

IN BRIEF

HM CONGRATULATES
NEW UK PREMIER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Andy Burnham on the occasion of his appointment as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes for the UK Premier, wishing him continued health, happiness and success in his new role, and for the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly British people. His Majesty also expressed his hope for the further strengthening of cooperative and friendly relations between the two countries.

HM’S GREETINGS TO
KING OF BELGIANS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie of the Belgians on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan lauded the strength of the partnership and cooperation relations between the two countries. His Majesty also wished Belgium continued progress and prosperity, and the realisation of further achievements at all levels.

SAYYID SHIHAB BIDS FAREWELL TO NEPAL AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of the Republic of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. HH Sayyid Shihab expressed his thanks to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to enhance bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Nepal, wishing him continued success. — ONA

Oman advances in global
environmental index

MUSCAT: The Environment and Natural Resources priority under Oman Vision 2040 aims to establish effective, balanced and resilient ecological systems that protect the environment and sustain natural resources in support of the national economy.

The priority seeks to balance environmental, economic and social requirements within the framework of sustainable development, while ensuring high-quality, pollution-free environments, enhancing food and water security through renewable resources and advanced technologies, and optimising Oman’s strategic location and biodiversity.

This priority is directly linked to the economy and development axis by ensuring resource sustainability, and serves as a key driver for emerging sectors such as the green and circular economies, while also supporting the Human and Society axis.

The priority targets three key indicators: the Oman Water



In the most recent EPI reading, Oman climbed six places to rank 49th globally out of 180 countries, up from 55th in 2024.

Index, the share of renewable energy in total consumption, and the Environmental Performance Index. In the most recent EPI reading, Oman climbed six places to rank 49th globally out of 180 countries, up from 55th in 2024. Oman also secured third place in the Middle East, second in the Arab world, and second among GCC states.

In sub-indicators, Oman ranked first globally in sustainable solid waste management, clean household fuel, sulphur dioxide emissions trends, species habitat and

open-water trawling, and ninth in marine environment protection. Oman aims to be among the top 40 countries by 2030 and to reach the top 20 by 2040, reflecting its commitment to environmental improvement, resource conservation and human well-being.

The progress results from national efforts by the Environment Authority and relevant institutions, supported by a steering committee, technical teams and a dedicated team to ensure data quality and completeness. SEE ALSO P2

Iran and US widen attacks

PRESIDENT MASOUD SAYS COUNTRY IN ‘FULL-SCALE WAR’ WITH US

IRAN’S Revolutionary Guards said on Monday they had struck US military assets across the Middle East after another night of US bombardment of Iranian cities, part of a cycle of attacks that has all but wrecked an interim ceasefire agreement.

Oil prices briefly jumped above \$90 a barrel after renewed disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, but later pared gains after Iran’s Foreign Ministry said mediators had recently presented proposals to Tehran, signalling that diplomatic contacts remain active.

US President Donald Trump, under mounting political pressure at home over rising gasoline prices, defended the latest strikes on Iran as retaliation for the deaths of as



Iranian women walk past a banner with a picture of the former Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Bagheri, in Tehran, Iran. — Reuters

many as three American service members in recent Iranian attacks.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said his country was in a “full-scale war” with the

United States and that Tehran should accept the repercussions of the conflict.

“The reality is that today the Islamic Republic of Iran is engaged in a full-scale war,”

Pezeshkian said, adding that “we must be realistic and accept the natural consequences of this resistance,” he said, according to a presidency statement.

The conflict has also escalated with attacks on desalination facilities, raising the prospect of water shortages across parts of the Gulf and opening a new front in a war that is increasingly threatening civilian infrastructure.

Bahrain’s Civil Aviation Authority said on Monday that Iran had targeted the kingdom’s civil air navigation systems, but that operations and air traffic were proceeding normally.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said two oil tankers had “exploded” and were immobilised after attempting to transit the strait via an “unsafe” route.

SEE ALSO P6



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OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The campaign runs from July 20 to 30. — ONA

CAMPAIGN TO PLANT 4 MILLION SEEDS UNDER WAY



HATEM BIN SALEM AL MAHRI

SALALAH: The Environment Authority (EA) in Dhofar Governorate carries out an environmental campaign to plant 4 million seeds of native trees in the governorate’s mountains. The initiative is part of the EA’s ongoing efforts to

improve vegetation cover, combat desertification, enhance biodiversity and restore natural ecosystems.

The campaign, which runs from July 20 to 30, is the fruit of cooperation with Dhofar Municipality and the awareness initiative team, with active participation by members of the local community. It covers the wilayats of Mirbat, Taqah, Salalah, Rakhyouut and Dhalkout.

Hatem bin Salem al Mahri, Director of the Vegetation Development Department at the Directorate-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, said that it is the fifth consecutive year for the campaign. He noted that choosing the Khareef Dhofar Season provides optimal conditions for germination and early growth, due to abundant rainfall and dense fog which contribute to increasing the chances of seed germination and growth.

During this season, humidity helps seedlings develop a strong root system, enabling them to withstand subsequent periods of drought. He added that trees play a role in stabilising the soil, reducing erosion, and maintaining its fertility, thus supporting the sustainability of vegetation cover.

He noted that the participation of government institutions, volunteers, and community members in implementing the campaign reflects the importance of community partnership in protecting the environment, preserving natural resources, and supporting national efforts aimed at achieving environmental sustainability. — ONA

SAYYID BADR RECEIVES CREDENTIALS COPIES OF KOREA, MALAYSIA, SWITZERLAND AMBASSADORS



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received copies of the credentials of Lee Jong il, Ambassador-designate of the Republic of Korea; Ahmad Kamrizamil Bin Mohammad Riza, Ambassador-designate of the Kingdom of Malaysia; and Gregorio Bernasconi, Ambassador-designate of the Swiss Confederation, who are appointed to the Sultanate of Oman. The Foreign Minister welcomed the ambassadors, wishing them success in performing their diplomatic duties. He also affirmed his aspiration that the relations of friendship and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and their respective countries will witness further growth and development, serving mutual interests. — ONA

34,239 SEATS AVAILABLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE PREFERENCE modification period for admission to higher education institutions for the 2026/2027 academic year begins today (Tuesday) and continues until Saturday, August 1, the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) has announced.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri, Director-General of the HEAC, said that the total number of available seats has reached 34,239 compared to 29,259 in the previous academic year, representing a 17-per cent increase.

He added that the available seats are distributed among government higher education institutions, internal scholarships and grants at non-governmental higher education institutions, as well as external scholarships and grants provided by sisterly and friendly countries. The available specialisations encompass a variety of disciplines including health, engineering, information technology, natural sciences, architecture, business administration, education and arts and humanities.

He added that the preference modification period will end on August 1 and the entrance exams, personal interviews, and medical examinations will take place between August 8 and 15 following the announcement of the

“Preference modification period will end on August 1 and the entrance exams, personal interviews, and medical examinations will take place between August 8 and 15 following the announcement of the candidates on August 6.

AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL AZRI



The available seats are distributed among government higher education institutions, internal scholarships and grants at non-governmental higher education institutions.

candidates on August 6. The initial selection results will be announced on August 19, and accepted students will have until August 24 to complete their registration procedures at the higher education institutions.

Al Azri urged students whose results will be released after the initial selection announcement to promptly submit their applications and confirm their preferences during the current application modification period rather than waiting for their final results, adding that the system will not allow registration or modification of preferences after the end of this period.

He noted that the HEAC

continues to develop its digital and guidance services to enhance the efficiency of the registration and admission system, providing students with a more user-friendly and transparent experience throughout the application and selection process.

Students and parents have to follow the HEAC’s website and official platforms for updates, instructions, and information, and to utilise the available guidance and awareness materials.

This will help them make informed decisions that enhance their chances of obtaining the appropriate specialisation and building their educational and professional futures.

Oman advances in global environmental performance index

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The priority targets three key indicators: the Oman Water Index, the share of renewable energy in total consumption, and the Environmental Performance Index.

In the most recent EPI reading, Oman climbed six places to rank 49th globally out of 180 countries, up from 55th in 2024.

Oman also secured third place in the Middle East, second in the Arab world, and second among GCC states.

In sub-indicators, Oman ranked



The priority seeks to balance environmental, economic and social requirements within the framework of sustainable development. — ONA

first globally in sustainable solid waste management, clean household fuel, sulphur dioxide emissions trends, species habitat and open-water trawling, and ninth in marine environment protection.

Oman aims to be among the top 40 countries by 2030 and to reach the top 20 by 2040, reflecting its commitment to environmental improvement, resource conservation and human well-being.

The progress results from national efforts by the Environment Authority and

relevant institutions, supported by a steering committee, technical teams and a dedicated team to ensure data quality and completeness.

International partnerships with index-responsible bodies and global data providers helped track methodological updates, verify data and address gaps that could affect Oman’s ranking.

The advancement reflects national policies in climate action, sustainable resource management, biodiversity conservation, air quality improvement, renewable energy

expansion, circular economy promotion and sustainability initiatives aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Key efforts include expanding air quality monitoring with 70 stations established in 2025, and leading a global trend to separate dust particles from industrial carbon dioxide in air quality measurements — distinguishing natural from industrial impacts. This contributed to Oman ranking first globally in sulphur dioxide emission reductions.

Oman has also developed waste management and circular economy systems, focusing on resource sustainability and value creation. Initiatives include the second phase of an industrial waste treatment facility, identification and measurement of carbon dioxide sources, a reverse vending machine project to facilitate waste sorting and raise awareness, and strategic partnerships to produce recycled plastics.

A waste-to-energy project processing about 3,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste daily to generate 75-100 MW of electricity will significantly reduce landfill reliance by 2030, enhance resource efficiency, support the circular economy and strengthen renewable energy and sustainability targets. This policy has raised recycling rates from about 11 to over 100, achieving 40 per cent solid waste recovery. — ONA

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SHORTTAKES



To improve network performance, 40 stations have been upgraded to 5G technology.

Telecom sector strengthens readiness for Khareef 2026

SALALAH: The telecommunications sector has announced its readiness for the Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, with a series of projects implemented to enhance network coverage, capacity and service quality during the annual tourist season.

The initiatives include the installation of 29 new communication stations to expand and improve coverage across various locations in Dhofar, along with 13 additional stations installed along Sultan Said bin Taimur Road to ensure reliable connectivity for road users. As part of efforts to improve network performance, 40 stations have been upgraded to 5G technology, while the capacity of 58 communication links has been increased to enhance speed and stability. Transmission lines at 30 stations have also been upgraded to improve network efficiency and capacity. To address increased demand at locations expected to witness high visitor traffic during the season, 38 mobile communication stations have been deployed to strengthen coverage and accommodate the anticipated rise in telecommunications usage. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said the measures reflect the sector’s commitment to enhancing service readiness during peak tourist seasons, meeting users’ needs and ensuring a continuous and secure communication experience across Dhofar Governorate. — **ONA**

Dhofar Governorate to host energy and society exhibition



The event will take place in Ateen Square in the Wilayat of Salalah.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals will organise a 13-day event titled ‘Energy and Minerals Exhibition and Media Forum for Sectors of Energy and Minerals 2026’ in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, from July 25, 2026. The opening ceremony will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The event is in pursuance of the ministry’s efforts to enhance communication with society, business partners and the media, with the prime objective of highlighting the role of the vital sector in supporting the national economy and achieving in-country value (ICV) and sustainable opportunities for investment to back pillars of future development in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event will take place in Ateen Square in the Wilayat of Salalah on the sidelines of Khareef Dhofar Season programmes. It aims to offer interactive knowledge and showcase educational experiences in the interest of members of the public who will get an opportunity to learn about the history of oil and the contribution of sources of traditional and renewable energy and minerals to daily life. — **ONA**

Strategic road projects strengthen food security



The road works would significantly benefit local agricultural and livestock producers.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

AS part of its drive to strengthen infrastructure and advance sustainable development, Oman is pressing ahead with a series of strategic road projects across Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and Al Sharqiyah North governorates. The initiatives are designed to improve connectivity, support economic diversification and enhance access to productive sectors, particularly those contributing to national food security.

Among the flagship projects is the 70-kilometre road leading to Al Namaa Poultry Company in the Wilayat of Dhank. The route is expected to provide a major logistical boost to one of Oman’s key food production facilities by facilitating the movement of livestock feed, production inputs and finished products while reducing transport costs and improving supply chain efficiency.

Salim bin Rashid al Alawi, a farmer from Dhank, said the road would significantly benefit local agricultural and livestock producers.

“The new road will save time, reduce transportation costs and make it easier to move products and production materials. It will also encourage further investment in agriculture and livestock farming, as modern road infrastructure is essential for the success of productive projects,” he said.

The project aligns with Oman’s broader strategy to strengthen national food security by investing in infrastructure that supports agricultural and industrial development while creating a more attractive environment for private sector investment.

In Al Buraimi Governorate, construction of the 42-kilometre Al Abeelah-Al Fiyadh Road is expected to improve connectivity between residential communities, shorten travel times and enhance road safety. It will also facilitate commercial activity, improve access to essential services and support balanced regional development, creating new opportunities for businesses and investors. Meanwhile, the Wadi Bani Jaber Road project in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate will improve access to remote villages while supporting tourism in one of the governorate’s most scenic destinations. The road is also expected to enhance access

to public services and improve safety, particularly during seasonal weather conditions.

Mohammed bin Khamis al Jabri, a resident of Wadi Bani Jaber, described the project as a long-awaited development for the local community.

“This road will make daily travel safer and more convenient for residents, students and employees while improving access to essential services. It will also strengthen tourism and create new opportunities for small businesses and home-based enterprises that rely on visitors to the area,” he said.

The projects underscore Oman’s integrated approach to infrastructure development, recognising that modern road networks are not merely transport corridors but key enablers of economic growth, investment and social development. By strengthening links between communities and supporting strategic sectors such as food production, tourism and commerce, the projects are expected to contribute significantly to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 while improving the quality of life across Oman.

OMAN DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR INCLUSION

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Parents of children with Down syndrome and special abilities should overcome social concerns and allow their children to engage with the wider community, the Oman Down Syndrome Association has urged, highlighting the importance of inclusion, acceptance and equal opportunities.

The association said many children with special abilities continue to face social isolation due to stigma, exclusion and misconceptions about their condition and parenting, which can place emotional and psychological pressure on families.

“We have 438 children with Down syndrome who are brought to us by their parents and caregivers. However, many more children remain confined within their homes due to parents’ fears of social rejection,” said Ahmed bin

“To help our children enjoy life and integrate with the rest of the world, we need to move beyond stereotypes, allow them to interact with their peers and provide the support they need.”

AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL JABRI

Mohammed al Jabri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Down Syndrome Association.

He stressed that changing public perceptions and encouraging social interaction are essential to helping children with Down syndrome develop confidence and participate fully in society.

“To help our children enjoy life and integrate with the rest of the world, we need to move beyond stereotypes, allow them to interact with their peers and provide the support they need,” Al Jabri said.

As part of its efforts to promote awareness and inclusion, the association will launch the 2026 Down Syndrome Awareness Caravan under the theme ‘A Message of Awareness: A Lasting Impact’ from July 31 to August 7, 2026.

The caravan will begin in Muscat Governorate, travel through Nizwa and continue to Dhofar Governorate before returning to Muscat. It aims to spread awareness about

the rights, abilities and potential of people with disabilities while promoting inclusive practices among families, communities, educational institutions and healthcare providers.

Al Jabri said the initiative is designed to reach different segments of society across governorates and wilayats, helping build a more informed, accepting and inclusive community in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

“Salalah was chosen as one of the key destinations as it provides an opportunity to reach more people at various tourist locations while also allowing the children to experience the pleasant Khareef weather,” he added. The awareness caravan will feature community programmes, awareness sessions, introductory workshops and activities aimed at creating a lasting social impact beyond the duration of the campaign.

SPOTLIGHT

Digital economy contribution projected to reach 10 per cent of GDP by 2040 as Oman moves from AI experimentation to national implementation

OMAN ADVANCES AI AMBITIONS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

OMAN IS moving beyond artificial intelligence (AI) pilot projects and experimentation towards structured national implementation, with a focus on building digital capabilities, responsible governance and AI-driven economic growth. Dr Salim al Shueili, an expert in artificial intelligence and digital transformation, said Oman has entered a new phase where AI is being integrated across government and economic sectors through national programmes, specialised infrastructure projects and capacity-building initiatives.

“We are no longer discussing artificial intelligence only as an emerging technology or conducting isolated pilot projects. Oman now has a national programme, governance frameworks, specialised infrastructure projects, capacity-building initiatives and practical applications across government and economic sectors,” Al Shueili told the Observer.

The National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies serves as the key framework guiding Oman’s AI ambitions. The programme focuses on accelerating AI adoption in economic and development sectors, developing national expertise, localising technologies and ensuring responsible, human-centred AI governance.

It also aims to support startups, strengthen public-private partnerships, attract investment and enhance Oman’s competitiveness in the global digital economy.

Oman has already introduced or initiated AI-based solutions in areas including urban planning through satellite imagery, government services, education, energy, infrastructure and tourism-related analytics.

The national programme reported the launch of eight AI applications in 2024 following the ‘Engineer It with AI’ competition. Other major initiatives include the Omani language model Mueen AI, Oman AI Studio, and the National Open Data Platform.

Al Shueili said Mueen AI represents an important step towards developing AI capabilities that reflect Oman’s linguistic, cultural and institutional context.

“Mueen AI is not simply another chatbot. It represents an attempt to develop an AI language capability that reflects Oman’s linguistic, cultural and institutional context and supports government organisations with intelligent language applications,” he said.

He added that Oman AI Studio provides a platform for government entities, innovators and companies to transform challenges into practical AI solutions, while high-quality open data remains essential for developing reliable AI applications.

Oman has also made progress in establishing frameworks for safe and ethical AI adoption through the National Policy for the Safe and Ethical Use of AI.

The policy addresses innovation, economic development, national capabilities, infrastructure and the relationship between technology and legislation.

The AI Experts Committee has also been established to provide specialised advice, support strategic development and promote responsible innovation.

The establishment of the Artificial Intelligence Special Zone through Royal Decree No 50/2026 marks another milestone, highlighting Oman’s ambition to position AI as not only a tool for government modernisation but also as a future investment and economic sector.

Al Shueili said projects such as the Digital Triangle will provide the infrastructure needed for an AI economy, including data centres, cloud platforms, advanced computing capacity and secure connectivity.

International rankings indicate Oman’s growing progress in AI readiness and responsible adoption.

Oman ranked 45th globally in the 2024 Government AI Readiness Index, achieving the national programme’s target of entering the top 50 countries. In the 2026 Global Index on Responsible AI, Oman ranked 61st, showing strengths in areas such as enabling conditions, inclusion, diversity, trust and safety.

Al Shueili noted that the two indices measure different aspects of AI development — one focusing on government readiness and the other on responsible implementation — and should be viewed as complementary assessments.

Oman has also strengthened its global engagement as one of the 29 founding member states of the World AI Cooperation Organization, giving the country a greater role in international discussions on AI governance, cooperation and equitable access to technology.

“Oman has built a credible foundation. The next stage is to convert that foundation into measurable outcomes: more productive businesses, better public services, scalable Omani AI companies, valuable intellectual property and high-quality employment for Omanis,” Al Shueili said.



Mueen AI represents an attempt to develop an AI language capability that reflects Oman’s linguistic, cultural and institutional context and supports government organisations with intelligent language applications.

DR SALIM AL SHUEILI
AI, digital transformation expert

Oman joins Unesco World Heritage Committee session in Busan

SEOUL: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), being held in the city of Busan in the Republic of Korea from July 19-29.

The session is attended by representatives of parties to the 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Oman's delegation is led by Amna bint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco. During its current session, the Unesco committee discussed files of nomination for new sites to be added to the World Heritage List and reports on the conservation of listed sites, in



Amna bint Salim al Balushi leads Oman's delegation in Korea.

addition to policies and procedures related to the protection and management of World Heritage sites.

The session also deals with means of managing risks and disasters, handling the effects of climate change and activating the role of local communities tasked with protecting heritage.

Oman's participation in the session stems from its keenness to follow up developments in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and contribute to the discussion of issues related to the protection and management of World Heritage sites, in a bid to support national efforts aimed at preserving cultural and natural heritage in line with global standards. — ONA

Municipal election review under way

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE Ministry of Interior is reviewing candidate submissions for the fourth-term Municipal Council elections after receiving digital applications from eligible Omani citizens earlier this year.

The ministry accepted candidacy applications from April 5 to 23, 2026, through the official Elections portal, while candidates have until October 29, to formally withdraw their applications.

"The exact number of candidates contesting the October 2026 elections is not publicly available because the Ministry of Interior is currently reviewing the submissions. All nominations and subsequent polling are conducted digitally through the official elections.om portal or the Intikhab mobile application," said Malik al Hina'i of the Ministry's Elections Department.

In the previous Municipal Council elections, held in December 2022, 727 candidates contested 126 seats across Oman's wilayats.

Municipal Councils provide Omani citizens with representation on local issues, including infrastructure, healthcare, the environment and the economy.

Article (10) of the Municipal Councils Law sets out the eligibility criteria for

Municipal councils provide Omani citizens with representation on local issues, including infrastructure, healthcare, the environment and the economy



candidates. They must be Omani citizens by origin, at least 30 years old at the opening of nominations, and hold a minimum qualification of a General Education Diploma.

The law also stipulates that candidates must not have been convicted by a final judgment of a felony or a crime involving dishonour or breach of trust, even if rehabilitated. They must be registered in the electoral roll of the constituency they seek to represent.

Candidates must not be affiliated with any security or military entity, be under legal guardianship by court order, or suffer from a mental illness affecting their legal capacity.

The law further requires that candidates must not be employed by any security or military entity, hold membership in the State Council or the Majlis Ash'shura, or reside or work outside Oman.

KHOULA HOSPITAL PERFORMS 10 SUCCESSFUL EPILEPSY SURGERIES

GHALIA AL THUKHRI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Khoula Hospital has performed 10 successful epilepsy surgeries with a 70-per cent recovery rate since the beginning of 2025.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Maawali, Consultant Neurologist at Khoula Hospital, said that the causes of epilepsy may stem from a dynamic process called Epileptogenesis.

This condition causes the cerebral cortex to malfunction, resulting in spontaneous and continuous epileptic seizures. Several factors contribute to this, including genetic predisposition, strokes, brain infections, tumours and injuries. However, in some cases, the cause remains unknown.

Al Maawali noted that the surgical treatment of epilepsy involves delicate stages, beginning with diagnosis, which presents the greatest challenge. In some cases, epilepsy is not caused by the underlying condition itself, but rather by other problems. Some cases are due to behavioural disorders, heart problems, or other issues.



DR SAID BIN MOHAMMED AL MAAWALI



DR AHMED BIN SULAIMAN AL AZRI

Surgical treatment of epilepsy involves delicate stages, beginning with diagnosis, which presents the greatest challenge



Diagnosis is undertaken by a specialist physician, and the patient undergoes several tests, including electroencephalography (EEG), scans, and others. After that, the case is assessed, and the appropriate medication is prescribed adding that 70 per cent of cases respond to medication.

Dr Ahmed bin Sulaiman al Azri, Senior Consultant Neurosurgeon at Khoula Hospital, explained that the decision to intervene surgically is made after careful evaluation.

A patient who begins experiencing seizures and whose condition improves functionally with anti-seizure medications is not considered

a candidate for surgery.

He pointed to the development in the medical protocol, where previously, the patient would take two types of medication at the maximum possible dose without improvement before considering surgery. Now, it is sufficient for the patient to not respond to one type of medication to be immediately placed on the list of candidates for surgery.

Al Azri noted that most patients refuse to undergo surgery at first due to lack of awareness of its nature. However, the patient's conviction begins when it is explained to him that the surgery has a 70-per cent recovery rate.

محافظة مسقط
Muscat Governorate
MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (23/2026)

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

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRES/26/001	Supply and installation interlocks and Kerbstones for Al-Kharies Schools	7/8/2026	28/8/2026
PRES/26/002	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve Storm Water problems in Hail North Walayt Al Seeb	7/8/2026	28/8/2026

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Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
343/ 2026	Consultancy Services (Design and Supervision) for the Construction of the Autism Spectrum Disorder and Rehabilitation Center at Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (Nizwa)	Companies specialized in the field of Civil Engineering Consulting Architectural Engineering Consulting Quantity Surveying and Surveying Services Project Management Consulting Electrical Engineering Consulting Mechanical Engineering Consulting Interior Design Consulting Landscape Design Consulting Safety and Fire Prevention Engineering Consulting with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with first or second degree	Monday 10-08-2026 02:00 PM	Sunday 30-08-2026 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Tuesday 21/07/2026.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Soldiers inspect the site of an explosion that targeted their vehicle in the southern Lebanese area of al Mansouri. — AFP

LEBANON ARMY BEGINS TAKING OVER PILOT ZONES’

WASHINGTON: The Lebanese army began taking charge of security in three southern villages on Monday, the US said, as a deal to secure an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon and the disarmament of Hezbollah faced its first test on the ground. The US State Department said operations had started in “pilot zones” in Froun, Sriba and Zawtar Al Gharbiya “in accordance with the Trilateral Framework and under the auspices of the Military Coordination Group for Lebanon.” State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott described the step as “a direct outcome” of talks held between Israeli and Lebanese delegations in Rome last week, adding that Washington would keep working with both sides “to implement the framework to a successful conclusion.” In exchange, the Lebanese Armed Forces are to assume sole security control of vacated areas and certify that they have been cleared of Hezbollah weapons and infrastructure. The pilot zones are intended to trial the approach in a handful of villages straddling the Litani River before it is extended to other areas. A Lebanese military source said that troops had begun intensifying patrols in several villages adjacent to areas occupied by Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. — AFP

INDIAN PROTESTERS MARCH TO THE PARLIAMENT



Students hold placards during a protest demanding the resignation of India’s Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. — AFP

NEW DELHI: India’s youth-led Cockroach Janta Party movement said on Monday a federal minister had promised the government would weigh its demands as thousands of protesters marched on parliament despite police efforts to scatter them with tear gas and cane charges. The months-old movement and the protest are seen as the biggest public challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his third term. A police decision to forcibly move hunger-striking activist Sonam Wangchuk to hospital on Saturday galvanised a movement demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over examination paper leaks. Members say the leaking of the papers for a national entrance test to medical school in May was a sign of deep-seated corruption in education. Thousands of young supporters gathered through the night at the protest site of Jantar Mantar in New Delhi for the march on the opening day of parliament’s monsoon session. Scores of police and paramilitary personnel turned out across the capital, stopping protesters as they chanted and waved the national flag. — Reuters

DROWNING ACCIDENT

Nigeria searches for survivors of boat sinking



Rescue operations were underway on Monday to find survivors of a capsized boat in northwestern Nigeria after at least five people drowned and a dozen went missing. Up to 40 people were initially feared to have drowned in the accident, including women and children, which occurred when the vessel was crossing a river in Jigawa state. But as of Monday afternoon, 23 of the estimated 40 passengers had been found alive. Around 12 are still unaccounted for. — AFP

MUSICAL DIPLOMACY

Thai PM bursts into song on China visit



Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul serenaded Chinese Premier Li Qiang during a formal lunch in Beijing, the latest example of his musical diplomacy. Footage released by Anutin’s office showed the Thai leader sitting alongside Li on a long table, holding a microphone and singing a classic hit by Taiwanese star Teresa Teng. Li and other assembled guests, who sat in front of Thai and Chinese flags, clapped alongside as a piano was heard in the background. — AFP

SCORCHING TEMPERATURES

Severe heat kills five Afghan migrants



Authorities in southwestern Afghanistan were searching for 14 people missing in the desert after five other migrants trying to reach neighbouring Iran died in the heat, police said. “After their vehicle broke down in a storm and became stuck in the dust, the driver was forced to head towards residential areas in search of a solution or someone who could fix the problem, but he lost his way,” said Gul Mohammad Quadrat, Nimroz province police spokesman. — AFP

YEMEN’S ANSAR ALLAH GROUP ANNOUNCES SAUDI MARITIME BLOCKADE	IRAN’S INTERIOR MINISTER MOMENI IS SET TO TRAVEL TO MEDIATOR PAKISTAN	BAHRAIN’S AVIATION BODY SAID IRAN HAD TARGETED AIR NAVIGATION SYSTEMS	KUWAIT’S MILITARY SAID THAT IT WAS RESPONDING TO RENEWED MISSILE AND DRONE SALVOS	IRAN SAID DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES ARE GOING ON WITH THE UNITED STATES
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IRAN VOWS ‘FULL-SCALE WAR’ WITH US

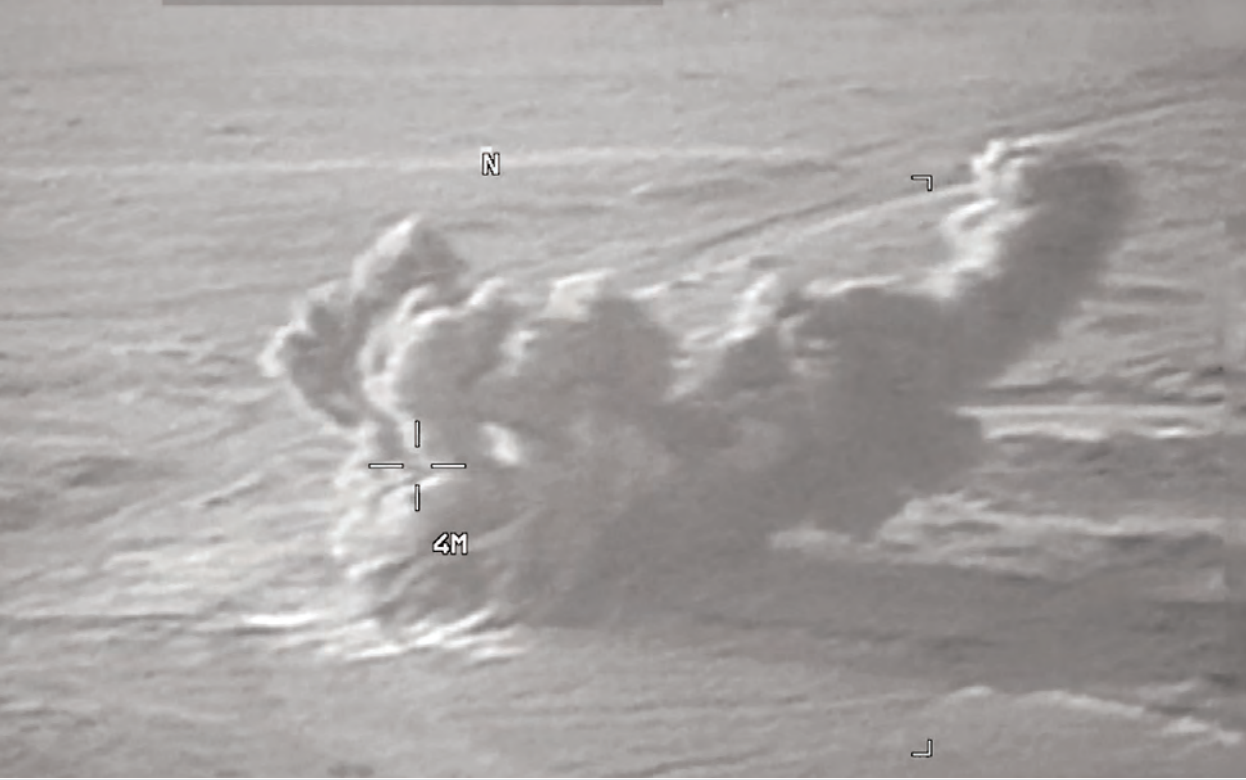
IRAN IS fighting a “full-scale war” with the United States, its president said on Monday, as Washington expanded its strikes across the Islamic republic, including a city hosting a nuclear power plant. Iran kept up its own attacks across the region in response, with its Revolutionary Guards announcing they had hit targets in Bahrain, Jordan and Syria, while Bahrain said Tehran had targeted its air navigation systems. “The reality is that today the Islamic Republic of Iran is engaged in a full-scale war,” said President Masoud Pezeshkian, according to a presidency statement. He added that “we must be realistic and accept the natural consequences of this resistance.”

His comments came after state media and local authorities reported US strikes on Monday in the north and centre of the country, further than areas near the blockaded Strait of Hormuz waterway through which a fifth of world oil supplies transited prior to the war. The Middle East war resumed after a weeks-long lull prompted by an agreement signed in June, and oil prices surged to a one-month high as the foes battled to control the vital Strait of Hormuz. As its truce with the US collapsed, Tehran reimposed its blockade of the waterway, while Washington hit back by again blockading Iran’s ports.

All of the Iranian provinces hit on Monday host military bases and air defence systems. In Bushehr, home to the country’s only operational civilian nuclear power plant, governor Mohammad Mozaffari told state news agency IRNA: “A few minutes ago, several locations in Bushehr city were hit by the American enemy’s projectiles.”

In East Azerbaijan province in the north, the head of the local crisis management unit Majid Farshi said that “one person was martyred and several others injured” in an attack there. Despite the latest attacks, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said diplomatic exchanges with the United States via mediators were ongoing. “Ideas have been conveyed to us by certain mediators,” he told a press conference in Tehran. Iran’s Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni was set to travel to mediator Pakistan’s capital on Monday, a Pakistani interior ministry source said, without confirming the reason.

In Hormuz, meanwhile, sailors abandoned a vessel set on fire in an attack, according to the UK Maritime Trade Operations agency. The Revolutionary Guards had earlier said that two oil tankers trying to transit the strait “exploded



Smoke rises from an explosion during what US Central Command (CENTCOM) says are strikes on Iran. — Reuters



“The reality is that today the Islamic Republic of Iran is engaged in a full-scale war. We must be realistic and accept the natural consequences of this resistance

MASOUD PEZESHKIAN

and were brought to a halt”, according to a statement reported by Tasnim news agency.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called on countries around the world to share the burden of protecting global shipping. But Baghaei said on Monday that Tehran would not allow the strait to be used by its foes “to threaten Iran’s security and national interests”. US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Sunday that it successfully completed the ninth consecutive night of strikes against Iran, while Rubio said he would “continue to try” to reach a diplomatic solution.

The fresh fighting came after a weekend in which the US announced three new US military fatalities and one service member missing in action.

Two were killed during Iranian missile and drone attacks on Jordan on Friday, while another service member died in northern Iraq during the controlled detonation of unexploded ordnance from a downed Iranian drone, CENTCOM said.

President Donald Trump said US strikes on Iran “hit them very hard” in honour of the American fatalities. The deaths brought to 17 the confirmed number of American military fatalities since the conflict began with a massive US-Israeli strike on the Islamic republic. On Friday, Iran’s health ministry reported that 50 people had been killed in recent fighting and more than 500 wounded.

Meanwhile, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards announced on Monday that they had hit targets in Syria, Jordan and Kuwait overnight. In Syria, Iranian forces launched “a



Pvt Isabella Gonzales, killed in action in an Iranian attack on Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, Jordan, in this image taken at a location given as Germany, released on Monday. — Reuters

surprise attack on the enemy special operations command centre in the Al Tanf region”, according to a Guards statement carried by state media. The US withdrew its troops from Al Tanf in February.

In Jordan, the Guards said it targeted US military aircraft stationed at Aqaba Airport “with ballistic missiles, causing severe damage to a number of them”. The Guards also said they hit US military targets based in Kuwait, including an early-warning radar system that was “completely destroyed”. Kuwaiti air defences were “engaging hostile drone attacks following Iranian aggression”, its army said on Monday. Bahrain’s interior ministry also said that its air raid sirens had sounded and urged citizens and residents to head to “the nearest safe place”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A helicopter drops water on a burning forest following a wildfire in Taradeau, southeastern France. — AFP

Fire forces evacuations in south France town

MARSEILLE: A fast-moving wildfire in southern France forced the evacuation of dozens of homes as more than 600 firefighters and a fleet of water-bombing aircraft battled to contain the blaze, authorities said. Fanned by strong winds and dry vegetation after days of extreme heat, the fire broke out near the town of Draguignan in the Mediterranean Var region. The blaze burned 10 homes, damaged nine others and left one firefighter with minor injuries, according to the prefecture.

The wildfire comes as southern France endures another heatwave, with temperatures having passed 40°C in parts of the Var region. The fire scorched around 60 hectares in Taradeau before jumping to the nearby town of Les Arcs-sur-Argens, where it torched a further 120 hectares in less than two hours.

Around 615 firefighters backed by reinforcements from four neighbouring departments, five Canadair water bombers, four firefighting helicopters and two Dash aircraft were deployed against the blaze, Var prefect Simon Babre said. As the flames reached the edge of built-up areas, authorities evacuated 150 people from two affected towns, housing them in a community hall and a school. — AFP

IRELAND CLAMPS DOWN ON E-SCOOTERS



Ireland will raise the minimum age for the use of electric scooters to 18 from 16, and require riders to be licensed and wear helmets, the government said on Monday, although it stopped short of a total ban Prime Minister Micheal Martin had said he was leaning towards. Ireland followed a handful of other European countries and cities in clamping down on surging e-scooter usage after a rise in accidents, particularly among children. Admissions of children and young people for traumatic brain injuries resulting from e-scooter accidents have risen by 50 per cent in the last 12 months, according to Children's Health Ireland (CHI), which operates all national paediatric services. — Reuters

Hungary’s ruling party backs Judit Polgar for president

BUDAPEST: The lawmakers of Hungary’s ruling Tisza party unanimously support chess legend Judit Polgar for president and will make a final decision about the nomination at their next meeting, the parliamentary group’s leader Andrea Bujdosó said on Monday. Prime Minister Peter Magyar said on Sunday that he would ask Polgar, widely regarded as the greatest ever female chess player, to take up the largely ceremonial role of president

until a new constitution is passed. On Saturday, Tamas Sulyok signed a constitutional amendment passed by Tisza that ended his term as president. Electing a new president and drafting a new constitution are key elements of Magyar’s drive to dismantle former premier Viktor Orbán’s bastions of power, for which Magyar says he received a strong mandate from voters. Magyar ended the 16-year rule of

Orbán’s nationalist Fidesz party with a landslide election victory in April. Parliament, where Magyar’s party has a two-thirds majority that allows it to change any laws, will elect a new president who will be in office until a planned new constitution takes effect, or for a maximum of five years. Bujdosó said Tisza’s parliamentary group had agreed after a long discussion that Polgar, 49, was “patriotic, honourable,

empathetic, brave, outstanding and dedicated in her profession”, and “able to express the nation’s unity”. “The president of the republic must be a person who guards the unity of the nation and constitutionality,” Magyar told parliament. Polgar, subject of the documentary “Queen of Chess” released in February, is the only female player to have been ranked in the world’s top 10 of what is a male-dominated sport. — Reuters

Burnham becomes PM vowing 10-year plan for UK

NEW UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham on Monday promised to set out a 10-year-plan for Britain, to ease the cost of living crisis and outlined policy goals including an end to sleeping on the streets. Accompanied by his wife Marie-France van Heel, Burnham earlier met King Charles III at Buckingham Palace to become the head of government after Keir Starmer resigned. Burnham, 56, arrived at Downing Street to resounding applause from supporters and acknowledged he was the country’s seventh prime minister since the start of 2016.

Britain needed to show the world it could “regain stability”, he said, vowing to offer “a new political model” and “build a new economy”. In foreign policy goals, he told broadcasters earlier his first calls would be to US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky, to whom he will offer reassurance that “I will be with him 100 per cent”. In his brief speech outside Downing Street, the new Labour leader said he would “bring forward a new plan for Britain, a 10-year plan”, without giving specifics.

Naming short-term goals, he promised to “give people some breathing space now, some help with the cost of living.” He also said his first instruction would be a pledge to “end rough sleeping”, a measure he attempted to implement as a regional mayor in northern England, although it was not fully successful. Other announcements included a pledge to re-industrialise Britain



Britain’s new PM Andy Burnham and his wife Marie-France van Heel pose on the steps of 10 Downing Street. — AFP

through public procurement and to build more public housing.

Starmer departed Downing Street earlier, insisting his short time in office had made Britain a better place. “I am confident that Britain is now stronger and fairer than it was two years ago,” Starmer told reporters in his farewell speech outside Downing Street. “I go with good grace, I go with a smile, and I go proud of everything that we have achieved,” he added. Burnham will face an in-tray overflowing with challenges with little time to make his mark with a nationwide election due in 2029.

In an interview with The Times published late on Sunday, Burnham said he wanted to draw a line under a decade of political turmoil. “What we’ve

been doing hasn’t been working. That’s the way I see it,” he said. “I am going to try and do things in a different way.” The focus now turns to his senior cabinet appointments, with all eyes on who will replace Rachel Reeves as finance minister. The former mayor of Greater Manchester, nicknamed the “King of the North”, has been parachuted in by the Labour Party, after Starmer resigned last month, with MPs viewing him as the party’s best chance of reining in Nigel Farage’s anti-immigration Reform UK party.

Among Burnham’s most urgent challenges will be a tepid economy, high government borrowing costs, a ballooning welfare bill and irregular migrants arriving in small boats that have fuelled support for Reform. Unpredictable energy

prices due to the US-Iran war and volatile relations with the United States under Trump also threaten to buffet his premiership.

Burnham told The Times he would take a “different approach to public spending, and to running the economy — more focused on early investment, early intervention, setting people up for success, and much less paying for failure.” Starmer led Labour to a landslide election victory in July 2024 after 14 years of Conservative rule. He announced that he would resign as prime minister and Labour Party leader in June after a string of scandals, missteps and policy U-turns blighted his leadership. But Burnham, who only returned as a member of parliament four weeks ago, has little room to manoeuvre amid sluggish economic growth, high public debt and strict financial rules requiring him to balance government spending against tax revenue.

Burnham was an MP between 2001 and 2017, serving as a minister in the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. He has since reinvented himself as a man of the people, melding a relaxed, folksy style with slick social media videos. But Burnham’s swift “coronation” as Labour leader and now prime minister has raised questions on how he will achieve his aims.

EU chief Antonio Costa congratulated Burnham on taking up the job, and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz invited him to visit Berlin to mark “the deep bond between us”. — AFP

Russian attack on corn ship off Ukraine’s Odesa kills 10

ODESA: A Russian missile strike on a ship carrying corn near Ukraine’s southern port of Odesa killed 10 people, Ukrainian officials said on Monday, in the deadliest attack in a weeks-long flare-up of violence in the Black Sea. Russia hit the Golden Leo - a Guinea-Bissau-flagged ship manned by a crew from India and Syria - with three cruise missiles, causing a fire on Sunday, Ukraine’s navy wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

A witness in Odesa saw smoke billowing from a vessel off the coast on Sunday, which it was able to confirm was the Golden Leo. A separate Russian attack on Odesa, Ukraine’s largest seaport, killed three people and wounded three others on Monday, Serhiy Lysak, head of the city’s military administration, said. He said infrastructure facilities came under attack but gave no further details.

A search and rescue operation lasted all night, Ukraine’s seaports authority said, adding that nine crew members and one of its maritime pilots were killed. Eight of the vessel’s 17 crew members

A search and rescue operation lasted all night, Ukraine’s seaports authority said, adding that nine crew members and one of its maritime pilots were killed. Eight of the vessel’s 17 crew members were rescued



Smoke rises from a vessel on fire in Odesa, Ukraine. — Reuters

were rescued, it added. Golden Leo is owned by Mumbai-based Ocean Grace Shipping Ltd, according to LSEG data. Its manager, Friends Shipping Co SA, did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. There was no immediate public comment from Moscow on the incident.

The Black Sea was a flashpoint of the Ukraine war in the months following Russia’s 2022 full-scale attack on its neighbour. But under a deal meant to

ease global price shocks and allow both countries to ship grain, shipping had largely resumed. Moscow and Kyiv, however, are now stepping up attacks in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov and targeting key revenue sources.

Ukrainian forces have hit Russian energy infrastructure, including oil tankers, while Russia is intensifying its attacks on Ukraine’s deep-water ports and cargo vessels. Russia’s defence ministry said on Monday that its forces hit fuel reservoirs at the port of Odesa overnight, Interfax reported.

Russian strikes have killed 28 people in the Odesa region so far this month, its governor said on Monday.

Both Russia and Ukraine are major grain exporters, and the renewed violence on this route has raised concerns about supply. Ukraine, which in recent seasons accounted for about 6 per cent of global wheat exports and about 11 per cent of global corn exports, has lost about a third of its capacity to export grain via its Black Sea ports due

to Russian missile and drone attacks, traders and analysts have said. The Ukrainian attacks have forced Russia, the world’s top grain exporter, to limit shipping in the Sea of Azov - a route that handles about a quarter of its grain exports, sources said.

Meanwhile, Russia on Monday accused Ukraine of killing five civilians, including a minor, in a drone attack on a bus in Russia’s Belgorod region and said three other civilians were in hospital in a critical condition. Alexander Shuvayev, the governor of the Belgorod region, said in a statement on Telegram that 23 civilians had been injured in the attack in total. “Today, in the town of Shebekino, a drone operated by...terrorists from Kyiv deliberately and cynically struck a passenger coach,” Shuvayev said. “It is with a heavy heart that I report: according to preliminary data, five innocent civilians, including a minor, were killed as a result of this inhuman and despicable attack: four women and a boy died from their injuries.” — Reuters

OPINION

The Indian Ocean’s rising geopolitical significance



SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

AS the Strait of Hormuz takes up centre stage in geopolitics today, the larger context within which the strait exists in the Indian Ocean has been more widely researched lately by historians, strategic scholars, and even literary critics. Today, these studies are emerging as central to understanding the current conflict.

Largely seen to connect maritime history, society and culture from Africa all the way to Australasia, Indian Ocean Studies shifts the perspective from land and continental connections to those which are enriched by waterways and coastal contacts. This includes exploring prehistoric connections, trade along the Silk and Spice Routes, as well as migrations buoyed by traditional boats and dhows.

Historically, the Indian Ocean was primarily seen as separating continents and contributing to the annual monsoons, on which so much of agriculture in Asia depends. By the early 21st century, however, the ocean began to be seen as a treasure trove of historical material which showcased ancient trade routes that enabled rich cultural interdependencies.

In 1938, Allan Villiers published a travelogue on his journey from Kuwait to the Swahili coast, using well-researched material and offering a unique perspective on life as seen from the sea.

This interest was carried forward by multiple conferences which reflected the rising interest in the interdisciplinary studies of the Indian Ocean. They also included the historical work of Abdul Sherrif’s ‘Dhow cultures of the Indian Ocean’ and Michel Pearson’s ‘The Indian Ocean’, in which he stated that he wanted to “write a more total history than has appeared so far”.

The attempt thus far has been to resist the subordination of Ocean Studies, particularly the Indian Ocean, in understanding the complex networks that make up world history, politics and society. It was also an attempt to shift attention from the Atlantic Ocean, with its focus on the slave trade.

Emerging work on the Indian Ocean includes fascinating work on the connections between architecture and trade in Mocha, the travel of coffee from Yemen, and the linguistic similarities of coastal and interior regions of Africa and India, to name just a few areas of scholarship.

Today, it has become even more important to understand the complex geopolitics of the Indian Ocean, given the recent conflicts and recalibration of all concerned entities.

In fact, the inability to understand the interplay of geographical and cultural histories, linguistic connections and dissonances, as well as ancient friendships and rivalries, makes it difficult to apply

The Indian Ocean has been called the ‘global superhighway for commerce and energy’ and is responsible for over 70 per cent of all container trade, and 80 per cent of seaborne oil trade

Western-centric modes of control.

The Indian Ocean has been called the ‘global superhighway for commerce and energy’. It is responsible for more than 70 per cent of all container trade and 80 per cent of seaborne oil trade. As such, its economic significance is irrefutable. But more importantly, the interconnectivity and networks which go back to pre-history make the Indian Ocean a geo-political and strategic centre.

The region, in fact, is the flashpoint for the strategic competition of global powers as they jockey for security influence, mainly through naval dominance and logistical access.

Of equal significance is the fact that the ocean also stores huge untapped wealth in the form of hydrocarbons, fisheries and precious minerals, all of which present economic opportunities for all the states surrounding the ocean, and any world power would aspire to control it.

Most importantly, the Indian Ocean today has become the epicentre of conflict in the Arabian Gulf, bringing together multiple powers and their proxies at war with each other. Without a historical perspective and a cultural understanding of the Indian Ocean, this present conflict risks being reduced to a binary war that ignores complex relationships steeped in history and maritime geography.

THE AMERICAN DREAM FADES FOR INDIAN STUDENTS

PRAVEEN PARAMASIVAM AND SAI ISHWARBHARATH

A Shrinikheathan is breaking from his family’s tradition of studying in the United States, opting instead for a master’s degree in Germany.

The 22-year-old Chennai engineering graduate is learning German and taking a language proficiency test as he applies for courses, drawn by the low cost of studying in Germany and its traditionally strong industry links.

His decision reflects young Indians’ growing interest in European universities as the India-EU trade deal’s mobility provisions and tighter US immigration rules prompt many to rethink the American Dream, a dozen students and education consultants said.

“The world is becoming more multi-polar. Earlier, the US was all that everyone was talking about,” Shrinikheathan said, adding he was happy to have study choices beyond the “wildly more expensive” United States and Canada.

If sustained, the shift could reshape global student flows, with Europe emerging as a viable alternative to North America for Indian students as the EU seeks young talent to offset labour shortages from an ageing population.

European tuition fees are typically 50 to 80 per cent less than the US, according to education consultant KC Overseas, with lower living costs also reducing the bill. “The European Union has become a leading destination for Indian students,” an EU official said in a statement. “Indian students bring entrepreneurial spirit, cultural richness, and research excellence.” He added: “European campuses while deepening EU-India ties in innovation, trade, and diplomacy... this trend will continue to grow, benefiting Europe’s talent pool and India’s competitive workforce.”

India’s overseas student outflow fell to about 626,000 in 2025 from more than 908,000 in 2023, government data showed, with students wary of tougher visa rules and rising costs in the US and other popular study destinations.

Last week, Washington moved to tighten the duration of visas for foreign students as part of a wide-ranging immigration crackdown that began after Donald Trump took office in January 2025.

Indians’ interest in Europe has risen since the January trade deal, which aims to make it easier for students and skilled workers to move to Europe through easier visa pathways, clearer post-study work routes and improved recognition of Indian qualifications. — Reuters

The curious science behind left-handedness

EVERY family seems to have one. The uncle who signs birthday cards with his left hand.

The cousin who somehow manages to write across a page without smearing half the ink. The child at school was trying to fit into one of those little classroom desks that were clearly designed by somebody who had never actually met a left-handed person.

Most of us notice these things, but have we ever stopped and wondered why some people are left-handed in the first place?

It sounds like the sort of thing science should have solved years ago. After all, scientists can estimate the age of the universe and read the instructions hidden inside our DNA.

Ask them why your aunt insists on signing Eid cards with her left hand, though, and the answer is usually, “Well... we have a few theories.”

There is something oddly reassuring about that. Perhaps the universe likes to keep a few easy-looking questions unsolved.

Many researchers now think we have been asking the wrong question. Why focus on the ten per cent who are left-handed? Why not ask why the other 90 per cent of people seem to prefer the right hand? The pattern is remarkably consistent wherever scientists look.

Different countries, different cultures, different periods of history, roughly one person in ten is left-handed. If it were a serious disadvantage, you might expect evolution to have quietly removed it by now. If it gave people a huge advantage, perhaps we would all be left-handed.

Instead, nature seems perfectly happy with its mysterious ten per cent. So where does it come from? The obvious answer is genetics, and



DR KHALFAN
AL HARRASI

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that is partly true. Left-handedness often runs in families, but scientists have spent years looking for a single ‘left-handed gene’ and have come up empty-handed.

Some jokes really do write themselves. The current idea is that many different genes each play a small part, together with events that happen before birth.

In fact, studies suggest that some unborn babies already seem to prefer one thumb over the other, and that preference often matches the hand they favour later in life. None of us actually decides to become left-handed.

Then there is the brain, because whenever scientists cannot explain something, the brain usually wanders into the conversation sooner or later.

We have probably all heard that left-handed people simply have the opposite kind of brain from everyone else. It is a nice, tidy explanation.

Unfortunately, nature rarely bothers with tidy explanations. Most left-handed people process language mainly in the left side of the brain, just like everybody else.

The differences seem to be much more subtle, and scientists are still trying to work out exactly what they mean.

Some researchers think being different may even have its advantages. Imagine you are a tennis player. Nearly everybody you practise against is right-handed because nearly everybody is right-handed.

Then you arrive for an important match and discover your opponent is left-handed. Suddenly, the angles feel unfamiliar, and you start wondering whether somebody changed the rules while you were in the changing room.

Studies have found that left-

handed people appear more often than expected in sports such as tennis, boxing, and fencing. It does not mean left-handers are secretly superhuman.

It may simply mean that being less common occasionally works in your favour. Of course, for left-handed people themselves, everyday life can provide enough adventure without worrying about scientific theories.

Ask one about the small frustrations of daily life, and there is a good chance the conversation will eventually arrive at scissors.

Somehow it always comes back to scissors. Add classroom desks, spiral notebooks, and can openers to the list, and it quickly becomes clear that the world was largely designed by right-handed people for other right-handed people.

Perhaps that is what makes this whole subject so fascinating. It starts with something so ordinary that we barely notice it. Somebody picks up a spoon with the left hand instead of the right, and nobody gives it a second thought.

Then you start asking questions, and before long, you have wandered into genetics, evolution, and the workings of the human brain.

Maybe that is the real charm of left-handedness. It is not because left-handed people are mysterious or unusual.

It is because something so ordinary, something we see every day without thinking about it, can still quietly refuse to explain itself.

In a world where we like to believe we have almost everything figured out, it is rather comforting to discover that nature still keeps a few little secrets. One of them may be sitting at your dinner table tonight, happily holding a fork in the other hand and wondering what all the fuss is about.

When billions breathed together...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THE Fifa World Cup concluded on Sunday, but fans are yet to come out of the vibe. It was a lifestyle for the last few days.

The time difference of the matches did not matter to the fans who sat up and watched their favourite players compete. The adrenaline rush must have been the same as one playing on the field. It was indeed an unusual World Cup final with both teams going nil until Spain beat holders Argentina 1-0 in extra time to win the trophy.

Post-match, it was chaotic on the field, but amidst all that, one could also see Yamine Lamal; the energy has been similar amongst the football fans too.

The supporters of the winning team have been walking around with a smile and an air of achievement. And the fans of other teams have been all about disappointment and irritation. People did not mind staying up late and waking up and rushing to work. You could tell from people's expressions which team they were supporting.

One person explained how he was watching with everyone at their staff accommodation, and he said he did not want to express too much enthusiasm for his team because the majority of the supporters were for the opposite team. This was the time when friends became rivals and people forgot about challenges.

Football, when it comes to the World Cup, seems to be a worldwide emotion. I do not know which one people enjoy the most – the spectacular goals or the breathtaking saves.

This year around, I was more excited about the saves.

To me it is similar to life. Just like a football match, life consists of goals (achievements), saves (overcoming challenges), and misses (missed opportunities).

The World Cup united people in such a way that people overlooked differences. A victory can fill an entire nation with joy, and a defeat can break many hearts. Life heals because this status changes when another stronger emotion is experienced.

It also shows how everyone enjoys winning, and for the last few weeks we have been wanting the players to do that for us.

Did you notice another aspect? All the selected players are in top form, but some stood out.

Why? We not only want to see a display of good skills; we also want them to be entertainers. Some of them have this as an inborn skill. Surely during those precious minutes, when they are testing their resilience, entertainment is the last thing on their mind.

But the emotions are raw, and people connect with emotions.

For some countries, football has been part of their identity. Each edition brings out heroes.

The World Cup celebrates diversity because more than 40 teams bring their traditions, styles, and cultures onto one stage, and not to forget the spectators. Not everyone plays football, but so many enjoy

Football, when it comes to the World Cup, seems to be a worldwide emotion. I do not know which one people enjoy the most – the spectacular goals or the breathtaking saves

watching it spread across the globe. It was as if billions of people were breathing together.

We also saw technology enter the arena. The simple football is so sophisticated today. In the past it was all about 22 players chasing a football with billions of people glued to screens watching each move. But now the football has built-in technology, starting with an inertial measurement unit (IMU) sensor. It can track the exact moment the ball is kicked, send data to the video operations room, and provide analytics that include ball speed, trajectory, and patterns of play.

However, football is still all about emotions and determination. It displays physical energy, but the mind plays an important role.

At each edition, the Fifa World Cup teams display intelligence on many levels, such as tactical intelligence, decision-making, spatial awareness, emotional intelligence (the players perform in front of billions), and collective intelligence (they should perform as a unit).

Now the players have gone home, and the stadiums for the time being might be quiet but not as quiet as the seconds before a penalty shot.

Some of the great players would have retired by the time the teams qualify and appear for the next Fifa World Cup. But you will always remember where you were on World Cup Final 2026 and the skills and resilience you observed in the last few weeks.

SWISS RESEARCHERS HOARD VAST TROVE OF NASA CLIMATE DATA

NINA LARSON

Researchers have copied massive quantities of publicly-available climate and environmental data from Nasa onto a Swiss supercomputer to train artificial intelligence models - and for safekeeping amid US funding cuts.

Switzerland's Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH) university announced the move late last week, saying its researchers had copied around 100 petabytes of Nasa data to the Swiss National Supercomputing Centre (CSCS) in the southern city of Lugano. "The sheer amount is impossible to visualise," Reto Knutti, professor of climate physics and head of ETH's Center for Climate Systems Modeling (C2SM), said.

It had taken approximately a year to copy the roughly six billion files, he said - the equivalent of around 20 million feature-length films, in terms of data volume.

And going forward, the researchers are also planning to copy large quantities of datasets from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The datasets, gathered over decades, contain vital information about Earth systems, including greenhouse gases, clouds, precipitation and ice sheets. They will be used to help train AI models capable of swift and reliable forecasting in areas like weather, climate and natural hazards.

Though it was not the main driver for the move, the researchers said their mission was partly motivated by concern over the impact of dramatic US funding cuts for the scientific community.

ETH professor and former Nasa chief scientist Thomas Zurbuchen, who initiated the data transfer, highlighted in a statement the key role the United States had played in Earth observation for decades. Without the extensive measurement programmes run by Nasa and NOAA, the world "would know far less about our planet today", he said. But since his return to office last year, US President Donald Trump has pursued deep cuts to federal climate science and Earth-observation funding, including programmes that contribute data to international monitoring networks. Knutti pointed out that "so far, the US has not restricted access to the data".

"But we also know that decisions in the US administration are sometimes quick, and not completely obvious."

All the data copied so far had been publicly available, he stressed. "It's not a secret."

"Data is the new gold," Knutti said.

He pointed out that data-driven forecasting models - known as foundation models - were already beating the traditional models, which use mathematical equations to simulate the complex processes taking place in the oceans and atmosphere. — AFP

Oman and the power of quiet diplomacy

AMID THE rapidly escalating turmoil in the region, the Sultanate of Oman stands out for its distinctive foreign policy — one grounded in balance, positive neutrality, and a consistent commitment to de-escalation rather than confrontation. This approach is not a recent development; it reflects a long-established diplomatic tradition shaped over decades by Omani leadership, positioning the country as a trusted mediator in one of the world's most complex regions.

For many years, Oman has upheld a careful neutral stance, avoiding alignment with competing regional blocs. This approach has earned it broad credibility across the Gulf, the Arab world, and the wider international community. While other states have often been drawn into regional rivalries, Oman has preserved its role as a quiet mediator, working discreetly and prioritising stability over political gain.

Oman has played a meaningful role in containing several crises, relying on a broad and balanced network of relationships, particularly with parties that often struggle to maintain direct communication. Its relationship with Iran is a clear example: Oman has consistently maintained open channels of dialogue even during periods of heightened regional and international tension. This reflects a pragmatic reading of geopolitics, grounded in the belief that coexistence is a necessity, not a choice.

Modern history reflects Oman's contribution to easing tensions in several sensitive contexts. It has helped facilitate communication between Egypt and Iran following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, supporting efforts to rebuild diplomatic bridges during a difficult period. Its role was also evident during the 2017 Qatar crisis, where Oman maintained a neutral position, avoided escalation, and worked quietly to preserve



ANWAR AL KHANJARI

The author is a translator and researcher interested in the region's political and social history

Omani neutrality is sometimes misunderstood as passivity or hesitation. In reality, it reflects a form of influence built on trust, patience, and sustained engagement, prioritising dialogue over confrontation

regional cohesion. In Yemen as well, Oman has refrained from military involvement while supporting dialogue between conflicting parties and encouraging a political settlement.

Similarly, Oman has sustained diplomatic engagement with states such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Iran even during periods of regional division, based on the belief that isolation rarely produces solutions. Dialogue, even under the most challenging conditions, remains central to its diplomatic philosophy. It is in this context that Oman has often been described as the "Switzerland of the Middle East," reflecting its reputation for neutrality and mediation.

Beyond political engagement, Oman has also contributed to humanitarian diplomacy, particularly in facilitating the release of hostages and detainees in conflict zones, including Yemen and Iran. These efforts, often conducted quietly, underscore the high level of trust Oman enjoys among different parties and its ability to operate effectively in sensitive environments without escalating tensions.

One of the most significant examples of Omani diplomacy was its role in facilitating indirect communication that helped pave the way for the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the United States. By hosting confidential channels of dialogue and preliminary discussions, Oman helped create conditions necessary for formal negotiations. It has continued to facilitate engagement between the two sides, reflecting its enduring belief that diplomacy remains the most sustainable path to stability.

In the midst of ongoing regional conflicts, Oman continues to play a constructive role as a facilitator of dialogue and a supporter of de-escalation. It prioritises bridging divides and encouraging negotiations without imposing conditions or seeking political

advantage. This approach has contributed to its reputation as a credible and trusted mediator among diverse parties.

Understanding Omani foreign policy requires attention to its historical and geographical foundations. Its maritime heritage, long-standing trade networks across Asia and Africa, and early international relations — including ties with the United States dating back to the nineteenth century — have all contributed to shaping a political outlook centred on balance and coexistence. This approach was further reinforced under the late Sultan Qaboos, who established a foreign policy grounded on non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and bridge-building. This legacy continues under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

What distinguishes Omani foreign policy is its neutrality and independence. Oman has consistently avoided involvement in conflicts that do not serve its national interest and has resisted external pressure to adopt polarised positions. It preserves sovereign decision-making guided by long-term stability and regional balance.

Despite this record, Omani neutrality is sometimes misunderstood as passivity or hesitation. In reality, it reflects a form of influence built on trust, patience, and sustained engagement, prioritising dialogue over confrontation. It is a deliberate strategy focused on containing conflict, not amplifying it.

Ultimately, Omani foreign policy reflects a deeper national identity grounded in wisdom, balance, and dignity. This approach has helped the country avoid the costs of regional conflict while securing a respected position in international relations. It is a model that continues to emphasise that restraint is not weakness, but a different form of strength — one that works quietly, but effectively, toward peace and stability.

SPORTS

AN emotional Spain coach Luis de la Fuente spoke of his pride in his players after they won the second World Cup in the country's history. "I feel especially proud of this generation of footballers who have grown with this idea... giving us an example of a group, of a family," he said. "They are players with exceptional talent. For me, it has been an honour to have accompanied them on this journey. " De la Fuente, who also coached them to the Euro 2024 crown, added: "I'm very emotional, looking back. We have won everything, and that is wonderful. "They are a generation of footballers who are a source of pride for Spain. Together, we are stronger." The 65-year-old coach said he believed Spain should have won the game earlier than the 106th minute goal by Ferran Torres that settled a tense final, but he praised Argentina 'keeper Emi Martinez for an inspired performance. Argentina had Enzo Fernandez sent off for a second yellow card in the 93rd minute before the game went into extra time. "I think the game should have been decided earlier. Dibu's great saves prevented us from winning sooner, but it is a World Cup final and, even with ten players at the end, you have to suffer," de la Fuente said. — AFP

We have grown together: De la Fuente



Spain coach Luis De La Fuente celebrates. — Reuters



American makeover leaves soccer facing a battle for its soul

NEW YORK: The 2026 World Cup may be remembered as much for its organisational and refereeing changes as for the football itself, raising questions about which innovations will remain part of the game after the tournament leaves North America. Fifa embraced several features associated with American sports, including mandatory hydration breaks, championship rings for the winners and an extended halftime show at the final. While some were viewed as host-specific additions, others could influence future tournaments. The hydration breaks, introduced throughout the competition on player welfare grounds, effectively divided each half into two segments. Coaches used them as tactical timeouts, while broadcasters gained scheduled opportunities that could prove commercially valuable. However, the interruptions also drew criticism from fans who felt they disrupted football's traditional continuous flow. UEFA has already indicated it will maintain its rule limiting hydration breaks to one minute, suggesting resistance to making the format permanent. The tournament also highlighted Fifa's willingness to reshape aspects of the World Cup to suit the host market. The 27-minute halftime show at the final, compared by many to the Super Bowl, and the presentation of championship rings reinforced the influence of the North American sports model on football's biggest event. Refereeing generated equally intense



Fifa President Gianni Infantino (L) and US President Donald Trump. — AFP

debate. Officials were required to apply new rules and interpretations while managing growing expectations for consistency and transparency. Several controversial decisions reignited discussions over the increasing complexity of the Laws of the Game and the role of technology. VAR remained central to major decisions but did little to eliminate disputes. Instead, debate often shifted from the referee's on-field judgment to interpretations of slow-motion replays and technical regulations. Social media further amplified criticism and conspiracy theories surrounding officiating. Fifa refereeing chief Pierluigi Collina rejected allegations of bias, insisting match officials operated with complete independence throughout the tournament. The expanded 48-team format also came under scrutiny. While it provided more nations with the opportunity to compete and increased the number of knockout matches, the tournament's 104-game schedule prompted questions over whether the larger format enhanced the sporting spectacle or simply served Fifa's commercial ambitions. Ultimately, beyond the identity of the champions, the 2026 World Cup may be remembered for setting new precedents in tournament organisation, refereeing and the balance between football tradition and commercial evolution. Whether those changes become permanent could shape the future of the World Cup ahead of the 2030 edition. — Reuters

SCALONI SAYS WE GAVE IT EVERYTHING



Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni looks dejected. — Reuters



Argentina's Messi and De Paul look dejected. — Reuters

ARGENTINA MANAGER Lionel Scaloni said his team gave their utmost and he would need to think about what comes next for him in emotional remarks after his team lost 1-0 to Spain in Sunday's World Cup final. Spain needed an extra-time goal by substitute Ferran Torres to edge past 10-man defending champions Argentina. "It was a dream place for everyone and we tried up until the very last minute to give our utmost and I believe it is only fair to take this time to myself to think this through," Scaloni told reporters. "I will talk to the president - I have an idea of what I would like to do. I will see out my contract and I feel the need to think as I don't know if something as

big can be done and maybe we need to speak this through." "I have never in my life - please bear with me - I would have never imagined, including my staff, that we would be in this place," Scaloni said, tearing up and wiping his eyes. **DULL GAME** The flagship match of the tournament was one of its least exciting with the teams playing each other to a stalemate until Torres made the breakthrough to avoid penalties. But it came after a hard-fought campaign by Argentina, who had nail-biting matches against England, Egypt and Cape Verde in their run to the final. It was also a disappointing, possibly final, chapter for Lionel Messi, one of the greatest ever footballers,

who will leave this tournament empty-handed. "It was crystal clear to me that he's going to play up until he decides (not to) do so and his team will support him... I hope that everyone feels proud of him, of what he's achieved because he's the best football player ever," Scaloni said. Messi was also moved to tears on the pitch after the match, facing the Argentine goal where the team's fanatical supporters serenaded him and the other Argentina players. "The fans, I'm sure, are struggling like us but these are moments to bounce back stronger," said Scaloni. "It's hard for people to enjoy being runners-up as much as being winners.... We have to go on." — Reuters



Argentina's football fans react. — Reuters



SPORTS

Al Faisal, Tuck finish second and fifth at Paul Ricard



OMAN'S Al Faisal al Zubair and his British team-mate Ben Tuck delivered strong performances at this weekend's two International GT Open races at the Paul Ricard circuit in southern France.

They guided the Al Manar by Dragon Racing Ferrari 296 GT3 EVO to second overall in Saturday evening's opening race from a similar position in qualifying and then moved up from 12th on the grid to finish fifth in the slightly shorter second race on Sunday afternoon.

Al Zubair said: "It was a very positive weekend and one we should be particularly proud of after Misano, where we struggled a little. To come here, qualify second and finish second overall was fantastic. We had a very competitive car yesterday and there are a lot of positives we can take away from the

weekend to take to Monza, which is a longer race. It is important that we are comfortable with the car.

"I am very happy with the way it all went. I felt that qualifying this morning was a little unfair and I struggled with that after we had a major electrical power outage at the race track that affected the whole region. Starting at the back was a bit difficult in dirty air and the Ferrari is known not to be the best car in dirty air.

"But to finish P5 today, a podium and P2 yesterday and close to a win was very positive. No handicap for the next race but, with Monza's long straights, we will hope to have a good straight-line speed to battle some of the other manufacturers, like BMW and Mercedes, for example. Motivation is high and we proved here that we can have the Dragon car on the overall podium."



The Al Manar by Dragon Racing team made a strong start in the first of Friday's free practice sessions and a lap of 2min 04.043sec was sufficient to put the Ferrari fifth in the rankings from 30 cars in the field. The

Ferrari ran for 24 laps, but the fastest Pro lap (2min 03.624sec) of the session fell to the Scuderia Villorba Corse Lamborghini.

Free practice two took place late on Friday afternoon and saw the Al

Manar duo post a best lap of 2min 04.437sec during 24 tours of the circuit. The Team Motopark Mercedes of Christian Mansell and Maximilian Gotz topped the Pro times with a best run of 2min 03.383sec.

Tuck excelled in the first qualifying session, the Briton carding a hot lap of 2min 02.153sec that was sufficient to put the Al Manar by Dragon Ferrari at the top of the Pro standings and second on the entire grid for the opening 70-minute race.

The partnership for the 30-lap race worked well and Al Zubair took over for the second stint and the duo were able to maintain second place to the chequered flag just 1.069 seconds behind the triumphant ZRS Motorsport Porsche pairing of Pietro Armanni and Alex Fontana. Mansell and Gotz rounded off the podium for Team Motopark.

Cooler temperatures prevailed for the second qualifying stint on Sunday morning. Al Zubair ran for 11 laps and recorded a best run of 2min 02.487sec in a session where less than a second separated the leading 13 cars.

The Omani duly slotted into 12th on the grid and eighth of the Pro runners with the Elite Motorsport Ferrari of Tom Emson and Tom Lebbon topping the Pro times. A power outage in the area affected preparations but Al Zubair and Tuck gradually climbed through the field in the second one-hour race to finish fifth.

Victory in race two went to Emson and Lebbon from a Team Motopark Mercedes and the ZRS Motorsport Porsche. The Al Manar by Dragon Racing team concludes its three-race foray into the International GT Open at Monza in Italy on September 25th-27th.

TSITSIPAS ENDS 16-MONTH TITLE DROUGHT



Stefanos Tsitsipas ended a 16-month wait for an ATP Tour title when the Greek defeated Belgium's Raphael Collignon 6-4 6-7(3) 6-3 to win the Swiss Open in Gstaad on Sunday.

The victory was Tsitsipas' first title since he beat Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in the Dubai Tennis Championships final in March 2025 and the 13th ATP singles crown of his career.

"I would like to start by mentioning how amazing the final was today," Tsitsipas said. "It's been a long time so it does mean a lot to me."

The 27-year-old, a former world number three currently ranked 85th in the world, produced a strong

serving performance in the two-hour 17-minute contest, firing four aces without a double fault. He won 21 of 29 points on his second serve and saved two of the four break points he faced.

Tsitsipas took the opening set before first-time ATP Tour finalist Collignon fought back to level the match in a second-set tiebreak. The Greek regained control in the decider, however, securing the break he needed to seal the title.

The triumph provides a timely confidence boost for two-time Grand Slam finalist Tsitsipas as he looks to build momentum ahead of the U.S. Open, which begins on August 30. — Reuters

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,152.347

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$79.45
BRENT \$88.53
LIGHT \$81.72



SHORT TAKES



FSA says investment funds accounted for the majority of the increase.

Fund sector capital nearly doubled to **1.2 billion** in 2025

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Total capital of investment and real estate funds in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 89.9 per cent during 2025 to reach nearly RO 1.2 billion, according to figures released by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), reflecting expanding activity in the sector and its growing appeal to investors.

Investment funds accounted for the majority of the increase, with capital more than doubling to RO 993.8 million by end-2025, up 125.4 per cent from RO 440.8 million a year earlier, FSA data showed.

Real estate investment funds recorded more moderate growth of 7.4 per cent, with capital rising to RO 204 million from RO 190 million in 2024.

The FSA said the strong performance highlights the widening scope of the funds sector and reinforces its attractiveness as an investment channel within Oman's capital market.

The growth comes amidst broader momentum in Oman's capital markets, with the Muscat Stock Exchange pursuing emerging market classification and a series of high-profile listings deepening market liquidity in line with Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

Dhofar to host energy, minerals exhibition

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals will launch the Energy and Minerals Exhibition and Media Forum 2026 in Salalah on Saturday, showcasing Oman's energy transition, mineral resources and investment opportunities during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

The event, which runs until August 6, will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar and is being organised in cooperation with companies operating in the energy and minerals sectors.

Strategic airport location for Oman's AI Special Zone

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 20

A PRIME site adjacent to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) headquarters near Muscat International Airport has been selected to host Oman's newly established Artificial Intelligence Special Zone, according to Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

Confirmation of the location was disclosed in the latest edition of *Duqm Economist*, OPAZ's quarterly publication, marking the first official indication of where the landmark technology zone will be developed.

According to Al Yousef, the AI Special Zone will occupy approximately 104,000 square metres in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate, close to the Civil Aviation Authority building. The location was chosen to maximise integration with existing transport, digital and logistics infrastructure while enhancing the zone's attractiveness to international investors.

Established under Royal Decree No 50/2026, the Artificial Intelligence Special Zone is intended to accelerate innovation, foster an integrated digital economy and support economic diversification goals outlined in Oman's Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2026-2030).

The digital economy is projected to achieve an average annual growth rate of 10.8 per cent at constant prices during the plan period, with its contribution to gross domestic product expected to reach around 4.2 per cent, underscoring its growing role as a key pillar of national economic growth.

The Board of Directors of OPAZ has been tasked with appointing the entity responsible for developing, operating



The AI Special Zone is planned on a 104,000 sq m plot close to the Civil Aviation Authority building.

The digital economy is projected to achieve an average annual growth rate of 10.8 per cent at constant prices during the plan period, with its contribution to gross domestic product expected to reach around 4.2 per cent, underscoring its growing role as a key pillar of national economic growth.

and managing the zone in coordination with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The arrangement is intended to ensure institutional coordination while creating an investment environment conducive to advanced technology industries.

Al Yousef said the new zone will operate under Oman's Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law, enabling investors to benefit from a comprehensive package of incentives, exemptions and facilitation measures designed to attract leading international technology companies.

Priority sectors will include artificial intelligence, semiconductors and robotics, while closer integration with Oman's existing economic zones is expected to strengthen supply chains and foster stronger linkages between technology industries and other productive sectors.

OPAZ, working jointly with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information

Technology, is also preparing a comprehensive implementation and operational roadmap for the project.

The framework will define governance arrangements, institutional responsibilities, investment-friendly policies and performance indicators to measure the zone's economic and developmental impact while ensuring alignment with national priorities.

Manal bint Hamid al Abri, Director of Investment Contracts and Agreements at OPAZ, said the zone is being designed as a fully integrated innovation ecosystem supporting every stage of technology development, from research and development through commercialisation and operations.

In addition to artificial intelligence, it will target semiconductors, robotics, the Internet of Things, cybersecurity and data centres, positioning Oman as a regional hub for advanced digital industries and innovation-driven investment.

PDO seeks bids for flare gas and seismic projects

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has launched two procurement opportunities aimed at reducing gas flaring and strengthening subsurface exploration capabilities, inviting qualified local and international suppliers to compete for contracts that support more efficient hydrocarbon production.

The state-owned energy producer said it is seeking proposals for the monetisation of flare gas in its North Concession Area, alongside the pre-qualification of suppliers for advanced seismic data processing services.

The flare gas project focuses on developing solutions to recover and commercially utilise gas that is currently flared during oil production operations. PDO said the tender is open to companies and consortia with proven expertise in flare gas recovery,



PDO is seeking proposals for the monetisation of flare gas in its North Concession Area.

gas processing and related energy technologies. Proposals must be submitted by August 20, 2026.

The initiative forms part of broader industry efforts to reduce routine flaring, improve operational efficiency and cut

greenhouse gas emissions by converting associated gas into commercially valuable products or energy.

Recovering flare gas has become an increasingly important priority for oil and gas producers

worldwide, enabling operators to reduce emissions while generating additional revenue from gas that would otherwise be wasted.

In a separate procurement exercise, PDO is seeking to pre-qualify suppliers to establish an in-house Seismic Processing Centre equipped with qualified geophysicists and high-performance computing capabilities.

The centre is expected to deliver advanced seismic data processing services that will enhance the interpretation of subsurface geological structures and support exploration and field development activities.

The company said eligible bidders must demonstrate proven experience in seismic processing, seismic imaging and geophysical services. The submission deadline for the pre-qualification process is July 28, 2026, at 11:30 am.

The planned centre reflects the growing use of advanced computing and digital

technologies in hydrocarbon exploration, where high-resolution seismic imaging plays a critical role in identifying new reserves, improving drilling accuracy and optimising field development.

The procurement opportunities underscore PDO's continued investment in technologies that improve production efficiency while supporting the Sultanate of Oman's long-term energy sustainability objectives.

The flare gas project aligns with industry-wide efforts to maximise resource utilisation and reduce emissions, while enhanced seismic processing capabilities are expected to strengthen exploration performance and improve decision-making across upstream operations.

Interested companies can access the pre-qualification screening documents through PDO's supplier relationship management portal, where suppliers without existing accounts may register using the Public Tender Login facility.

BUSINESS FEATURE

Salalah’s two economies — and the plan to make them one

QASIM AL MAASHANI

FOR DECADES, Salalah’s economy has followed two different calendars. One arrives with Khareef, the annual monsoon season that turns Dhofar’s mountains green and draws families seeking relief from the Gulf summer. For several weeks, apartments fill, restaurants become busier and shops, roads and visitor sites operate at seasonal intensity.

The other never waits for the rain. It moves through the Port of Salalah, Salalah Free Zone and Salalah Airport, linking southern Oman to international shipping routes, manufacturing supply chains and overseas markets throughout the year.

These two economies already overlap, but not as fully as they could. The Greater Salalah Structure Plan — a long-term framework for guiding land use, infrastructure and investment to Oman Vision 2040 — asks whether tourism, trade and the everyday city can be connected more effectively.

That is the deeper economic story behind a document that might otherwise look like a long list of roads, districts, transport links and projects.

Developed under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and presented to stakeholders in Salalah, the framework seeks to organise future growth so that the city’s economic assets reinforce one another instead of developing as separate islands.

BEYOND A SEASONAL CITY
Khareef is not presented as a problem to be replaced. It remains one of Salalah’s strongest competitive advantages and one of Oman’s most distinctive tourism products.

But the framework identifies the concentration of visitor activity in a short season as an economic and infrastructure challenge. By its account, the city’s population more than triples during Khareef, sharply increasing demand for accommodation, roads, parking, utilities and public services. Outside the peak, some businesses face a much thinner market.

The plan therefore calls for a move beyond “Khareef-only” tourism towards a year-round offer built around heritage, the coast, mountains, agriculture, nature and events.

The distinction matters. Extending tourism across more months is not simply about increasing visitor numbers. A longer season could help businesses retain staff, use assets more efficiently and develop services that are not dependent on one narrow climate window.

A hotel, restaurant or tour operator serving customers for much of the year has a different business model from one relying heavily on several crowded weeks.

Tourism, however, is only one part of the proposed diversification. The framework places it alongside logistics, manufacturing, agriculture, business services, education, healthcare, retail and knowledge-based activity.

Salalah is therefore being planned not as a tourism city with an industrial zone attached, but as a city expected to draw growth from several economic engines.

FROM GATEWAYS TO AN ECONOMIC PLATFORM
Salalah already possesses infrastructure that many cities would struggle to assemble: a major container port, a free zone, an international airport and proximity to important maritime routes.



The Greater Salalah Structure Plan is a long-term framework for guiding land use, infrastructure and investment to 2040

Yet infrastructure alone does not guarantee that the surrounding city captures a greater share of the value it generates.

Cargo can pass through a port without creating enough local

Khareef powers a seasonal consumer economy, while the port, free zone and airport connect Salalah to global trade throughout the year. The city’s 2040 framework seeks something harder than expanding either: creating stronger links between them to support a broader, more resilient economy.

manufacturing. An airport can move passengers without producing a substantial aviation-services economy. An industrial zone can attract factories while remaining disconnected from research, housing, public transport and local suppliers.

The framework’s response is closer spatial and economic integration. It proposes bringing the port, free zone and airport together as a logistics and manufacturing hub, while improving their links with the urban core, employment centres and new development areas.

It identifies a proposed Airport City logistics hub, an Innovation District and a pharmaceutical precinct at Raysut alongside the Port and Free Zone.

Each has a distinct role. The airport hub is intended to support logistics and higher-value exports. The pharmaceutical precinct would bring together production, distribution and healthcare-related activity.

The Innovation District is envisaged as a link between research, universities, mixed-use development and commercial activity. The port and free zone would remain anchors for industrial and trade-related investment.

Taken together, the aim is to build an economic chain within one urban region: research, production, logistics, export and supporting services.

Whether that model succeeds will depend less on the quality of the maps than on the quality of implementation. Businesses invest where land, infrastructure, regulation, skills and markets work together. Drawing investment clusters is only the first step.

THE CITY AS PRODUCTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE
One of the more important ideas in the structure plan is that urban quality and economic competitiveness are not separate



Khareef remains one of Salalah’s strongest competitive advantages and one of Oman’s most distinctive tourism products.

agendas.

Housing, public transport, public spaces and environmental protection may appear secondary beside ports and factories. In practice, they influence whether workers can reach jobs, whether companies can recruit talent and whether investors view a city as a place in which to establish long-term operations.

The framework promotes compact development, mixed-use neighbourhoods and closer alignment between housing, employment and transport.

Greater Salalah’s population is projected to rise from about 379,000 to approximately 613,000 by 2040. At the same time, the presentation says 42 per cent of residential plots remain undeveloped, despite the city’s outward spread. About two-thirds of trips are already made by private car.

That creates an important economic choice. Salalah can continue expanding across new land, extending roads, water, electricity, sewerage and public services over greater distances. Or it can use more of the vacant and underused land already within the city, concentrating growth where infrastructure and services can be provided more efficiently.

The plan favours the second approach, supported by a proposed urban growth boundary, infill development and more mixed-use, transit-oriented growth.

This is not simply an urban-design

preference. Dispersed cities cost more to operate. Longer journeys increase congestion, infrastructure networks become more expensive to extend and viable public transport becomes harder to provide.

Compact growth does not mean crowding every neighbourhood. It means matching development more closely with the infrastructure, jobs and services required to support it.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT EMPTY LAND
Salalah’s agricultural belt, wadis, khors and coastline are often discussed as natural or tourism assets. The structure plan also treats them as part of the city’s economic infrastructure.

Wadis provide drainage and flood protection. Agricultural land supports production, landscape identity and potential visitor activity. Public beaches and green spaces contribute to quality of life and tourism. Khors and coastal ecosystems protect biodiversity and help define the city’s character.

Poorly managed expansion could weaken the assets on which parts of Salalah’s economy depend.

The plan therefore combines growth controls with proposals for wadi buffers, coastal resilience, green corridors and protection of agricultural and ecologically sensitive areas.

The economic principle is straightforward: development that damages natural protection systems

may create immediate land value but impose higher costs later through flooding, erosion, environmental loss or weaker tourism appeal.

The test will be whether environmental safeguards remain firm when they conflict with short-term development pressure.

RO 4.3 BILLION IS A REQUIREMENT, NOT THE STRATEGY

The framework estimates that its proposed capital projects and technical assessments could require around RO 4.3 billion through 2040.

It identifies 261 proposed interventions — 114 capital projects and 147 technical assessments — and assumes an investment mix divided almost evenly between the public and private sectors.

The figure is a planning estimate, not approved expenditure or confirmed investment. Individual interventions would remain subject to financing, procurement, regulatory approval and implementation decisions.

The scale is substantial, but the headline number should not obscure the more important issue. Spending RO 4.3 billion does not by itself create an integrated economy.

A road that does not improve access to jobs, an industrial district without skills or supporting suppliers and a tourism project unable to attract demand off-season may all be completed without delivering the wider transformation envisaged.

The value will come from sequencing: which infrastructure is built first, which investment clusters become commercially viable and whether private capital follows the public groundwork.

Eng Aseela al Busaidy, Technical Director of the Greater Salalah Structure Plan at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, captured that distinction in her closing remarks to the workshop.

“We are not dealing with separate projects, but with an integrated system in which every project supports the others and every investment creates added value for its surroundings”, she said.

The harder task is ensuring that each completed asset raises the usefulness and economic return of those around it.

THE REAL MEASURE
By 2040, success should not be measured only by kilometres of road built, investment announced or land developed.

It should be measured by whether businesses operate for more of the year; whether more goods passing through Salalah’s gateways are processed, manufactured or supported locally; and whether growth produces higher-value employment accessible to residents.

It should also be measured by whether the city preserves the natural systems and cultural identity that make it economically distinctive. The framework provides the structure for that transition. It connects tourism with heritage and nature, logistics with manufacturing, urban growth with transport and investment with environmental resilience. But a plan can connect these elements on paper more easily than institutions can connect them in practice.

The Greater Salalah Structure Plan ultimately asks a simple economic question: Can a city known internationally for one remarkable season build an economy that performs throughout the year?

The framework offers one possible answer. Whether it succeeds will depend not on the ambition of the maps, but on the discipline of implementation over the next 15 years.

SHORTTAKES



Revenue generated by three- to five-star hotels rose 8.4 per cent year-on-year to RO 85.4 million during the January-March period.

OMAN HOTELS LIFT REVENUES DESPITE WEAKER TOURISM

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Hotels in the Sultanate of Oman increased revenues during the first quarter of 2026 despite a slowdown in visitor numbers, as stronger room rates helped offset weaker travel demand caused by seasonal factors and regional disruptions, according to a report by real estate consultancy Cavendish Maxwell.

Revenue generated by the Sultanate of Oman's three- to five-star hotels rose 8.4 per cent year-on-year to RO 85.4 million during the January-March period, even as guest numbers fell 5.9 per cent to about 572,000 and average occupancy slipped to 56.1 per cent from 59.3 per cent a year earlier.

The report said hotels were able to maintain pricing power during the first two months of the year, with average room rates climbing 15.5 per cent to RO 57.5, while room revenue increased 13 per cent to RO 53.2 million.

"Oman's hospitality market faced some demand pressure in the first quarter, partly linked to shifting seasonal travel patterns and regional disruptions," said Khalil al Zadjali, Head of Oman at Cavendish Maxwell.

"Even so, hotels continued to record revenue growth supported by stronger room rates. Looking ahead, the combination of measured supply growth and continued tourism initiatives should help support the sector's long-term development," he said.

The consultancy attributed the softer performance largely to the earlier timing of Ramadan, which shifted travel patterns, together with regional airspace disruptions that affected travel activity during the latter part of the quarter.

Oman boosts skills to strengthen supply chains

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has completed a specialised logistics and supply chain management programme aimed at improving operational efficiency and strengthening the competitiveness of Omani businesses as the Sultanate of Oman continues to expand its logistics sector under Oman Vision 2040.

The programme, held across Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al Buraimi governorates between June 28 and July 16, trained 53 business owners and professionals from the trade, transport, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution sectors. It focused on helping companies improve inventory management, reduce logistics costs, accelerate product delivery and adopt digital technologies across their supply chains.

The initiative forms part of OCCI's wider strategy to equip the private sector with skills needed to support economic diversification and improve business productivity in key industries.

"The programme represents a strategic step towards enhancing the efficiency of the logistics sector in the Sultanate of Oman and reinforcing its position as one of the key enablers of economic diversification and business competitiveness," said Mukhtar bin Abdullah al Shukaili, programme manager.

He said the initiative was designed to strengthen leadership and management capabilities within companies, enabling businesses to improve



The programme, held across Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al Buraimi Governorates between June 28 and July 16, trained 53 business owners and professionals from the trade, transport, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution sectors.

operational performance while expanding their competitiveness in local and international markets.

The training covered modern logistics and supply chain management practices, including procurement planning, warehousing, transportation, inventory optimisation and the use of advanced digital solutions to improve operational performance.

Ali bin Salim al Kalbani, the programme's lead trainer, introduced participants to international best practices in logistics management and demonstrated how integrated supply chains can reduce transportation and storage costs, minimise waste, improve delivery times and enhance customer satisfaction.

To complement classroom training, participants visited several manufacturing companies to observe logistics operations in practice. The visits included Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives in Al Rusayl Industrial City, Gulf Mushroom Products Company in Al Batinah South and Mazoon Dairy in Al Sinainah, Al Buraimi Governorate.

The companies showcased their warehousing, inventory management and distribution systems, giving participants practical exposure to technology-driven logistics operations and supply chain planning.

Ibtisam bint Darwish al Zaabi, Director of Majan Training Institute, said the programme was designed to help entrepreneurs improve the

management of their logistics operations while reducing costs and enhancing efficiency.

"Our role was to develop specialised training content and provide experienced trainers to ensure participants gain practical knowledge that can be applied directly within their businesses," she said.

The logistics programme is one of five specialised private-sector capacity-building initiatives launched by OCCI covering industry, tourism, agriculture, logistics and mining. The chamber plans to launch its Mining Project Management Programme later this month, targeting project managers, entrepreneurs and companies operating in the mining sector as Oman seeks to expand another key pillar of its non-oil economy.

SalamAir launches Muscat-Kigali flights

MUSCAT: SalamAir will launch its first direct flights between Muscat and Kigali on Tuesday, expanding its African network and strengthening air links between the Sultanate of Oman and Rwanda as the low-cost carrier continues to broaden its international footprint.

The airline will operate two flights a week on the new route, offering passengers direct access to Kigali while providing onward connections through SalamAir's growing network across the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe.

A ceremony marking the launch was held at Muscat International Airport on Monday, attended by officials from SalamAir, Oman Airports, the Civil Aviation Authority, the Rwandan Embassy in Oman and representatives from the



A ceremony marking the launch was held at Muscat International Airport on Monday.

aviation and tourism sectors.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, Chief Executive Officer of SalamAir, said

the new service marked another milestone in the airline's expansion strategy. "The launch of direct flights

to Kigali represents an important step in our continued expansion into promising markets that support tourism, business and international connectivity," he said.

"Rwanda is a dynamic destination offering significant opportunities and this route will strengthen relations between the two countries while supporting Oman's tourism ambitions under Oman Vision 2040."

Kigali is regarded as one of East Africa's fastest-growing business and tourism hubs and the new route is expected to facilitate trade, investment and cultural exchanges between Oman and Rwanda.

Lieutenant General Dan Munyuza, Rwanda's Ambassador to Oman, said the direct service would strengthen the movement of passengers, businesses and goods while creating

new opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

"This route represents a significant milestone in strengthening connectivity between Rwanda and Oman and will contribute to deeper cooperation in tourism, trade and investment," he said.

Nasser bin Ahmed al Sharji, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Oman Airports, said each new international destination enhances Muscat International Airport's role as a regional gateway.

"Every new destination contributes to developing air connectivity, supporting tourism and trade and opening new opportunities in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040," he said. — ONA

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar gains on tensions



The US dollar edged higher against major currencies as escalating US-Iran tensions boosted demand for safe-haven assets and lifted oil prices.

The dollar index rose 0.1 per cent to 100.84, while the yen weakened to 162.48 per dollar. Investors also looked ahead to the United States Federal Reserve policy meeting later this month, with rates widely expected to remain unchanged. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold slips as oil climbs



Gold prices fell as Brent crude rose above \$90 a barrel, fuelling inflation concerns and reinforcing expectations that US interest rates could remain higher for longer.

Spot gold slipped 0.4 per cent to \$4,000.55 an ounce, while US futures also declined. Investors were watching a busy week of technology earnings for fresh market direction. Other precious metals also fell. — Reuters

MONETARY POLICY

China holds lending rates



China kept its benchmark lending rates unchanged for a third straight month, maintaining the one-year loan prime rate at 3.0 per cent and the five-year rate at 3.5 per cent.

The decision signals policymakers' preference for stability as government authorities seek to support economic growth while monitoring domestic demand and conditions in the property market. — Reuters

OPINION

How Oman is shaping the future of artificial intelligence



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

A few years ago, artificial intelligence (AI) was mostly described as a technology of the future. Today, that future has arrived. AI is no longer just a topic discussed by technology experts but rather a strategic priority for governments, businesses and societies around the world.

Virtually every country is now asking the same question: How can we benefit from AI and how can we ensure we are not left behind? What differentiates one country from another, however, is not who talks about AI the most, but who takes meaningful action. Oman is one of those countries taking clear steps to position itself in this global transformation.

Our approach here in Oman towards AI reflects a clear understanding that AI is not simply another technology trend. It is an opportunity to transform industries, improve government services, create new economic opportunities and prepare the next generation for a new future powered by AI.

As part of Oman Vision 2040, digital transformation has become a key pillar of national development. Through initiatives focused on artificial intelligence and advanced digital technologies, Oman is working towards building an ecosystem that supports innovation, develops talent, encourages research and enables businesses to adopt emerging technologies.

One of the most important elements of

Oman's AI journey is its focus on people. Technology alone cannot create progress. Behind every successful AI ecosystem are skilled individuals, researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators who can transform ideas into real solutions.

As Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, has highlighted, AI represents a major opportunity for the Sultanate of Oman to accelerate digital transformation and create new possibilities across different sectors.

His message reflects an important reality: AI is not only about adopting technology, but about building national capabilities and creating an environment where innovation can flourish.

Furthermore, Oman's decision to become a founding member of the Global AI Cooperation Organisation demonstrates that we in Oman do not intend to be only a user of AI technologies but also an active participant in shaping the global conversation around AI cooperation, governance and responsible adoption.

This is an important milestone because the future of AI will not only be defined by algorithms and computing power. Trust, ethics, cybersecurity, collaboration and responsible leadership will also define it.

Our approach here in Oman towards AI reflects a clear understanding that AI is not simply another technology trend. It is an opportunity to transform industries, improve government services, create new economic opportunities and prepare the next generation for a new future powered by AI.

The private sector will play a critical role in this journey. AI should not be viewed simply as a tool to reduce costs but should be seen as a tool for innovation, improved customer experiences, smarter decision-making and also the creation of new business models.

Companies that embrace AI today will have a significant advantage in tomorrow's economy. At the same time, universities, startups and entrepreneurs must be empowered to experiment, innovate and develop solutions that address challenges in sectors such as healthcare, education, tourism, logistics, energy and finance.

The greatest opportunity for Oman is to move from being a consumer of technology to becoming a creator of technology. The countries that will succeed in the AI era are not necessarily those that have the biggest resources, but those that can combine vision, talent, innovation and execution.

Oman has many of the foundations required for success: a clear national vision, strong leadership, a young and talented population and a growing digital ecosystem.

The AI revolution has already started. The question is no longer whether AI will change the world, but how each country will participate in that change.

Oman has chosen its path and that is not only preparing to adopt AI but also to help shape its future. Until then, watch the space Insha Allah.

FORGET CRUDE; WAR PUSHES REFINERS TO THE BRINK

RON BOUSSO

The global oil refining industry is flashing warning signs. The supply chain for the products that fuel the global economy is under growing stress as conflicts in the Middle East and Russia ripple through energy markets.

Benchmark crude prices have retreated sharply from the highs of \$118 a barrel reached during the height of the Iran war and are now hovering around \$85, suggesting many investors believe the threat of an energy crisis has faded.

While crude supplies have partially recovered, the system that converts crude into fuels is still struggling after months of disruption from conflicts in Russia and the Middle East.

Gasoline and diesel inventories sit near multi-year lows, refining margins have surged to record levels and refinery throughput remains severely curtailed across key producing regions.

Households and industry consume refined products, not crude, so this is the stress they should be monitoring.

WARTIME CASUALTIES

Refineries have proven to be tempting targets.

In the Middle East, major refineries in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates remain either partially or entirely offline after the outbreak of the Iran conflict on February 28 triggered the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

China, meanwhile, has sharply reduced refinery runs to compensate for the massive decline in imports during the Iran conflict.

Across Asia, refiners have also been forced to reduce operations because of constrained crude supplies.

And Russia's refining sector has been battered by sustained Ukrainian drone attacks, triggering domestic fuel shortages that have forced Moscow to curb diesel exports in a bid to contain soaring local prices.

Taken together, those disruptions removed roughly 5 million barrels per day of global refining output in the second quarter compared with a year earlier, with refinery runs averaging around 78 million bpd, according to the International Energy Agency.

The temporary reopening of Hormuz following the US-Iran ceasefire on June 17 briefly eased some of the pressure. But even though Gulf producers rushed crude exports through the waterway, refined product flows remained far weaker.

According to Kpler data, the region exported around 4 million bpd of crude in June, but only 1 million bpd of oil products, totalling a quarter of pre-war levels.

Now, the renewed disruption to traffic through Hormuz — due to escalating hostilities between the US and Iran — has once again choked off regional exports, threatening hopes for a recovery in Asian or Middle Eastern refinery activity. Buffers and time are both running short. — Reuters

Igniting the engine of Oman's future growth

HALF a century ago, Oman struck oil and bought itself a future. Today a second discovery is under way not beneath the desert, but inside our institutions, our enterprises and our people. Artificial intelligence is the first great resource in history that is not extracted but cultivated and unlike oil, it appreciates with use. The nations that grasp this distinction will write the next chapters of economic history. The rest will read them.

Consider what the world's economists are actually telling us. In the World Economic Forum's latest Chief Economists' Outlook, nearly nine in ten expect global growth to weaken yet more than 90 per cent expect AI adoption to accelerate, making it the single engine of optimism in an economy running low on it. The International Monetary Fund states flatly that AI can lift global growth.

The Forum's Future of Jobs research projects that by 2030 structural change will create 170 million jobs and displace 92 million a net gain of 78 million while 86 per cent of employers expect AI to transform their business within the decade. These are not the numbers of a passing fashion. They are the vital signs of a new industrial revolution.

Yet the same surveys carry a quieter message: the productivity dividend is arriving later and more unevenly, than the early euphoria promised. Good. Every general-purpose technology has behaved this way electricity took a generation to redesign the factory before it redesigned the economy.

The delay is a test of the adopter. AI rewards not those who buy it, but those who reorganise around it. The dividend, in other words, is earned in distinctly human currency. Nowhere is that test more consequential than in the Gulf.

Our region enters the AI era with capital, ambition and one of the youngest populations on earth and with an old vulnerability that recent months have made painfully vivid as energy shocks and geopolitical strain continue to shape the global outlook. For hydrocarbon economies, diversification is no longer a policy



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Oil fuelled Oman's first ascent. Artificial intelligence is the engine of its second and Omanis must keep their hands on the wheel.

preference; it is an existential deadline. And AI is the most powerful diversification instrument the Gulf has ever been handed, because it is a force multiplier for everything else every port, every factory, every bank, every mind.

Oman, to its credit, is not waiting. Artificial intelligence sits at the heart of Oman Vision 2040, whose latest progress report shows 74 per cent of indicators advancing toward target. The National Programme for Artificial Intelligence is embedding the technology across healthcare, energy, finance and logistics. A dedicated Special AI Zone in Muscat now offers free-zone incentives to global investors and builders.

The ambition is measurable: a digital economy contributing 10 per cent of GDP by 2040, with the IMF suggesting the transformation could add 1.5 to 2 percentage points to annual growth. Omani business has answered the call 87 per cent of the country's chief executives already deploy generative AI, ahead of the global average. Non-oil sectors now drive roughly 70 per cent of GDP.

The engine is turning. And this month the engine gained a global gearbox. On July 16 in per cent, Oman signed the agreement establishing the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation, one of the 29 founding members and the only nation from the Middle East among them.

The new intergovernmental body exists to narrow the AI divide between nations and make the technology safer for humanity.

The signature carries a message worth pausing on: Oman does not intend merely to consume the rules of the intelligent age; it intends to help write them giving its firms and researchers access to frontier expertise and a seat where global AI governance takes shape. But engines need fuel and the fuel of this transformation is the private sector above all, the small and medium enterprise.

Oman's SME base passed 130,000 registered firms in 2025 and the Eleventh Five-Year Plan targets a private-sector contribution of 56 per cent of GDP. Here lies AI's most radical property: it is the great

equaliser. A ten-person logistics firm in Salalah can now run demand forecasting and fraud detection that a decade ago belonged only to multinationals.

A young founder can compress the distance from idea to market from years to months. Diversified economies are not decreed from above; they are compounded from below, one more productive firm at a time. AI puts that compounding within reach of every Omani entrepreneur willing to seize it.

It would be dishonest, however, to pretend the road is clear. The binding constraint is not silicon but skill. Globally, half of executives name the shortage of capable people as the top barrier to AI adoption; 63 per cent call the skills gap the greatest obstacle to transformation of any kind. Oman is no exception.

A Special AI Zone without Omani engineers to animate it is a monument, not an economy. Data governance, affordable computing power and trust all matter but talent is the gate through which everything else must pass.

The remedy is demanding but not mysterious. Worldwide, 77 per cent of employers plan to reskill their workforce to work alongside AI by 2030; Oman must match that with national urgency AI fluency built into schools and universities, reskilling funded as infrastructure rather than charity and adoption designed for augmentation, not replacement.

AI pays its highest returns when it amplifies human judgment. A nation that trains its people to direct these systems captures the dividend; one that lets the systems merely run captures inequality.

That, ultimately, is the choice before us. Artificial intelligence can be an engine of growth or an autopilot flying the economy somewhere nobody chose to go.

The difference lies entirely in human hands in policy, in investment, in the courage to bet on our own people. Oil made Oman prosperous. Intelligence cultivated, distributed and defiantly human will make it unstoppable.

The first discovery was luck. The second is a decision.

ART/LIFE



Where History Sits at the Table

> 20

MUSIC EVOLUTION

PETULA CLARK, 93, HOPES REAL SINGERS WILL SURVIVE THE AI TIDE



Veteran British singer Petula Clark says she hopes artificial intelligence will never replace the warmth, emotion and personal connection that define a real performer.

The 93-year-old Downtown star said that while AI continues to reshape the music industry, she believes audiences still value genuine human expressions.

“We’re all very worried about that,” Clark said. “They’re saying eventually AI will have emotion, and even that’s a little worrying. I hope not. I find the whole thing a bit scary.”

She noted that technology has long been part of music production but questioned how far it could go. “We’re still here. But for how much longer?” she asked.

Clark said that although age has lowered her vocal register, she still enjoys performing and believes no technology can replicate her unique style.

“My voice has changed... it’s come down a little bit, but I kind of like it,” she said. “What I do is very personal, and it’s mine; nobody can be me. It comes from the heart.”

The Grammy-winning singer revealed plans for what could be an emotional concert in a London theatre later this year.

“It may be my last one; who knows?” she said. “But I’m really looking forward to getting back to an audience. There’s nothing quite like the communion with an audience.”

Clark, who became a major star in France after marrying French publicist Claude Wolff in 1961, said melody has always been the first thing she listens for in a song.

“Melody is international,” she said, recalling that her 1964 hit Downtown had no lyrics when composer Tony Hatch first played it on the piano. The song went on to sell millions of copies and earned her a Grammy Award.

Asked about today’s artists, Clark praised Adele as “a wonderful singer” and “a very good songwriter.” She added that she still listens to music every day, particularly classical music and jazz.

Clark has also released her autobiography “Is That You, Petula?” named after John Lennon’s greeting when she visited his famous 1969 Montreal bed-in for peace and appeared on the recording of Give Peace a Chance.

Looking back on a career that began as a child performer on BBC radio during World War II and later included films, musicals and television, Clark described her life as “very exciting”, “very sad” and “very happy.”

She said she hopes her music has brought happiness to audiences over the decades. “They’ve made me happy, too,” she said. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



VINTAGE

A participant drives his scarlet red vintage car during the 19th Summer parade of vintage vehicles in the city of Paris. — AFP



OPERA

Julia Muzychenko as Violetta performs on stage during a press rehearsal of the opera “La Traviata” by Giuseppe Verdi. — AFP



CULTURE

People make their way to a gathering to celebrate the Torch Festival, held by the Yi ethnic minority, in Puge County in China. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



A heavenly portrait unfolds at Al Haffa beach



Piercing eyes frolicking high above

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DANNY BOYLE’S MURDOCH BIOPIC TO OPEN VENICE FILM FESTIVAL



A film about press baron Rupert Murdoch’s transformation of the British media by “Trainspotting” director Danny Boyle will open this year’s Venice Film Festival in September, the festival announced on Thursday.

“Ink” tells the story of Murdoch’s purchase of The Sun tabloid in 1969, which he turned into the best-selling newspaper in the country through a mix of sport, explicit content and right-wing politics.

The Australia-born media mogul is played by Guy Pearce (“Memento”, “The Hurt Locker”), with his first The Sun editor Larry Lamb played by Jack O’Connell (“Sinners”).

It is set in 1969, “the year we first walked on the moon — and the year Rupert Murdoch & Larry Lamb launched a newspaper that was to change the world far more”, Boyle said in a joint statement with the Venice Film Festival.

The film, based on a play of the same name by screenwriter James Graham, will premiere on the opening night of the festival

which runs from September 2-12.

Boyle won a best director Oscar for “Slumdog Millionaire” and has a string of hits to his name, including “28 Days Later” and its sequel “28 Years Later”.

He previously turned his lens on another historic business figure in “Steve Jobs”, a 2015 feature about the founder of Apple.

The full line-up for Venice, one of the big three European festivals alongside Cannes and Berlin, is expected to be unveiled next week.

Hollywood favourites George Clooney and Ellen Burstyn (“The Exorcist”, “Interstellar”) are to be given lifetime achievement Golden Lion awards this year.

“This festival is without question my favourite and to be given the Golden Lion is a tremendous honour. It also probably means I’m old, but I’ll take it,” Clooney, a regular in Venice, said in a statement last week. — AFP



Shakira energises the crowd with a performance of the tournament anthem during the historic halftime show.

MADONNA, BIEBER, SHAKIRA & MUPPETS STAR AT HALFTIME



Madonna opens the World Cup’s first-ever halftime show with a spectacular performance at MetLife Stadium.



Justin Bieber delivers a special World Cup-themed performance during the star-studded halftime spectacle.

MUSICAL superstars Madonna, Shakira, Justin Bieber, BTS and Coldplay headlined the Fifa World Cup final’s first-ever halftime show on Sunday, joined by Brazilian football legends, Ted Lasso actors and a host of international performers in a Super Bowl-style spectacle.

The 12-minute performance also paid tribute to football icon Pelé and featured a rendition of the White Stripes’ ‘Seven Nation Army’, led by conductor Gustavo Dudamel with musicians from the US, Venezuela and Iran. Coldplay later teamed up with New York’s PS22 Chorus, alongside characters from Sesame Street and The Muppets, in a finale supporting the Fifa Global Citizen Education Fund, which promotes access to education and sport for disadvantaged children.

The halftime entertainment extended the match break between

Spain and Argentina to 27 minutes, prompting debate over its potential impact on players. Fifa president Gianni Infantino had predicted “a couple of billion” viewers would watch what organisers described as “the single largest gathering of artists united for a cause since Live Aid.”

The show opened with Madonna arriving beneath MetLife Stadium in a dune buggy driven by Brazilian greats Ronaldo and Ronaldinho before launching into Music. Her set flowed into an orchestral performance of ‘Seven Nation Army’, a song synonymous with football stadiums worldwide.

K-pop sensation BTS followed with a football-themed version of Dynamite, before Ted Lasso stars Jason Sudeikis and Brendan Hunt introduced Bieber, who performed a World Cup-inspired rendition of Everything Hallelujah. Shakira and Nigerian singer Burna Boy then raised the tempo with the tournament anthem Dai Dai,

accompanied by Ugandan dancers. A moving tribute honoured Pelé, featuring archival footage from his farewell appearance at the former Giants Stadium in 1977. The Brazilian legend died in 2022.

Curated by Coldplay frontman Chris Martin, the show highlighted the Fifa Global Citizen Education Fund, which aims to raise \$100 million to support education and sport initiatives for underprivileged children.

The campaign had already exceeded \$60 million before kickoff through ticket sales, corporate backing and private donations.

FIFA said grants have been awarded to 58 organisations, benefiting around 400,000 children worldwide.

Before the match, Post Malone headlined the closing ceremony, while Tom Cruise delivered a speech celebrating football’s power to unite people. Robbie Williams, Nicole Scherzinger and Jennifer Hudson also performed. — AFP

FEATURES

HOW DINA MACKI IS TELLING ONE OF OMAN’S OLDEST INTERNATIONAL STORIES THROUGH FOOD

WHERE HISTORY SITS AT THE TABLE

YERU EBUEN

LONG before the first diners entered, before the aroma of seafood filled its rooms and before glasses clinked across its tables, the old house beneath Muttrah Fort had already lived a remarkable life.

Today, after nearly two years of meticulous restoration, the historic building has become Mesa, a contemporary Omani-Portuguese restaurant created by Omani-British chef and food writer Dina Macki. Yet beyond serving memorable meals, the restaurant offers guests a journey through one of Oman's oldest connections with the wider world.

“This is a beautiful renovation”, Macki shared on her social media, where a series of Instagram Reels document not only the restoration process but also the vision behind the project.

“We have restored a really important piece of history and I'm so glad that part of it gets to be this gorgeous restaurant for everyone to visit”, she said.

Located beneath the walls of Muttrah Fort, the restaurant’s setting carries deep historical significance. The fort, first occupied by the Portuguese after their arrival in Muscat in 1507 before Oman reclaimed the city more than a century later, represents a complex history shaped by conflict, trade and cultural exchange.

Mesa focuses on the latter, exploring the connections that continued long after those historic battles ended.

The restaurant’s name reflects this philosophy. “Mesa” means “table” in Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili, representing the many cultures that have crossed paths in Oman over centuries. Rather than creating a purely Omani or Portuguese dining experience, Macki explores the meeting point between the two traditions.

That approach is reflected in the menu, where Portuguese arroz is enriched with an Omani seafood broth and local ingredients are paired with Mediterranean techniques.

The result is not fusion for the sake of experimentation, but a celebration of Muscat’s maritime history, where flavours, ingredients and ideas travelled across oceans.

The building itself forms a central part of the experience.

“I can’t believe 720 days later we have made it here”, Macki said. “There is nothing harder than restoring an old house and hoping it will go smoothly”.

The restoration required careful decisions to preserve the character of the historic home while transforming it into a modern restaurant. From custom-made furniture to handcrafted details, every element was chosen with intention.

Walking through Mesa feels like exploring chapters of a carefully curated story. The reception features artwork by Omani artist Miran, while handmade sofas with fabrics sourced from Muttrah sit alongside vintage furniture. Custom woodwork from Suhar, traditional Omani-inspired details and Portuguese-style courtyard tiles create a space where both cultures exist naturally together.

One of Macki’s favourite areas is the intimate “Mirror Room”.

“It’s cosy”, she says. “It gives grandma vibes meeting a bar in Portugal”.

Perhaps the restaurant’s most symbolic feature is its indoor veranda, inspired by the traditional architecture of old Muttrah homes. Its wooden ceiling details reference historic designs from the area, while elements of the nearby fort are reflected throughout the space.

For Macki, every design choice reinforces one message: heritage should be experienced, not simply preserved.

Behind the scenes, bringing Mesa to life has required the same dedication. The restaurant currently relies on a team of at least 20 people to operate smoothly and Macki remains closely involved in daily operations.

“I’ve always thought that if I can’t do the job myself, why should I expect anyone else to?” she says.

Through her cookbook



Bahari, television appearances and writing, Macki has spent years sharing the richness of Omani cuisine with global audiences. Mesa represents the continuation of that mission, allowing visitors to experience Oman's stories through food, architecture and hospitality.

As evening falls over Muttrah, diners leave the restaurant and return to streets that have welcomed sailors, merchants and travellers for centuries. Above them, the fort remains a reminder of history’s endurance.

Beneath it, Mesa offers a quieter message: that heritage is not only preserved in monuments, but also in the moments shared around a table.