports, global, scouting, guiding, and value-based aspects.

The programme aims to broaden horizons and develop cognitive, scientific, and intellectual skills, in addition to life and artistic skills. It also seeks to enhance information technology skills, scientific innovations, and entrepreneurship among students to keep pace with the modern era.

Furthermore, it creates greater opportunities to discover and hone students’ talents, bolsters their



The programme targets students in grades 5 to 11, as well as students from the scout and guide units.

experiences in various fields such as cultural, scientific, artistic, scouting, and guiding domains. It encourages innovative thinking through workshops, creative challenges, and diverse artistic activities, including drawing and theatre. The initiative also involves applying certain scouting and guiding traditions related to camping and experiencing nature, developing participants’ skills in exploration, challenge, and adventure, and training them in specific land navigation skills using scouting and guiding methods, such

The programme offers innovative activities that align with contemporary changes and meet the growing aspirations of students

as utilising a compass, determining directions, estimating distances, and measuring heights.

Regarding personal and social development and student care, the programme seeks to nurture and embrace students, pay attention to them and their ideas, and create a supportive environment for their growth. It aims to enhance self-confidence and self-esteem, develop leadership and decision-making skills, foster a spirit of cooperation and teamwork, and improve effective communication skills among participants. Additionally, it addresses undesirable behaviours while promoting positive behavioural patterns and social responsibility.

The 2026 School Summer Programme is witnessing an expansion in its implementation scope to include all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. This will be carried out over consecutive time periods that take into account the readiness and local conditions of the governorates, ensuring the quality of execution, the optimal utilisation of available capabilities, and providing equal participation opportunities for students across different governorates. — ONA

Oman participates in panel discussions on judicial development in Milan

MILAN: Oman, represented by the Supreme Judiciary Council, participated in the panel discussions of the heads of supreme courts, organised by the Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research in Milan, Italian Republic, under the theme ‘Towards Enhancing Judicial Communication.’

The event saw the participation of heads of judicial councils and supreme courts in Arab countries, alongside a number of experts and specialists in judicial affairs.

The Supreme Judiciary Council was represented at the session by Sayyid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Court. The panel discussion addressed four main pillars, most notably the strategic plans of judicial councils and supreme courts in Arab countries, a forward-looking presentation of the most important regional experiences and practices, the pillar of Arab initiatives for judicial communication towards enhancing the capabilities of judicial councils and supreme courts, and the discussion of recommendations and their implementation mechanism.



Sayyid Khalifa bin Said al Busaidy, Chairman of the Supreme Court, represented the Supreme Judiciary Council.

The Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research indicated that conferences of supreme court heads constitute an important result of joint Arab action and embody the keenness of Arab countries to enhance judicial cooperation and exchange expertise between their judicial institutions. It added that the supreme courts represent the apex of the judicial pyramid in Arab judicial systems and undertake a pivotal role in consolidating the rule of law and achieving justice.

The Center emphasised that enhancing communication between judicial councils and supreme courts in Arab countries aims to identify the strategic plans and directions of these institutions.

The first pillar, dedicated to the strategic plans of judicial councils and supreme courts, witnessed a review of numerous Arab experiences, including a review of a number of working papers on the roles of the judiciary in some countries.

Under the same pillar, the Sultanate of Oman addressed the long-term strategic plan of the Supreme Judiciary Council 2024-2040, which was presented by Dr Salim bin Zwaïd al Hashemi, Assistant Secretary-General for Planning and Digital Transformation.

The presentation covered several aspects, including the preparation and implementation of the strategic plan as an institutional model that aligns with the objectives of

Oman Vision 2040, enhances the efficiency of the judicial system, and consolidates the principles of justice and the rule of law.

Al Hashemi touched upon the most prominent digital transformation projects within the strategic plan, including electronic and virtual trials, digital integration with government entities, digital infrastructure development, the employment of emerging technologies, and the creation of electronic platforms for publishing judgments and studies, in addition to developing digital judicial services to contribute to improving the beneficiaries’ experience.

He indicated that the plan seeks to raise the efficiency of judicial services by reducing litigation periods, developing the enforcement system, upgrading the services of courts and the notary public, improving case management, and expanding alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, in addition to developing judicial assistance, translation services, and services provided to persons with disabilities. — ONA

حكومة مسقط

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Advertisement No. (19/2026)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE-24-129 (Re-Call 3)	Design & Construction of a Site for Itinerant Vendors in Al Maabilah South (Al Maabilah Masar) (Re-Call 3)	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-084 (Re-Call)	Maintenance of Arches Fountain at Qurm (Re-Call)	05/07/2026	13/07/2026
PRE-26-092	Landscaping Maintenance & Cleaning Works at Bousher (A)	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-093	Landscaping Maintenance & Cleaning Works in Bousher (B)	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-094	Landscaping Maintenance & Cleaning Works at Airport Area	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-095	Landscaping Maintenance & Cleaning Works in Al Amarat	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-096	Landscaping Maintenance & Cleaning Works in Qurayyat	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-099	RFP for Application Support for Oracle EBS CRM	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-100	Construction of Greenhouses	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-101	Beautification & Development Works of Muscat Gate & Al Jifina	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-102	Rental of Equipment & Vehicles for MM (Unit Rate)	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRE-26-103	Provision of Cleaners for MM	16/07/2026	06/08/2026
PRS-26-030	Purchase of Ink, Spare Parts, and Maintenance of Mainframe Printers	16/07/2026	06/08/2026

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and South Korean Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back inspect honor guards at the Defence Ministry in Seoul. — Reuters

SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN REAFFIRM CLOSER DEFENCE TIES

SEOUL: South Korea and Japan on Sunday reaffirmed their commitment to the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and agreed to revive joint search-and-rescue drills in a step forward for security ties between the neighbouring countries. Meeting in Seoul, South Korean Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back and his Japanese counterpart Shinjiro Koizumi agreed to work on regional stability bilaterally, as well as through their partnerships with Washington. “Both ministers shared the view to continue cooperation for maintaining regional peace and stability amid a grave security environment,” South Korea’s defence ministry said. South Korea and Japan have been working to develop closer ties since 2022 and overcome sometimes bitter historical differences, a policy continued by President Lee Jae Myung and Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. On Sunday, Ahn and Koizumi also agreed to continue fostering exchange between their air forces’ respective aerobatic teams — South Korea’s Black Eagles and Japan’s Blue Impulse — to further advance search-and-rescue exercises. — Reuters

IRAQ AUTHORITIES ARREST 47 OFFICIALS IN WIDE CAMPAIGN



Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi delivers a televised address, in Baghdad. — Reuters file photo

BAGHDAD: Iraqi authorities arrested 47 officials, including members of parliament, on Sunday as part of an anti-corruption campaign in the corruption-plagued country. Iraq’s new prime minister, Ali al-Zaidi has made two main vows: to fight corruption and to ensure a state monopoly on weapons. His anti-graft raids come before an expected visit next month to Washington, where he hopes to attract US investment and is expected to renew his promise to ensure pro-Iran armed groups hand over their weapons. Iraq’s news agency INA quoted senior officials as saying that 47 suspects were “arrested on corruption charges,” including members of parliament and other officials, with at least one from the oil ministry. The round-up began early on Sunday when Iraqi security forces, primarily from anti-terrorism units, raided Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone and another neighbourhood in the capital. The Green Zone houses the US embassy and other diplomatic missions, as well as international institutions and government offices. High-ranking officials and politicians also live there. — AFP

BANGLADESH’S EX-PM SAYS WILL RETURN TO DHAKA ‘THIS YEAR’

NEW DELHI: Bangladesh’s fugitive former leader Sheikh Hasina has vowed to return to her country “this year”, according to an interview published on Sunday, months after she was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity. Hasina, 78, fled to neighbouring India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her 15-year, iron-fisted rule. She has not been seen in public since, except for a rare speech broadcast to a packed press club in

New Delhi in January. In an interview with Indian broadcaster NDTV, Hasina said she was not afraid of death and that the verdict against her was “part of an illegal, unconstitutional and politically motivated process”. “Many conspiracies have been hatched against me. But breaking through every web of conspiracy... I was elected prime minister five times by the people’s vote and worked for the country’s unprecedented development,”

Hasina said. “I want to say clearly: overcoming every obstacle and every conspiracy, I will return to my country this year,” she added in response to a question on whether she would return despite the death penalty verdict. Last November, Hasina was found guilty by a Dhaka court of incitement, order to kill and inaction to prevent atrocities, and sentenced to be hanged. The activities of her former ruling Awami League. — AFP

Iran, US step up attacks, threaten to escalate war

IRAN LAUNCHED missiles and drones on US military sites in Kuwait and Bahrain early on Sunday, shortly after President Donald Trump threatened to wipe out the Iranian leadership if they did not stick to the interim agreement to end their war. Israel said on Sunday it had struck Hezbollah in Lebanon on Saturday, just a day after it agreed the latest ceasefire deal with Lebanon to calm fighting that Iran says must end if the wider agreement is to stick.

The US military said earlier it had struck Iran again, hours after a tanker was hit in the Strait of Hormuz, the world’s most important energy shipping route, which Tehran has largely closed for most of the conflict. “There may come a point when we are no longer able to be reasonable, and will be forced to militarily complete the job that we very successfully started,” Trump said on social media. “If that happens, the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer exist!” he added. The 14-point interim peace accord was meant to halt the fighting, which the US and Israel started on February 28, and reopen the strait while talks proceeded on issues such as Iran’s nuclear programme. One round of mediated talks, led by Vice-President JD Vance



People ride past a banner with a picture of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, in Tehran. — Reuters

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and Iran’s parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, was held in Switzerland a week ago and Washington waived sanctions on Tehran, but fighting has since resumed and intensified. About an hour after Trump’s post, Kuwait’s army said its air defences were responding to missile and drone attacks, while Bahrain said sirens had sounded there. Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps said in a statement its navy and air forces had launched missile and drone operations targeting US military sites in Kuwait and Bahrain. The Guards said US strikes had violated the ceasefire and “will result

in the complete halt of all diplomatic processes”, state-run Press TV said. The IRGC navy command said American bases in the region “will experience hell in the coming days”. A US official, confirming the attacks on US facilities, said that there were no reported US casualties or major damage to US sites in the Middle East but the situation was still unfolding. Hours later, alarms sounded for a second time in Bahrain, where authorities said an Iranian attack damaged a residential building in Muharraq province, with no casualties reported. Bahrain urged the UN Security Council to hold an urgent session to hold Iran accountable. The Kuwaiti army said it had intercepted two ballistic missiles with no damage or casualties. US Central Command said earlier that its forces had carried out fresh strikes after a Panama-flagged tanker was attacked by an Iranian drone on Saturday. “Iran was given a chance to honour the ceasefire agreement but elected not to,” Central Command said in a statement. US strikes were “in direct response to continued Iranian aggression against commercial shipping” and targeted Iranian military surveillance, communications, air defence, drone storage and mine-laying facilities, it said. — Reuters



PALESTINIANS IN FACE OF HEAT AND VIOLENCE

A Palestinian woman sits outside a makeshift shelter at a displacement camp in Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip, during a heatwave in the region. Gaza remains gripped by daily violence, with both the Israeli military and Hamas accusing one another of violating the truce in effect since October 10. The war flattened swathes of the territory, displaced most of the population at least once, and left hundreds of thousands of people living in tents and temporary shelters. According to the UN, at least 1.6 million of Gaza’s 2.1 million residents are facing high levels of acute food insecurity mainly due to Israeli restrictions on goods entering the territory. Trucks of aid and private sector goods have entered Gaza more easily since an October 2025 ceasefire, but international NGOs and the UN warn the situation remains volatile, with regular goods still too expensive for Gazans to purchase. Israel controls all entry points into Gaza, and denies entry to certain goods. Gaza does not produce enough food to sustain its population, with 75 per cent of fields once used to grow crops either destroyed or damaged since the start of the war in October 2023, according to the UN’s food agency, FAO. — AFP

TRAGIC ACCIDENT

Saudi Aramco helicopter crash kills 14



A helicopter belonging to Saudi oil giant Aramco crashed on Sunday in Ras Tanura on Saudi Arabia’s eastern coast on the Gulf, killing 14 nationals. “The relevant authorities have launched a full investigation to determine the cause of the crash,” the state news agency added. Aramco did not respond immediately to an e-mailed request for comment. The incident took place at 6 am local time (03:00 GMT), the state agency said, without providing further details. — AFP

FIRM ACTIONS

Indonesia police charge four after protest



Indonesian authorities charged four people after an anti-government rally in the country’s second largest city. Some demonstrators hurled objects including firecrackers and rocks, Surabaya police chief Luthfie Sulistiawan told reporters, prompting officers to take “firm actions” to disperse them. Authorities arrested 24 people and released most of them without charge. “We had named four people as suspects for property destruction and assault against officers,” he said. — AFP

HEAVY GUNFIRE

3 troops dead in Karachi terror attack



Three Pakistani Rangers were killed in a terror attack in Karachi, following an explosion and heavy gunfire. The Pakistan Armed Forces said that terror group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar was responsible for the “cowardly” raid on a Rangers camp. “The assailants, after a blast at main gate of the camp, attempted to breach the perimeter security, however, their nefarious designs were decisively foiled by the vigilant and resolute response of Rangers troops.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Protesters hold flamingo-shaped placards as they demonstrate in Tirana, Albania. — Reuters

Albania protesters pressure over Trump-linked project

TIRANA: Thousands of Albanians took to the streets of Tirana again this weekend, demanding the prime minister’s resignation and an end to a tourism project linked to US President Donald Trump’s family. Since late May, protesters have gathered every evening to oppose the construction of a luxury hotel backed by Trump’s daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner, planned in a nature reserve on the Balkan nation’s coast.

Opposition to the development has become a flash point for frustrations over perceived corruption, with protesters calling for Prime Minister Edi Rama to step down over what they describe as a lack of transparency in the development. The planned resort in the protected natural area of Zvernec in southwestern Albania was first unveiled in 2024, but the wave of protests was sparked after barbed-wire fencing and bulldozers appeared on its beaches in late May.

On Saturday night, protesters carried giant pink flamingos through the crowd, alongside banners reading “Resign”. “Our demands are very clear”, Luciana Kokaj, one of the organisers, said. No official figures have been released, but journalists have seen at least several thousand people gathering each night in the city centre. Their anger stems from “a lack of transparency, a lack of accountability and arrogance”, according to lawyer Irena Dule, speaking at the protest. — AFP

PLANE CRASH IN FRANCE KILLS 11



Eleven people were killed when a small plane crashed in the northeastern French town of Tomblaine. The plane belonged to a parachutist school. The pilot and all 10 passengers — five students and five instructors — died in the accident. The French interior minister was on his way to the scene, the interior ministry said. Yves Seguy, the regional prefect, told broadcaster BFM the aircraft appeared to suffer damage before plunging vertically to the ground. The crash occurred in a built-up area near a shopping centre. “Give or take a few meters and the accident could have caused collateral casualties,” Seguy said. — Reuters

PUTIN VOWS TO ENSURE RUSSIA’S SECURITY AMID UKRAINE STRIKES

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday vowed to ensure security in his country and overcome “challenges” as Ukraine has stepped up its retaliatory attacks on targets within Russia amid Moscow’s four-year war on its neighbour. “Yes, we see the problems, we are aware of them and are responding to them, but we will certainly ensure the security of both the country and our citizens, as well as the inviolability of Russia’s borders,” Putin said at

the United Russia party congress. “We will undoubtedly overcome all the challenges facing us today, including terrorist attacks on our territory and infrastructure facilities,” he added.

Meanwhile, a Russian attack on Kyiv wounded at least two people, the city’s military administration said on Sunday shortly after warning the capital was being targeted by ballistic missiles. Russia has targeted Ukraine with near-daily strikes since the launch of its

full-scale attack in February 2022, the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War.

“As of now, the number of wounded in the overnight attack has risen to two,” head of the local military administration, Tymur Tkachenko said in a post on Telegram. Several fires broke out in the Darnytsky district as a result of the attack, Tkachenko said earlier. Russian strikes in Dnipropetrovsk in central Ukraine and northern Sumy killed two people. — AFP

Venezuela rescue crews race for quake survivors

RESCUE CREWS raced on Sunday to find survivors in the rubble of Venezuela’s powerful earthquakes as the death toll reached 1,430 and hopes dwindled more than three days after the earth roared and rumbled. Tens of thousands of people were reported missing as collapsed buildings dotted cities in a country already enduring an economic crisis and political upheaval after US forces captured former president Nicolas Maduro in January. Millions of people were also feared to lack sanitation and other basic needs.

Experts say the first 72 hours after natural disasters are the key, narrow window for finding the living. After that the search becomes one of recovering bodies. A Salvadoran rescue worker who declined to give his name put it this way: “At this point, they are probably dead bodies. Thanks to God maybe we can find people still alive.” An 11-year-old boy was rescued from the rubble in Caraballeda, north of Caracas, on Saturday, three days after the magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 tremors, interim leader Delcy Rodriguez said. “Every life is a source of hope for Venezuela,” she said in a post on X, accompanied by a video of the rescue.

Facing public outrage at the response by local officials, Rodriguez thanked other countries for the outpouring of aid. Twenty-four countries have sent 521 tonnes of supplies, 86 units with dogs trained to locate people trapped beneath the rubble and more than 2,700 search-and-rescue personnel, she said. UN aid chief Tom Fletcher said that the death toll could continue to soar, adding that more than 50,000 people were missing.

The search for survivors saw desperate attempts by local residents to claw away rubble from buildings that collapsed in Wednesday’s two quakes. “It’s just very chaotic, hot and unorganised,” said Australian firefighter Craig Demeillon, 43, who travelled alone to La Guaira from Miami to help. “Hopefully there’s more people to find.”

There was joy in the hardest-hit coastal area of La Guaira, north of Caracas, when locals pulled an infant alive out of the wreckage on Friday.

In one social media video, a man welled up



Panamanian rescuers and firefighters stand on arrival at the Arturo Michelena international airport in Valencia, Venezuela. — AFP

in tears as he held the baby in his arms. The UN migration agency said it had examined available population and damage data and had determined that “up to 6.76 million people could be affected,” and would “require emergency shelter, safe water, sanitation and hygiene services, healthcare, protection support and essential relief items.”

National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez reported 1,430 dead and 3,238 people injured, while the United Nations estimated \$6.7 billion in physical damage — equivalent to six per cent of Venezuela’s GDP. Foreign nationals confirmed dead include 28 Portuguese, nine Spaniards, seven Chinese, two Brazilians, one Chilean, one Italian-Venezuelan and one Uruguayan.

Venezuelans — already battered by years of a failing economy and the turbulence of the US intervention to topple Maduro — were furious at the government. Yessica Mendoza was forced to transport her own daughter to a morgue in Caracas after 25-year-old Yesimar Rodriguez and her husband Jhomel Anaya, 26, did not survive the tumbling debris of their home in La Guaira on Wednesday. “We were the ones who pulled them out ourselves. No help ever came,” the bereaved mother, 43, said, adding that the couple would be cremated without a wake due to the rapidly

advancing decomposition of their bodies.

The government has restricted access to La Guaira state, deployed the military to the area and required volunteers to obtain a safe-entry pass. Anger among those impatiently waiting to volunteer surged as they waited for passes outside a concert hall in the capital. “You need a permit to save lives — just imagine,” complained Carlos Itriago, 27. “I’ve been here since dawn standing in line so I can go rescue people,” said Ezequiel Rivero, 53. “Look at what time it is... how many lives have we already lost by now?”

Rodriguez said she had spoken with US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who “reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the response efforts.” The United States said one runway at Simon Bolivar International Airport was partially functioning to receive US military planes, while a naval ship had arrived off the coast. It said earlier it was sending a disaster response team of more than 250 personnel, including three special search-and-rescue units with dogs. Venezuela’s worst earthquakes in more than a century have come after the oil-rich country endured more than a decade of economic collapse. The crisis has hollowed out hospitals and public services, driving millions to leave the country. — AFP

Over 1,300 excess deaths recorded in Europe heatwave: WHO

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said that over 1,300 excess deaths had been recorded in Europe since June 21 in connection with the record-breaking heatwave roasting much of the continent. Tens of millions have been braving a weekend of extreme temperatures in Europe as a deadly heatwave moves eastwards, with some countries announcing rising death tolls and health services warning of saturation.

On Sunday morning, French health officials said there had been around 1,000 more deaths than expected in that country just since Wednesday. And across Europe, “more than 1,300 excess deaths have been recorded since 21 June linked to high temperatures in Europe”, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X. “Heat stress is often called the ‘silent killer’ — and European homes, workplaces and schools were not built for these temperatures,” he said.

At least 191 million people are forecast to endure temperatures of at least 35°C in Europe, with the heat particularly

At least 191 million people are forecast to endure temperatures of at least 35°C in Europe, with the heat particularly intense in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, according to estimates. A total of 381 million people in Europe, excluding Türkiye, will see temperatures surpass 30°C,



People gather at Castle Square under water curtains and near a tanker providing free drinking water in Warsaw, Poland. — Reuters

intense in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, according to estimates. A total of 381 million people in Europe, excluding Türkiye, will see temperatures surpass 30°C, according to analysis based on forecasts from the

German Meteorological Service and 2025 population projections from the Joint Research Centre collated by Austrian NGO Klimadashboard.

Millions of people across the continent are currently “living under extreme heat, hundreds have died, schools are shut, grids are buckling”, Tedros warned. “Driven by climate change and global warming, the phenomenon of the ‘once-in-a-generation’ heatwave is now occurring nearly annual,” he said, pointing out that “Europe is the fastest-warming continent on Earth, heating at twice the global average”.

The WHO chief said the United Nations health agency was “working with its Member States and partners to address the health threats posed by extreme heat through focusing on preparedness, prevention and stronger health system responses”. He called on European countries to “implement heat health action plans”, as part of a push to safeguard health in the face of climate change.

The French public health agency said most of the heat-related fatalities involved older people, warning that the number was expected to rise as more information became available about deaths in residential care and private homes. Scientists have said the heatwave, which began on June 20, was the worst recorded in Europe, and the blistering conditions have disrupted power generation, damaged infrastructure and overwhelmed healthcare systems.

The heatwave would have been “virtually impossible” without human-caused climate change, which has made this week’s soaring night-time temperatures 100 times more likely than they would have been just two decades ago, according to scientists.

Thunderstorms could hit parts of France and Germany over the next day or two, with cooler weather forecast in much of Western Europe this week as the heatwave moves deeper into Central Europe and the Balkans, meteorologists say. — AFP/Reuters

OPINION

HM’s visit signals new momentum in Oman-France ties



WHEN HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK visits France, it is more than a diplomatic formality. It is a chapter in a relationship that has quietly matured over five decades into one of Oman’s most balanced European partnerships.

In a region where alliances often shift with geopolitics, the Oman-France bond stands out for its consistency, its focus on practical cooperation and its refusal to be reduced to transactions alone.

France was among the first Western nations to recognise Oman’s modern renaissance after 1970. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1972 and since then, engagement has been steady rather than episodic.

Unlike partnerships driven only by oil or arms, Muscat and Paris built ties on culture, education, maritime affairs, and later, on energy transition and heritage preservation.

At sea, both nations share an interest in keeping the Indian Ocean and Strait of Hormuz open and secure. That convergence of interests created trust long before the current global emphasis on ‘strategic autonomy.’

His Majesty’s state visit to France arrives at a moment when both countries are recalibrating priorities.

First, economic diversification. Oman’s Vision 2040 is moving the economy beyond hydrocarbons into green hydrogen, ports, logistics, tourism and critical minerals.

France brings strengths that align directly: expertise in renewable energy, nuclear

and hydrogen technologies, aerospace and sustainable urban development.

French companies are already involved in Duqm and in port projects. A high-level visit elevates these projects from contracts to national priorities, giving investors on both sides political cover and momentum.

Second, security and maritime stability. France maintains a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean and is a resident power in the Gulf’s wider neighbourhood. Oman’s geographic position, its doctrine of non-interference, and its record as a credible mediator make it a natural partner for France on maritime security, anti-piracy, and keeping trade routes stable. In a world of contested sea lanes, this is practical diplomacy with real economic stakes.

Third, culture and soft power. France understands that influence today is also shaped by museums, universities, film and heritage. Oman’s approach to preserving forts, aflaj systems, and coastal towns fits well with French experience in conservation and cultural tourism. Joint exhibitions, student exchanges and language programmes are not symbolic extras. They create the human networks that sustain trade and policy ties when governments change.

The visit of His Majesty to France signals several important points. Oman has long pursued a foreign policy of openness to all, non-alignment and quiet mediation.

Deepening ties with France reinforces that model. It shows Muscat engaging a major European power without closing doors

By strengthening ties with a trusted European partner and maintaining its independent approach, Oman reinforces its role as a reliable bridge-builder in the Gulf, offering France a stable and credible partner in a strategically important region

elsewhere. For France, Oman offers a partner that is reliable, not polarising, and rooted in the Gulf.

The most important deliverables in 2026 will likely not be in defence, but in energy. Green hydrogen, decarbonisation of industry, and sustainable port infrastructure are areas where French technology and Omani land, sun, and ports complement each other. If agreements emerge in these sectors, the visit will be remembered as the point when the partnership pivoted to the future.

State visits are often judged by MoUs signed. The longer impact will be on students, researchers, and SMEs. Expanding scholarships, twinning universities, and making it easier for French tourists to discover Oman beyond Muscat will give the relationship a constituency beyond ministries.

Oman does not seek patrons. It seeks partners who respect sovereignty and deliver substance. France, for its part, needs credible partners in a region central to energy, trade, and security. And His Majesty’s visit frames that convergence clearly.

If the outcome is more joint projects in green energy, stronger maritime cooperation and deeper cultural exchange, then the visit will do what good diplomacy should: turn shared interests into shared work. In a turbulent decade, that kind of partnership is itself significant.

France and Oman may not always make headlines. But their steady, respectful engagement is exactly the kind of diplomacy that endures.

CERN’S COLLIDER HALTS FOR UPGRADE TO BOOST DARK MATTER SEARCH

AGNES PEDRERO

The world’s most powerful particle accelerator will shutter operations for four years of renovations to dramatically boost its collision-capacity and the potential for unlocking one of the greatest mysteries of the Universe: dark matter.

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) — a 27-kilometre proton-smashing circular tunnel at the heart of Europe’s physics lab CERN near Geneva — has most famously been used to prove the existence of the Higgs boson, dubbed ‘the God particle’.

In the tunnel, running about 100 metres below the French-Swiss border area, superconducting magnets and accelerating structures propel particles to extreme energies and then smash them together at phenomenal speeds.

But from Monday, activity will stop, as the extraordinary device undergoes upgrades aimed to further increase the precision and intensity of particle collisions.

Once completed, the enhanced particle smasher, donning the enhanced name of High Luminosity LHC (HL-LHC), is scheduled to begin operations in June 2030, and to run for about a decade.

“This is a very important moment. From Monday, we will be entering a new phase,” HL-LHC project chief Markus Zerlauth told reporters. “We still have lots of physics questions without answers. There are still many discoveries to be made.”

The goal is to increase the “luminosity” — that is, the total number of collisions produced over a given period — by a factor of 10 compared to the LHC. The total cost of the upgrade is expected to tick in at 1.2 billion Swiss francs (\$1.5 billion).

That will be covered by CERN membership fees, along with in-kind contributions, making up 10-15 per cent of the total, including from the United States, Japan, Canada and China.

The upgrade will require fully replacing the components in 1.2 kilometres of the 27-kilometre tunnel.

New superconducting magnets, capable of further concentrating the particle beams, will be installed to increase the number of collisions.

— AFP

Oman–France ties deepened through shared history

OMAN AND France have enjoyed close commercial and diplomatic ties for centuries. Historical records trace these relations back to the seventeenth century, when French merchants reached Omani shores to benefit from the Sultanate of Oman’s strategic ports.

As a maritime crossroads linking East and West, Oman became a natural partner for France, laying the foundations for enduring trade and diplomatic cooperation.

The relationship was formalised in 1844 with the signing of the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship during the reign of Sultan Said bin Sultan, followed by the establishment of a French consulate in Muscat in 1896 under Sultan Faisal bin Turki.

Since then, bilateral relations have steadily expanded across political, economic and commercial spheres, underpinned by mutual respect and a shared commitment to dialogue.

A major milestone came in 1979, when Oman and France signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement covering trade, economic development, education, culture and training.

Today, the partnership extends well beyond traditional diplomacy. Oman and France share broadly aligned positions on regional and international issues, emphasising dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution and respect for international law. Their cooperation also encompasses maritime security, anti-piracy operations, renewable energy and green hydrogen, reflecting common interests in both regional stability and sustainable development.



AISHA AL DARMAKI

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His Majesty’s visit reflects Oman’s diplomatic approach of building strategic partnerships with France based on dialogue, mutual respect and shared interests

Cultural and educational cooperation has evolved alongside political and economic ties. Omani and French universities and cultural institutions have signed numerous exchange agreements, while cultural diplomacy has been strengthened through academic partnerships, research collaboration and artistic exchanges.

The Oman–French Centre in Muscat continues to promote language programmes, exhibitions and cultural initiatives that deepen mutual understanding and reinforce people-to-people links.

High-level visits have played a central role in strengthening bilateral relations.

The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos made the first official visit by an Omani ruler to France in 1989, establishing a modern framework for cooperation in defence, politics and the economy.

This was followed by the visit of President François Mitterrand to Oman in 1992, during which the two leaders inaugurated the Oman–French Museum, a lasting symbol of the historical relationship between the two countries.

Against this backdrop, the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to France, at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron, marks a new chapter in bilateral relations. As His Majesty the Sultan’s first official visit to France, it is expected to deepen strategic cooperation across political, security, economic, cultural and educational fields.

The visit is also expected to produce new investment agreements and cooperation frameworks,

particularly in renewable energy, advanced technology and green hydrogen. Strengthening partnerships between Omani and French private-sector institutions could attract new investment, support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and generate fresh employment opportunities.

Beyond economics, the visit provides an important platform for political consultation at a time of heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

The partnership also offers considerable scope for expanding cultural and scientific cooperation. Future initiatives could include deeper collaboration with Oman Across Ages Museum, the further development of the Oman–French Museum, expanded academic exchanges, and joint programmes in museum management, digital transformation and advanced technologies.

The Sultan’s visit therefore reflects Oman’s broader diplomatic approach of building strategic partnerships founded on dialogue, mutual respect and shared interests. It reinforces political trust, broadens economic and cultural cooperation, and opens new avenues for investment and human capital development.

More importantly, it demonstrates how a centuries-old relationship continues to evolve in response to the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari

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Struggles shape character, growth and wisdom



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author and a communications professional

LIFE HAS always a way of testing us! At times, the challenges seem unfair, the setbacks feel tremendous, and the pain appears impossible to understand. However, if we look closely, many of the experiences we once wished had never happened become the experiences that shape our strength, character, and wisdom!

Without pain and struggle, we would never discover how resilient we truly are. Hardship forces us to grow in ways that comfort never could. The strongest people are not those who have avoided hardship; they are those who have faced difficulties, endured them, and emerged with greater courage and understanding.

The same is true of the people we encounter. Without negative people, we might never fully appreciate the positive influences in our lives. Difficult relationships teach us valuable lessons about respect, kindness, boundaries, and the qualities we should seek in others. Sometimes, the people who challenge us the most become unexpected teachers.

Rejection and heartbreak can feel upsetting in the moment. A lost opportunity, a failed relationship, or a closed door often leaves us asking, “Why did this happen to me?” Yet, many people eventually discover that what seemed like a painful ending was actually guiding them towards something better. The job you did not get may have

opened the path to a more fulfilling career. The relationship that ended may have made room for a healthier and happier future.

Likewise, those who doubt us can unknowingly become a source of motivation. When someone says, “You can’t do it,” we are presented with a choice: believe them or use their doubt as fuel. Some of the greatest achievements in history were accomplished by people who refused to let the opinions of others define their potential.

Painful endings are often the beginning of remarkable new chapters. While endings can bring grief, uncertainty, and fear, they also create space for growth, opportunity, and transformation. Every season of life serves a purpose, even when that purpose is not immediately visible.

This does not mean we should celebrate suffering or pretend that pain does not hurt. Difficult experiences are difficult for a reason. However, we can choose how we respond to them.

Instead of asking, “Why me?” or saying, “I did not deserve this,” we can ask more empowering questions: How can I use this experience? How can this challenge make me stronger? What lessons can I learn from it? How can I become wiser, better, and more resilient because of it?

The answers to these questions often reveal opportunities hidden within difficulty. Growth rarely comes from comfort. It comes from overcoming obstacles, adapting to

Every meaningful achievement, every lesson learned, and every personal breakthrough is often preceded by struggle

change, and finding the courage to continue when the path ahead is unclear.

Faith and trust are essential during these moments. Trust that some endings are sent to make way for new beginnings. Trust that what feels like a setback today may eventually become one of the greatest blessings in your life. It may not feel good in the moment, but keep your head up and remain open to the possibility that life is preparing something better for you.

Every person experiences pain, disappointment, and hardship. The difference lies in what we do with those experiences. Some allow pain to define them, while others allow it to refine them. Those who choose growth use challenges as a stepping stone rather than a stopping point.

Your best life cannot be lived without great challenges. Every meaningful achievement, every lesson learned, and every personal breakthrough is often preceded by struggle. The obstacles you face today may be preparing you for the opportunities of tomorrow.

Trust that struggle is part of life’s journey. Embrace the lessons it brings. Be one of the few who gain strength through struggle, wisdom through experience, and hope through hardship. When you do, you will discover that even the most difficult seasons can lead to extraordinary growth, and that within every challenge lies the potential for a greater version of yourself.

CYCLING INDUSTRY BETS ON SMART BIKES TO BOOST SALES

At the Eurobike trade fair, hopes are high that smart and AI-enabled bicycles can revive an industry that has been dealing with years of flagging sales.

Artificial intelligence, long used in cars and smartphones, is now entering the cycling world in areas ranging from electric motors to safety and services.

At the stand of Avinox, a manufacturer of motors for electric bicycles, the DNA of parent company and Chinese drone specialist DJI has been transposed to cycling.

The motor on display features sensors that continuously monitor the cyclist’s movements and terrain conditions, allowing AI to automatically adjust the motor’s assistance to the pedal drive.

This makes the ride “easier and safer without having to think about it,” Avinox developer Ferdinand Wolf said.

The system even allows a rider to transmit their real-time heart rate so that the e-bike motor modifies the level of assistance as needed.

Elsewhere at the show, there is technology that aims to keep cyclists alive and injury-free.

At Germany’s Canyon, a racing bike equipped with cameras and radars promises to alert cyclists “to the presence of elements they do not necessarily perceive”, company spokesman Ben Hilldson said.

“If a car is parking, the system can anticipate the opening of a door and warn the cyclist,” he said.

The rider would then be alerted via either visual signals on the frame, vibrations in the handlebars or through technology inside their helmet.

Canyon is presenting a helmet fitted with a large visor capable of displaying real-time alerts or receiving an audio signal, depending on the user’s preference.

The products are for now in the prototype stage, Hilldson said.

Canyon is also working with carmaker Volkswagen on a communication system that would allow the bicycle to interact with surrounding cars and other infrastructure, with the launch expected in about three years.

The main obstacle: almost all vehicles currently on the road are not yet equipped to exchange such data.

Artificial intelligence is also shaking up services in the cycling industry.

At insurer Linexo “around 90 per cent of claims will be handled entirely automatically by the end of the year”, head of the bicycle division Soeren Hirsch said.

Automation handles standard cases, while experts review complex claims and detect fraud, “the only way to keep insurance premiums stable”, he added.

Start-up Wunderfix meanwhile offers repair services linking retailers, customers and shops via an application that allows cyclists to diagnose and, where possible, repair their bicycles themselves.

— AFP

Innovation a word we all use and none of us define

A FEW years back, I was in a room with decision-makers and senior stakeholders from across multiple ministries. We had gathered as part of Oman’s Innovation 2040 agenda to discuss priorities. The energy was serious. The intent was genuine.

But as the conversation unfolded, something quietly troubled me.

One leader said we needed to invest in innovative solutions. Another agreed — and began talking about artificial intelligence. A third nodded, then steered toward new technology systems. And a fourth, equally passionate, was speaking about something else entirely: being more creative in solving everyday operational problems.

Nobody disagreed. The room felt aligned. It wasn’t.

Each person was talking about innovation — and each one meant something completely different. No one paused to ask the most important question of all: what exactly are we talking about when we say that word?

This is not a rare scene. Across Oman’s government entities and private sector boardrooms, innovation has become one of those words we all use and none of us define. It sits comfortably in vision documents and strategic plans — precisely because it means everything, which is another way of saying it means nothing.

And this is not a small problem. It is a foundational one.

ISO 56002, the international standard for innovation management, defines innovation as “a new or changed entity realising or redistributing value.” Simple, precise and broad enough to cover all forms. But even within that definition, innovation is not one thing. Leaders need to distinguish between at least three types.

There is incremental innovation — improving existing processes, doing what we already do better, faster, cheaper. Then there is disruptive innovation — challenging how an entire sector operates, the way digital payments reshaped banking or e-government transformed citizen



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We are investing seriously in innovation. But investment without governance is energy without direction.

services. And then there is radical innovation — breakthrough change that redefines the rules entirely. Artificial intelligence is not improving how we work; it is fundamentally restructuring what work means.

Each requires a different strategy, different investment, and a different tolerance for risk. Mixing them without clarity is how organisations end up doing a little of everything and excelling at nothing.

And clarity must extend beyond the type of innovation to the type of value it creates. The ISO definition speaks of “realising or redistributing value” — but value is not only financial. A digital health platform bringing specialist consultations to patients in remote wilayats redistributes value through equal access to care. A fintech solution giving women who have never had access to a bank account their first pathway to credit and financial independence creates economic justice. An adaptive learning tool serving students with disabilities advances social inclusion. A clean energy initiative protecting Oman’s coastline generates environmental value for future generations. When a leadership team is explicit about which types of value they are committing to create — financial, social, or environmental — their investment decisions become sharper, their priorities clearer, and their impact far more intentional. Without that clarity, organisations default to measuring only what is easiest to count, and systematically underinvest in the change that matters most.

This is why governance is not a bureaucratic afterthought. It is the mechanism that turns good intentions into accountable decisions.

When a board cannot agree on what innovation means, it cannot agree on what to fund or what success looks like. Budgets get fragmented. Teams receive contradictory directions. The organisation produces activity — workshops, pilots, committees — without producing real change.

As Oman accelerates toward its Vision 2040 ambitions, this conversation is urgent. We are investing seriously in innovation. But investment without governance is energy without direction.

So the next time innovation appears on your agenda, before the presentations begin, ask three simple questions: What does innovation mean to you? Can we agree on a shared definition? And which of these three types are we truly ready to commit to?

And that conversation may be the most valuable hour your leadership team spends all year.





England's Kane celebrates scoring their second goal.
— Reuters

KANE BECOMES ENGLAND'S TOP GOALSCORER

HARRY KANE broke Gary Lineker's 36-year-old record to become England's all-time top scorer at World Cups on Saturday, adding another line to his extraordinary resume with his 11th goal at the quadrennial showpiece as the Three Lions won Group L.

Kane drew level with Lineker's mark during England's opening win over Croatia and made the record his own in front of an ecstatic crowd at New York New Jersey Stadium, heading a goal off a fine assist from Jude Bellingham.

"It's an honour to play with him. For me he's the best England player of all time," said Bellingham, after the 2-0 win over Panama. "He's the one who has showed up more than anyone, any England player. It's quite easy to play with him. In all honesty he's at a level at the minute which is just incredible.

"You don't doubt him at all in terms of whether he's involved or not you know he's going to make a difference."

England will play one of the eight best third-placed teams in the Round of 32 on Wednesday. — Reuters



Egypt's Mohamed Salah.
— Reuters

Egypt sweat on Salah fitness after hamstring strain

EGYPT: Egypt captain Mohamed Salah is suffering from a hamstring issue but the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) gave no indication on Saturday whether he would be fit for his country's World Cup last-32 clash with Australia on Friday.

Salah was substituted during Egypt's 1-1 draw with Iran on Friday after complaining of pain, and scans later confirmed a hamstring strain, team doctor Mohamed Abou El Ela said in a statement released by the EFA.

The 34-year-old has begun a treatment programme, the statement added. Salah scored one goal and provided two assists in Egypt's three group-stage matches as they reached the knockout stage for the first time.

Regular left back Ahmed Fatouh has suffered a hamstring tear and is unlikely to recover in time to face Australia, according to the EFA.

Centre back Mohamed Abdelmonem, who arrived at the World Cup after a season disrupted by injuries at Ligue 1 side Nice, sustained a severe ankle bruise before being substituted after 14 minutes against Iran. The EFA said he is preparing to face Australia.

Egypt finished second in Group G on five points and will face Australia in Dallas for a place in the round of 16.

— Reuters



Egypt coach Hossam Hassan



TICKET PRICES SKYROCKET FOR PORTUGAL-CROATIA CLASH



Croatia's Luka Modric. — Reuters



Portugal's forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo. — AFP

TICKET PRICES at resale platforms skyrocketed for the World Cup game between Portugal and Croatia in Toronto next week, with the average price for the cheapest ticket crossing \$3,000 late on Saturday, data from price-tracking website Ticketdata showed.

Portugal were held to a draw against Colombia in Miami, which meant Cristiano Ronaldo's side finished second

in Group K. Croatia finished second in Group L after they defeated Ghana in their last group game.

Portugal will now face Croatia at Toronto Stadium in the round of 32 on July 2 in a match pitting Ronaldo against his old team-mate at Real Madrid, Luka Modric.

The average price for the cheapest ticket stood at \$3,225 on secondary resale websites as of 11 pm ET (03:00 GMT), according to Ticketdata, the highest for

any round-of-32 game.

Ticketdata gathers data from resale platforms including StubHub and Vivid, according to its website.

The price had more than doubled from before kick-off in the game between Portugal and Colombia, highlighting the dynamic pricing system adopted by tournament organiser Fifa this year.

The system lets prices move with demand — a regular practice at US concerts and sporting events - and had pushed group-stage game resale tickets

above \$1,000.

An earlier Reuters analysis showed the prices for tickets and accommodation alike have pushed the world's biggest sporting spectacle this year further than ever into the hands of those with higher incomes, signalling a reshaping of the profile of World Cup ticket holders.

Fifa has urged fans to use only its own official resale platform, saying its resale and exchange marketplace is the only platform through which it can guarantee proper delivery of tickets. — Reuters

World Cup offers marketing lessons for Oman's branding

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

THE FIFA World Cup evolved far beyond being the world's biggest football tournament. Today, it represents one of the largest global marketing platforms where brands compete not only for visibility but also for consumers' emotions, loyalty and long-term engagement.

Speaking to the Oman Observer, marketing and communications expert Abdullatif al Maamari said that the ongoing Fifa World Cup 2026 has demonstrated that successful marketing is no longer determined by the size of advertising budgets but by the ability to create authentic stories that resonate with audiences.

"The World Cup is no longer just a football tournament; it has become

the world's biggest marketing laboratory," Al Maamari said. "The biggest battle on the pitch is no longer between national teams, but between global brands competing for the most valuable real estate in the world as the attention and emotions of billions of people."

According to Al Maamari, what has stood out during this World Cup is not the amount of money invested by multinational companies, but the strategic thinking behind every campaign.

"What impressed me most during this cycle wasn't the size of the budgets," he explained.

"It was the strategic intelligence behind the campaigns. The brands that succeeded were not necessarily those that spent the most. They were the ones that understood people the best."

Similarly, branding on



ABDULLATIF AL MAAMARI

referees' communication equipment, match official uniforms, digital LED perimeter boards, fan engagement zones and interactive social media campaigns have all demonstrated how every element of the tournament can become a valuable marketing asset.

For Al Maamari, these examples should inspire Omani institutions to rethink



how they approach sports marketing — not only during global tournaments but also in local and regional sporting events.

"These are not merely observations," he said. "They represent a practical road map. We are approaching a defining decade for the region, with the Fifa World Cup 2034 set to be hosted in Saudi Arabia. The question is not whether we have

the financial resources to compete. The question is whether we have the courage to tell our own story."

"On paper, the campaign featured some of the biggest names in world football and entertainment, including Lionel Messi, Lamine Yamal, Jude Bellingham, Thimothée Chalamet and Bad Bunny," Al Maamari explained. "But the film was never really about the celebrities. It was about a feeling."

Produced with a nostalgic 1990s visual style and set in neighbourhood streets rather than glamorous stadiums, the campaign reminded viewers that football greatness begins in ordinary communities.

"The message was simple yet powerful," he said.

"Legends are not born inside stadiums — they are born in the streets where children play without crowds or pressure.' In just two and a half minutes, Adidas didn't

simply promote football boots. It sold people their own childhood memories."

Nike adopted a completely different strategy but achieved a similar emotional impact. "Instead of producing a cinematic commercial, Nike released 42 signed Polaroid photographs across its social media platforms over a period of twelve weeks," al Maamari said.

"The images featured football icons such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Erling Haaland and Kylian Mbappé."

As billions of viewers continue to follow the action at the Fifa World Cup 2026, the tournament is proving once again that football is far more than a sporting spectacle.

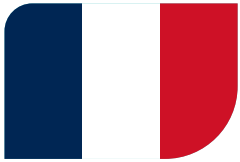
It is a global platform where innovation, creativity and emotional storytelling shape consumer behaviour and redefine the future of marketing.



QUALIFIED AND ELIMINATED TEAMS

WORLD CUP 2026

FOR THE ROUND OF 32

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
 	 	 	 
Group E	Group F	Group G	Group H
 	 	 	 
Group I	Group J	Group K	Group L
 	 	 	 

BEST THIRD-PLACED

Group B	Group D	Group E	Group F	Group I	Group J	Group K	Group L
							

ELIMINATED

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Industry remained the largest recipient of development financing, receiving RO 71 million.

Oman development financing reaches **﷼214 million in 2025**

MUSCAT: Development financing in the Sultanate of Oman totalled RO 213.8 million across 7,106 projects in 2025, down about 9 per cent from RO 234.9 million provided to 7,398 projects a year earlier, according to the 2026 Statistical Yearbook published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

Industry remained the largest recipient of development financing, receiving RO 71 million, or 33.2 per cent of total lending. The tourism, professional and public services sector followed with RO 66.3 million, representing 31 per cent, while fisheries accounted for RO 31.6 million, or 14.8 per cent. Mining recorded one of the strongest increases, with its share of total lending rising from 0.7 per cent in 2024 to 4.8 per cent in 2025, equivalent to more than RO 10.3 million, reflecting growing investment activity in the sector.

Regionally, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South together attracted the largest share of development loans, accounting for RO 53.3 million across 1,617 projects, or 24.9 per cent of the total. Muscat followed with RO 50.2 million distributed among 762 projects, while North and Al Sharqiyah South received RO 35.5 million. Al Dakhiliyah and Dhofar also recorded sizeable allocations.

Al Wusta posted notable growth, with its share of total lending increasing from 3.6 per cent in 2024 to 6.5 per cent in 2025, while Al Buraimi recorded the smallest share at 1.8 per cent.

Housing finance continued to expand despite the decline in overall development lending. Total housing loans rose 4.6 per cent to RO 151.8 million from RO 145.1 million in 2024, while the number of beneficiaries increased to 3,277 from 3,250. Al Batinah South received the largest share of housing finance at RO 40.4 million across 902 loans, followed closely by Muscat with RO 41.7 million distributed through 842 loans. Al Batinah North ranked third, ahead of Al Dakhiliyah, while Musandam recorded the smallest share. — ONA

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 28

Dhofar Governorate has 36 tourism projects under development, including 23 that have already entered construction, as the governorate moves to expand its hospitality base ahead of another busy Khareef season, an industry expert familiar with the sector told the Observer.

The remaining 13 projects are going through administrative and financing procedures before implementation begins, the expert said, pointing to a growing pipeline of tourism investment in one of Oman's most visited governorates.

Dhofar now has 123 licensed hotel establishments offering more than 8,400 rooms, the expert added. The figures highlight the steady expansion of the governorate's formal accommodation market at a time when seasonal demand continues to test capacity, prices and service standards. The growth comes as Dhofar looks to ease pressure



The growth comes as Dhofar looks to ease pressure on accommodation during the season months.

on accommodation during the season months while laying the groundwork for a more active tourism economy beyond Khareef.

For decades, Khareef has defined Dhofar's tourism identity. The cooler weather, mist-covered mountains and green landscapes draw visitors from across Oman and the Gulf, turning Salalah and nearby wilayats into the country's busiest summer destination.

But the latest project pipeline suggests a wider shift is under way.

Investment is no longer focused only on preparing for the peak season. It is increasingly tied to accommodation, leisure, services and visitor experiences that could support tourism across more months of the year.

The rise in licensed rooms is especially important during peak Khareef weeks, when demand for hotels and apartments can increase sharply.

More licensed establishments give visitors clearer

High-end tourism projects advancing across Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

OMRAN Group, the Omani government's executive for tourism development, says it is making headway in the development of a sizable portfolio of upscale lifestyle destinations and resorts across Oman - projects designed to enhance Oman's tourism and hospitality appeal.

The projects, entailing multiple billion-dollar investments, will significantly bolster the Group's expansive portfolio of assets currently distributed across the hospitality sector (33 properties), urban communities and Integrated Tourism Complexes (14 destinations), and experiential initiatives (18 in total).

Summing up its overall performance in 2025, Omran Group said: "Through targeted investments, global alliances, and active participation in leading international platforms, the Group reinforced its role in enhancing destination competitiveness, enabling private sector participation, and delivering sustainable, long-term value to the national economy.

The Group also successfully attracted foreign direct investment totalling RO 243.8 million, reflecting growing investor confidence in the opportunities offered by Oman's tourism sector," Omran - part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) - added in its newly published 2025 Annual Report.

Among the flagship projects is The Chedi Ras Al Hadd, a five-star beachfront resort on Oman's eastern coastline that will feature 250 luxury rooms designed to blend seamlessly with the area's distinctive natural environment.

Construction is progressing steadily, with overall physical completion exceeding 69% as of end-2025, positioning the resort as a major new luxury destination in



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the emerging Ras Al Hadd tourism corridor.

In Musandam Governorate, Omran is partnering with international hospitality brands to create world-class destinations. Club Med Musandam, the first Club Med resort in the Middle East, unveiled its architectural design in 2025 following an international competition won by renowned design firm AW.

Inspired by Omani heritage and Musandam's spectacular fjords, the resort is expected to generate more than 1,000 direct and indirect jobs while establishing the governorate as a leading destination for sustainable luxury tourism.

The group has also partnered with Enevororia to introduce Oman's first Nobu resort at the Yiti Integrated Tourism Development near Muscat. Set on a 75,000-square-metre site, the project will comprise a Nobu-branded hotel, branded residences, the signature Nobu restaurant, a private beach, premium dining venues, wellness facilities and recreational amenities, further strengthening Oman's appeal in the global luxury hospitality market.

Additional partnerships include an agreement with VA Group to develop the Muttrah Waterfront -

the first phase of the Port Sultan Qaboos masterplan - and the third phase of Yiti Integrated Tourism Development, reinforcing Omran's commitment to creating vibrant mixed-use urban and tourism destinations.

Construction of the Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Muscat at The Sustainable City - Yiti continued to make strong progress during 2025, reaching approximately 81.2% completion by the end of December.

The five-star beachfront resort will comprise 140 hotel rooms and suites, 30 luxury villas, the brand's signature Nikki Beach Club, multiple restaurants, and a Nikki Spa, adding another internationally branded luxury hospitality destination to Oman's premium tourism portfolio.

Meanwhile, in collaboration with Mohsin Haider Darwish Group, Omran is developing Alie Nivas, a hyper-luxury resort in Musandam featuring 30 exclusive cliffside villas, a Michelin-star restaurant and private wellness suites.

Operated by Van de Bunt International, the project combines ultra-premium tourism with renewable energy solutions, environmentally responsible construction and opportunities for local SMEs.

Dhofar expands tourism base as hotel rooms top 8,400

accommodation options and give regulators a stronger base to monitor pricing, standards and bookings. The economic effect also extends beyond hotels.

A larger hospitality market feeds demand for restaurants, transport operators, tour guides, laundry services, cleaning companies, maintenance firms, food suppliers, event organisers and small businesses.

For Dhofar, the issue is no longer whether it can attract visitors during Khareef. The governorate has already established itself as Oman's leading seasonal destination. The harder task is to turn high visitor numbers into stronger spending, longer stays and more consistent business activity across the year.

Industry observers say opportunities beyond Khareef remain underdeveloped. The Sarb season, winter tourism, eco-tourism, heritage sites, coastal attractions, mountain routes and family entertainment all offer room for growth if supported by stronger infrastructure and better

visitor services.

Execution will be critical. Projects still awaiting administrative or financing clearance will need to move forward without long delays, while those already under construction will have to meet the standards expected by visitors and investors.

The real test is not the number of projects announced, but whether they improve the experience on the ground — from accommodation and access to public facilities, transport, cleanliness, safety, entertainment and digital booking services.

That test matters because strong Khareef occupancy alone is not enough to build a resilient tourism economy. Hotels and tourism assets need activity outside the peak season, supported by events, packages, conferences, sports, cultural programming and regional weekend travel.

The direction is closely aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which identifies tourism as a key sector for diversification, employment and regional development.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



This recognition underscores the company's leadership in utilising innovative financing tools.

OETC WINS ‘BEST SOVEREIGN/SEMI-SOVEREIGN SUKUK DEAL’ AWARD

MUSCAT: The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has achieved a new milestone in its track record of excellence by winning the “Best Sovereign/Semi-Sovereign Sukuk Deal” award at the 2026 Global Banking & Markets (GBM) Awards for the Middle East.

This recognition underscores the company's leadership in utilising innovative financing tools and highlights the confidence of international financial institutions in its solvency and robust financial strategies.

On this occasion, Eng Hisham al Riyami, Acting Chief Executive Officer of OETC, stated: “This prestigious award reflects the success of the company's vision in adopting the highest efficiency standards within capital markets and its ability to attract high-quality investments that support infrastructure projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

The success of this Sukuk deal embodies our steadfast commitment to financial sustainability and our responsibility to enable the energy transition while developing the national grid in accordance with international standards.”

Furthermore, Ali al Reesi, Chief Financial Officer of OETC, emphasised the strategic importance of this achievement, saying: “Winning this international award is the fruit of continuous efforts to strengthen the company's financial position and optimise its financing structure to meet the expansion needs of the grid.

This award reflects the prominent position OETC has reached as a leading issuer in the Sukuk market, and our capability to manage complex financial instruments with high efficiency and proficiency.”

In the same context, Sulaiman al Riyami, Manager of Financial Planning and Reporting, expressed his pride in this achievement, saying: “We are proud to receive the ‘Best Sovereign/Semi-Sovereign Sukuk Deal’ award at the 2026 GBM Awards.

This is a prestigious honour that reflects our excellence in financial innovation, our commitment to sustainable finance, and our role in delivering long-term value to the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

This achievement represents a significant milestone in our journey, embodying the outstanding efforts, expertise, and fruitful collaboration among our employees, partners, and stakeholders who continue to support our vision and successes.

Bank Muscat joins the spirit of Khareef Dhofar 2026 as main sponsor

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to national responsibility and active participation in Oman's cultural and social landscape, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its sponsorship of Khareef Dhofar 2026. The season officially opened on June 21, 2026 and runs through September 21, 2026.

This sponsorship is an extension of the Bank's longstanding support for tourism development and the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Bank Muscat firmly believes that tourism is a cornerstone of a diversified national economy and a driver of sustainable development; values that are at the heart of what the bank does every day, as captured in its vision “To serve you better, every day.”

Khareef Dhofar 2026 is shaping up to be the biggest edition of the season yet, with over 125 cultural, artistic, sporting and entertainment events spread across Dhofar Governorate.

The programme is designed to cement

Lexus UXh summer campaign launched

THE luxury crossover experience in Oman is reaching new heights this season with the introduction of exclusive rewards on the premium Lexus UXh. Through the newly launched “Own the Momentum” summer campaign, individual retail buyers can easily step up to a sophisticated vehicle designed for modern city life.

Running until July 8, 2026, this seasonal initiative gives premium car buyers an excellent opportunity to upgrade their daily drives while enjoying substantial ownership benefits that bring total confidence to every journey.

To make ownership smooth and worry-free, this limited-time summer promotion includes a great package of advantages tailored specifically for the Lexus UX HEV range. Every new UXh purchased during the campaign period comes with 1 year of comprehensive insurance (Oman only), 1 year of free vehicle registration and a 3-year or 30,000 km service package.

These excellent benefits ensure complete peace of mind and professional care during the warm summer months, allowing drivers to focus entirely on the pleasure of the drive.

Known as the “Creative Urban Explorer,” the Lexus UXh stands out on the road with its bold design and expressive styling. At the heart of the vehicle is an advanced self-charging hybrid system that pairs a responsive 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine with a high-torque electric motor.

This system uses regenerative braking to charge itself automatically while you drive, delivering a highly efficient performance that is perfect for both daily city commutes and long coastal road trips across the Sultanate of Oman.



This initiative gives premium car buyers an excellent opportunity to upgrade their daily drives.

Inside, the cabin serves as a quiet and luxurious retreat from the summer heat, blending beautiful craftsmanship with intuitive technology.

The driver-focused cockpit features premium ventilated leather seats and the Lexus Climate Concierge for personalised temperature control.

The modern dashboard houses a stunning 8-inch high-resolution touchscreen, a colour head-up display and seamless smartphone integration, along with a convenient wireless charging pad to keep you connected on the move. Family safety is deeply integrated into

the Lexus UXh through the advanced Lexus Safety System+ 3.0 suite.

This collection of active safety features includes a Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Detection, Full-Speed Range Dynamic Radar Cruise Control and Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist to help protect you at every turn.

Luxury car enthusiasts and drivers looking for a perfect balance of style and sustainability are invited to visit their nearest showroom to experience the exceptional Lexus UXh firsthand before the summer offers wrap up on July 8, 2026.

Global Money Exchange launches Sound Box in Oman

MUSCAT: Global Money Exchange, a leading money exchange establishment in Oman, has launched an innovative “Sound Box” device to support its QR-based payment services.

The QR-based payment service is offered by its digital arm, the Global Pay Merchant App. The device provides merchants with instant audio alerts whenever a payment is received from a customer. Merchants can choose either English or Arabic as the notification language.

The facility was inaugurated at the company's head office in Ruwi. During the event, businessman Nihas received the first Sound Box device from KS Subromoniyam, Managing



The facility was inaugurated at the company's head office in Ruwi.

Director of Global Money Exchange Company. Speaking on the occasion,

Subromoniyam said that this is the first device of its kind in Oman and forms part of

the Omani government's initiative to promote a cashless economy.

He added that the Sound Box enhances payment verification for merchants by providing immediate confirmation of successful transactions.

Nihas welcomed the initiative, stating that the facility would be a valuable addition for businesses, particularly during busy periods, as it helps merchants instantly confirm that payments have been received.

Among those present at the function were Sonam Dorge, General Manager; Amit Taludker; Adv R Madhusoodanan; Krishnankutty; and Shaikh Ahammed al Khalili.



This sponsorship is an extension of the Bank's longstanding support for tourism development and the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Dhofar's standing as one of the premier seasonal destinations, drawing visitors from across Oman and the wider region.



TAYA BIN EID BAIT SABEEA
Deputy General Manager - Interior Regions at Bank Muscat

key locations throughout the governorate, including the beloved Ittin Square in Al Saada, Waqt Al Tifl at Awqad Park and Salalah Public Health Garden, as well as activations in the wilayats of Mirbat, Taqah and Sadah, offering something for every visitor.

Speaking on the occasion, Taya bin Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager - Interior Regions at Bank Muscat, said: “We see Khareef

This year's highlights include the second edition of the Dhofar International Theatre Festival, the inaugural Dhofar International Sculpture Festival, traditional symphony and coral performances and a varied lineup of Stand-Up Comedy shows featuring Arab artists.

Events are spread across multiple

Dhofar as far more than a sponsorship; it is a genuine platform for us to connect with the society. Our participation is rooted in a firm belief that a thriving national economy is built through the active engagement of all its stakeholders.

This season plays a vital role in elevating cultural and social awareness, showcasing the rich diversity of Dhofar's heritage and natural beauty, and ultimately strengthening tourism across the Sultanate of Oman.

As always, we are committed to ensuring that both customers and visitors to Dhofar have seamless access to Bank Muscat's full range of banking services, wherever they are and whenever they need us.

We are proud to be part of this iconic national occasion and to reinforce the Bank's presence at some of Oman's most important public and cultural events.”

Bank Muscat operates 13 branches and 3 Hisaby service centres across Dhofar Governorate, distributed in line with population density and commercial activity.

SHORTTAKES

WhatsApp emerges as Oman’s new shopfront as AI reshapes e-commerce

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

A growing number of Omani businesses are turning the messaging apps already on customers’ phones into fully fledged online stores, as artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes how goods are bought and sold across the Sultanate of Oman and the wider Gulf.

The shift is steering e-commerce away from standalone apps and websites towards conversational channels mainly WhatsApp where shoppers can browse, order, pay and receive an



TALAL
AL MARHOON

Founder and Chief
Executive Officer,
Wiya

invoice without leaving the chat. Behind much of that change is a wave of locally built AI platforms wagering that the fastest route to digital sales runs through tools customers open every day.

Among them is Wiya, an Omani AI firm that has made the WhatsApp storefront its central product. Its founder and chief executive, Talal al Marhoon, argues that the case

for conversational commerce in Oman is simple: customers are already there on WhatsApp.

“In Oman and the Gulf, WhatsApp is part of the daily purchasing journey,” Al Marhoon said. “Customers enquire, order and want to pay through it. I don’t believe in forcing someone to download a new app or navigate a complicated site when they can finish everything in a place they use every day.”

The problem the technology aims to solve, he said, is one many small and mid-sized firms share: enquiries scattered across WhatsApp, Instagram and company websites, slow replies and weak follow-up. The result is lost business. “Many organisations were losing customers not because of a weak product, but because of weak communication,” Al Marhoon said, noting that buyers tied to official working hours often lose sales to competitors who answer faster.

Wiya’s platform automates customer service and folds payment and invoicing into the conversation. Al Marhoon shares the story of a village shopkeeper selling water and consumer goods who had been taking orders over WhatsApp but could not keep up, sometimes losing sales without realising it.

Al Mouj Muscat adds 878m to Oman’s GDP

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

Al Mouj Muscat said it has contributed RO 878 million to the Sultanate of Oman’s gross domestic product over the past two decades, highlighting the growing economic impact of one of the country’s largest integrated tourism developments.

The findings, released as the waterfront destination marked its 20th anniversary, are based on an independent study conducted by Omani consultancy The Firm for Business and Economic Consulting.

The study positions Al Mouj Muscat as a major contributor to economic diversification, tourism growth and foreign investment in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

According to the report, Al Mouj Muscat has generated more than RO 1 billion in cumulative revenue over the past 20 years while facilitating RO 880 million in foreign direct investment and property ownership.

The destination also records around RO 385,000 in daily transactions and supports 167 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Around 43.6 per cent of its expenditure is retained within the Omani economy, reinforcing its contribution to local businesses and supply chains.

The development has attracted buyers and residents from more than 90 nationalities, while delivering a 337-per cent shareholder return through a diversified portfolio spanning residential communities, hospitality, retail, marina and leisure



The ITC has generated more than RO 1 billion in revenue while facilitating RO 880 million in foreign direct investment.

assets.

Ahmed al Massan, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Al Mouj Muscat, said the project had evolved beyond a conventional real estate development into a long-term economic asset for Oman.

“Al Mouj Muscat was never intended to be a conventional development; it was designed to demonstrate what integrated destinations can deliver for a national economy. Twenty years on, the results are clear, with sustained investment, measurable economic contribution, and a thriving ecosystem that continues to grow in scale and complexity,” he said.

“As we enter our next phase, our priority is to build on this momentum by unlocking new investment pathways, raising delivery standards, and positioning Oman even more strongly on the global map for tourism and integrated living.”

Tourism remains one of the project’s strongest economic drivers. Al Mouj Muscat attracts nearly four million

visitors annually through its integrated mix of hotels, marina, golf course, retail outlets, restaurants and year-round events.

Its hospitality portfolio comprises five branded hotels with a combined 1,196 rooms, which the study estimates have contributed RO 274 million to Oman’s tourism GDP since opening.

The award-winning Al Mouj Marina, featuring 400 berths and supporting 31 tour operator SMEs, contributes between RO 2.5 million and RO 3.8 million annually to tourism revenues through marine tourism, waterfront retail and leisure activities.

Al Mouj Golf has also strengthened Oman’s profile as a regional sporting destination. Ranked among the world’s top 100 golf courses on nine occasions over the past two decades, it has hosted 11 international championships, attracting players and visitors from around the world.

The destination’s events programme has become

another important economic contributor. According to the study, 142 sporting, cultural and lifestyle events have generated an estimated RO 245 million in economic impact, supporting tourism demand, hospitality businesses and the wider visitor economy.

HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Founder of The Firm, said the study showed Al Mouj Muscat’s impact extended well beyond direct financial returns.

“Our research shows that what distinguishes Al Mouj Muscat is the consistency and breadth of its impact over time.

The data demonstrates a development that not only generates direct economic returns, but also activates wider value chains, which are critical pillars of the country’s long-term development agenda, from SME growth to tourism demand and foreign investment inflows.

Few projects operate with this level of integration and measurable economic and social impact.”

Electric trucks to spur transport efficiency and emission reduction

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 28

Electric trucks are gaining traction in Oman’s transportation and logistics sector, with companies increasingly adopting them as a more efficient and sustainable alternative. This reflects a significant shift in the transportation system and directly supports the reduction of operational costs and emissions.

In this context, Oman Flour Mills Company recently received its new electric prime mover, affirming that this step will contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of national industries, developing the food security sector, and improving operational efficiency, in addition



Electric prime-mover deployed by Oman Flour Mills.

to reducing environmental and noise pollution and lowering carbon emissions.

The company indicated that

using electric trucks can achieve operational savings of up to 70% compared to traditional methods, due to lower energy and maintenance costs and increased operational efficiency.

In the logistics sector, Sohar Port and Freezone is witnessing the launch of its first fleet of electric container trucks through Hutchison Ports Sohar, a first for Omani ports.

According to official data, the fleet consists of 15 smart electric trucks operating within the Container Terminal, with the aim of directly reducing emissions, increasing operational efficiency, and supporting the transition to low-carbon, smart ports.

These trucks feature advanced

operating technologies, including intelligent driving systems, high-capacity batteries, and rapid battery swapping capabilities that allow for continuous, 24/7 operation.

Omani companies, along with port operators, are moving towards increased reliance on electric vehicles as part of a broader transformation in the transportation sector.

This transformation aims to reduce operating costs, decrease dependence on traditional fuels, and improve the efficiency of supply chains, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy.

Experts in the transport and energy sectors believe this

transformation will yield numerous economic benefits, most notably reduced transportation and logistics costs, attracting investment in clean technologies, developing charging infrastructure, creating new job opportunities in renewable energy and advanced technologies, and strengthening Oman’s position as a regional hub for sustainable transport.

Oman is also witnessing growing investments in charging station projects, clean energy technologies, and battery components, as part of a strategic approach to building an integrated electric transport system that supports the national economy and promotes long-term sustainability.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Norway lockout hits oil sector



Around 1,000 Norwegian oil service workers were locked out on Saturday as a labour dispute escalated, disrupting offshore drilling and some production.

The action affects several major service companies and is expected to reduce the country’s oil and gas output by about 12,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day next week. Safety-critical workers remain exempt from the lockout. — Reuters

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

BIS warns of global risks



The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) warned that rising public debt, financial vulnerabilities and uncertainty surrounding the AI boom are increasing risks to the global economy. BIS urged policymakers to strengthen fiscal and financial discipline to preserve stability, warning that persistent inflation and lingering supply shocks continue to pose significant challenges. — Reuters

AUTO SAFETY

Tesla probe closes



US safety regulators have closed an investigation into power steering failures affecting about 376,000 Tesla Model 3 and Model Y vehicles after the company completed a software-based recall.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the update addressed a defect that could increase steering effort at low speeds, reducing the risk of crashes. — Reuters

OPINION

Shadow AI: The hidden data risk business can't ignore



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS



K V CH MADHU SUDHANA RAO

The writer is AI researcher based in the USA

THERE is a new challenge hidden beneath Artificial Intelligence (AI), the fastest-growing workplace technology, which is Shadow AI. Shadow AI is not an advanced, complex cyberattack or the activity of any malicious, subversive insider agents, but it is often the product of good intentions. Shadow AI refers to the use of AI tools within an organisation without approval, oversight, or governance from IT or security teams.

An employee decides to upload a private, confidential contract to an AI tool to get a summary. A financial analyst thinks it is ok to paste private customer information into an AI tool to generate customer insights. A project manager believes it is okay to ask for an AI tool to optimise an internal strategy presentation for an executive meeting. The decisions above may save employees' time. However, each of those activities raises a critical question about data privacy.

It is a common misconception among employees that once an AI tool generates a response to a request, the employee's data is also deleted. This is untrue. In fact, the way AI tools handle data is dependent on a multitude of factors. These factors include the organisation's policies, the type of subscription offered, the privacy settings, and more.

Some enterprise AI tools are designed specifically to avoid using customers' data to train their AI models. However, many AI

tools targeted at the consumer market have less restrictive, more flexible data retention policies. The challenge of Shadow AI is not that all AI tools handle user data poorly. Most users are unaware of how a given AI service handles sensitive data and fail to verify its data-handling practices before using the service. There may be a data trail that users are completely unaware of.

Cybersecurity generally aims at preventing data theft. However, this goal is increasingly threatened by Shadow AI, where employees use unapproved AI tools that may inadvertently leak confidential information without realising the consequences. Shadow AI is particularly concerning in the governance of enterprise AI. As organisations deploy Generative AI, the balance between Generative AI and privacy is evolving and becoming increasingly challenging for organisations and regulators alike.

Businesses expect and demand that sensitive information be kept safe and that business confidentiality be respected. The emerging technologies that meet this expectation include: zero-knowledge architectures and client-side encryption, private large language models, on-premise AI deployments, confidential computing, and secure Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)

Clients are rapidly moving this technology beyond a competitive edge to a prerequisite for industries that need to protect sensitive

The challenge of Shadow AI is not that all AI tools handle user data poorly. Most users are unaware of how a given AI service handles sensitive data and fail to verify its data-handling practices before using the service. There may be a data trail that users are completely unaware of.

data. Clients are starting to care about the AI system's ability to protect their data as much as they care about its intelligence. The defining characteristic of future AI will be trust, not ability.

Establishing well-defined AI governance policies across enterprises is imperative for educating employees on the appropriate use of AI, restricting data sharing, and ensuring that approved enterprise-wide AI tools have privacy protections.

The need for frequent employee engagement initiatives, awareness sessions, and training is on par with the need to employ technological safeguards. Responsible AI considerations have outpaced fairness, explainability, and accuracy. Controlling and safeguarding the enterprise's most valuable asset, its information, is a primary concern.

Compared with earlier digital technologies, artificial intelligence is changing the workplace at an unprecedented speed and scale, with far-reaching implications. These technologies create new obligations for governance, accountability, and organisational understanding.

In the era of rapid technological disruptions, successful organisations are those that use AI with conscious responsibility. As organisations' strategic priorities necessitate the integration of AI, data protection and respect for privacy are no longer optional safeguards; they are central to responsible, enterprise-wide AI adoption.

KPMG'S SELF-DESTRUCTION PUTS BIG FOUR ON NOTICE

ANTONY CURRIE

It's so often the cover-up that gets you. Or in KPMG Australia's case, such a botched attempt to deal with serious allegations from a company whistleblower that it came close to a cover-up.

It's only been three months since accusations came to light that staff at the Big Four accounting firm used confidential information to win business. KPMG has now lost much of its senior management Down Under, including, this week, the chair of both Australia and Asia-Pacific, Martin Sheppard. Coming so soon after a PwC scandal, it ought to prompt an urgent overhaul of the industry.

Recovering from this implosion will be tough. PwC's revenue fell 26% in the year after its own scandal in 2023 revealed it had leaked government planning on tax-avoidance laws so corporate clients could dodge the levies

top-four bank Westpac.

The whistleblower complaint was made two years ago but only went public this year after a politician raised it in parliament.

It also claimed ethical lapses blurred the lines between those working on the separate internal and external audits for \$40 billion Telstra and helped KPMG secure work from \$65 billion Macquarie.

How many of those claims are valid is as yet unknown - largely because KPMG did not properly investigate them. One law firm it hired, Ashurst, told a parliamentary committee last week that it was tasked only with investigating the whistleblower as a workplace grievance issue, not the individual's assertions, as KPMG had claimed.

KPMG did, at least, admit at the end of May that it did not look into the allegations with "the necessary rigour". That was at the same time as accepting Australia CEO Andrew Yates' resignation, as well as that of head of audit and assurance, Julian McPherson.

Two partners entangled in the Lendlease affair left this week - Paul Rogers and Eileen Hoggett, who relinquished her role as chief operating officer earlier this month.

Recovering from this implosion will be tough. PwC's revenue fell 26% in the year after its own scandal in 2023 revealed it had leaked government planning on tax-avoidance laws so corporate clients could dodge the levies. KPMG's mess may sting more as it extends the mistrust to the core auditing function.

The sagas expose major flaws that may well affect its peers. — Reuters

Copper soars, but smelters can't bank on it to survive

WHILE the copper price hovers near all-time highs, the metal's value to smelters has collapsed after an unprecedented implosion in processing fees. The companies that convert mined concentrate into refined metal are now relying on what comes with the copper for their financial survival.

By-products of the conversion process, such as gold, silver and sulfuric acid are now just as important to a typical smelter's bottom line as copper.

This curious state of affairs has been caused by China having expanded smelting capacity far faster than the world's miners can deliver raw materials.

The disconnect isn't going away any time soon. Mine production is physically constrained and despite talk of Chinese smelter cutbacks, the country's refined copper production continues to rise. This has profound implications for both the copper concentrates market and the global production landscape.

BEYOND ZERO

Annual "benchmark" copper treatment and refining charges (TC/RCs) fell from \$80 per metric tonne and 8 cents per lb in 2024 to \$21.25 and 2.125 cents in 2025. This year they are zero. Spot treatment charges have been negative for many months, meaning smelters are effectively paying miners for the right to process their copper concentrate.

The headline TC/RCs in these deals have become almost meaningless. More important is the pricing of the precious metals in the concentrates and the sulfur that can be captured for conversion into acid. Higher gold and silver prices have a provided significant offset to the loss of what was a core smelter revenue stream.

Sulfuric acid has helped even more, thanks to the interruption to Gulf supplies due to the Iran war's closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Indeed, some Chinese copper smelters are processing more pyrite,



Employees inspect products at a copper company in China. Reuters



ANDY HOME

The writer is a senior metals columnist at Breakingviews

Mine production is physically constrained and despite talk of Chinese smelter cutbacks, the country's refined copper production continues to rise. This has profound implications for both the copper concentrates market and the global production landscape.

so-called "fool's gold", just for its higher sulfur content. Analysts at consultancy CRU estimate that processing fees accounted for 39% of total smelter income in 2018.

But last year, the biggest revenue generators were "free metal" and by-product credits, largely for sulfur, at 50-53% and 25-27% respectively.

"Free metal" is the difference between the payable content of the raw material and the smelter's actual recovery rate, across copper and other metals.

END OF THE BENCHMARK?

What's remarkable about this upending of the smelter business is that it's played out in such a short time. That reflects the speed and scale of China's build-out of processing capacity.

The country's refined copper output surged by 8% year-on-year to 14.72 million tonnes in 2025. Global mine production, by contrast, increased by just 1%, according to the International Copper Study Group.

The China Smelters Purchase Team (CSPT), a grouping of the country's largest producers, agreed in November to reduce output by 10% this year to halt the collapse in processing fees.

But actual production grew by another 7.4% year-on-year between January and April 2026, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

The speed of change in the copper concentrates market is forcing participants to re-think the market's reliance on annual "benchmark" deals to determine price. Chilean

producer Antofagasta is proposing a shift to spot index pricing in its mid-year negotiations with Chinese smelters, as reported by local data provider Shanghai Metal Market.

The CSPT, which has just added new members to enhance its negotiating power, is likely to balk, but without meaningful cuts to Chinese production, the divergence between annual "benchmark" and spot reality will yawn ever wider.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

The key question is whether this is a sustainable smelter finance model over the medium term.

For those with modern technology, capable of high precious metals recovery rates, and with sulfuric acid off-take arrangements, it probably is. "For them, the (TC/RCs) collapse has been painful on paper but manageable in practice," according to CRU. However, the consultancy warns that "the picture is considerably bleaker for smelters with older infrastructure, higher fixed base costs or geographic disadvantages in acid placement".

These plants are more dependent on processing fees precisely because of their disadvantages relative to newer players.

And many of them are outside China, posing another threat to a beleaguered part of the Western copper supply chain.

Glencore has already placed its Philippine smelter on care and maintenance and only committed to continue operations at its Australian processing units after receiving an A\$600 million (\$395 million) bailout from federal and state governments.

China, on the other hand, accounted for around half of global refined copper production in 2025, up from 15% in 2005, with more gains likely this year.

Chinese smelters seem to accept they are in a battle where only the fittest will survive.

The West's problem is that it is likely to be a major casualty of China's ferocious competition for raw material and revenue in a structurally under-supplied concentrates market. — Reuters

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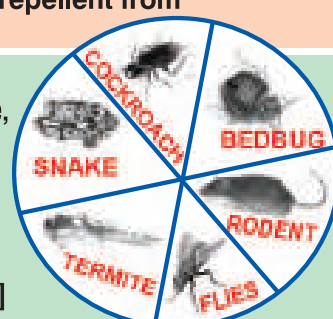
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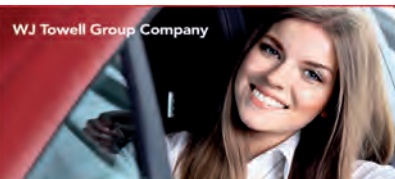
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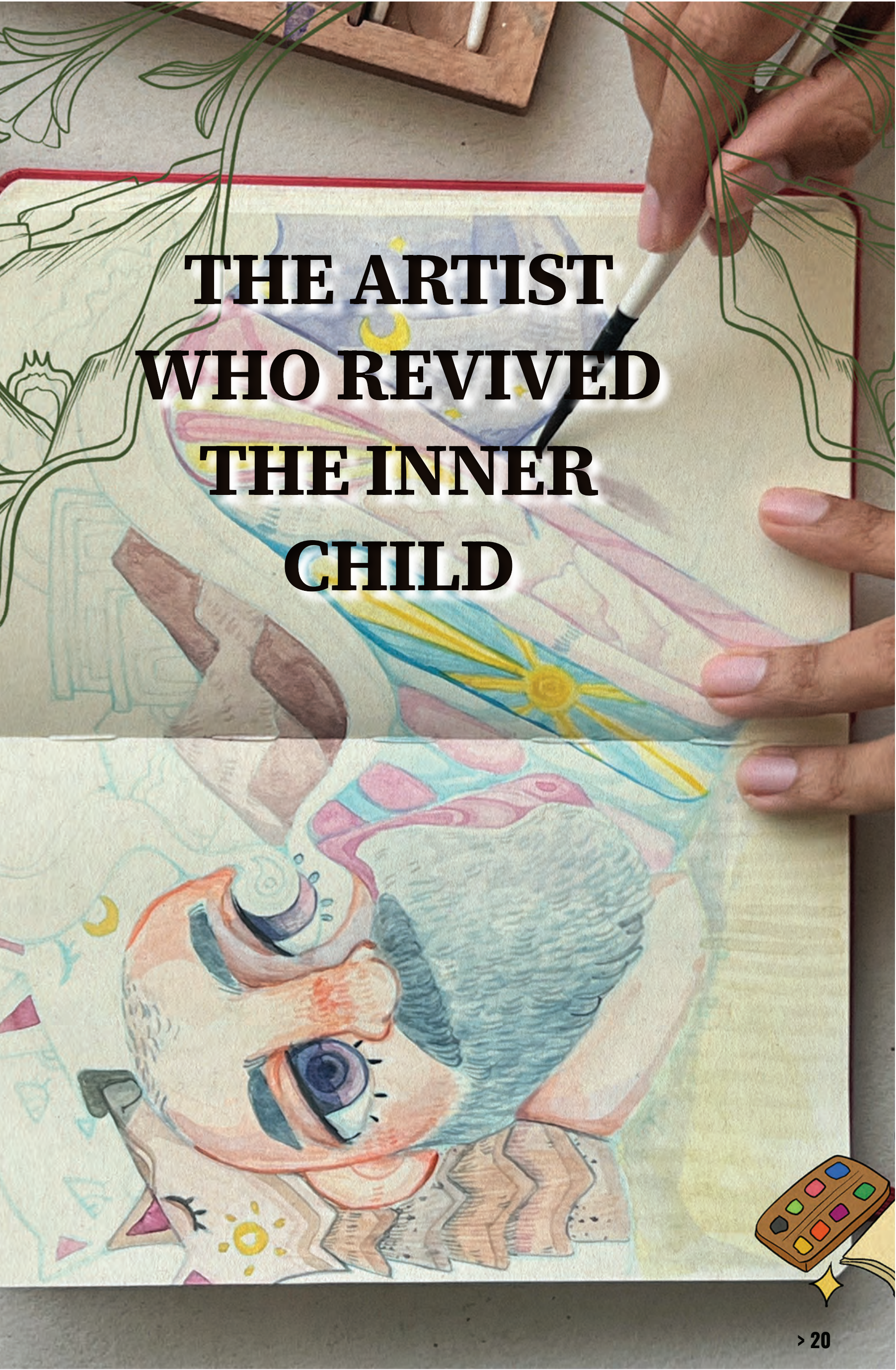
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ART/LIFE



THE ARTIST WHO REVIVED THE INNER CHILD

SCREENLEGEND

ANN BLYTH, FILM STAR OF 1940S-50S FAMED FOR ‘MILDRED PIERCE’, DIES AT 98



Ann Blyth, who earned an Oscar nomination playing Joan Crawford’s daughter in the classic 1945 melodrama “Mildred Pierce” and thrived in light and heavy roles during Hollywood’s Golden Age, died on Wednesday at age of 98, according to media reports

Blyth, who trained as an opera singer and was comfortable in film musicals, dramas and even a farce in which she played a mermaid, died of natural causes, according to the reports.

She made more than 30 movies during a film career lasting from 1944 to 1957. Blyth was just 16 when she gave a tour de force performance in the film for which she is best remembered - “Mildred Pierce.” The movie also gave temperamental cinema legend Crawford her only career Academy Award.

Blyth more than held her own on screen as Crawford’s status-seeking, hateful and murderous daughter Veda, who competes with her mother for the same man, her stepfather, played by Zachary Scott. In one scene, Blyth slaps Crawford across the face, knocking her down.

“Get out before I kill you,” an angry Crawford tells Blyth.

The movie was directed by Michael Curtiz, whose other films included the classics “Casablanca,” “The Adventures of Robin Hood” and “Yankee Doodle Dandy.”

“He had a great confidence in me, which in turn helped me,” Blyth told the Los Angeles Times in 2013 of Curtiz.

“She just blew everybody away,” film historian Alan Rode told the Times, referring to Blyth. “It’s certainly Joan Crawford’s movie, but she is really the spine of the movie. She is the epitome of the film noir daughter from hell. It’s just an amazing performance that stands the test of time.”

“Mildred Pierce” was a hit with the public and critics, earning an Oscar nomination as best picture. Crawford won the Oscar as best actress, while both Blyth and co-star Eve Arden were nominated as best supporting actress but did not win. Blyth’s career momentum was stymied after “Mildred Pierce” when she suffered a broken back in a toboggan accident.

Her versatility enabled her to shine in musicals like “Kismet” (1955) and “The Student Prince” (1954), spectacles like “The Golden Horde” (1951), comedies including “Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid” (1948) co-starring William Powell.

She had a lovely soprano voice and performed early in her career on the operatic stage. Blyth was a natural for film musicals, although for the songs in “The Helen Morgan Story” the studio insisted on dubbing her vocals with another singer.

Ann Marie Blyth was born on Aug. 16, 1928, in Mount Kisco, New York. She trained as a singer and actress as a child. While touring as a teenager with a Broadway play in Los Angeles, she was given a screen test that led to her Hollywood career.

Blyth had five children with her husband James McNulty, who died in 2007. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES

MASQUERADE

Attendees wearing period costumes take part in the 14th edition of The Grand Masked Ball clubbing event in the Orangerie of the Chateau de Versailles. — AFP



CULTURE

A jockey balances on a wooden plough sometimes holding and biting the tails of two bulls to steer them through a paddy field. — AFP



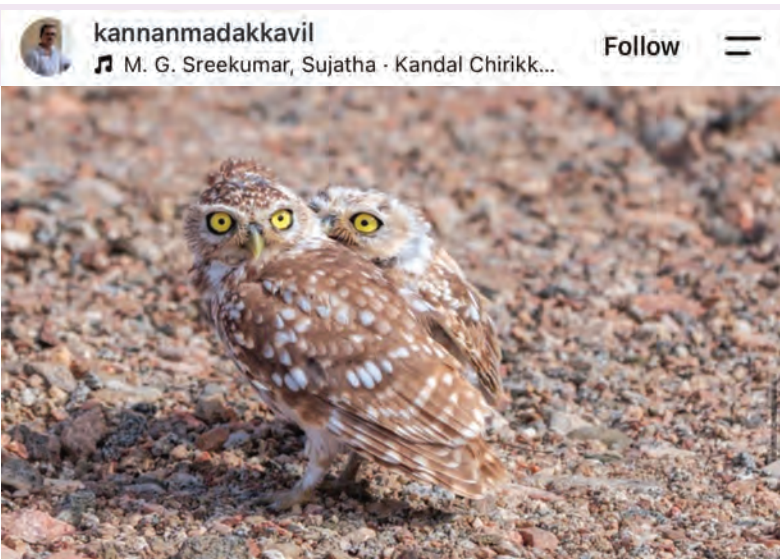
CELEBRITIES

Ferrari’s Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc signs autographs during the “Styrian Green Carpet” prior to the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Qantab seen from above



A beautiful little owl caught in a perfect pose

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MANDOPOP MEGASTAR JOLIN TSAI WINS BEST ALBUM AT TAIWAN’S MUSIC AWARDS



Mandopop megastar Jolin Tsai won album of the year on Saturday in Taipei, at one of the most prestigious entertainment events in the Chinese-speaking world, Taiwan’s Golden Melody Awards.

While Taiwan has only 23 million people, its pop music scene has an outsized cultural influence across East Asia, especially in China, thanks to creativity unfettered by censorship or government control.

Tsai, who cites the likes of Madonna and Kylie Minogue as influences, won for her concept album “Pleasure”, which was inspired by the seven deadly sins. She also won best female Mandarin singer.

“Making this album, for me, felt like I had been comfortably sitting in the passenger seat for a long time, and now I’ve finally taken the steering wheel myself — driving forward with all the partners who, like me, understand my music,” she told the audience.

Tsai, 45, has been hugely

popular across the Chinese-speaking world since the release of her debut album in 1999.

The awards celebrate not only Mandopop but artists singing in Taiwanese — also known as Hokkien or Hoklo — Hakka and indigenous languages like Paiwan, once suppressed but now supported and promoted by Taiwan’s government.

Best Hakka singer Sarah Chan, who gave her acceptance speech in Hakka, Mandarin and English for the album “Blue Hour Bloom”, said the recording had a much broader meaning for her.

“This Hakka-language album gave me the chance to speak more Hakka with my mother at home, and to have more exchanges with my family,” she said.

Hakka make up about one-fifth of Taiwan’s population, but many do not speak the language — which has five different dialects across the island — fluently after decades of its public use being discouraged.

— Reuters



THOUSANDS CELEBRATE VESPA TURNING 80



AN icon of Italian life, the Vespa marked its 80th anniversary on Saturday as around 25,000 scooters took part in a parade through Rome. Riders from across the world filled the capital’s streets, some wearing biker jackets despite the heat, others in T-shirts, as the distinctive hum of engines echoed through the city.

Some participants rode solo, others in pairs, even passing through areas usually closed to private traffic. David Baamonde from Texas described a two-week journey from the United States to Rome via Germany and Austria. “For me, the Vespa is a way of life, a sense of carefree living,” he said.

Long associated with Italian cinema classics such as Roman Holiday and La Dolce Vita, the Vespa is deeply tied to Rome’s global image. Mayor Roberto Gualtieri called it “an iconic symbol” of Italy’s post-war recovery and cultural identity, noting its role in shaping how the world sees the Eternal City.

The Vespa, meaning “wasp” in Italian due to the sound of its engine, was first patented on 23 April 1946 by Piaggio. It is still manufactured in Pontedera, Tuscany. Gualtieri described it as a symbol of an Italy “emerging from



the war and getting back on its feet”. The celebrations began earlier in the week with a “Vespa Village”

at the Foro Italico sports complex, culminating in the large parade through Rome. Thousands of “Vespisti” from around the world attended, showcasing the scooter’s rounded design, colourful bodywork, and signature handlebar-mounted headlight.

American siblings Andrew Ward and Julie Stover also joined the event, renting a Vespa in Rome. Ward said he had always wanted one, while Stover called it “classy” and “special”, noting its quality compared to other scooters.

Originally designed as an affordable mode of transport, the Vespa has become a symbol of Italy’s post-war economic and social revival. Piaggio executive chairman Matteo Colaninno said it represents both mobility and social progress, with nearly 20 million vehicles produced since 1946.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni also praised it as a symbol of “Italian creativity and style”. For many riders, however, its appeal lies in connection and community. Franco Gaudino called it “a legend”, while Illac Diaz said, “Vespa is like a family”.

Eighty years on, the Vespa remains a global symbol of freedom, design, and shared experience.

— AFP

FEATURES



Mohammed al Attar is an Omani visual artist, illustrator and writer whose work blends childhood, psychology and Omani heritage into imaginative worlds that explore identity, healing and human emotion.

RUQAYA AL KINDI

SOME children are content with watching cartoons, while others try to draw their favourite characters. As a child, Mohammed al Attar was preoccupied with a different question: where do these worlds come from, and how can a screen contain entire cities, characters and stories? That curiosity inspired him to imagine worlds of his own, complete with names, houses and roads.

As he grew older, so did his dreams. Today, Mohammed writes and paints with the imagination of the child who once believed fish could fly, birds could dive into the sea, and the impossible was simply a word invented by adults. “My imagination is fertile because my relationship with my inner child is strong,” he said. “My artwork reminds us that each of us has a child within who deserves wings to break boundaries and reach the impossible.”

His works exist somewhere between reality and dream. They are neither fully surreal nor strictly realistic, but occupy a space where

emotions take visual form. Mohammed does not paint simply to create beautiful images. Instead, he believes that emotions left unexpressed become burdens. “I believe repression is the enemy, and expression is salvation,” he explained.

This philosophy is reflected in recurring motifs such as glowing hearts, closed eyes, repeated faces and children embracing themselves. For Mohammed, art and writing are psychological tools that help him confront emotions, analyse behaviour and better understand both himself and others. He describes his creative practice not as a painting journey, but as a healing journey. “We find peace when we allow ourselves to confront and contain our feelings, accepting both the dark and bright aspects of them,” he said.

His work resonates with audiences because of its emotional honesty. Rather than avoiding difficult feelings, he transforms them into colourful, symbolic compositions. Through people’s responses, he discovered that art creates a safe space where viewers realise they

are not alone in their struggles.

Omani heritage is another defining influence. Traditional dress, castles, old houses and palm trees frequently appear throughout his paintings, not as decorative elements, but as living characters within imagined stories. “Omani heritage and identity are a library of stories and legends that nourish my imagination,” he noted. “I don’t merely document identity, I reimagine it and create new extensions for it.”

Faces also dominate his compositions, often with multiple expressions contained within a single figure. To Mohammed, people do not possess one fixed identity but many selves that question, struggle and grow together. Likewise, the symmetry found throughout his work began as an artistic challenge before evolving into a reflection of his own journey of self-exploration.

At the heart of Mohammed’s artistic world is childhood, not as a stage of life, but as a permanent part of the human spirit that continues to wonder, dream and hope regardless of age. His childlike figures stand

facing the world with open hearts, reminding viewers of the innocence often lost in adulthood.

Among his most emotional works are those dedicated to Palestine. While acknowledging that no painting can fully express its story, he sought to capture both pain and hope through symbols of traditional dress, olive trees and homeland. “These works were not merely a political stance, but an extension of my belief that art should be a space where people feel they are not alone,” he said.

Mohammed’s creativity extends beyond gallery walls into books, clothing, furniture and everyday objects. He dreams of making art part of daily life, believing stories can live on a coffee cup, notebook or piece of fabric.

Rather than fearing artistic block, he continually shifts between painting, writing and digital media, describing constant renewal as “immunity against artistic block”.

He describes his philosophy as “simple yet profound”, but behind those words lies a world of children who never stopped dreaming, hearts learning to heal, and imagination that remains open to everyone.

