

OMAN
Observer
DAILY



VOL. 45, NO. 228
PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

2010000387405

The Observer is bringing out an online supplement on FIFA World Cup 2026, which will be published on [www.omanobserver.om](#) at 12 pm daily.

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ OUTLINES ROAD MAP FOR INVESTMENT, ENERGY, DEFENCE, EDUCATION

OMAN, FRANCE FORGE NEW ERA OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

THE Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic have emphasised the importance of developing investment relations between the two countries, highlighting the need to increase mutual investment in each country's productive sectors. This was stated in the joint communique issued at the conclusion of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the French Republic.

The full text of the communique reads as follows:

"On June 29, 2026, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, paid an official visit to France at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic.

This first visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to France reflects the long-standing and trustworthy bilateral relationship between France and the Sultanate of Oman, established in the late 19th century, when the French consulate opened in Muscat in 1894.

His Majesty the Sultan and the French President held an official discussion session during which they commended the intensification of the bilateral contacts over the last year at all levels and emphasised their shared commitment to strengthening their comprehensive and forward-looking bilateral partnership in a variety of areas.

They welcomed the positive outcomes of the first strategic dialogue that took place in Paris on April 14, 2026 and of recent ministerial visits, including of the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs to Muscat on May 1, which resulted in tangible progress in political, economic, defence and cultural areas.

His Majesty the Sultan and the French President opened the Franco-Omani business forum, which brought together more than 60 French and Omani companies. This event helped strengthen business relations between the two countries and led to the signing of major economic contracts in the fields of renewable energy, water and aerospace.

TURN TO P2



HIS MAJESTY CONCLUDES VISIT TO FRANCE EN ROUTE TO UNITED KINGDOM ON A PRIVATE VISIT

OMAN, FRANCE AGREE TO STRENGTHEN MILITARY COOPERATION, MARITIME INTELLIGENCE

BOTH COUNTRIES PLEDGE TO INCREASE TWO-WAY INVESTMENTS, LEVERAGING OMAN VISION 2040 AND FRANCE 2030

AGREEMENTS TO DEEPEN COLLABORATION IN RENEWABLE ENERGY, HYDROGEN, LOGISTICS

PARTNERSHIP EXPANDS STUDENT EXCHANGES, RESEARCH COLLABORATION, FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

TWO LEADERS REAFFIRMED SUPPORT FOR DIALOGUE, DE-ESCALATION, FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION

HM, Macron grace signing of 12 agreements, MoUs

PARIS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic graced at the Élysée Palace in Paris on Monday the signing of 12 agreements, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and declarations of intent between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic.

An agreement on the training of Omani medical specialists was signed between the Ministry of Health and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. It was signed on behalf of the Sultanate of Oman by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and on behalf of France by Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

A Memorandum of



Understanding was also signed in the fields of logistics, ports, and the Muscat Metro project, between the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the French Ministry of

Transport. It was signed for Oman by Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and for France by Philippe Tabarot, Minister of Transport.

As part of efforts to boost

economic cooperation, a memorandum of understanding on investment promotion was inked between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the French ministry responsible for foreign trade and economic attractiveness. It was signed for Oman by Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and for France by Nicolas Forissier, Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness.

In the civil aviation sector, a memorandum of understanding on air transport was signed between the Civil Aviation Authority and the French Ministry of Transport. TURN TO P4

OMAN, FRANCE UPGRADE TIES



WHEN His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sat down with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, the optics mattered. The Republican Guard at Les Invalides, the two national anthems, and the Guard of Honour. But what will endure from now on is not a ceremony. It is the substance: 12 agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and a Declaration of Intent that reposition Oman-France ties for the next decade. This was not a visit to restate friendship but rather a visit to convert alignment into projects.

— SEE P8

OMAN AND FRANCE FORGE



FROM PAGE 1

Both sides commended the dynamism of the bilateral economic relations and expressed their wish to expand them further by enhancing bilateral trade and facilitating trade flows between the Sultanate of Oman and France. They reiterated their joint commitment to implementing projects of mutual interest, based on the long-standing presence of French companies in the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides emphasised the importance of developing investment relations between the two countries, highlighting the need to increase mutual investment in each country's productive

sectors. This would be achieved through partnership opportunities provided by the Oman Vision 2040 and France 2030, particularly in the areas of renewable energy, hydrogen, maritime infrastructure, logistics, information technology, transportation, tourism, culture and the space industry. In this context, both sides welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Investment Promotion, agreeing to leverage it as a key executive instrument to operationalise these ambitions and facilitate concrete investment flows.

His Majesty the Sultan and the French President also reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening their cooperation in the strategic

sectors of civil aviation and space. To this end, they stressed the importance of signing a technical cooperation agreement between the French Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Omani Civil Aviation Authority, a letter of intent and a memorandum of understanding on transports including cooperation in urban transport and metro system.

France also welcomes the partnership established between Oman and Airbus for the construction of Oman's first satellite and the partnership between CMA-CGM and Asyad Group to expand and integrate its logistics networks around the ports of Oman as well as the recently signed partnership between Oman

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic received His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday at the Elysée Palace in the French capital, Paris. President Macron welcomed His Majesty the Sultan and his accompanying delegation as esteemed guests of the French Republic.

Upon His Majesty's arrival at the forecourt of the French Republican Palace, the Guard of Honour gave a military salute to His Majesty, while martial musical pieces were performed. His Majesty then proceeded to inspect the Guard of Honour.

Thereafter, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with senior French dignitaries present to receive him, while the French President shook hands with the members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty.

Afterwards, commemorative gifts were exchanged between His Majesty the Sultan and the French President, followed by a commemorative photograph to mark the occasion of the visit.

His Majesty the Sultan and the French President then held a bilateral meeting, during which they discussed a range of political and economic issues and files of mutual interest to both countries. The meeting also addressed the most significant current developments and evolving situations on the regional and international arenas, as well as their implications across various levels.

Both leaders emphasised the importance of deepening bilateral cooperation and expanding the horizons of the strategic partnership between their countries, through greater investment flows, increased economic and commercial exchange and the exploring new avenues for collaboration—thereby fostering sustainable economic development and realising their mutual interests. — **ONA**

and Suez for water management in the Greater Muscat, and the first milestone reached by EDF and Oman in developing pumped hydrostorage capacities in Oman.

The two sides praised the cultural cooperation between the two countries and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening Omani-French cultural and academic ties. They welcomed in this regard the signature of several agreements aimed at boosting collaboration in the cultural, scientific and academic sectors, including student and research mobility, archaeology, museology and health.

As far as the educational cooperation is concerned, they agreed that efforts will be made to increase the enrolment of all students who meet the admission requirements of the International French School of Muscat, in accordance with the procedures and regulations approved by the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

They also stressed the importance to increase student mobility to France within the framework of joint academic cooperation projects,



HIS MAJESTY CONCLUDES VISIT TO FRANCE EN ROUTE TO UNITED KINGDOM ON A PRIVATE VISIT



PARIS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left Paris last evening, concluding his visit to the French Republic, en route to the United Kingdom on a private visit.

His Majesty was seen off by Nicolas Forissier, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness; Nabil Hajlaoui, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman; Ahmed

bin Mohammed Al Aruini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the French Republic; Amna bint Salem Al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco; and a number of senior French military officers and members of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the French Republic.

His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of profound



gratitude and appreciation to the French President, expressing his deep thankfulness for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation throughout the visit. His Majesty further expressed his sincere wishes of continued health and well-being for the French President, and enduring progress and prosperity for the friendly French people. — **ONA**

NEW ERA OF PARTNERSHIP

including the establishment of a jointly funded mechanism involving public and private higher education institutions from both countries, the promotion of collaborative research projects, the development of dual-degree programmes, and the expansion of existing scholarship programmes for Omani students pursuing short and long-term studies in France, in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

They highlighted the importance of strengthening the teaching of the French language in the Sultanate of Oman through the expansion of the French language pilot programme in Omani public schools, the professional development of Omani French-language teachers, and the promotion of literary and academic translation as a means of fostering cultural and educational exchange.

They also welcomed the longstanding partnership between the Ministry of Education of the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani-French Centre in Muscat, which promotes educational and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

They further acknowledged the Centre's contribution to the teaching of French in Omani schools, the provision of language training opportunities, and the organisation of student mobility initiatives, including the annual summer school programme in France for Omani students.

In the museum sector, they agreed to strengthen the exchange of expertise relating to the museum sector and to continue the joint efforts to open the Omani-French museum (Bait Faransa) 'Maison de la France,' showcasing the longstanding historical relations between the two countries.

In the archaeology sector, they agreed to cooperate jointly in scientific research and to promote outcomes through academic publications in both France and Oman.

As for scientific cooperation, both sides emphasised the importance of enhancing scientific cooperation in the field of Humanities through the activities of the French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA) office in the Sultanate of Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan and the French President discussed bilateral cooperation in the field of defence and security. They lauded the quality of the bilateral military cooperation, particularly the integration of French equipment within the Omani armed forces, as well as conducting regular joint exercise of all forces and visits by French warships to different ports in Oman.

They stressed their joint commitment to enhancing their collaboration in key strategic areas, particularly maritime security and the fight against illicit trafficking.

In line with France's constant dedication to preserve maritime security and freedom of navigation in the region, including through the multinational naval deployments, the two sides committed to strengthening their cooperation in maritime intelligence, maritime surveillance, and the safeguarding of trade routes.

They agreed to finalise the work initiated in 2022 on the Agreement on the Exchange and Reciprocal Protection of Classified and Protected Information in the Field of Defence. They also agreed to finalise the agreement on information exchange between their respective military intelligence departments.

As for the regional and international landscape, the two leaders reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to sustained coordination and the intensification of joint efforts aimed at contributing to international peace and security.

They underscored the imperative of supporting de-escalation across the region, advancing conflict prevention, and countering all forms of terrorism, as well as combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, they highlighted the critical importance of securing maritime routes and ensuring the freedom and safety of navigation in accordance with international law.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and to multilateralism. They also underlined their commitment to the norms of international law, international humanitarian law and international maritime law. In particular, they reaffirmed their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which remains the legal framework for governing maritime spaces, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman.

France welcomed Oman's mediation on the nuclear issue as well as Oman's efforts to resolve the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. Oman welcomes France's efforts to support a swift resumption of traffic in the Strait of Hormuz.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik expressed his warm thanks to President Emmanuel Macron and the people of France for the friendly welcome and generous hospitality extended to His Majesty and his accompanying delegation during their visit to France. His Majesty also extended an invitation to President Macron to visit Oman."

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His Majesty was seen off by Nicolas Forissier, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness; 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 bint Salem al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco; and a number of senior French military officers and members of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the French Republic.

His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of profound gratitude and appreciation to the French President, expressing his deep thankfulness for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation throughout the visit.

— **ONA**

IN HONOUR OF HM, FRENCH PRESIDENT HOSTS OFFICIAL LUNCHEON



PARIS: In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic hosted an official luncheon at the Elysée Palace in Paris. The luncheon was attended by the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan, as well as a number of senior French officials. — **ONA**



Oman and France review military ties

PARIS: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, met with Catherine Vautrin, Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs of the French Republic, at the Elysée Palace in Paris, on Monday during the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the French Republic.

They discussed the strong bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the friendly French Republic, as well as a number of topics of common interest, particularly the existing military cooperation between the two countries' defence ministries, and ways to enhance it to achieve shared interests and serve the aspirations of the leadership of the two friendly nations for greater cooperation and coordination.

General Vincent Giraud, Chief of Staff to the President of the French Republic, attended the meeting.

— **ONA**



HIS MAJESTY ACCORDED OFFICIAL RECEPTION CEREMONY



PARIS: An official reception ceremony was held at Les Invalides, ‘The House of Invalids’, in Paris on Monday for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, on the occasion of His Majesty’s official visit to the French Republic. As the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan departed towards the palace courtyard, it was escorted by a group of motorbike outriders from the French Republican Guard. Upon His Majesty’s arrival at the square of Les Invalides, he was received by Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and General Loïc Mizon, Military Governor of Paris. The Commander of the Guard of Honour then gave a military salute, asking for His Majesty’s permission to commence the official reception protocols. Thereafter, the Omani Royal Anthem and the French National Anthem were played. His Majesty then proceeded to inspect the Guard of Honour, after which he shook hands with senior French government dignitaries present to receive him. In turn, the French Minister greeted the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA



Omani–French forum highlights expanding ties

PARIS: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, accompanied by President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic, graced the Omani-Franco Business Forum in Paris on Monday, held as part of His Majesty’s official visit to the French Republic.

During the forum, His Majesty the Sultan commended the sustained growth and development of the economic and investment partnership between the two friendly nations across diverse sectors, reaffirming the importance of intensifying joint efforts to explore new investment opportunities that would lead to the establishment of promising collaborative ventures.

His Majesty said: “I am happy to be here in Paris. It has been a great day today. We have talked about so many things that concern Oman and France, and the rest of the world.”

His Majesty added “I am very delighted to be your guest with a beautiful gathering here, from both sides of Oman and France. What we have signed today are bigger than anything else we have done in the past couple of years.”

His Majesty expressed his appreciation for the remarks made by the French President during the meeting, in which he identified promising areas for cooperation. He affirmed that the French side’s openness to



His Majesty and President Macron graced the Omani-Franco Business Forum. — ONA

strengthening its partnership with the Sultanate of Oman has been met with a warm welcome from both His Majesty and the accompanying delegation.

His Majesty emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman welcomes all French business partners and looks forward to a greater presence of Omani investments in the French Republic in the coming period. He expressed his confidence that the Omani investment team will be diligent in seizing investment opportunities wherever they may arise. The forum was organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Business France, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), with the aim of strengthening cooperative and

partnership relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the French Republic.

The forum witnessed the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding, reflecting the growing economic and investment partnership between the two countries. These encompassed the fields of energy, industry, automotive, education, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, technology, aviation, space, renewable energy and the perfume industry. In the space sector, Omani spaceport company “Etlac” signed an agreement with French firm “Latitude” to collaborate on launching light rockets from the “Etlac” spaceport in the Sultanate of Oman, while MBsat inked a memorandum of understanding with “Telespazio” to provide

ground station operation solutions and satellite services.

In aviation, “Ankaa Space and Technologies” signed an agreement with French company “Thales” as the main contractor on the Omani side for the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), covering the supply, installation and operation of a new generation of air traffic control radar systems.

In transport, Al Hashar Group signed an agreement with French group “Renault” to distribute Renault vehicles in Oman, while Mohsin Haider Darwish Group concluded a commercial agreement with “Michelin” to supply tyres to the Omani market.

In energy and industry, the National Energy and Engineering Company signed an agreement with French group “Sagemcom” to assemble smart electricity meters in Rusayl Industrial City. Al Fajar Al Alamia Company reached an agreement with “Saint-Gobain” to explore investment in the natural gypsum sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreements also included a memorandum of understanding between Amouage Perfumes of Oman and French cosmetics L’Oréal, focused on luxury fragrance manufacturing, national talent development and expertise exchange in the sector. — ONA

*HM, Macron
grace signing of 12
agreements, MoUs,
declarations of intent*

FROM PAGE 1

The signatories were Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Philippe Tabarot, Minister of Transport.

The two sides also signed a declaration of intent for cooperation in the space sector, between the Foreign Ministry and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. It was signed for Oman by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and for France by Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

In the cultural domain, a declaration of intent concerning the ‘Maison de la France’ was signed between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. It was signed for Oman by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and for France by Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

In the education sector, a declaration of intent on French-language instruction was signed, with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, signing for Oman and Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, signing for France.

In the water sector, an agreement on water network management in Greater Muscat was signed between, on the Omani side, Oman Investment Authority, Nama Water Services, and the National Energy Centre, and on the French side, SUEZ Group and the National Trading Company. It was signed for Oman by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services and Abdullah bin Rashid al Badi, CEO of the National Energy Centre, and for France by Xavier Girre, CEO of SUEZ Group, and Tony Giorgio, CEO of the National Trading Company.

In the transport and logistics field, a master terms agreement was signed for a joint venture to develop and operate a multipurpose terminal, between ASYAD Group and France’s CMA CGM Group. It was signed for Oman by Abdulrahman bin Salim al Hatmi, CEO of ASYAD Group, and for France by Rodolphe Saadé, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the CMA CGM Group.

Additionally, a contract was signed for the first phase of the Al Kamil and Al Wafi Solar Power Plant project, with a capacity of 500 megawatts, between Nama Power and Water Procurement Company and France’s EDF Renewables.

It was signed for Oman by Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, CEO of Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, and for France by Béatrice Buffon, who became Executive Vice-President of EDF Renewables.

In line with the push toward renewable energy projects, an agreement was signed for the Wadi Dayqah Dam pumped-storage hydropower project, between the Authority for Public Services Regulation and France’s EDF Group.

It was signed for Oman by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, and for France by Béatrice Buffon became Executive Vice-President of EDF Renewables.

The signing ceremony was concluded with the signing of a strategic partnership agreement between Oman Investment Authority, Station 11, and Station F, to launch a programme enabling Omani startups to explore and expand into French and European markets.

The agreement was signed for Oman by Al Mutasim bin Salim al Sariri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Station 11, and for France by Eloi Peyrache, Dean of HEC Paris, and Roxanne Varza, Director General of Station F.

These agreements, memoranda of understanding and the declarations of intent come within the framework of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the French Republic.

They reflect the strength of Omani-French relations and further advance the avenues of cooperation and partnership between the two nations across a wide range of sectors. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai led the Omani delegation.

Oman-Iran panel on Strait of Hormuz holds first meeting in Muscat

MUSCAT: The Joint Oman-Iran Committee on the Strait of Hormuz held its first meeting in Muscat on Monday to exchange views on the future management of the strait and related issues. The Omani delegation was led by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry, while the Iranian side was headed by Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs. The two sides discussed ways to strengthen coordination on matters concerning the Strait of Hormuz in line with the mutual interests and sovereignty of both nations, reaffirming their commitment to international law. They also explored frameworks for cooperation in navigation and maritime services, building on their status as the two littoral states of the strait and on existing bilateral and international understandings. — ONA

Oman at GCC meeting of electricity, water ties committee



The meeting discussed steps taken to prepare a study aimed at enhancing Gulf integration in strategic sectors.

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, participated via video-conferencing in the extraordinary meeting of the GCC Electricity and Water Cooperation Committee. The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the meeting by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The meeting discussed the executive steps taken by the GCC Secretariat-General to prepare a comprehensive study aimed at enhancing joint Gulf integration in strategic sectors, contributing to supporting the march of Gulf joint action and enhancing water security in the council's countries. The meeting also reviewed a proposal to prepare a study on the possibility of implementing water interconnection projects between the GCC countries as a strategic step to enhance water security and to hold a workshop bringing together senior officials and specialists from member states. — ONA

Majlis Ash'shura discusses several draft legislations

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura discussed on Monday, in its 22nd regular session of the third regular annual sitting of the tenth term, a draft agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the elimination of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and the prevention and avoidance of tax evasion. The session was held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura. The session discussed the report of the Economic and Financial Committee on the expressed desire regarding establishing a system to link corporate tax procedures with government entitlements. It aimed to create an integrated electronic system that links corporate tax obligations with



government financial entitlements, thereby contributing to accelerating procedures, enhancing tax compliance, improving the

efficiency of financial collection and raising the level of integration among government institutions. The session included a discussion

on the report of the Economic and Financial Committee regarding the expressed desire on 'Economic Diplomacy: Impact, Results

Oman, US discuss economic, investment cooperation

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, received on Monday Ana Escrogima, Ambassador of the United States to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, they reviewed the relations of friendship and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America, and discussed ways to enhance



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said receives Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to Oman.

them in various fields, including economic and investment aspects, in addition to exchanging views on a number of topics of common interest. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry, and Yaarub bin Abdullah al Yaarubi, Secretary-General of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs. — ONA

Muscat Council reviews social development plan



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said chairs the Municipal Council of Muscat meeting.

THE Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate held its meeting on Monday, chaired by HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat. The Council addressed the annual plan of the Ministry of Social Development for 2026 and the regulatory framework for the governance of Muscat Municipality's competencies regarding lease contracts and licences for practicing commercial activities. Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, reviewed the plan's priorities and strategic directions. This comes within the framework of national orientations aimed at enhancing the social development system and achieving the targets of Oman Vision 2040. The plan focused on developing the social work system and elevating the quality of services provided to various segments of society. This is achieved by adopting a developmental approach that places individuals, families, and society at the forefront of its priorities, grounded in the principles of welfare, empowerment, and sustainability. The Minister of Social Development also touched upon the pillars of the plan, which aim to enhance institutional integration and expand the scope of partnership with various sectors. The plan seeks to align social programmes and initiatives with national priorities and developmental plans, alongside developing social services and programmes and raising their

MoSD's annual plan focuses on developing the social work system and elevating the quality of services provided to various segments of society

efficiency. This contributes to consolidating the values of social justice and community solidarity, as well as enhancing family stability and social cohesion. Within the framework of following up on regulatory issues related to organising the urban environment, the Council was briefed on a presentation by Muscat Municipality regarding the regulatory framework for the governance of the municipality's competencies concerning lease contracts and commercial activity licences in residential buildings. This aims to enhance the efficiency of urban regulation and preserve the residential character of neighbourhoods, thereby striking a balance between public interest requirements and the rights of commercial activity owners. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



People cross a street past a billboard displayed on the facade of a building in Tehran. — AFP

TRUMP SAYS IRAN REQUESTED MEETING TO BE HELD IN DOHA

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said that Iran has requested a meeting that will be held in the Gulf state of Qatar on Tuesday, despite an earlier denial from Tehran that talks were planned. **"IRAN HAS REQUESTED A MEETING. IT WILL TAKE PLACE TOMORROW IN DOHA!"** Trump posted on his Truth Social platform on Monday. Shortly afterwards, White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said US negotiators Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff would be "flying to Doha for high level meetings this week". Iran's foreign ministry earlier on Monday denied reports that Iranian and American technical teams will meet this week to discuss the implementation of the deal to end the Middle East war. A diplomat with knowledge of the talks confirmed on Monday that officials from the US and Iran are to meet in Doha to discuss the accord. "Technical teams working on the implementation of the MoU are scheduled to meet in Doha in the coming days," the diplomat said on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks. — AFP

SYRIA SLAMS ISRAELI INCURSIONS AFTER VIOLENCE IN SOUTH



A man speaks with a child while sitting near an unexploded artillery shell that fell during reported overnight Israeli bombardment in Syria's southwestern Daraa province. — AFP

DAMASCUS: Syria's foreign ministry on Monday condemned Israeli incursions and bombardment in the country's south a day after violence near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that state media and locals said caused residents to briefly flee. Tensions rose on Sunday in the village of Abidin in the Yarmuk Basin area in the southern province of Daraa after Israeli forces advanced into the area, with angry residents trying to block the road with stones to stop the patrol. Syria's foreign ministry in a statement condemned "the Israeli attacks represented by incursions into Syrian territory in Quneitra and Daraa provinces and the targeting of the region with artillery shelling", slamming "a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity". Israel sent troops into a UN-patrolled buffer zone that for decades separated Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan, occupying what it now calls a "security zone" in southern Syria. — AFP

BURNHAM PLEDGES RADICAL DEVOLUTION OF UK GOVT

MANCHESTER: The frontrunner to become Britain's next prime minister, Andy Burnham, vowed in a keynote speech on Monday to "bring about the biggest rebalancing of power our country has seen" if he succeeds Keir Starmer. Burnham, currently the only candidate to replace Starmer as Labour leader and prime minister, pledged to devolve greater powers to regional mayors, including in Manchester where until recently he was in charge.

"I am going to give Britain the circuit breaker it needs," Burnham told an invited audience in the northwest English city, pledging to put power "in the hands of the people and places who can use it best". "We need a new determination to raise living standards of every single person in this land," he added. "And we must accept that to do that, to fix the economy and the country, we need to change politics and we need to do it now." "We will create a more

streamlined state with a clearer purpose: to power up all parts of the country and put a laser-like focus on growth and regeneration," he said. "The change will be driven through the prime minister's office in an extended operation, based here in Manchester." He vowed that office would "oversee the biggest council house building programme since the post-war period". However, he did not set out how that would be funded, amid squeezed public finances in the UK. — AFP

Pakistan launches deadly attack on Afghanistan

PAKISTAN LAUNCHED its deadliest attack on Afghanistan in months, with Islamabad saying on Monday it killed dozens of militants as the Afghan government reported civilian casualties. The night-time strikes are the latest flare-up of violence between the neighbours whose relationship has been fraught since 2021, when the Taliban government took power in Kabul, and follow a weeks-long war that erupted in February. Pakistan's information minister said air and ground operations killed 29 militants and were aimed at a group that it blames for a deadly weekend assault in Karachi, although Afghan authorities have repeatedly denied their territory harbours attackers. The Taliban government said the air strikes hit three eastern provinces, killing 36 civilians and wounding 163. A resident of Paktia province, Adam Khan, said he "cannot put into words the condition of the children I saw at the hospital, or the screams of their parents and siblings". Those killed in one of the strikes "were innocent civilians, including children, elderly people and women" sleeping in a house, the 63-year-old said. In neighbouring Paktika province, community leader Amin Mangal told AFP a Pakistani strike



Afghan residents look at the remains of a building damaged in a Pakistani air strike at a village in Tsamkani district of Afghanistan's Paktia province. — AFP

Pakistan's information minister said air and ground operations killed 29 militants and were aimed at a group that it blames for a deadly weekend assault in Karachi. The Taliban government said the air strikes hit three eastern provinces, killing 36 civilians and wounding 163

on a house killed six people. "They were very poor and helpless, had no working man in the household, and were living with the help of charity," Mangal said. The Pakistani operation along the border is the deadliest since March, when an attack on a drug treatment centre in Kabul killed hundreds according to the United Nations. Pakistan's information minister, Attaullah Tarar, said the latest offensive targeted Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Hamdullah Fitrat, Afghanistan's deputy government spokesman, said the Paktia site "was bombed for a second time" after residents

rushed to rescue people. Pakistan's military and the prime minister's office did not respond to a request to comment on the allegation. In the countries' capitals, the foreign ministries summoned each other's diplomats over the attack in Afghanistan's border area and earlier in Pakistan's megacity Karachi. In Paktia's Tsamkani district, hundreds of mourners gathered before the funeral beds of some of those killed. Mediation from several countries, including China, has failed to produce a lasting resolution between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their war earlier this year killed hundreds of Afghans and displaced tens of thousands, according to the UN. There have been sporadic attacks since a ceasefire reached in March, with Pakistani strikes in June killing 13 people, Afghan officials said. Islamabad is mediating between the United States and Iran to end their war in the Middle East, but Pakistan says its battle against militancy at home requires its strikes on Afghanistan. Explosives were detonated and gunmen opened fire inside a Rangers paramilitary camp in Karachi on Saturday in one of the worst militant attacks in Pakistan's most populous city in years. Three paramilitary personnel were killed and that they had detained an Afghan involved in the attack. — AFP

AFTERSHOCK HITS CARACAS AMID RESCUE HOURS

CARACAS: Residents of Caracas woke up on Monday to an aftershock that rocked their houses, while rescue teams continued their fourth day of round-the-clock work in the areas affected by last week's powerful earthquakes in Venezuela. A 4.6-magnitude aftershock centred at a depth of 10 km (6 miles) hit north of the Venezuelan capital Caracas early on Monday, according to the US Geological Survey. No damage was immediately reported from the aftershock, the president of the National Assembly, Jorge Rodriguez, said on social media. Rescue efforts have been focusing particularly on La Guaira, the hardest-hit state of a country long-mired in a deep political and economic crisis. Wednesday's twin earthquakes have left close to 1,500 people confirmed dead and hundreds of collapsed buildings. The international community has rallied to help Venezuela in the wake of the disaster. The country has received support from 24 countries, which have sent over 500 metric tonnes of supplies, more than 2,700 rescue and support personnel and about 86 canine teams, according to Venezuelan authorities. — Reuters

VIOLENCE INCIDENT

Gunmen shot 5 dead in northern Germany



Five people were shot and killed at a youth welfare facility in a northern German town on Monday, and police said they had detained two individuals, including the suspected shooter. Police believe the incident occurred at a youth welfare facility in Stade. Police cordoned off the area in a cobbled, tree-lined street with red brick homes, and forensic experts in white suits and plain clothes police were at the scene. — Reuters

RECORD-BREAKING SUMMER

Italy, Balkans endure heatwave impact



Italy and the Balkans felt the impact of a heatwave that has caused hundreds of excess deaths and disrupted daily life across the continent, with growing concerns over the spread of wildfires. In Italy, 22 cities from Bolzano in the north to Palermo on the southern island of Sicily were covered by a red heat warning. In Croatia, the weather service issued a red alert for regions including the capital Zagreb and the tourist destinations of Split and Dubrovnik. — Reuters

BRUTAL ATTACKS

Israel kills 3 in Gaza, including a child



The Israeli military killed three Palestinians, including a child, in an air strike on central Gaza, according to Gaza health ministry, despite a ceasefire that has officially been in effect since October. Twelve Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military since Saturday. Israel has repeatedly carried out strikes on Gaza since a US-mediated ceasefire with Hamas was reached in October. Hamas has accused Israel of violating the ceasefire. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman, France upgrade ties with deals across key sectors



WHEN HIS Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sat down with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, the optics mattered. The Republican Guard at Les Invalides, the two national anthems, and the Guard of Honour. But what will endure from now on is not a ceremony. It is the substance: 12 agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and a Declaration of Intent that reposition Oman-France ties for the next decade.

This was not a visit to restate friendship but rather was a visit to convert alignment into projects.

Oman and France have long had a quiet partnership. That foundation was important, but foundations do not generate jobs or decarbonise industry. The 12 instruments signed in Paris do.

They move the relationship from diplomatic goodwill into energy, industry, ports, education, culture, and security cooperation. A Declaration of Intent provides the political umbrella; the MoUs and agreements provide the legal and technical pathways. In diplomacy, volume matters less than direction.

For Oman, deeper engagement with France reinforces its doctrine of openness to all. It demonstrates that Muscat can deepen ties with a major European power without foreclosing relationships elsewhere. For

France, Oman offers a partner that is stable, sovereign, and not drawn into regional polarisation. In a multipolar Gulf, that balance has value.

The third thread is often underestimated: people. Agreements on higher education, university twinning, research collaboration, and cultural heritage preservation matter because they create constituencies beyond ministries.

Oman's forts, aflaj irrigation systems, and coastal towns align with French conservation expertise. Joint exhibitions, scholarships, and language programmes create the network of students, researchers, SMEs, and curators who sustain cooperation when governments change.

A partnership that lives only in communiqués is fragile. One that lives in classrooms and museums is durable.

The better question is sequencing. First, the Declaration of Intent frames ambition: energy transition, maritime stability, cultural exchange, and investment facilitation. Second, the MoUs create working groups, feasibility studies, and regulatory alignment. Third, the agreements lock in specific projects with timelines and responsibilities.

If the energy MoUs yield hydrogen pilots and port upgrades, and if education MoUs produce over 200 student exchanges annually, then the visit pays for itself in human and economic capital.

The agreements reflect the strength of Omani-French relations and further advance the avenues of cooperation and partnership between the two nations across a wide range of sectors

Geopolitically, 2026 is a year of recalibration. Supply chains are shifting. Energy markets are decarbonising. Sea lanes are under pressure. Middle powers are seeking reliable partners, not patrons.

Oman does not seek a patron.

It seeks partners who respect sovereignty and deliver substance.

France needs credible, non-polarising partners in a region central to energy and trade. The Paris meeting codifies that mutual need.

In line with the push towards renewable energy projects, an agreement was signed for the Wadi Dayqah Dam pumped-storage hydropower project between the Authority for Public Services Regulation and France's EDF Group.

These agreements, memoranda of understanding, and declarations of intent come within the framework of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the French Republic.

They reflect the strength of Omani-French relations and further advance the avenues of cooperation and partnership between the two nations across a wide range of sectors.

The twelve agreements will not transform a relationship overnight.

But they can align two countries around the right sectors, with the right mechanisms, at the right time. In a turbulent decade, that is precisely the kind of diplomacy that endures.

HOPE FADES FOR VENEZUELA QUAKE SURVIVORS

MARGIONI BERMUDEZ & BRIAN CONTRERAS

Hopes were fading of finding survivors more than four days after powerful twin earthquakes struck Venezuela, as residents grew increasingly frustrated with the government's response to the disaster that has killed at least 1,450 people and left tens of thousands unaccounted for.

A strong aftershock was felt in the hardest-hit areas of the capital Caracas and La Guaira shortly after 7 am on Monday, which the US Geological Survey measured at magnitude 4.6, adding to fears for the safety of hundreds of buildings weakened by the tremors.

French and American rescue teams found a man and his teen son alive under the rubble on Sunday in Caraballeda, a town about 40 kilometres north of Caracas, journalists saw.

The rescue offered a glimmer of hope in an ongoing tragedy that has shaken a country already mired in an economic crisis, but that hope dwindled as the critical 72-hour window for rescuing trapped victims passed.

Millions more people were feared to lack sanitation and other basic needs after one of Latin America's most devastating earthquake disasters.

Some 774 buildings were badly damaged in back-to-back quakes of magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 that struck on Wednesday evening, including 189 buildings that have totally collapsed, National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez said on Sunday.

AFPTV drone footage from La Guaira showed smoke rising from piles of concrete and debris, where a neighbourhood of multistorey buildings once stood.

In the coastal town of Tucacas, rescuers were digging for people trapped in the pancaked layers and rubble of a collapsed building complex.

Luis Salas, 27, who joined the rescue efforts, said that "the hardest part was when we felt hope in the tunnels we went into - crawling, clearing debris, working with all our heart, with great faith - and when we reached our targets, we found them lifeless."

Experts say the first 72 hours after natural disasters define the narrow window for rescuing the living. After that, the search usually becomes one of recovering bodies.

In the Caracas neighbourhood of Chacao, Caracas, large electronic screens on a building usually used for advertising were showing the faces of missing people.

— AFP

A habit that keeps doors open

TAKE ANY family gathering and there is a good chance that, somewhere in the room, two people are not speaking to each other. Nobody can quite remember how it started. A comment was misunderstood. Somebody took offence. Pride took over. Before long, people who once sat happily at the same table are acting as though they represent rival governments negotiating a border dispute.

Then somebody steps in. Usually, it is an uncle, an aunt, or a grandfather who starts making phone calls and arranging conversations. Nobody is trying to determine the winner. The goal is simply to stop the disagreement from becoming permanent. The peacemaker rarely receives much gratitude. If the relationship is repaired, everyone quietly moves on as though the problem solved itself. Watching this happen over the years has made me wonder how Oman developed the same habit.

That may sound like an unusual comparison, but countries are created by people. Many of us became familiar with certain values without spending much time thinking about them. Hospitality mattered. Respect mattered. Keeping relationships mattered.

History played a role as well. For centuries, Oman looked outward towards the sea. Omani sailors and merchants travelled across the Indian Ocean and met people with different languages, customs, and beliefs. Trade depended on trust and reputation. A merchant who turned every disagreement into a permanent conflict was unlikely to get very far. Sailors learned that today's disagreement did not necessarily prevent tomorrow's partnership. They also learned that the world was rarely divided neatly into friends on one side and enemies on the other. Real life was



When people keep talking, misunderstandings are less likely to grow and tensions are less likely to spread.



DR KHALFAN BIN HAMED AL HARRASI

The writer is an academic and researcher

For Oman keeping a relationship matters more than winning an argument. In a world that rarely suffers from a shortage of disagreement, that is exactly the kind of habit a country should have

more complicated than that.

Talking to someone is not the same as supporting them, although that difference often disappears when tensions rise. Meet somebody for coffee and before long someone assumes you have joined their side. Meet two different people for coffee in the same week and you may be accused of running your own foreign ministry. Diplomacy suffers from much the same misunderstanding. The point of talking is not to give up what you believe. It is to understand the other person's position, explain your own, and see if any progress is possible.

Neutrality has never been particularly good at attracting attention. It lacks drama.

There is also a tendency to connect strength with noise. The louder the statement, the stronger the position. At least that seems to be the theory. Reality is often different. Anyone can throw fuel on the fire. Preventing the fire from spreading is usually the harder task. Much of Oman's influence comes from something less visible than military strength or economic

size. People answer the phone. In diplomacy, that is a bigger achievement than it sounds. Many of us struggle to get relatives to answer family WhatsApp calls.

No approach works every time, and no country gets everything right. Trust, however, remains one of the most valuable assets any mediator can have. When people keep talking, misunderstandings are less likely to grow and tensions are less likely to spread. In a connected region, that matters. One thing we rarely think about is the number of problems that never happen in the first place.

For those who find this difficult to understand, Oman's approach starts from a simple idea: keeping a relationship matters more than winning an argument. Long before it became a foreign policy, it was already a habit. A habit that keeps doors open. A habit that encourages dialogue instead of violence, and communication instead of isolation. In a world that rarely suffers from a shortage of disagreement, that is exactly the kind of habit a country should have.

Surging demand for copper driven by AI, electrification trends



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

WE LOVE gold and silver for jewellery. They have been enjoying a distinct status symbol. Now there is a metal that is much in demand due to the growing need in AI infrastructure and data centres requiring massive amounts of copper wiring and cooling components. Industry leaders are claiming it to be the metal that could be the next thing to be invested in. It has been nicknamed the ‘metal of electrification’, but the fact is that it is still being considered as an industrial metal rather than a precious one. Chile ranks first in the world for copper production. We would have to ask the serious investors how significant the metal is going to be in the portfolio. Copper was melted in Oman historically when Oman was known as Magan. Copper is an important part of Oman’s coinage. According to researchers, during the era of Sultan Faisal bin Turki from 1888 to 1913, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman minted pure copper 1/4 Anna coins. Apparently, these historical copper coins were used for maritime trade across the Indian Ocean and continued to stay in circulation until the 1940s.

Copper continues to have its presence. Today, Omani coinage retains copper derivatives. In his article titled ‘The Lost Land’, in Aramco World, John Lawton wrote, ‘One piece of persuasive evidence did emerge – an analysis showing a match between copper objects in Sumer and copper ore in Oman. ‘Because Sumerian copper objects contained traces of nickel, archaeologists were excited when a prospector for the Anglo-Persian Oil Company reported in 1928 that samples collected from ancient copper workings in Oman contained 0.19 per cent nickel – a close match to Sumerian copper objects.’ This is a reflection of copper exports from Magan going through Dilmun to Sumer. Magan – or Makan - was, in the third and second millennia BC, the Sumerians’ chief source of copper. He goes on to point out, “In 1973 and 1974, the company, Prospection (Oman) Limited, located some 44 ancient mining sites in northern Oman, some dating from the 17th-century Portuguese occupation, others from the ninth or tenth-century Islamic period and at least three – according to a Harvard archaeological survey – dating from the third millennium BC.”

For those who love the colour of copper, the metal is also used in jewellery, but it requires special care. Most importantly, copper is today in financial conversations, whether one invests in it or not

There are archaeological sites in Suhar and Al Rustaq. The world of metals has been evolving. It was the first widely used metal in the world, and then came bronze. As societies evolved, copper continued its journey even when the world ushered in electricity, as copper is still the global standard for electrical wiring and power generation. No wonder we hear so many incidents of copper wire or cables going missing in the world. But we cannot lock it up and keep it safe. It has to be out there. For those who love the colour of copper, the metal is also used in jewellery, but it requires special care. Most importantly, copper is today in financial conversations, whether one invests in it or not. It was gold that was skyrocketing; then there was silver, and now copper. Financial experts and analysts would know more, but as a fan of the metal, I am just happy copper is enjoying the glory once again. Again, we must also remember that when it comes to mining, where they find copper, there could be the presence of gold and silver. In other words, we never know what we are missing.

FOR OR AGAINST AC? EU WON’T PICK SIDES

The EU refused to be drawn into a political debate on the merits of air conditioning on Monday, saying it was not for Brussels to micromanage how people cool their homes. AC has become a hot political topic in France in particular with party leaders coming out starkly for or against its broader use, as Europe swelters under a record-breaking heatwave. “I doubt we have a particular view or position on air conditioning,” European Commission spokeswoman Anna-Kaisa Iitkonen told journalists when asked whether the bloc backed either camp. Europeans have traditionally used AC much less than other parts of the world, with many there seeing the US staple as environmentally unfriendly, energy guzzling and a potential spreader of germs. In France, the issue has become highly political ahead of elections next year. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen said she wants air conditioning for all, while at the other end of the spectrum, her hard-left rival Jean-Luc Melenchon calls it “a false solution that makes the problem worse”. Only about 20 per cent of European homes have AC installed, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). But units have been flying off the shelves in recent weeks as millions broil in old, often poorly insulated apartments - raising questions about the impacts of wider installation. Detractors argue AC is high in energy consumption, uses potentially polluting cooling fluid and rejects hot air outside, which can locally worsen heat in dense urban areas. Experts note that the impact on the environment depends on the source of the energy consumed to operate it. Heating and cooling measures, as well as improving buildings’ energy efficiency, were part of a new EU housing policy currently under development, Iitkonen said. But the commission would not tell people whether they should install a unit at home or not, she added. “These are issues where the commission is not micromanaging how people should be going about this.” Meanwhile, as a record-breaking heatwave swept across Europe, the Balkans remained on alert for sweltering temperatures on Monday, prompting health warnings and sparking wildfires. Although heat was easing in parts of Western Europe, temperatures were expected to climb again in the continent’s east on Monday. In Croatia, as in most of the Balkans, authorities warned of dangerous conditions, with both Bosnia and Albania predicting temperatures of up to 40C. After battling for days with a landfill fire near the Bosnian city of Mostar, which has poured acrid smoke into the surrounding area since last week, firefighters said they had largely managed to extinguish the blaze. Kosovo’s weather bureau said temperatures were expected to peak at 38C on Monday, and advised vulnerable residents to stay indoors during the day. — AFP

Cities show how climate action makes life better

IN THE global fight against climate change, there has been no shortage of targets and commitments. But people ultimately judge progress by what they experience in their daily lives. And nowhere is the impact of climate action more tangible than in the world’s cities. Mayors understand that the same measures that reduce greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions and strengthen climate resilience also improve people’s daily lives. Energy-efficient homes lower families’ bills. Increased access to renewables reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels and vulnerability to spikes in oil and gas prices. Better public transport and safer cycling infrastructure give people more affordable and healthier ways to move around their communities. Trees and green spaces improve air quality, cool neighbourhoods, and make cities more pleasant places to live. But climate action is also about protecting people from the already tangible effects of a warming planet. Heat waves, floods, droughts, and extreme-weather events are becoming more frequent and intense. Cities and their residents are increasingly on the front line of these challenges. That is why confronting climate change requires pursuing adaptation alongside mitigation. Around the world, local leaders are adapting schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and public spaces to protect citizens from excessive heat and other climate risks. Shading systems, green roofs, and natural cooling solutions can significantly enhance cities’ resilience to rising temperatures, with children, older people, and other vulnerable residents often benefiting the most. A combination of adaptation measures and energy efficiency can save lives, improve well-being, and reduce energy costs. These green investments also attract talent, innovation, and private investment, making climate action an economic opportunity. Mayors have been putting these principles into practice for years. As a result, GHG emissions have fallen in many of the world’s largest cities, even as their populations have continued to grow. Moreover, cities



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A combination of adaptation measures and energy efficiency can improve well-being and reduce energy costs. These green investments also attract talent, innovation, and private investment, making climate action an economic opportunity



Many member cities have adopted climate goals that are more ambitious than their national governments’ — and are on track to achieve them more quickly.

of all sizes and regions are working together to accelerate the progress they have made individually. Over the past decade, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) has grown into an alliance of more than 14,000 cities and local governments across 150 countries, representing over one billion people. Many member cities have adopted climate goals that are more ambitious than their national governments’ — and are on track to achieve them more quickly. Yet cities could move faster and go further with increased support. Specifically, they have a pressing need for technical expertise and access to finance. Many local authorities still lack the resources required to identify, develop, and implement climate projects at the necessary scale. Partnerships can help address these needs. The City Climate Finance Gap Fund, supported by GCoM and the World Bank, is already assisting cities in developing projects that can attract investment and deliver tangible benefits for their populations. Over the past few years, it has supported more than 1,400 cities in turning climate ambition into practical action. Now, GCoM, C40 (a network of the

world’s biggest cities committed to addressing climate change), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are building on that work with a new partnership to help cities scale up climate projects through technical and financial assistance. This initiative will focus largely on regions where the gap between ambition and available resources is widest. National governments increasingly recognise the power of cities to drive progress on climate change. While promising, it should be only the beginning. Mayors and city leaders understand better than anyone that the most successful climate policies are those that people can see and feel in their everyday lives: cleaner air, safer streets, lower energy bills, healthier homes, and better protection against extreme weather. With the right support, cities can continue to protect people, strengthen resilience, and create the conditions for sustainable growth. Most importantly, cities can play a powerful leadership role by showing the world that climate action is not a burden, but an opportunity to build better lives and more vibrant communities for all.

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FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



South Korea's Lee Kang-in looks dejected after the match. — Reuters

SOUTH KOREA DEMANDS CHANGE AFTER DISMAL WORLD CUP EXIT

SOUTH

Korea's dismal World Cup first-round exit has sparked fury at home and calls for a complete overhaul at the top have not been silenced by coach Hong Myung-bo's resignation.

South Korea, World Cup semi-finalists as co-hosts in 2002, limped out of the tournament after failing to squeeze into the knockout rounds as one of the top eight third-place finishers.

They had the last 32 within their reach only to suffer a shock 1-0 loss to lower-ranked South Africa.

Their early exit prompted coach Hong to quit on Sunday and cast doubt over the international future of captain Son Heung-min.

It also earned the team a rebuke from the country's president Lee Jae Myung, who pointed the finger at "incompetent people" and apologised to the nation.

The president's comments reflect public anger that has reached boiling point after years of simmering discontent at South Korean football chiefs.

Former captain Park Ji-sung said, "We may have expected this outcome years ago."

"We have to look back and ask ourselves why things have come to this," the former Manchester United player said after the team's elimination was confirmed.

"Even after spending a decade learning how to prepare for the World Cup and develop Korean football, we have forgotten those lessons once again."

South Korea were expected to get out of a Group A that included co-hosts Mexico, plus South Africa and the Czech Republic.

They started with a 2-1 win over the Czechs but lost 1-0 to Mexico before flopping against South Africa.

The team were expected to arrive home on Tuesday morning but local media reported that the Korea Football Association (KFA) were not planning to organise an event to welcome them back.

In 2014, angry fans pelted the team with Korean candies when they returned from the World Cup in Brazil, where they went out in the group stage during Hong's first spell as coach. 'MESSAGE TO CHANGE'

Hong has been a lightning rod for criticism since he returned to the job in July 2024, five months after his predecessor, German World Cup-winner Jurgen Klinsmann, was axed.

The KFA came under fire for the process that led to Hong's reappointment, with questions asked over its transparency and fairness.

Hong, who was regularly booed by fans, did himself no favours at the World Cup by dropping star player Son for the South Africa game, in which South Korea needed only a



A South Korea fan looks dejected after the match. — Reuters



South Korea fan watches the match wearing a Son Heung-min scarf. — Reuters

point to progress.

Hong admitted afterwards that he was struggling to understand what had gone wrong, as the nation nervously waited for results in other games to decide their fate.

Lee Chun-soo, a member of the 2002 World Cup team, said he "felt pathetic and frustrated rooting for Uzbekistan" against the Democratic Republic of Congo in the hope that the result would send South Korea through.

"This is a message to change," Lee said on his YouTube channel.

"Everyone should be ready to step down." South Korean fans reserved a sizeable chunk of their anger for KFA president Chung Mong-gyu. Chung said before the World Cup that he would quit after the tournament, blaming his "lack of virtue" following fierce criticism of his 13-year tenure. — AFP



South Africa's Khuliso Mudau in action with Canada's Liam Millar as South Africa coach Hugo Broos reacts. — Reuters

BROOS MAY CHANGE DECISION TO QUIT AS SOUTH AFRICA COACH



HUGO Broos could reverse his decision to quit as South Africa coach, the 74-year-old Belgian said after his side's World Cup last-32 exit against Canada.

"It is not clever to make decisions when you are disappointed, so I will not do it here," Broos said at his post-match press conference in Los Angeles.

Broos announced several months ago that he would quit football after a three-decade coaching career when South Africa were eliminated from the global showpiece.

"I want to spend more time with my wife, children and grandchildren," he said in a pre-World Cup interview.

But a South African Football Association insider hinted that Broos may now be having second thoughts about leaving.

"Hugo may continue as head coach or fill some other role, such as scouting and watching South Africans playing in Europe," said the source.

Broos has been credited with transforming South Africa from a team labelled a "joke" to qualifiers for the World Cup after a 16-year absence.

When he took charge in 2021, Bafana Bafana (The Boys) attracted less than 200

spectators to a goalless friendly match against Botswana in Johannesburg.

Before travelling to North America, South Africa hosted a warm-up match against Panama in Cape Town that drew a capacity 50,000 crowd.

Broos then masterminded a historic World Cup Group A win over South Korea last week to take South Africa to the knockout stage for the first time after first-round exits in their three previous appearances.

Broos said his team bowed out in Los Angeles on Sunday after failing to match the power and speed of co-hosts Canada, who won 1-0 thanks to a 92nd-minute winner by Stephen Eustaquio.

"I have said many times that modern football is more than just technique. There is power and speed, and we do not have it in our team yet. Canada had those qualities," said Broos.

While South Africa return to Johannesburg, Canada will face the Netherlands or Morocco in Houston on Saturday in the round of 16.

The next challenge for South Africa will be 2027 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying. They share Group D with co-hosts Kenya, Guinea and Eritrea. — AFP



South Africa coach Hugo Broos speaks with players during a hydration break. — Reuters



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



FRANCE 'S FIREPOWER PUTS SWEDEN IN THE FIRING LINE

DIGNE AND BARCOLA ARE EXPECTED TO START ON FRANCE'S LEFT AGAINST SWEDEN

FRANCE HAVE PROLIFIC ATTACKING FIREPOWER VICTORY WOULD SEND

FRANCE INTO THE ROUND OF 16 AGAINST GERMANY OR PARAGUAY



FRANCE 'S

glittering attack carried them smoothly through the World Cup group stage, but coach Didier Deschamps still has issues to solve on the left side of his team before Tuesday's Round of 32 meeting with Sweden. France finished top of Group I with a perfect record, scoring 10 goals in wins over Senegal, Iraq

and Norway, with Kylian Mbappe, Ousmane Dembele and Michael Olise giving them arguably the most devastating attacking unit in the tournament. Yet the left flank has looked less settled. Theo Hernandez has not fully convinced at left back, and Lucas Digne is expected to come into the side against Sweden, bringing more defensive security and a steadier delivery from wide areas. Further forward, Bradley Barcola is expected to replace Desire Doue on the left of France's attack, with Deschamps looking for more direct running, pace in transition and natural width on the flank opposite the Olise-Mbappe-Dembele axis. The adjustment would not change France's overall balance but could give them a more coherent left side against a Sweden team likely to defend deep, attack at set pieces and look to expose any space

behind France's defence, which has sometimes been caught off guard. The return of William Saliba in central defence will, at least, bring some stability back. However, any rival will face the same conundrum: however many goals they score, Les Bleus always look capable of scoring one more. Mbappe has been France's central figure again, while Dembele's hat-trick against Norway and Olise's creativity have underlined the depth of attacking options available to Deschamps. Barcola, Doue, Rayan Cherki, Jean-Philippe Mateta or Marcus Thuram give France the kind of bench power no team can match. Sweden arrive as awkward opponents rather than spectacular ones. They finished second in Group F behind the Netherlands, opening with a 5-1 win over Tunisia before being torn apart by the Dutch 5-1 and drawing with Japan 1-1. However, they have enough physical presence and organisation to make the evening uncomfortable if France lose patience. The knockout stage is a different test from the group phase, when France were able to overwhelm opponents despite occasional defensive lapses. But the 2022 final against Argentina aside, France have not lost a knockout game at the World Cup since 2014. Can Sweden cause an upset? "I don't buy it. Sweden have Alexander Isak, Viktor Gyokeres and Anthony Elanga. They are not a bad side, but they are nowhere near France's firepower," former England great Gary Lineker told French sports daily L'Equipe. "Of course, with four genuine forwards, Les Bleus could be vulnerable on the counter, as we saw against Norway's second string on Friday, but they will score more goals than the other teams." Victory would send France into the Round of 16 against Germany or Paraguay. — Reuters

Michael Olise. — AFP

Elliot Stroud. — AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,467.838

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$66.69
BRENT \$72.57
LIGHT \$70.11



BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Wadi Dayqah Dam in Qurayyat.

OMAN STUDIES FIRST PUMPED HYDRO ENERGY PROJECT

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

Oman’s power sector authorities are studying the feasibility of developing the Sultanate of Oman’s first Pumped Hydro Energy Storage (PHES) project, which would harness the Wadi Dayqah Dam in Muscat Governorate as the cornerstone of the

landmark energy storage initiative. Pumped hydro energy storage technology uses surplus electricity — typically generated by solar and wind farms during periods of low demand — to pump water from a lower reservoir to an

upper reservoir. When electricity demand increases or renewable generation declines, the stored water is released through turbines to generate electricity and feed it back into the grid.

A feasibility study initiated by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), in collaboration with other stakeholder agencies, proposes leveraging the natural topography of Wadi Dayqah by using the existing dam reservoir as the lower reservoir and constructing a new upper reservoir on the Jabal Abyad plateau.

The proposed system will have an installed capacity of 1,975 MW and provide up to nine hours of energy storage, delivering approximately 17,970 MWh of dispatchable electricity. It would store surplus solar and wind power during off-peak periods and release it during times of peak demand, thereby enhancing grid stability, reducing dependence on gas-fired generation, lowering carbon emissions and easing the burden of fuel subsidies.

By providing large-scale energy storage, grid balancing, frequency regulation and backup capacity, pumped hydro can facilitate the integration of higher shares of variable renewable energy while reducing reliance on gas-fired power generation.

Two major BESS projects near completion in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

CONSTRUCTION of two utility-scale Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) projects is nearing completion at the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate and the Wilayat of Al Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate. The investments are designed to strengthen Oman’s energy security as the Sultanate of Oman accelerates its transition to renewable electricity.

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) — the operator of the national transmission grid — is implementing the projects as part of its strategy to enhance grid stability and reliability amidst the increasing integration of intermittent solar and wind power.

Each project has a storage capacity of 500 MW/2,000 MWh, enabling it to deliver 500 MW of electricity continuously for four hours. This places the facilities among the largest utility-scale battery energy storage projects in the Gulf region.

“BESS is emerging as a critical enabler of grid flexibility, reliability and efficiency, particularly in the context of growing renewable energy integration, peak demand management and the provision of ancillary services”, majority state-owned OETC said. “BESS plays an important role in supporting daily grid operations by addressing supply-



Each BESS project has a storage capacity of 500 MW/2,000 MWh, enabling it to deliver 500 MW of electricity for four hours.

By storing surplus electricity generated by solar and wind farms and releasing it during periods of peak demand, each BESS facility will play a pivotal role in strengthening grid stability, enabling greater renewable energy integration, and reducing reliance on gas-fired power generation.

demand imbalances, relieving internal network congestion and responding to system disturbances”.

By storing surplus electricity generated by solar and wind farms and releasing it during periods of peak demand, each BESS facility will play a pivotal role in strengthening grid stability, enabling greater renewable energy integration and reducing reliance on gas-fired power generation.

Significantly, OETC’s 2025–2040 Master Plan outlines a broader roadmap for battery storage deployment across the Main Interconnected System (MIS), Dhofar Power System (DPS), Musandam, supporting the country’s long-term energy transition.

Under this strategy, OETC plans to deploy an additional 1,000 MW/2,000 MWh of battery storage in the MIS by the second quarter of 2026, along with a 30 MW/120

organised by the OPEX team, features companies from industrial, commercial and service sectors, providing a platform to promote Omani products, attract investment and establish new business partnerships.

The OPEX team comprises Madayn, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the SMEs Development Authority (Riyada).

Dr Rashid al Alawi, Director of Investment at Madayn, said participation supports efforts to attract industrial investment while showcasing the services and incentives available across Oman’s industrial cities.

Officials said the exhibition offers an opportunity to strengthen trade ties with East Africa, promote Omani exports and help SMEs access new markets through direct engagement with investors, distributors and importers. — ONA

OMAN SHOWCASES PRODUCTS AT TANZANIA TRADE FAIR

MUSCAT: Oman has launched its participation in the 50th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (SabaSaba 2026) in Tanzania, with 24 public and private sector organisations showcasing Omani products and investment opportunities as part of efforts to expand exports into East African markets. The exhibition has brought together 3,891 exhibitors from more than 23 countries, including over 430 international participants. Oman’s pavilion,

Imtidad opens new opportunities for Omani renewable companies

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

Oman’s newly launched Imtidad community solar programme is creating new business opportunities for local renewable energy companies and manufacturers as the Sultanate of Oman expands the use of clean electricity while encouraging greater participation by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Launched last week by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), in partnership with Nama Group and licenced electricity companies, the programme allows households and businesses to benefit from solar energy without installing panels on their own properties. Instead, subscribers purchase shares in grid-connected community solar stations and receive credits on



The Imtidad initiative allows households and businesses to benefit from solar energy without installing panels on their own properties.

their electricity bills based on the electricity generated.

The initiative has also brought together several Omani companies across the renewable energy value chain, highlighting the growing

capabilities of local firms in engineering, manufacturing and clean energy solutions.

Green Universe Enterprise (GUE), an Omani SME, was selected through a competitive tender conducted by Nama Distribution Company to deliver the first phase of the project. Sumaya al Rawahi, CEO — GUE said the company met both the technical and commercial requirements of the evaluation, adding that the tender was designed to be executed by an Omani SME.

According to Al Rawahi, the wider Imtidad programme is a government-led community initiative targeting schools, hospitals, homes and other government entities, with the aim of extending renewable generation across the community.

Omani manufacturer Voltamp

Energy also participated in the project by supplying the specialised inverter-duty transformers that connect the solar plant to the electricity network. Issa al Maskari, Business Development Manager for the US and EMEA at Voltamp Energy, said the transformers were built to operate for 25 to 30 years in harsh environmental conditions, provided they were properly maintained.

“We are confident our transformers should seamlessly perform on the grid at 30 years with no catastrophic failures”, he said, adding that service life could extend beyond 50 years with regular maintenance.

Muscat-based Nafath Renewable Energy is among the local companies that will be competing in the upcoming projects under the Imtidad programme. Nasr al

Nasseri, Business Development Officer at Nafath said: “Nafath handled projects end to end, beginning with a comprehensive feasibility study before moving through design, execution, commissioning and maintenance. Each installation is linked to a monitoring system that tracks daily, monthly and annual output and lets clients view real-time performance data”.

The Imtidad model is designed to broaden participation in renewable energy by allowing consumers to benefit from solar generation without owning or maintaining the infrastructure themselves. APSR says the approach will help maximise underutilised land, reduce electricity costs for participants and support the Sultanate of Oman’s clean energy transition under Oman Vision 2040.

BUSINESS FEATURE



DHOFAR FRANKINCENSE EYES GLOBAL LUXURY MARKET

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

For centuries, frankincense connected Dhofar to the world. Today, Amouage wants to turn that inheritance into a modern business model built on traceability, sustainability and premium global demand.

At Wadi Dawkah, one of the key sites within Oman’s Unesco-listed Land of Frankincense, the Omani High Perfumery House has spent the past three and a half years developing what it describes as a globally unique sourcing methodology for frankincense.

The aim is not simply to harvest resin. It is to create a full value chain around Omani frankincense — from tree to bottle — that can meet international expectations for ethical sourcing, environmental protection and transparency.

“What we need to do now is implement the same methodology at scale to produce tonnes of Omani frankincense”, said Matthew Wright, Director of Natural Ingredient Platforms at Amouage SAOC.

“That is so Oman can significantly increase its market share of the international frankincense market. By providing a unique methodology and a unique product — Boswellia sacra with a distinct olfactive signature — we think we can create global demand for it”.

The business significance lies in the shift from a heritage commodity to a certified luxury ingredient. Frankincense has long been central to Oman’s cultural identity, religious practice and trade history. But in global markets, the challenge is no longer only supply. It is proof: where the resin came from, how it was harvested, who benefited and whether the trees and the surrounding ecosystem were protected.

That is where Amouage is

positioning Wadi Dawkah as a reference site.

The company’s approach comes at a time when luxury consumers and international fragrance houses are under growing pressure to prove the origin and environmental credentials of natural ingredients. For Oman, this offers a potential route to capture more value from one of its most recognisable natural assets, rather than allowing frankincense to remain a low-margin raw material.

Wright said Wadi Dawkah had provided the base for a sourcing model that could now be tested elsewhere in Dhofar. One of those sites is Wadi Gazelle, which he said covers about 1,500 acres, or six square kilometres.

“We have already set up a working camp, employed seven people, trained seven more and have started harvesting”, he said.

The Wadi Gazelle work is being treated as a pilot. The question, Wright said, is whether a new generation of Omanis can sustainably harvest larger quantities of frankincense in difficult terrain.

“I am very optimistic that they can”, he said. “If they can and if it succeeds over the next 18 months, there is nothing to stop further expansion”. That expansion would mean creating a network of wild harvesting sites that follow international standards, with frankincense then distilled at Wadi Dawkah to produce high-quality frankincense oil.

For Oman, the economic opportunity is wider than Amouage



At Wadi Dawkah, we have employed young men from the area who have a historic link to those trees. We believe that the best way to find people who are fascinated, driven and passionate about frankincense and ensure ethical standards is to employ Omanis.

MATTHEW WRIGHT

alone. A scalable model could support rural employment, strengthen local skills, protect biodiversity, enhance heritage tourism and build a stronger Omani presence in the global natural ingredients market.

It also fits a broader national direction. Oman Vision 2040 places emphasis on diversification, sustainability and higher-value economic activity. Frankincense, if developed carefully, sits at the intersection of all three.

But the model will need discipline. Dhofar’s frankincense trees are not just a commercial resource. They are part of a fragile cultural and environmental landscape. Any serious attempt to scale production must balance output with regeneration, local acceptance and scientific management of wild harvesting areas.

Wright said Amouage’s approach depends heavily on employing Omanis from areas connected to the trees.

“At Wadi Dawkah, we have employed young men from the area who have a historic link to those trees”, he said. “We believe that the best way to find people who are fascinated, driven and passionate about frankincense and ensure ethical standards is to employ Omanis”.

That local dimension may prove decisive. In Dhofar, land, heritage and community relationships are closely linked. A business model that ignores local knowledge would struggle to gain credibility. A model that embeds local talents and respects inherited knowledge could create a more durable supply chain.

Amouage is also linking the project to its wider natural ingredient strategy. Wright said frankincense in the south and rose in the north represent the company’s long-term contribution to biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and craft preservation.

“An enormous part of our environmental, social and governance commitments is found within our natural ingredient activities”, he said.

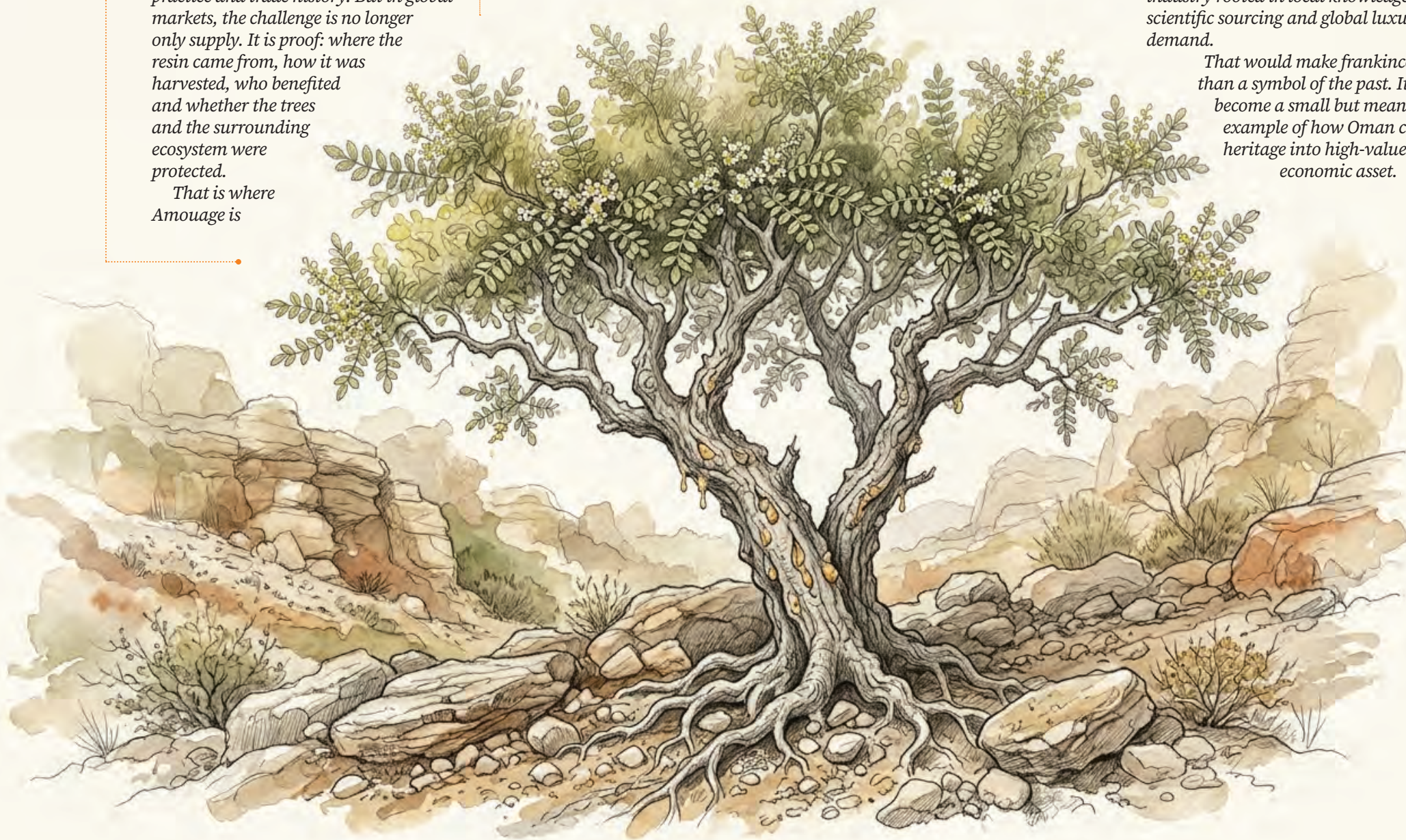
The timing is also part of Amouage’s own transformation. Since the arrival of Chief Executive Officer Marco Parsiegla and Chief Creative Officer Renaud Salmon, the company has deepened its link to Oman, centralising production in Muscat and investing more heavily in Omani natural ingredients.

For Wright, natural ingredients offer more than supply security. They are a way to tell Oman’s story to the world through scent.

“We think natural ingredients are an incredible way to tell wonderful stories about Oman to the world and an incredible way to contribute positively to the country”, he said.

The next test will be whether the Wadi Dawkah methodology can work beyond one protected heritage site. If Wadi Gazelle proves commercially and environmentally viable, Oman could have the early framework for a premium frankincense industry rooted in local knowledge, scientific sourcing and global luxury demand.

That would make frankincense more than a symbol of the past. It could become a small but meaningful example of how Oman converts heritage into high-value economic asset.



THE WADI DAWKAH MODEL AIMS TO BUILD TRACEABLE SUPPLY CHAIN, SUPPORT LOCAL JOBS AND RAISE OMAN’S SHARE OF GLOBAL PREMIUM MARKET

SHORTTAKES



Participants review the draft standards under the Gulf Standards Plan 2026.

OMAN HOSTS GCC ENERGY STANDARDS MEETINGS

MUSCAT: Oman is hosting meetings of three Gulf technical committees responsible for developing standards for the electricity, electronics and renewable energy sectors, as member states seek to strengthen regional technical cooperation and support the transition to cleaner energy.

The meetings, which continue until July 2, bring together representatives from GCC countries and Yemen, alongside specialists from government entities, electricity companies and the private sector.

Participants are reviewing draft standards under the Gulf Standards Plan 2026, focusing on product safety, energy efficiency, renewable energy technologies and electricity generation, transmission and distribution equipment.

Dr Jihad bint Jabr al Busaidy, Director of the Standards Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said Oman’s hosting of the meetings reflected the confidence of GCC member states and the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to advancing the Gulf standardisation system.

She said Oman is leading the preparation of 77 unified Gulf standards, with around 85 per cent completed, while national experts are also contributing technical reviews to more than 225 additional draft Gulf standards.

Officials said unified standards will improve product quality, support innovation, facilitate regional trade and strengthen investment in renewable energy, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the Gulf Cooperation Council’s broader economic integration goals. — ONA

Oman LNG ships first cargo aboard Muscat LNG

OMAN LNG has shipped its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo aboard the newly commissioned Muscat LNG, marking a milestone in the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to strengthen its position as a reliable global energy supplier while expanding national participation across the LNG value chain.

The vessel, owned by Asyad Shipping, loaded its inaugural cargo at the Oman LNG terminal in Sur before departing for international markets. It is the first of two newly built LNG carriers expected to enter service this year, with a second vessel scheduled to arrive in July.

The deployment of Muscat LNG expands Oman’s LNG shipping capacity and reflects closer collaboration between the country’s energy, maritime and logistics sectors.

The carrier is equipped with dual-fuel propulsion and advanced technologies designed to improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions, supporting global efforts to decarbonise maritime transport.

Hamed bin Mohammed al Naamany, Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, said the first voyage represented another step in strengthening the company’s export capabilities.

“This first shipment aboard Muscat LNG marks an important milestone in our journey to



The deployment of Muscat LNG expands Oman’s LNG shipping capacity and reflects closer collaboration between the country’s energy, maritime and logistics sectors.

continuously enhance Oman’s LNG export capabilities. It reflects our strong collaboration with national partners, including Asyad Shipping and our shared commitment to operational excellence, sustainability and delivering reliable energy to the world”, he said.

The shipment comes as Oman continues to invest across its integrated energy ecosystem, from gas production and liquefaction to shipping and international delivery, supporting the objectives of

Oman Vision 2040 to create greater in-country value and reinforce the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a regional energy and logistics hub.

Oman LNG, established in 1994, is one of the country’s flagship energy companies and one of its largest sources of national income after oil revenues.

Beyond LNG exports, the company has invested in social development initiatives covering entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, tourism and women’s empowerment.

The Oman LNG Development Foundation’s investment arm also holds a 10 per cent stake in Muscat LNG, reflecting its strategy of supporting investments across the energy, shipping and logistics sectors.

The arrival of Muscat LNG and the planned deployment of a second carrier next month are expected to further strengthen Oman’s ability to transport LNG using nationally linked assets, enhancing supply chain resilience and supporting the long-term growth of the country’s gas exports. — ONA

Initiative launches drive for secure enterprise AI in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 29

A new telecom and technology alliance on Monday unveiled a coordinated effort to accelerate the deployment of localised, secure artificial intelligence (AI) across the Omani corporate landscape, answering growing regulatory pressure for strict domestic data isolation within the Gulf region.

The initiative took centre stage at a major cloud forum held at the JW Marriott Muscat, which brought together over a hundred regional executives to address the practical bottlenecks of enterprise AI adoption. The event was jointly organised by Ooredoo Business and Google Cloud.

As regional economies rush to integrate large language models under digital transformation mandates like Oman Vision 2040, local enterprises face structural headwinds. Strict compliance and residency laws across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) prohibit the transfer of sensitive data across international borders, complicating



Diaa Eldin Ali, Senior Data and AI Customer Engineer at Google Cloud, speaks on multi-tiered architecture structured around the Gemini enterprise ecosystem.

the use of public, consumer-facing generative AI tools.

“The real market differentiation is no longer just the intelligence of the model itself, but the computational infrastructure backing it up and how securely you contain it”, said Diaa Eldin Ali, Senior Data and AI

Customer Engineer at Google Cloud, during a technical keynote.

Ali detailed a multi-tiered architecture structured around the Gemini enterprise ecosystem, drawing a sharp operational line between the high-speed processing capabilities of lighter models and the deep analytical reasoning required for heavy institutional data pipelines.

Addressing structural concerns around latency and processing bottlenecks — common friction points when corporations run multi-megabyte document analyses or multimodal embeddings — Ali emphasised Google’s reliance on proprietary, specialised hardware to stabilise enterprise workloads.

Central to the address was the introduction of an enterprise-grade “landing zone” within the cloud environment.

The infrastructure blueprint guarantees zero-training exposure, ensuring that a firm’s internal data remains strictly isolated and is never fed back into public model training sets. For the Omani market, the technical framework addresses

a crucial legal vulnerability. Under regional data sovereignty rules, financial services, healthcare bodies and public ministries cannot leverage deep automation without verifiable end-to-end encryption.

The system showcased features designed to inherit local corporate security parameters natively, preventing lower-tier access to sensitive files like human resource records or payroll data.

The forum also highlighted a major operational shift from standard query-and-response AI tools to autonomous corporate agents capable of executing complex, multi-step business workflows.

To mitigate the risk of “hallucinations” — a persistent issue where AI engines manufacture false metrics — the architecture leverages retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) strictly bound by live data connectors.

Instead of duplicating massive databases, the system handles real-time queries via data federation directly into existing ERP architectures like SAP, Oracle, or

Salesforce.

Telecom operator Ooredoo, functioning as the localised infrastructure host and primary network organiser, positions itself as the necessary intermediary to bridge global hyperscale computing with Omani regulatory mandates.

By routing Google Cloud’s model matrix through localised data infrastructure, the partnership aims to offer domestic enterprises a legally compliant path towards full-scale automation.

While acknowledging the broad corporate anxieties regarding artificial intelligence and human labour displacement, the forum’s speakers projected a near-term horizon focused on workforce augmentation rather than replacement.

Analysts at the event noted that the initial benchmark for measuring corporate return on investment (ROI) would hinge on operational efficiency gains, such as cutting document retrieval windows and shortening complex supply chain workflow cycles, rather than immediate workforce reductions.

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar heads for monthly gain



The US dollar edged higher and remained on track for its strongest monthly performance in nearly a year as investors sought safe-haven assets amidst renewed tensions between the United States and Iran.

The euro and pound weakened, while the yen hovered near a 40-year low. Markets are also awaiting US jobs data for clues on the Federal Reserve’s interest rate path. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold slips as oil climbs



Gold prices declined as rising oil prices and expectations of higher interest rates in the United States reduced demand for the precious metal.

Spot gold fell 0.5 per cent to \$4,067.99 an ounce, while US futures slipped 0.4 per cent. Traders continue to price in further US Federal Reserve tightening, with higher oil and energy prices adding to higher inflation concerns. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil rebounds on tensions



Oil prices rose after renewed exchanges between the United States and Iran highlighted the fragility of their interim agreement and disrupted energy shipments. Brent crude gained 0.8 per cent to \$72.57 a barrel, while US crude advanced 1.3 per cent to \$70.11.

The rebound followed three consecutive weekly declines as oil exports gradually recovered after the earlier conflict. — Reuters

OPINION

Banning social media for kids is a shared responsibility



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

OVER a month ago, I wrote an article on whether Oman should ban social media for kids. “Yes” was my answer and the opinion was that we in Oman should learn from global experiences and implement thoughtful measures that protect our children without completely disconnecting them from the digital world. Where are we today?

Around the world, governments are beginning to take action after growing concern about cyberbullying, mental health, online predators, misinformation, addiction and the amount of time children spend glued to their screens.

What started as discussions among parents and psychologists has now become a national policy issue in many countries, including here in Oman. The idea of banning children from social media is no longer just a debate. It's indeed a mission.

Some countries have already introduced age restrictions and stronger verification requirements, while others are preparing similar legislation. The goal is simple: allow children to enjoy technology without exposing them to risks they may not yet be mature enough to handle. However, introducing a ban is the easy part. Making it work is far more challenging, trust me.

Technology has always found ways around restrictions. We have seen people use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass blocked websites and services. If a

child can download a VPN in a few minutes, geographical or platform restrictions quickly become ineffective. Fake birthdays, borrowed accounts and weak age verification systems also make enforcement difficult. This means that legislation alone will never solve the problem. A successful social media ban requires every stakeholder to play a role.

Yes, a shared responsibility is the need of the hour. Governments must establish clear laws, define minimum age requirements, require stronger age verification and impose penalties on platforms that fail to comply. At the same time, regulations should protect children's privacy and avoid collecting unnecessary personal data. Most countries seem to agree that the age should be a minimum of 16.

Technology companies owning platforms of the likes of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, etc must move beyond simply asking users to enter their birthdate. They should also invest in reliable age verification, safer default settings, better parental controls and artificial intelligence capable of identifying underage accounts while respecting privacy.

Internet service providers and telecommunications companies (Omantel, Ooredoo, Awasr, Vodafone, etc) can also contribute by supporting family-friendly internet services, providing optional parental controls and helping families create safer online environments. Schools have an equally important responsibility, for

What started as discussions among parents and psychologists has now become a national policy issue in many countries, including here in Oman. The idea of banning children from social media is no longer just a debate. It's indeed a mission.

instance, for teaching students about online safety, cyberbullying, misinformation, digital wellbeing and responsible technology use.

Preparing children to make good decisions is just as important as restricting access.

Parents remain the most influential factor. No technology can replace conversations at home. Parents should understand the platforms their children use, set healthy screen-time boundaries, encourage offline activities and build trust so children feel comfortable discussing their online experiences instead of hiding them.

Finally, children themselves must become part of the solution. They should understand that these measures are not about punishment but about protecting their wellbeing during an important stage of development. When young people understand the reasons behind the rules, they are more likely to respect them.

In my humble opinion, relying solely on legislation won't work. Combining it with education, family awareness, cooperation from telecommunications providers and partnerships with technology companies will surely work. When every stakeholder accepts responsibility, protecting children online becomes achievable.

Banning social media for children is not simply about blocking an app. It is about building an ecosystem where all stakeholders work together. Only then can the digital world become a safer place for the next generation. Trust me.

BAIDU CHIP
IPO CHANNELS
EXTREME AI FRENZY

ROBYN MAK

AI chips are running perilously hot. China's Kunlunxin is targeting a valuation of \$50 billion in its upcoming Hong Kong IPO, The Information reported, citing sources. That's up 17 times in just six months or so as semiconductor shortages continue, accounting for most of majority owner Baidu's market capitalisation.

Sure, by one metric it would trade at a similar multiple to listed rivals. But the speed and disconnect highlight how the markets are turning frothy. Founded as search engine-operator Baidu's in-house silicon unit in 2011, Kunlunxin — named

Founded as search engine-operator Baidu's in-house silicon unit in 2011, Kunlunxin — named after a sacred mountain range often featured in ancient Chinese folklore and kung-fu tales — is one of the country's most promising Nvidia challengers. Booming demand, Washington's export controls and Beijing's preference for homegrown

alternatives mean domestic chipmakers now hold 41% of the so-called AI accelerator server market in the People's Republic, according to data provider IDC, referring to the specialised hardware used to train or run AI models. Kunlunxin is a minnow against Nvidia and larger domestic rivals like Huawei and Alibaba's chipmaking arm.

But 58%-owner Baidu does not compete directly with many internet companies, unlike the \$228 billion e-commerce empire that spans online videos, food delivery and more. That may explain why Alibaba nemesis Tencent is already a customer and TikTok-parent ByteDance is mulling a big purchase, per Reuters. The \$34 billion Baidu, which boasts a robotaxi business and other AI applications, is also a top user of Kunlunxin kit.

Analysts at Citi forecast Kunlunxin revenue will hit 14 billion yuan, roughly \$2 billion, in 2027, more than triple last year's top line.

At 25 times sales, that implies a similarly punchy valuation multiple as Shanghai-listed Cambricon Technologies and Shanghai Iluvatar CoreX Semiconductor, whose shares trade in Hong Kong. Still, a \$50 billion target is an astonishing acceleration from the \$3 billion valuation in last December's funding round. Moreover, it implies that Baidu's stake is worth over 80% of its market capitalisation as of Friday's close — a bizarre market disconnect between AI exuberance and the search-engine operator's languishing stock, down 20% this year in Hong Kong and New York.

That Kunlunxin is “prioritising” potential investors that buy its semiconductors in the share offering is a sign of hubris too. — Reuters

From tariff lines to
production lines

THE diplomatic milestone has rightly been celebrated. The GCC-UK Free Trade Agreement — the first comprehensive pact between the Gulf Cooperation Council and a G7 economy — was concluded this year and the negotiating teams deserve their credit.

But a trade agreement is only as good as the use a country makes of it. As ratification proceeds and the deal moves towards entry into force, the question that should occupy Oman is not whether the agreement matters — it plainly does — but what we will actually do with it. The scale is worth stating plainly.

Trade between the United Kingdom and the GCC already runs at roughly \$71 billion a year and official modelling expects the agreement to lift that by close to 20 per cent — about \$21 billion a year over the long run. Around 93 per cent of GCC tariffs on British goods will be removed.

For Oman the reciprocal benefit arrives immediately: tariffs on our current exports to the United Kingdom fall away the day the agreement takes effect. Goods are to clear customs within 48 hours and firms can request advance rulings on classification and origin.

For a commercial relationship already worth close to \$2.4 billion and rooted in nearly four centuries of commercial ties, this agreement represents not merely a modernisation of trade rules, but a modernisation of economic opportunity. Yet reading the deal as a discount on shipping goods would understate it.

The most valuable provisions carry no price tag: guaranteed access for services, which make up the larger share of modern trade; commitments on the free flow of financial data; mutual recognition of professional qualifications; and clearer terms for business travel.

These build an ecosystem, not a single transaction.

WHERE SMALL BUSINESSES
ACTUALLY WIN



DR YOUSUF
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The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

The GCC-UK free trade agreement hands Oman a diversification opportunity — now implementation is everything. The harder work of any trade agreement begins after the signing, not before it. For Oman, the true reward is not the agreement itself, but the productive capacity, investment and industries we choose to build because of it.

Across the GCC, some 675,000 formal small and medium enterprises already generate up to 63.5 per cent of non-oil GDP and one in four jobs. In Oman, SMEs are the engine of Oman Vision 2040, not a footnote to it. What holds them back is seldom the tariff itself; it is paperwork, unpredictability and the cost of proving where a product was made.

Here the agreement quietly delivers — self-certification of origin after a single registration, advance customs rulings and simpler documentation lower precisely the barriers that weigh most heavily on a small exporter. A young Omani fintech can process financial data without building a costly local data centre.

An engineering or advisory firm can have its qualifications recognised abroad and place its people with greater certainty. For the private sector, the real prize is predictability — the one input that lets a small company plan, invest and hire.

THE CASE FOR OMAN AS A
MANUFACTURING BASE

This is the argument I would put to any investor. Oman is the only Gulf economy that holds both a free trade agreement with the United States — in force since 2009, with duty-free access for industrial and consumer goods — and, since June this year, a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India that takes some 98 per cent of our tariff lines to zero.

Add our GCC membership, the bloc's agreements with Singapore, the EFTA states and New Zealand, the India-GCC talks now under way and this new pact with the United Kingdom and a rare advantage comes into view: a product that qualifies as “Made in Oman” under the rules of origin can reach the British, American, Indian and European markets duty-free from a single production line.

That strategy is waiting to be executed. Our deep-water ports at Al Duqm, Suhar and Salalah open onto Indian Ocean and African

routes; our free zones offer full foreign ownership and tax holidays of up to 30 years. Investment-grade status has been restored — Moody's at Baa3, S&P at BBB- — and public debt has fallen from above 68 per cent of GDP a few years ago to around 35 per cent. The market is already responding: this year a major manufacturer began a billion-dollar battery-materials plant in the SOHAR Port and Freezone.

The question is no longer whether Oman can host advanced manufacturing, but whether we will present the full offer — Gulf, American, Indian and British market access combined — as one compelling proposition.

FROM AGREEMENT TO
ADVANTAGE

Oman Vision 2040 and its Eleventh Five-Year Plan give us both the mandate and the measure: roughly 4 per cent annual growth, manufacturing expansion near 6 per cent, the private sector's contribution to GDP rising toward 56 per cent, foreign investment inflows of about 11 per cent of GDP and some \$40 billion of fresh investment.

Non-oil activity already accounts for more than 73 per cent of GDP. The agreement is not the destination; it is an instrument for reaching those targets provided implementation matches ambition.

Four steps would help. Sell Oman as a destination, not merely a market, placing our investment-promotion teams in front of British companies in clean technology, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital infrastructure.

Build origin-compliance capacity, so Omani manufacturers can certify origin across several agreements rather than one.

Equip SMEs directly, with practical training on self-certification, advance rulings and qualification recognition.

And use professional mobility deliberately, channelling Omani engineers, advisers and financial talent into a market that has committed to receiving them.

CLASSIFIEDS

SIT. WANTED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LOOKING for Pipeline Engineer with 8 Years Experience offer salary: 200 OMR Phone : +96896965333 Email : sultanalhabsi701@gmail.com

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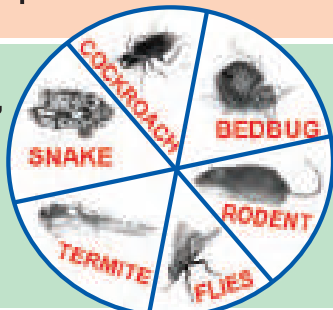
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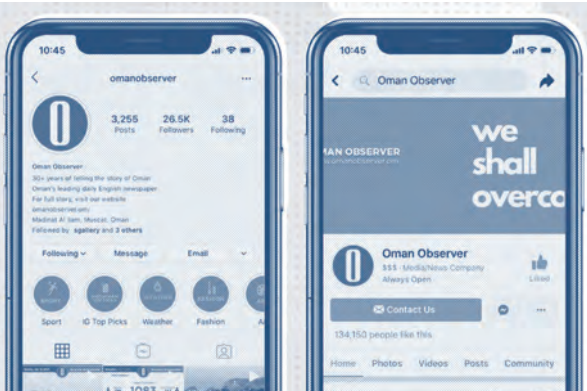
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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provision of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law, the company SUN RAYS ALHAIL TRADING (LLC), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1477566, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Rials Omani 25,000.000 to 15,000.000.

Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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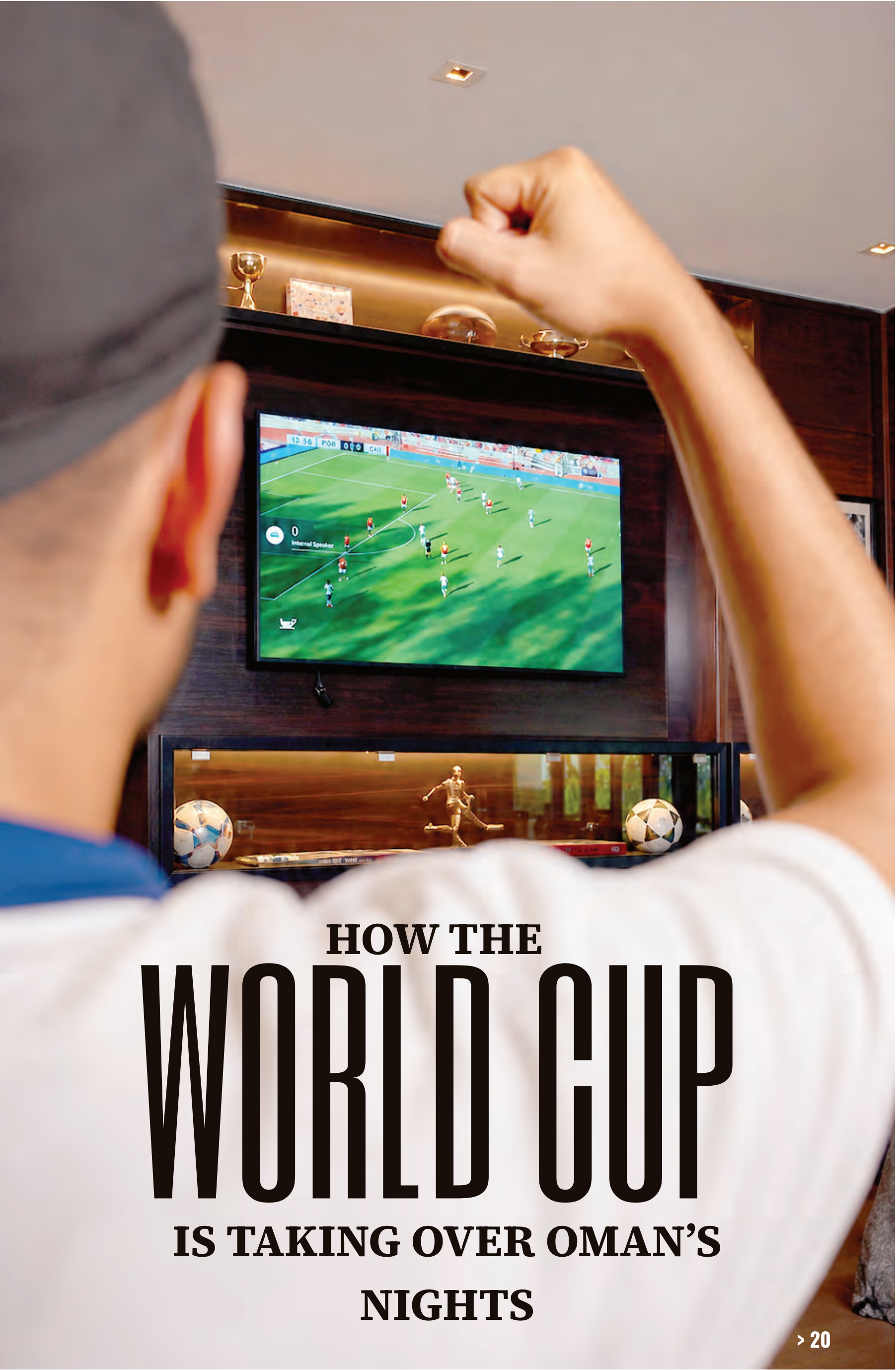


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ART/LIFE



HOW THE WORLD CUP IS TAKING OVER OMAN’S NIGHTS

> 20

AI & MEDIA

HOLLYWOOD BRINGS AI FIGHT TO EUROPE



Cate Blanchett has been a staunch proponent of protecting rights in the AI age. — AFP

Cate Blanchett brought Hollywood star power to Brussels last week as she launched a free tool to give people the right to decide how their image can be used by AI firms.

Blanchett announced the Human Consent Registry was live at the European Parliament, also attended by Hollywood directing heavyweight Steven Soderbergh.

The public tool, available online, will allow anyone to register how they want their identity — name, image, voice, likeness, movement and/or other personal attributes — to be used by artificial intelligence systems.

They will have three options: allowed, allowed with terms, or prohibited.

“Your identity is your IP [intellectual property] in the age of AI and every person deserves the right to decide how AI can or cannot use it”, Blanchett said in a statement.

The registry has been launched by RSL Media, co-founded by Blanchett, a non-profit organisation focused on ensuring consent in AI use.

Blanchett has been a staunch proponent of protecting rights in the AI age.

She was among more than 800 creatives, including fellow actor Scarlett Johansson and director Guillermo del Toro, who published an open letter accusing AI giants of “theft” in January this year.

Hosting Tuesday’s event was EU lawmaker Eva Maydell, who hailed the new tool as one “that makes rights transparent, scales trust and keeps human creativity at the centre of technological progress”.

The European Parliament has garnered international attention after the EU became the first in the world to regulate AI so comprehensively.

Maydell was one of the key EU negotiators of the landmark AI Act.

Blanchett and Soderbergh were not the only Hollywood figures in town to talk AI.

Acclaimed American filmmaker Darren Aronofsky told an audience of creatives at the EU Parliament how his AI studio, Primordial Soup, was using the technology for storytelling.

Aronofsky felt that while the models often created “incredible” images, they lacked “the power of emotion and the power of our humanity”.

With that discovery, he said he realised: “We need to figure out how to use this incredible technology” and “turn them into storytelling machines”. — AFP

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



CULTURE

Musicians play traditional instruments during Pacu Jawi, a traditional bull racing event, in Simabur village, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra. — AFP



SUMMER

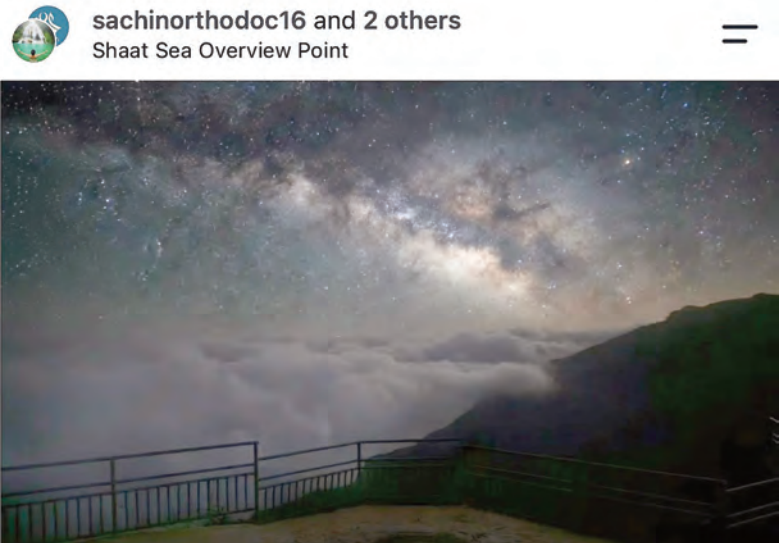
Lemurs eat frozen food at Rome’s Zoological Garden “Bioparco” during a heatwave. — AFP



THEATRE

Actors perform on stage Medaaye, a play by Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan, at the Wole Soyinka Theatre at the University of Ibadan, in southern Nigeria. — AFP

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SURF CULTURE INSPIRES PHARRELL’S LV PARIS SHOW



Models present creations by designer and musician Pharrell Williams as part of his Menswear Spring-Summer 2027 collection show. — Reuters

Musician and Louis Vuitton menswear designer Pharrell Williams unveiled a California-inspired collection at Paris Fashion Week last week, transforming the runway into a beach scene complete with sand, surfboards and a towering artificial waterfall as France endured a record-breaking heatwave.

The Spring/Summer 2027 show drew heavily from American surf and skate culture, with models wearing an eclectic mix of denim, hoodies, colourful jackets and low-cut sneakers reminiscent of classic California skate styles.

Some carried surfboards, while others accessorised with miniature Louis Vuitton monogram bags.

Held outdoors at the Cité Universitaire in southern Paris, the show took place as temperatures remained above 30 degrees Celsius late into the evening. Across France, temperatures neared 40 degrees Celsius, forcing several tourist

attractions, including the Eiffel Tower, to temporarily close.

Despite the extreme weather, Paris Fashion Week has continued without cancellations. However, some fashion houses, including Dior and Rick Owens, adjusted their schedules and moved shows to the morning to avoid the worst of the heat.

A spokesperson for Louis Vuitton said the company increased water supplies and scheduled additional breaks to improve working conditions for staff and attendees.

Alongside the surf-inspired looks, the collection featured more traditional tailoring, including dark green suits, coats and pullovers with leather detailing.

Paris Men’s Fashion Week will be followed by Haute Couture Week beginning on July 6, with fashion industry observers closely watching Pierpaolo Piccioli’s debut couture collection for Balenciaga.

— Reuters



Alicia Keys paid tribute to Clive Davis. — dpa

ALICIA KEYS PAYS HEARTFELT TRIBUTE TO CLIVE DAVIS

US singer-songwriter Alicia Keys said Clive Davis “changed [her] life forever” in a heartfelt tribute to the award-winning music executive, who has died aged 94.

The Girl On Fire singer, 45, praised Davis for believing in her from the beginning after signing her at 18.

In a post shared on Tuesday, Keys remembered the producer and media executive who helped shape her career. She went on to win 17 Grammy Awards and score UK top-10 singles including Empire State Of Mind, No One and Fallin’.

“Clive Davis changed my life forever”, she wrote. “He believed in me from the very beginning, when I was just 18 years old and very few saw what I was capable of”. Keys said Davis supported her through every chapter that followed, not merely in an industry sense but with “love for how unlimited I could be”.

She recalled that he called her a “renaissance woman”, describing it as one of her favourite descriptions because it reminded her to remain boundless. “If he didn’t see in me the glimmer of what was to become, you and I may have never known each other and be on this deep musical journey”, she added.

“We will celebrate your extraordinary life, legacy and heart today and always. You will be missed beyond words”.

Davis’ family announced his death on Monday. Tributes have since poured in for the former Columbia Records president, whose career helped launch or elevate Whitney Houston, Patti Smith, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Aerosmith and Earth, Wind & Fire.

Joel said Davis recognised great musical talent and understood the power of contemporary music, adding that he would always be grateful for his understanding of “the critical importance of songwriting”.

Springsteen said Davis changed his life and treated him with the same respect and kindness when he was “a 22-year-old nobody” as he did after his success.

Patti Smith thanked Davis for



Alicia Keys Remembers Clive Davis in Beautiful Tribute

transforming music and for decades of belief, support and friendship.

Born in 1932, Davis became president of Columbia Records in 1967. He signed Neil Diamond, Pink Floyd and Aerosmith; and also worked with Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, Barbra Streisand and Miles Davis.

After leaving Columbia in 1973, he founded Arista Records, where early success came with Barry Manilow’s hit Mandy. He continued to work across pop, R&B and country music, championing artists at different career stages.

Carlos Santana described Davis as a “visionary” who believed in the

band from the start. The guitarist said Davis understood that music was more than entertainment, calling it a force that brings people together beyond borders.

Davis signed Houston as a teenager and played a major role in building her into one of pop’s biggest stars. The pair remained close friends until her death in 2012.

He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000.

In announcing his death, Davis’ family called him a devoted family man and a music legend whose vision, instinct and pursuit of excellence shaped the soundtrack of countless lives. — dpa

HOW THE WORLD CUP IS TAKING OVER OMAN’S NIGHTS



YERU EBUEN

If you drive through Muscat after midnight, you may notice something unusual. Roads are quieter, but cafés are full, hotel lounges buzz and restaurants welcome another wave. Across the city, families and friends gather around television screens, cheering, debating referee decisions and reliving every goal.

The Fifa World Cup has arrived, transforming daily life. Staged across the United States, Canada and Mexico, it has captured Oman’s attention. With a record number of Arab teams competing, interest has reached levels usually reserved for the latter stages.

For many, the World Cup is far more than a sporting event.

“It only happens once every four years”, said Muscat resident Ahmed al Jabri, a lifelong football supporter. “You can miss a league match and

watch the highlights later. With the World Cup, every match feels important”.

That sentiment is echoed across social media, where fans share late-night viewing sessions, packed sports lounges and impromptu gatherings.

One theme stands out: football in Oman is rarely watched alone.

Football has long been part of the country’s social fabric.

From neighbourhood kickabouts after sunset to packed stadiums, it brings generations and backgrounds together.

“Football brings everybody together”, said university student Khalid al Balushi. “My father supports one team, my friends support another, but during the World Cup we’re all watching the same matches together”.

The timing has added another layer.

With matches played overnight Gulf time, dinner becomes

pre-match preparation, coffee consumption rises and sleep schedules become flexible.

Businesses have been quick to respond. Across Muscat, hospitality venues have become football destinations, offering more than a television screen.

JW Marriott Hotel Muscat has emerged as a prominent gathering spot during major sporting events.

Its spacious venues, dining and location attract groups seeking a polished social experience.

Elsewhere, hotels are adopting similar approaches. Kempinski Hotel Muscat’s Countdown Sports Lounge has become a popular viewing destination, while Sheraton Oman Hotel has also made football nights a major draw.

Beachfront venues are pairing screenings with outdoor dining, allowing guests to enjoy cooler evenings while following the action.

The trend extends beyond luxury

hotels. Neighbourhood cafés, restaurants and traditional tea shops in Muscat, Suhar, Nizwa and Salalah are extending opening hours for fans watching deep into the night. Many prefer these communal settings, saying shared reactions create an energy that cannot be replicated at home.

There is an economic upside too. For restaurants and cafés, the World Cup offers an opportunity during a quieter period of the year. Longer hours, special menus and themed promotions are helping venues attract customers who might otherwise have stayed home.

Employers, however, may be preparing for a different reality. Research by GulfTalent involving 1,200 professionals across nine Middle Eastern countries, including Oman, found that 84 per cent plan to watch at least some matches, while nearly half intend to stay up through the night for selected fixtures.

The impact is less about watching games during work than the following morning. While 45 per cent believe their performance will not be affected, around 30 per cent expect to arrive tired after sacrificing sleep.

Others plan to start later, work remotely or use annual leave following major matches. Nearly three-quarters of surveyed managers said they would allow some flexibility during the tournament.

For the next few weeks, Oman will continue operating on World Cup time. Hotel lounges will stay lit after midnight, tea shops will remain busy until dawn and friends and families will gather for just one more match.

Productivity may take a slight hit, but few fans would have it any other way. The World Cup only comes around once every four years.

