

Observer



IN BRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETES EMIR OF QATAR

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar on the anniversary of his accession to power. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to the Emir on this auspicious occasion. His Majesty wished the Emir continued success in leading the people of his country towards achieving further accomplishments and developments across all levels. His Majesty also lauded the deep-rooted relations between the two countries.

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S PRESIDENTS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Nataša Pirc Musar of the Republic of Slovenia on her country's Independence Day. In the cable, His Majesty wished the President and the people of her country happiness and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the relations of cooperation and partnership between the two countries further growth and development in various fields.

His Majesty the Sultan also sent a cable of greetings to President Zoran Milanović of the Republic of Croatia on his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty lauded the relations of cooperation and friendship between the two countries. He also wished the President continued success in leading the friendly Croatian people and fulfilling their aspirations for further progress and stability.

OMAN RE-ELECTED TO UN COMMITTEE

NEW YORK: *The Sultanate of Oman was elected for the second consecutive time as a member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for the period (2027-2031). The election took place on the sidelines of the 21st Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.*

The re-election of the Sultanate of Oman to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for a second consecutive term underscores the prominent standing that Oman enjoys on the international stage. It also reflects the keenness of member states to see Oman represented in this highly significant committee.

The membership of Oman will provide opportunities to enhance cooperation with other members and contribute effectively to achieving the Committee's goal of protecting children's rights globally. Furthermore, it supports the shared ambition of providing a safe, healthy and prosperous environment for all children. — ONA

HM gives audience to Prime Minister of Qatar

Review US-Iranian talks, conducted through Qatari-Pakistani mediation



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

At the beginning of the audience, the guest conveyed the greetings of Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. He also conveyed the Emir's good wishes to His Majesty for abundant health and happiness, and to the Omani people for continuous progress and prosperity.

For his part, His Majesty the Sultan asked the guest to convey his heartfelt sentiments and good wishes to the Emir and to the Qatari people.

The audience reviewed the trajectory

of the ongoing US-Iranian negotiations, conducted through Qatari-Pakistani mediation, alongside the latest developments in diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the war and reaching a definitive and comprehensive settlement of the crisis.

His Majesty the Sultan underscored the imperative of advancing these endeavours to secure peace and stability in the region, while emphasising the vital importance of harmonising the constructive initiatives undertaken by sisterly and friendly nations in this regard.

The guest praised the pivotal role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, in supporting paths of dialogue, furnishing communication channels, and bridging

views between the various parties.

From the Omani side, the audience was attended by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Hamed bin Said al Afi, Head of the Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan; and Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-large at the Foreign Ministry.

From the Qatari side, it was attended by Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Hamad bin Khamis al Kubaissi, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Security Council; and Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Wadi Darbat comes alive as Dhofar Khareef visitors return

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 24

At Wadi Darbat, one of Dhofar's most popular natural attractions, the early days of Khareef are carrying two stories at once: visitors returning for the season, and local residents watching the skies as the wadi waits for heavier rain.

During a field visit, young Omani entrepreneurs were seen preparing boats, organising ticketing arrangements and checking safety measures ahead of an expected rise in visitors over the coming weeks. Among them was Abdullah bin Amer al Maashani, who operates



boats at Wadi Darbat as part of a group of young Omanis engaged in seasonal tourism activity. He said preparations were focused on organising the area, arranging

tickets and ensuring that families can enjoy boat rides safely.

The activity reflects the economic importance of Khareef for small local businesses. For many young

Omanis, the season provides a short but valuable commercial window, particularly in recreation, food services, transport, local products and visitor support.

But for residents of Wadi Darbat, the season is not measured only by visitor numbers. It is also measured by rainfall, water levels, grazing conditions and the movement of livestock.

One resident said the water level in the wadi had not yet reached the level usually expected during the season, adding that residents hoped further rainfall would improve conditions in the coming weeks. He said local families had already

moved their cows and camels towards the coast of Taqah to protect the animals from seasonal mosquitoes and flies.

The practice, he said, is not new. It is a habit inherited from grandparents and remains part of the local rhythm of life during Khareef.

"After the rainy season ends, around the end of September, we usually move back to Wadi Darbat," he said, noting that livestock ownership and seasonal movement remain part of family heritage in the area.

His account gives a deeper picture of Khareef beyond the visitor experience. **TURN TO P3**

OMAN

HIS MAJESTY AND PRIME MINISTER OF QATAR REVIEW US-IRANIAN NEGOTIATIONS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Investment opportunities span adventure attractions, family entertainment facilities, retail outlets, food and beverage venues, and digital advertising infrastructure.

Cable car project offers promising investment opportunities for SMEs

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

As the Muttrah Teleferik cable car project prepares for its trial run in December, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has announced a range of investment opportunities specifically for SMEs, enhancing their contribution to one of the most prominent new tourism projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

SMEDA announced several investment opportunities related to the project, targeting companies with licensed activities in the specified sectors and offering innovative, value-added ideas that contribute to improving the visitor experience and enhancing the project's economic viability.

The incentives offered to investors include support in designing the visual identity for projects, marketing and promotion through the Muttrah Cable Car project's media and marketing channels, the possibility of partial investment in selected projects, and specialised consulting and guidance sessions in the areas of operation, marketing, and business development.

SMEDA also provides funding of up to RO 500,000, subject to the terms and conditions of the Riyada programme. The investment opportunities include a mountain bike project, a mountain toboggan run, digital advertising screens, a giant swing set, an indoor children's play area, outdoor kiosks and restaurants, a specialised flower shop, and a shop for manufacturing and selling Omani sweets.

According to the Authority, the mountain bike project involves operating off-road bikes on a mountain trail ranging from 500 to 700 metres in length at the Summit Station. Likewise, the mountain toboggan run project involves operating single or double toboggan rides on a safe, metal track approximately 867 metres long, traversing the mountain slopes. Additional investment opportunities include a giant swing attraction, the installation of digital LED advertising screens at the cable car stations to enhance visitor engagement and generate revenue, and the development of an indoor, climate-controlled family entertainment zone featuring educational children's activities and leisure facilities.

Oman, Qatar affirm support for regional stability, peace

SAYYID

Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the course of the solid Omani-Qatari relations and the fruitful bilateral cooperation programmes across various economic and investment fields. They also discussed strategic partnership opportunities and ways to develop them in a manner that yields greater benefits and interests for the two countries and their peoples.

On another note, the two sides discussed a number of regional and international issues and developments, exploring ways to address them within the framework of the two countries' cooperation and alignment of visions. They highlighted the mutual keenness of both



The two sides discussed developments in the regional scene and the ongoing political and diplomatic actions. — ONA

sides to actively contribute to supporting regional stability and creating a more secure and balanced environment in the region.

Furthermore, the two sides discussed developments in the regional scene and the ongoing political and diplomatic actions aimed at containing tensions and creating more

sustainable pathways for dialogue and understanding. They also examined recent updates related to the security of maritime navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, emphasising the importance of ensuring the smooth flow of trade and energy movement through vital maritime corridors. This, they noted, must be carried out

in accordance with the rules of international law, and in a manner that preserves the sovereignty of states, the safety of navigation, and the broader interests of the international community.

The two sides expressed their deep appreciation for the joint efforts exerted by the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar, alongside the relentless efforts of the GCC countries. These efforts come within a framework of integrated coordination and mutual understanding, serving in support of dialogue and peaceful endeavours aimed at reinforcing the pillars of security and stability.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinaï, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry and Dr Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the State of Qatar, along with a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

NCSI advances national digital transformation

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on Wednesday launched three key national initiatives aimed at enhancing Oman's data ecosystem, strengthening institutional integration and advancing digital transformation efforts in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The initiatives — the interactive “Atraj” application, the Coordination Portal for the State Administrative Apparatus and the Central Data Warehouse Project — were unveiled during a ceremony held at the Grand Millennium Muscat.

Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, Chief Executive Officer of NCSI, said the launch reflects the Centre's continued commitment to developing the national statistical and information system, promoting statistical literacy and leveraging modern technologies to support evidence-based decision-making.

“The launch of these three national initiatives embodies our commitment to



NCSI launched three key national initiatives aimed at enhancing Oman's data ecosystem.

strengthening the statistical and information ecosystem and enabling the effective use of data in supporting sustainable development and informed policymaking,” he said.

On the Coordination Portal for the State Administrative Apparatus, Dr Al Barwani described it as a central digital platform designed to strengthen institutional coordination and collaboration across government entities.

The portal provides a secure and reliable environment for sharing reports, publications, studies, government projects, survey findings and public opinion research, enabling more efficient communication and knowledge exchange among stakeholders.

According to NCSI, the platform will support the systematic sharing of data, indicators and information, helping government institutions make better-informed decisions, formulate policies based on reliable evidence and maximise the use of institutional knowledge.

The third initiative, the Central Data Warehouse Project, represents a strategic step in Oman's digital transformation journey by creating a comprehensive national platform for data management, integration and accessibility.

Dr Al Barwani said the project will contribute to unifying national data sources, improving data quality and reliability, and enhancing the availability of information for decision-makers, researchers and other beneficiaries.

SHORT TAKES



The Council reviewed the latest developments regarding the progress of work at the university across various relevant aspects. — ONA

SQU COUNCIL HOLDS MEETING FOR THE YEAR 2025/2026

MUSCAT: The Council of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) held its fourth meeting for the academic year 2025/2026 on Wednesday, chaired by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the University Council.

The Council reviewed the latest developments regarding the progress of work at the university across various relevant aspects, alongside the executive status of the various decisions and recommendations issued during its previous meetings.

During its meeting, the Council approved the draft of the updated academic regulations for undergraduate studies. This comes within the framework of the university’s continuous efforts to develop and modernise its academic system to keep pace with the latest developments and best practices in higher education institutions. The Council also agreed to add articles to resolve tie-break situations within the admission requirements for bachelor’s programmes at the College of Education, thereby enhancing the principles of fairness and objectivity in the selection procedures among applicants. — ONA

WADI DARBAT COMES ALIVE AS KHAREEF VISITORS RETURN



FROM PAGE 1

For tourists, Wadi Darbat is a place of greenery, water and boat rides. For residents, it is also a living environment shaped by rain, livestock, family memory and changing public infrastructure.

The site is also attracting repeat visitors from the Gulf. A Saudi visitor who arrived in Salalah on Sunday said this was his third visit to Dhofar. He said he usually stays for around two weeks and first came to know Salalah through a friend who had been visiting Oman regularly with his family. His return reflects one of Dhofar’s strongest tourism advantages: visitors who no longer see Salalah as a new destination, but as a familiar summer escape.

Residents also point to visible improvements at Wadi Darbat. The resident said road lighting introduced last year had made night movement easier, while improved access surfaces and public facilities had helped both residents and visitors. He said these developments were also creating seasonal business opportunities for young Omanis, while praising the cooperation of the Dhofar Municipality and other authorities involved in preparing the site.

As visitor numbers rise, residents and operators say safety must remain central. The resident urged visitors coming to Wadi Darbat and the wider south of Oman to enjoy the season responsibly and follow safety instructions, particularly around water bodies, roads and crowded tourist areas. The early picture from Wadi Darbat shows why Khareef is more than a tourism season. It is a period when natural conditions, local livelihoods, public services and small business activity meet in one place.

The challenge now is to ensure that the season’s growing popularity continues to support local communities while protecting the safety, environment and character of one of Dhofar’s most important natural landmarks.

Information Minister, GRTO DG discuss media ties

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, met on Wednesday with Dr Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz al Hazza, Director-General of the Gulf Radio and Television Organisation (GRTO). The meeting took place within the framework of enhancing joint Gulf media cooperation and exchanging expertise and experiences between media establishments in GCC countries.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the march of cooperation between the Ministry of Information and the Gulf Radio and Television Corporation.



The two sides reviewed the march of cooperation between the Ministry of Information and the Gulf Radio and Television Corporation. — ONA

and Television Corporation, as well as the efforts exerted to enhance Gulf media integration. They also discussed a number of topics of common interest related to developing media work and expanding fields of cooperation across various media programmes and initiatives.

The meeting also touched upon ways to elevate joint Gulf media content and boost the utilisation of digital transformations and modern technologies in the media industry, in a manner that contributes to development. — ONA

State Council eyes food security, business growth

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

THE STATE COUNCIL held its ninth session of the third ordinary term of the eighth council period on Wednesday, chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

In his opening remarks, the chairman congratulated members on the occasion of the New Hijri Year and commended the meeting held with the Council of Ministers, describing it as positive and productive. He said the meeting falls within the framework of ongoing cooperation and coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman to develop shared visions that achieve national goals and development plans.

The session’s agenda covered three main topics, the first of which was the unified law project on the management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Dr Abdulkarim al Lawati, Rapporteur of the Social and Cultural Committee, explained that the law addresses the collection, preservation, maintenance, evaluation and classification of



The session was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The session’s agenda covered three main topics, the first of which was the unified law project on the management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

plant genetic resources, alongside regulating the movement of these resources between GCC member states and making data available to researchers and scientific centres.

He confirmed that the law will play a significant role in strengthening food security through protecting plant heritage and developing agriculture that is compatible with the natural environment of these countries. The second topic addressed the study on developing the framework for government performance management.

Mohammed al Shehhi, Rapporteur of the Economic and Financial Committee, said Oman

is advancing steadily in this area, driven by a firm Royal will reflected in national visions, sectoral strategies and five-year plans.

He noted that the study’s recommendations include developing the legislative and regulatory framework, achieving integration between relevant units and digital transformation, as well as developing government leadership capable of delivering the required objectives.

The third topic covered the study “Analysis of the Business Environment in the Sultanate of Oman: Practical Steps to Enhance Entrepreneurship”.

Mohammed al Ghassani, Rapporteur of the Special Committee, stressed that developing the business environment is no longer a reform option but a strategic necessity to strengthen the competitiveness of the Omani economy regionally and internationally.

He noted that the study identified challenges at both the regulatory and institutional levels, as well as the operational and sectoral levels, pointing out that legislation and policies are in place, but the gap lies in implementation, which the study’s recommendations aim to address.

SUMMER PROGRAMMES TO INSPIRE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JUNE 24

Under the slogan “Our Environment: Trust and Sustainability,” the Environment Authority (EA) in Al Batinah North is launching a series of activities for school students as part of the “Our Summer: Leadership and Creativity 2026” initiative. Organised in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, the programmes will run from June 29 to July 2, targeting children aged 10 to 14 years.

The initiative reflects the Authority’s commitment to making productive use of the summer vacation by enhancing environmental awareness among young people and promoting sustainability values through a variety of interactive educational activities.

The first event will feature an educational field trip to Mini Zoo Park in Suhar, where participants will explore biodiversity, learn about different animal species and their natural habitats, and gain a deeper understanding of wildlife conservation. The visit is also designed to strengthen students’ observation and exploration skills while encouraging compassion toward animals.

On June 30, the Environment Department will host the workshop “I Decorate My Bag,” during which students will design and decorate bags using colours, shells, beads,



The initiative reflects EA’s commitment to enhance environmental awareness among young people.

and other natural materials.

The workshop aims to nurture artistic creativity while encouraging the reuse of available resources in innovative ways that support environmental sustainability.

Participants will accordingly join the workshop “Taking Care of My Beautiful Seedling,” where they will learn the basics of home gardening, including watering,

fertilising and caring for plants. The activity seeks to foster a love for nature and strengthen students’ sense of environmental responsibility.

The programme will conclude on July 2 with the workshop “World of the Seas,” which will involve creating artistic models inspired by the marine environment using sand, shells, and eco-friendly materials. Students will learn about the ecological and economic importance of marine ecosystems while developing their creative and artistic skills.

Eng Nasser bin Hamood al Yaqubi, Director of the Environment Department in Al Batinah North, emphasised that these programmes form part of the Authority’s ongoing efforts to spread environmental culture among all segments of society, particularly students, who represent the foundation of a sustainable future.

One parent of a participating student expressed appreciation for the initiative, highlighting the importance of environmental programmes in shaping children’s awareness and character.

“In today’s world, children spend a great deal of time with technology and indoor activities. Programmes like these provide valuable opportunities for them to connect with nature, learn about environmental responsibility and develop practical skills in an enjoyable way.”

SPOTLIGHT

ENERGY HEALING

A GROWING POPULARITY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

AS people increasingly seek holistic approaches to health and well-being, energy healing has emerged as one of the most talked-about complementary practices worldwide. Advocates claim it can help restore balance, reduce stress and support the body’s natural healing processes. However, questions remain over whether its benefits stem from measurable therapeutic effects or from psychological and emotional factors. Energy healing encompasses a range of practices, including Reiki, therapeutic touch and crystal healing.

While methods vary, they are generally based on the belief that the human body is surrounded by or infused with an energy field that influences physical, emotional and mental health. Practitioners aim to identify and correct imbalances within this field to promote wellness.

The growing interest in such therapies reflects a broader shift toward integrative health approaches, particularly among individuals looking to manage stress, anxiety and lifestyle-related conditions. Wellness centres, spas and private practitioners offering energy healing sessions have become increasingly visible, attracting clients from diverse backgrounds. Despite its popularity, the scientific community remains cautious.

Dr Mariam al Meqbgli, a consultant in internal medicine, says there is currently insufficient scientific evidence to support claims that energy healing can directly treat physical diseases.

“Modern medicine relies on treatments that can be objectively measured, tested and replicated through rigorous scientific studies,” he explains. “To date, there is no conclusive evidence demonstrating that energy healing can cure or alter the course of medical conditions.” However, Dr Al Meqbal acknowledges that many individuals report feeling better after undergoing such sessions. “People often experience relaxation, reduced stress levels and an improved sense of well-being. These outcomes are valuable, but they do not necessarily confirm the existence of a therapeutic energy field,” she adds.

Mental health specialists suggest that some of the perceived benefits may be linked to psychological mechanisms that are already well understood. According to psychologist Sara al Alawi, the environment surrounding energy healing sessions can itself have a positive impact on emotional well-being. “When individuals enter a calm setting, receive

focused attention and believe they are taking steps to improve their health, they may experience genuine feelings of relief and comfort,” she says. “This does not automatically validate the underlying theory of energy transfer, but it highlights the powerful connection between the mind and the body.” Al Alawi notes that “stress and anxiety can influence sleep quality, pain perception and overall health. Activities that promote relaxation may therefore contribute to an individual’s sense of recovery and improved functioning.” Researchers often point to the placebo effect when discussing complementary therapies. The phenomenon occurs when patients experience real improvements because they expect a treatment to help, even if the treatment itself has no direct physiological action. Scientists stress that the placebo effect is not imaginary; rather, it demonstrates how beliefs and expectations can influence health outcomes. At the same time, supporters of energy healing argue that the absence of definitive proof should not be interpreted as proof of ineffectiveness.

They contend that many aspects of human health remain incompletely understood and that further research may shed light on mechanisms not yet fully explained by science. Health professionals nevertheless caution against using energy healing as a substitute for evidence-based medical care, particularly for serious illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular disease or severe mental health disorders. Delaying appropriate diagnosis and treatment can lead to significant health risks. Instead, many experts view energy healing as a complementary practice that may help some individuals achieve relaxation and emotional balance when used alongside conventional healthcare.

The rise of social media has also contributed to the visibility of energy healing. Personal testimonials and success stories are widely shared online, often encouraging others to explore alternative wellness practices. Yet experts emphasise that individual experiences, while meaningful, do not replace scientific evidence gathered through controlled studies.

As interest in holistic health continues to grow, energy healing remains a subject of ongoing debate. For some, it offers a pathway to mindfulness, comfort and self-care. For others, the lack of scientific validation warrants scepticism. What is clear, however, is that the conversation surrounding energy healing reflects a broader public interest in understanding the relationship between physical health, emotional well-being and the pursuit of balance in modern life.

THE GROWING INTEREST IN ENERGY HEALING REFLECTS A BROADER SHIFT TOWARD INTEGRATIVE HEALTH APPROACHES, PARTICULARLY AMONG INDIVIDUALS LOOKING TO MANAGE STRESS, ANXIETY AND LIFESTYLE-RELATED CONDITIONS.

SHORT TAKES



The step comes within the framework to enhance expertise in the judicial field. — ONA

Oman explores experience in legal qualification

RABAT: The Sultanate of Oman explored the pioneering experiences and successful practices of the Kingdom of Morocco in the fields of training, qualification, and research relating to judicial, legal, and academic work.

This came during the official visit paid by Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs to the Kingdom of Morocco.

The visit included a number of specialised scientific and training institutions in the capital, Rabat.

During this visit, the minister was briefed on the approved training and qualification system, the specialised academic and research programmes, and the mechanisms for preparing and qualifying personnel working in the legal and judicial professions, in a manner that contributes to the development of the judicial work system.

This step comes within the framework of the two countries' keenness to enhance cooperation and exchange expertise in the judicial, legal, and academic fields, reflecting the depth of the bilateral relations. It supports the paths of partnership and mutual cooperation in various areas of shared interest. — ONA

SQCCRC maintains JCI international accreditation



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCRC), affiliated to the University Medical City, has maintained its international accreditation awarded by the Joint Commission International (JCI), according to the outcome of a global assessment survey.

The Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care Centre obtained its first international accreditation in June 2023, and it has ever since maintained its status as the only government health institution in the Sultanate of Oman accredited by the JCI.

The JCI accreditation is based on a comprehensive assessment of a health institution's healthcare system. The assessment covers patient safety, the quality of clinical services, governance and leadership, risk management, infection control, staff efficiency, medication management, healthcare environment and ongoing amelioration. — ONA

ROP to mark international day against drug abuse, trafficking

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) will join other countries of the world in observing the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Trafficking, which falls on June 26 every year. The event seeks to underscore the importance of intensifying efforts to address serious issues that threaten the security of societies and the health and stability of individuals.

This year, emphasis will be laid on qualitative shifts in drug



trafficking and patterns of drug abuse amid the emergence of new substances and the exploitation of modern technologies and social media in promoting narcotics. Combating action includes holding public awareness programmes and expanding the scope of international cooperation to minimise the impact of this phenomenon.

As part of the programme, the ROP will organise a sports event at Al Mouj Walk in the Wilayat of Al

Seeb on June 27, 2026, from 5 to 9 pm. The event will be attended by various segments of society.

On June 28, 2026, the Directorate-General for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances will also organise an exhibition at Muscat Mall in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. The exhibition features the security roles that the Directorate-General undertakes when dealing with the abuse of drugs and psychotropic substances. — ONA

‘Afaq’ strategy unveils 92 million projects

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, JUNE 24

AL DAKHILIYAH Governorate has unveiled its “Afaq” Strategy (2026-2030) alongside 282 development and investment projects valued at more than RO 92 million, during its Annual Media Forum 2026.

The “Afaq” Strategy will guide the governorate's development journey in the coming years. The strategy aims to enhance institutional readiness and strengthen the governorate's economic, investment, and tourism competitiveness in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The “Afaq” Strategy is the result of an extensive participatory process involving more than 330 participants from 46 entities through 32 interactive sessions, nine field visits and over 50 direct interviews with community members. The process was designed to create a development road map that reflects local priorities and future aspirations.

The strategy is built around several key pillars, including institutional development, stimulation of the local economy and strengthening Al Dakhiliyah's development identity, while maximising the governorate's tourism, cultural and natural assets.

Shaikh Mahmoud bin Rashid al Saadi, Acting Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said, “The governorate's ongoing projects and initiatives reflect strong collaboration between the governorate, government entities, the private sector and the wider community.” He described the “Afaq” Strategy as a road map for Al Dakhiliyah's next development phase, translating community aspirations and sustainable development objectives into actionable plans aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Mahmoud bin Humaid al Wahaibi, founder and CEO of Oman Think Urban, said, “Afaq reflects an advanced approach to development planning based on data analysis and community engagement, and has the potential to become a national model for developing governorates.” During the forum, the governorate highlighted 282 development and investment projects with a total value exceeding RO 92 million, covering a range of key sectors aimed at driving economic growth and improving the quality of life across the governorate.

The forum also highlighted growing economic indicators across Al Dakhiliyah



The forum reviewed investment contracts and newly introduced opportunities.

Governorate, with the value added from non-oil activities surpassing RO 1.078 billion, representing nearly 8 per cent of Oman's total non-oil value added contribution. Foreign investment exceeded RO 57 million, while investment returns increased by 40 per cent and investment contracts rose by 52 per cent, underscoring the governorate's increasing appeal as an investment destination and the expansion of its economic activities.

The forum also reviewed investment contracts and newly introduced opportunities launched by the governorate during the past period, covering a range of commercial, tourism, recreational, and service projects aimed at expanding investment prospects and supporting sustainable economic growth.

The governorate has also witnessed the completion and operation of several tourism, recreational, and service projects and destinations over the past period. Among the most notable is Nizwa Public Park, which has attracted more than 600,000 visitors since its opening, along with Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Public Park and a number of urban development projects and public facilities across various wilayats. These initiatives are expected to contribute to improving the quality of life while strengthening the governorate's tourism and investment appeal.

In the urban development and municipal services sector, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate

implemented 36 projects covering public parks, markets, tourism initiatives and service facilities, with a total investment of RO 23.56 million.

The governorate also executed 53 internal road projects with a combined length of 434.3 kilometres and a total cost exceeding RO 43.1 million, in addition to 21 street lighting projects that included the installation of 907 lighting poles across various wilayats.

In the basic services sector, work is currently underway on the Al Dakhiliyah Water Transmission Line Enhancement Project, valued at RO 128 million. The governorate's water infrastructure includes 131 reservoirs, 128 main pumping stations and 12 wastewater treatment plants, while the total length of water distribution networks reached 3,782 kilometres, with a coverage rate of 72 per cent.

In the municipal and regulatory sector, the relevant authorities issued 7,647 building permits, 3,613 building completion certificates and 971 excavation permits. A total of 23,846 administrative procedures and 43,703 field inspection visits were also carried out.

Veterinary control efforts included the inspection of 59,832 slaughtered animals, the disposal of 16,339 kilogrammes of unfit meat, and the testing of 1,048 water samples and 843 food samples, reinforcing food safety and public health standards in the governorate.

Dhofar Arabica coffee project opens new investment horizons

SALALAH: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is pressing ahead with efforts to diversify the agricultural production base and tap the comparative advantages of Oman's governorates, introducing high-value cash crops to boost food security, raise farmers' incomes and create sustainable investment opportunities in rural areas.

Mountain agriculture in Dhofar Governorate is emerging as a promising sector, with its unique climate and environment making it ideal for premium crops such as



ENG RADHWAN
BIN ABDULLAH
AL IBRAHIM

Arabica coffee.

Eng Radhwan bin Abdullah al Ibrahim, Director of the Agricultural Development Department in Dhofar and Project Manager for the Arabica coffee initiative, said the project is a strategic move to harness the governorate's natural resources and revive a crop that could become a new economic pillar for farmers and investors.

The first phase began in October 2025, coinciding with Omani Agriculture Day, he said. The project provides seedlings, technical support, training on modern farming practices, and assistance with planting holes and irrigation systems



The Arabica coffee project offers a model for future agricultural ventures that combine economic viability with environmental sustainability. — ONA

to improve water efficiency and sustainability.

He added that the initiative follows earlier turmeric and ginger projects launched in 2022 and 2023, and marks a new phase in developing mountain agriculture and high-value crops.

He pointed out that trials in the Qairoon Hairiti area had already shown success with Arabica varieties, particularly the Adeni and Al Dawairi types, strengthening the case for expansion across the governorate.

He said that the first phase targeted 30 farmers in Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A vendor sells durians by the roadside in Karak, in Malaysia's Pahang state. — AFP

MALAYSIANS FEAST AS DURIAN ‘TSUNAMI’ SLASHES PRICES

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians flocked to fruit stalls on Wednesday for a slice of durian after a bumper harvest and oversupply of rejected export crops caused a sudden price drop in the notoriously pungent but expensive delicacy.

Aficionados packed food halls and roadside tents around Kuala Lumpur to make the most of the so-called “durian tsunami” that has seen prices of some premium quality fruit drop by as much as 90 per cent.

Found across Southeast Asia, the spiky fruit comes in many varieties and in Malaysia, the highly prized cultivar Musang King is consumed locally and exported, mainly to China.

Malaysia, which produces more than 550,000 tonnes of durian a year, is currently in its peak harvest season.

Reports said on Wednesday the price of Musang King durian had plummeted from around 90 ringgit (\$22) per kg to as little as nine ringgit.

Other varieties, such as Black Thorn, have also dropped in price, according to local media reports.

“We learned from the industry that this year there would be a ‘Musang King tsunami’ — and this is indeed the case,” said Faisal Iswardi. — AFP

SCHOOLS IN TOKYO SUBURB TO GET BEAR SPRAYS



Japan saw a record 13 people killed by bears last fiscal year.

TOKYO: A Tokyo suburb has announced an emergency spending plan to buy 700 anti-bear sprays for schools and community organisations, the local government said on Wednesday, as the animals increasingly encroach into built-up areas around Japan.

Japan saw a record 13 people killed by bears last fiscal year, according to the environment ministry, and five more fatalities and 20 people injured between April 1 and May 30 this year.

Hachioji is on the outskirts of the vast Japanese capital region and on weekends draws Tokyoites to its popular hiking trails into the nearby forested mountains.

Eleven sightings or signs of bears have been reported there since April, with a motion-activated camera capturing footage of a black bear around a residence on April 29, broadcaster NHK reported.

The city will spend 15 million yen (\$93,000) on sprays, movable electric fences and devices that make high-pitched sounds, local government spokesman Ryosuke Sato said.

It is also planning to draft an action plan to call in hunters and take other measures in case bears appear in local neighbourhoods. — AFP

SITUATION REVIEW

Iran’s top diplomat speaks with Hamas



TEHRAN: Iran’s top diplomat spoke with a senior official from the Palestinian group Hamas regarding talks between Iran and the United States, state television reported on Wednesday. Abbas Araghchi discussed the “latest developments” in the region with Basem Naeem, a member of Hamas’s political bureau, Iranian television said.

The call follows the signing last week of a memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States aimed at bringing a lasting end to hostilities in the region,

CRACKS IN WINGS

Airbus ordered to inspect some A380 jets



Airbus said on Wednesday it was supporting inspections on a subset of A380 aircraft after Europe’s aviation regulator ordered urgent checks on the jets’ wing structures. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (published an emergency airworthiness directive on Monday requiring inspections of 16 A380 aircraft, warning about cracks found in wing spars that could affect structural integrity. The directive requires five planes to be inspected before next flight.

UKRAINE WARNING

‘Drone-relay stations have stopped working’



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy (pictured) said on Wednesday that signal relay stations in Belarus being used by Russian drones to attack Ukraine had stopped working, days after he warned the country’s leader to disable them.

Zelenskiy had said on Friday that Ukraine would be forced to act if President Alexander Lukashenko did not remove the stations in two regions bordering Ukraine within a week.

Iran says deal to end war declaration of US defeat

TECHNICAL TALKS WILL RESUME NEXT WEEK BETWEEN THE US AND IRAN

IRAN CALLED the deal to end the Middle East war “a declaration of America’s defeat” on Wednesday.

“The Islamabad understanding was not the result of pressure and coercion, but rather the result of the resistance and authority of the brave Iranian nation,” Iran’s top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said on Wednesday of the deal, which was finalised through Pakistan’s mediation.

“That is why, the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding became a declaration of America’s defeat,” he said, adding that security in the Middle East must be ensured by the countries of the region.

Iran has said it plans to charge what it calls maritime service fees for crossing the strait, as opposed to tolls, a plan fiercely opposed by the United States.

On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform that Iran had told Washington it would not charge for passage.

“Iran has informed the US that... there are ‘NO TOLLS, NO INSURANCE COSTS, & NO OTHER CHARGES OF ANY KIND BEING SOUGHT OR RECEIVED BY IRAN ON SHIPS TRAVELING THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ,’” Trump said, without specifying whether the commitment would outlast their 60-day negotiating period to reach a permanent settlement.

“We see the future of the region not in confrontation but in interaction and not in elimination but in coexistence,” Ghalibaf said.

PEACE IN LEBANON

Iran’s chief negotiator also reiterated that peace in Lebanon, which was drawn into the war when Hezbollah launched attacks on Israel, was a fundamental pillar of reaching a definitive agreement with the US.

“For us, the ceasefire in Lebanon has been and is as important as the ceasefire in Iran, and the end of the war in Lebanon has been as important as the end of the war in Iran,” Ghalibaf said.

In Lebanon, where Iran insisted a fragile ceasefire was a precondition for a broader agreement, people in areas worst affected by Israeli bombing were struggling to clear rubble from their streets.

In the beachside city of Tyre, 40-year-old Hussein Hassan said he had fled with his family to north Lebanon during the war but returned this week to reopen his barbershop. Tyre residents “love life and work. We shake off the dust and rise up again like the phoenix,” he said proudly, while welcoming customers to his shop, one of its walls cracked and its glass facade blown away.

Israeli troops remain deployed in parts of Lebanon following a ground



A family loads their belongings into a small cart as they prepare to return home following an interim deal between the US and Iran, after living in temporary tents in Beirut, Lebanon, on Wednesday. — Reuters

IRAN-GULF RECONCILIATION TALKS EXPECTED IN SAUDI

DUBAI: Talks on reconciliation between Gulf countries and Iran are expected to take place in Saudi Arabia, a diplomat said on Wednesday.

A summit aimed at mending ties between Gulf nations, Iran and possibly other regional neighbours in the aftermath of the Middle East war was expected in Riyadh, the diplomat said, without specifying a date.

The meetings would be independent of ongoing talks between the United States and Iran, the diplomat added.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the US-Iran deal with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan on Wednesday, renewing Washington’s commitment to the country’s security as he embarks on a tour of the Gulf.

Rubio is seeking to reassure close US allies — who were hit hard by Iran during the Middle East war — about the memorandum of understanding with Tehran, which fails to address some of the Gulf’s long-standing concerns about its missile programme and proxies.

“They discussed President Trump’s memorandum of understanding with Iran, efforts to secure full and safe transit through the Strait of Hormuz, and the importance of peace and stability in the region,” his spokesperson Tommy Pigott said.

Rubio also “thanked the UAE for their leadership and unparalleled support, praised their courage and resilience in the face of Iran’s attacks, and reaffirmed the US commitment to the security of the Emirates”, Pigott added. — Agencies

invasion, and on Wednesday, the military carried out an air strike in a border area targeting what it said were two Hezbollah operatives who posed a threat to its troops.

NO DATE SET

Pakistan said on Wednesday that technical talks will resume next week between the US and Iran, with no date yet confirmed.

One of the key sticking points has been Iran’s nuclear programme,

long a source of friction with Western powers who suspect Tehran is building a bomb, a claim it has systematically denied.

On Wednesday, Rafael Grossi, the head of the UN’s nuclear watchdog, said inspections of Iranian nuclear sites were “going to happen”.

But the Iranian official overseeing technical discussions in negotiations with the US reiterated that no agreement has been reached on inspections. — AFP



For us, the ceasefire in Lebanon has been and is as important as the ceasefire in Iran, and the end of the war in Lebanon has been as important as the end of the war in Iran.

MOHAMMAD BAGHER GHALIBAF

IRAN’S SPEAKER

SHORT TAKES



A police officer walks past Number 10 Downing Street in Westminster. — Reuters

London police to extend use of live facial recognition, drones

LONDON: London’s Metropolitan Police force said on Wednesday it will expand the use of drones, artificial intelligence and live facial recognition technology, which has been criticised by rights campaigners.

The scale-up plan involves rolling out static facial recognition across central London and having drone coverage in every London borough in a year’s time, the Met said in a press release.

“Policing today will fail if it is not allowed to keep pace with criminals through technology,” Met Commissioner Mark Rowley said.

In a speech, Rowley called for the force to be allowed to deploy new technology without being bogged down by legislation and bureaucracy.

Earlier this month, the police chief criticised London Mayor Sadiq Khan’s decision to block a multi-million-pound contract with Palantir for the Met to use the AI giant’s technology.

According to Rowley, a Palantir pilot had helped the UK’s biggest police force consolidate its data. “We must now bring the same technologies to bear in how we tackle crime more broadly,” he said.

The mayor’s office previously said it was not satisfied the Met had demonstrated the value for money of Palantir’s technology.

Rowley also called live facial recognition “the clearest example of what new technology can do”, citing that the tech has “contributed to more than 2,000 arrests” since 2024.

The Met scans the faces of passers-by and compares their biometrics with thousands on a watchlist, under its usage policy. The UK is the only European country to deploy the technology on a large scale. — AFP

COCKPIT OF POWER



Russia’s President Vladimir Putin inspects a Yakovlev SJ-100 short-haul jet aircraft at the Flight Research Institute named after M M Gromov in Zhukovsky in the Moscow on Wednesday. — AFP

France doctor confirmed first Ebola case outside Africa continent

PARIS: France on Wednesday announced its first confirmed case of Ebola identified on its territory, a doctor who had flown back from the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is fighting a major outbreak.

The case is the first of the deadly haemorrhagic fever identified outside the African continent during the current outbreak, which has also affected Uganda.

It is the first time France has detected Ebola. In 2014, during a major outbreak in West Africa, two patients were transported to France, but they had been diagnosed abroad.

The health ministry said it had identified “a first positive case of Ebola virus disease on national territory”.

The patient “boarded

a commercial flight from Kinshasa and was almost asymptomatic — except for headaches”, the ministry said.

Their condition “slightly deteriorated during the flight”, after which they were immediately isolated and taken into care upon landing in Paris, even before the disease was officially identified, the ministry added.

The patient was in a “stable condition” and their viral load was “very low”, the ministry added.

Efforts were underway to identify potential contacts.

Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu’s office said he was monitoring the situation “very closely”, but the health ministry stressed that the risk of transmission remained low.

ALIMA (The Alliance for International Medical Action),

‘Omega’ heatwave deadly

AT LEAST 50 DIE IN FRANCE; 2 DIE IN SPAIN; SCHOOLS SHUT IN UK

WESTERN

Europe was in the grip of a heatwave on

Wednesday that shattered records, caused the deaths of dozens of people, closed schools, knocked out electricity and wiped out poultry farms.

In France, which on Tuesday recorded its hottest day since records began nearly 80 years ago, authorities sought to restore electricity to thousands of homes hit by power cuts in the northwestern region of Brittany. The recorded temperature peaked at 44.3 degrees Celsius in the southwestern town of Pissos.

Italy’s health ministry issued its highest heat alert for 16 cities, from Florence and Milan to Rome, Turin and Verona.

In Britain, on course for its hottest June day ever, the Met Office weather service issued only the second extreme-heat weather warning in history. Hundreds of schools stayed shut or closed early, as high temperatures could place even healthy people at risk.

At least 48 people died in France from drowning as they attempted to seek respite from the crippling heat, while two young children were killed by heat in a car, authorities said.

Two elderly people died of heatstroke in Spain, which has experienced extreme temperatures since the weekend exceeding 40 °C. Temperatures there were starting to ease on Wednesday, after Monday and Tuesday were the hottest days on record for late June, national weather agency AEMET said.

The scorching temperatures killed hundreds of thousands of birds at poultry farms in Brittany and the Pays de la Loire, French agricultural bodies said. Farmers awaiting collection or burial were advised to pour sawdust or wood shavings on the carcasses to absorb liquid. The dead birds could be buried at the farms only after technical and environmental checks.

Nuclear power plants that provide most of the electricity in France reduced their output by about 7 per cent of electricity demand on Wednesday, as high temperatures reduced access to cooling water.

HEATWAVE LOCK-IN

A rare weather pattern known as an Omega block was causing the



A person shelters from the sun beneath a parasol as they take a punt ride along the River Cam, during a heatwave, in Cambridge on Wednesday. — AFP

record-breaking temperatures across Europe, as high as 18 degrees Celsius above normal, according to the Reuters Climate Monitor.

The phenomenon resembles the shape of the Greek letter Omega, with a bulbous middle trapping in intensifying heat hovering over regions for extended periods, with cooler weather on its fringes. Europe is warming at more than twice the global average, the World Meteorological Organization has said, which makes prolonged heat episodes increasingly likely.

MODELS AND COOKS FEEL THE HEAT

The Eiffel Tower announced early closing times, and the Changing of the Guard outside Buckingham Palace was scaled back, without the usual ceremony of soldiers in scarlet tunics and heavy bearskin hats.

In Paris, where the annual Fashion Week was under way, onlookers could be seen gasping and sweating during the Louis Vuitton show as male models showed off creations by pop singer Pharrell Williams. Labels including Dior and Rick Owens changed their schedules to hold shows in the morning, organisers said.

Sascha Meyer, manager of the Bamberger Haus beer garden in Munich where fresh chickens were roasting on a spit,

Early indicators
(Heat exhaustion)

Headaches

Nausea or vomiting

Heavy sweating

Heatstroke

Warning signs

- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Rapid heart rate
- Loss of consciousness
- Muscle twitching or seizures

What to do

For heatstroke seek immediate emergency medical care, call an ambulance

When your body gets too hot

Recommended first-aid measures

Lay down and elevate feet

Seek shade or cooler areas indoors

Drink small sips of water if able

Apply ice packs to the neck, groin and armpits

Wet clothes and skin

Loosen or remove clothing

reckoned it was close to 50 °C in the serving area.

An extreme heat warning was in place across the Netherlands, where outdoor sports were cancelled, public transport was scaled down and schools shortened classes or closed as temperatures were expected to soar to 36 °C. In Switzerland,

local authorities opened air-conditioned theatres for free daytime cinema screenings. Construction contractors altered working hours so employees could avoid the worst, while retailers struggled to meet demand for fans and portable air-conditioners.

— Reuters



Healthcare workers carry on a stretcher a patient suffering from the Ebola virus disease from an ambulance at the Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC) in Bunia, Ituri, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

an international medical humanitarian organisation, said the patient was one of its doctors.

The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May

15 after several unexplained deaths in the mineral-rich but volatile eastern Ituri province plagued by armed groups.

According to the latest official figures, more than

1,000 cases have been recorded, including 267 deaths, representing a fatality rate of around 25 percent.

Many experts consider it likely that the scale of the outbreak has been underestimated, as it is affecting remote regions.

The Bundibugyo strain of the virus that has caused the outbreak currently has no approved vaccine or treatment.

Existing Ebola vaccines, developed between 2018 and 2019, are only effective against the Zaire strain, which caused previous major outbreaks.

In May, an American surgeon who contracted Ebola in the DRC was flown to Germany for treatment. A Berlin hospital discharged the missionary earlier

this month, saying he had recovered following 17 days of medical care.

The doctor, identified as Peter Stafford of the Serge charity, had received care that included “experimental therapies currently being trialled for this type of virus”, said the hospital.

Public health experts estimate that the risk of the outbreak spreading worldwide remains low, due to the relatively low contagiousness of the Ebola virus.

“The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) considers the risk of infection to be low for European residents and travellers going to areas with active transmission, and very low for the general European population,” said the French health ministry. — AFP

OPINION

Women, climate, and the rooms we widen



RUMAITHA
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The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

IN 2021, at the height of the pandemic, I stood in Bandar Al Khairan to broadcast a TED Talk on why women are part of the climate crisis solution. Behind me were the mangroves, the coves, and the deep blue waters that make Oman’s coastline feel both ancient and alive. It felt important to speak from there because the message was rooted in place. Climate change was never an abstract global issue to me. I had seen it in the sea, in the mountains, in cyclones, in communities, and in the lives of women who are often asked to carry the consequences of crisis before they are invited to help solve it. The talk has now been watched more than a million times, and I still believe its central argument. Climate solutions are often framed through technology, finance, and policy. These tools are essential, yet societies are also part of the solution. Who we educate, who we empower, and who we trust to lead can determine whether climate action becomes truly resilient. The recent Royal directive to allocate an additional seat for Omani women in the Majlis Ash’shura in each governorate brings this argument home. It is a milestone for

representation, and a recognition that the future of national development must be guided by more of the people who live its consequences. Representation is the visible measure of the directive. Its deeper significance is one of timing. Oman is entering a decade where many of its hardest choices will be environmental. Water, land, coastlines, cities, and food systems will determine how people live, work, and plan for the future. These choices cannot stay distant from lived experience. A policy may begin in a chamber, but it eventually arrives in a home, a school, a farm, or a fishing village. It arrives in how people manage heat, protect livelihoods, and respond when the familiar rhythms of nature begin to change. A coastal zoning line reaches the family whose livelihood has always come from the shore. The people who absorb these choices first rarely sit where they are made. Women already stand in many of those places. They lead in institutions, classrooms, clinics, businesses, and civil society. They understand the daily negotiations that hold families and communities together, and they

The significance of these 11 seats will be measured by what they make possible. Presence is the beginning. These seats give women a hand in shaping the questions before the country, as Oman works towards a future that is more resilient, more sustainable, and more honest about the lives behind its policies.

are among those building the response itself. Omani women run the laboratories that study our seas and the planning teams behind water and energy decisions, and they start the enterprises that a green economy will rely on. Their expertise is technical as much as it is social, and both belong where the country’s priorities are set. Their presence in the Majlis Ash’shura can bring these realities closer to national debate. The significance of these 11 seats will be measured by what they make possible. Presence is the beginning. These seats give women a hand in shaping the questions before the country, as Oman works towards a future that is more resilient, more sustainable, and more honest about the lives behind its policies. A sustainable future is carried by the people who live inside its choices. When I made that argument from the shore at Bandar Al Khairan, it was one voice speaking into the wind. Oman has now written it into how the country decides. The women taking these seats will help set the questions before the nation, and every hard choice ahead will be answered by more of the people who live it.

RED OR GREEN? FOR BRAZIL, THE POLITICS OF KITS MATTER

RODRIGO ALMONACID

When Brazil faces Scotland in the World Cup on Wednesday, the South American team’s goalkeeper Alisson Becker will be dressed in a green kit — not the red one originally approved by Fifa. In any other country, such a wardrobe change might have gone unnoticed, but not in Brazil where the national team’s colours have become the subject of a deep political dispute. The Selecao’s iconic yellow and green jerseys were co-opted years ago by conservatives aligned with far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro — who is serving time for plotting a coup after losing the 2022 elections to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. And while Lula has set out to reclaim the colours of Brazil’s flag in his push to reelection in October, red — not typically part of Team Brazil’s gear — is the colour of the left and his party. When Fifa unveiled the group stage kits for each team’s goalkeepers before the tournament began on June 11, it said Alisson would be in a completely red uniform for the team’s final Group C match. The Liverpool shot-stopper wore black and pink kits in the first two games against Morocco and Haiti. But before the five-time world champions try to secure their place in the round of 32 in Miami, the change came down on the goalkeeper’s dress code: the red kit was dropped in favour of the green. After Brazilian sports media reported on Tuesday that the president of the country’s football federation (CBF) Samir Xaud had “vetoed” the red kit, he told ESPN the change was long-planned. “I asked for it because it’s something we already talked about some time ago. We’re prioritising the colours of Brazil’s flag,” Xaud told ESPN. Last August, Xaud asked US sportswear brand Nike, which has outfitted the team since 1996, to cancel the red kits —saying then that the move was not because of “political reasons” but to exalt national colours. In a message to AFP on Tuesday, the national federation denied any “veto,” and said Fifa chose the red kit “without knowing” it was not part of Brazil’s clothing collection for the games. The politicisation of the Selecao’s uniforms has permeated the football-mad country. Some avoid the green and yellow jerseys to avoid any association with Bolsonaro and his movement, while others on the left wear unofficial red merch emblazoned with the CBF’s crest or communist symbols. “We need to wear green and yellow and add ‘Not a Bolsonarist,’” the 80-year-old Lula said at an event in Rio de Janeiro earlier this month. “During the World Cup, we should wear in yellow and green so we don’t let Brazil’s colours be taken over by any fascist.” — AFP

Heatwaves risk health of both young and old

ISABELLE CORTES AND JULIEN DURY

A brutal heatwave blanketing much of Europe has prompted reminders that extreme heat poses a particular threat to the health of children and the elderly. Public health messaging usually focuses on the elderly, however, the deaths of two children inside a car in France on Monday were a tragic reminder that the very young are also at risk. Scientists have said that human-caused climate change will make heatwaves more frequent, intense and longer — such as the long week ahead of sweltering conditions forecast in Europe. Forecasters warned this week could rival a 2003 heatwave that claimed an estimated 70,000 lives across the continent. When the temperatures soar, both the old and young are less able to regulate their body heat, sweat less, and tend to rely on others to take care of them. Heatwaves “disproportionately” affect infants under one year old and people over 65 years, according to the 2026 Europe report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. Heatwave exposure for the elderly people soared by 266 per cent during 2015-2024 compared to 1991-2000, according to the report. For infants, the rate rose by 121 per cent. French epidemiologist Noemie Letellier said that elderly people face the worst consequences of extreme heat because of “physiological limitations as well as different social factors, such as precariousness, isolation and dependency.” Jacques Boddaert, the head of the geriatric department at the Pitie-Salpetriere University Hospital in Paris, said there were several factors that transform heat into “a real ordeal for these patients”. One is that, as people get older, it becomes harder for their bodies to



Pupils during water play at L'Ecole des Petits, an independent French bilingual school, as Britain experiences record temperatures during a heatwave in Fulham, London, on Wednesday. — Reuters

When the temperatures soar, both the old and young are less able to regulate their body heat, sweat less, and tend to rely on others to take care of them.

control their temperature. “The sensation of thirst also diminishes, and they react later to signs of dehydration,” Boddaert said. Chronic illnesses, which are more common in the elderly, can make extreme heat more of a risk. Some drugs, such as those people take for heart conditions, include diuretics that can pose health problems during extreme heat. And if the people taking care of the elderly happen to be on holiday — which can happen over summer — the situation “can become very dangerous,” Boddaert warned. But not all elderly people are the same, Letellier pointed out. Some may be enduring economic hardship, chronic illness, disability or be isolated from others. Elderly women, who tend to live alone, also have “more limited resources” than men, which can put them further at risk, Letellier said. While it is rarer for the death of

young children to be directly attributable to high temperatures, extreme heat can contribute to numerous health problems. It can also cause issues for pregnant women. Some of the “most notable are increased risks of adverse birth outcomes, including preterm birth and low birth weight,” according to a review of the evidence published in the Journal of Climate Change and Health in 2024. “Extreme heat exposure was also associated with increased rates among children of emergency department visits, asthma exacerbations, heat illness, and impaired school performance,” it added. A Climate Central report warned last year that “climate change at least doubled the average annual number of pregnancy heat-risk days experienced during the past five years” across more than 200 countries. — AFP

If you love America, cringe for it



BRET STEPHENS

The writer is an Opinion columnist for The New York Times, writing about foreign policy, domestic politics and cultural issues

MY father was fond of the Spanish expression “en los pequeños detalles se ve la persona” — the person is revealed in the small details. Last week, at the summit of the Group of 7 leaders in France, two details revealed two people in two starkly different lights. The first — who else? — is Donald Trump, the world’s most powerful man yet possibly the world’s smallest. Speaking to a journalist, the president claimed that Giorgia Meloni, the right-wing prime minister of Italy, with whom he was once friendly but has since fallen out, “begged me to take a picture with her. She wanted a picture with me so badly,” before adding, “I wouldn’t have done it, but I felt sorry for her!” Meloni’s response came swiftly. Trump’s statement, she said, was “totally invented.” “I don’t know why the president of the United States behaves this way toward his own allies,” she said in a video posted to social media. “After all, this is not the first time it has happened. I can only say that it’s upsetting that he doesn’t have the same resolve toward the enemies of the West, toward the enemies of the United States, toward leadership to which he instead proves much more indulgent.” “There is one thing he should remember,” she concluded. “I never beg — and neither does Italy.” No prizes here for guessing who’s telling the truth — or who, despite their very considerable

difference in physical size, is the bigger and braver person. But there’s also a lesson in this relatively trivial but telling episode that it behooves Americans to learn on the eve of our semiquincentennial: If you love America, now is the time to cringe for it. Cringing is not simply a physical reflex stemming from embarrassment or disgust. It also involves a mix of compassion and empathy. You cringe when someone’s child flubs their lines in a school play. You cringe whenever you feel implicated, if only as a human being, whenever someone humiliates those near them, even when they’re the last to know it. It’s how I felt for Jill Biden the night of her husband’s debate debacle. For 10 years, I’ve watched my former political party work overtime not to cringe; to pretend that the Vesuvius of verbal infamies erupting daily from Trump’s mouth is either unimportant, or hilarious, or calculating and shrewd. To exist as a sentient American in the age of Trump is to live in a perpetual cringe — morally, aesthetically, intellectually, politically. If the administration were a play or film script, it would be neither farce nor tragedy but instead a kind of absurdist travesty, “Waiting for Godot” meets “Pulp Fiction” meets “Dumb and Dumber.” However much we may disdain him, the president has the rest of us on the hook,

Let’s not be afraid to cringe. Ronald Reagan predicted, correctly, that the Soviet Union would end up on the ash heap of history; now it’s our turn to risk winding up on the ash heap of idiocy.

as the face and voice of a country that ought to know better. Trump’s angry visage draped between the exterior columns of the Department of Justice? That’s us. His gilded, meretricious redecoration of the White House? That’s us. His repeatedly avowed admiration for Vladimir Putin? That’s us. His laughable claim about having achieved regime change in Tehran? That’s us. His Mafia-like threats against NATO allies? That’s us. His indescribably vain (and pathetically fruitless) effort to affix his name to the Kennedy Center? That’s us. His venal family profiting off his presidency in ways both transparent and tacky? That’s us. The same goes for his insult of Meloni, which may be far from the worst of his sins but is also the most emblematic for being at once so utterly unnecessary as well as dementedly self-defeating. That’s us. The same country that freed its slaves, welcomed immigrants, invented airplanes, liberated concentration camps, landed men on the moon and challenged the Soviet Union to tear down this wall now bids to be the global equivalent of the expensively dressed man soiling his pants at a cocktail party. So let’s not look away from the parts we played in bringing America to this moment. Let’s remember who we once were, because it’s what we may yet be again — if only we feel the sting of our present shame.

Keiko Fujimori: Peru’s biggest political loser poised to win election

ANDREW BEATTY AND LUIS JAIME CISNEROS

Peru’s Keiko Fujimori is a perennial political loser. She has run for the nation’s presidency three elections in a row — and three times, she has lost. But on this, her fourth attempt, the daughter of disgraced late president Alberto Fujimori is on the verge of winning. With almost all the ballots counted, Fujimori held 50.12 per cent of the vote, a margin of just over 43,000 over her leftist rival Roberto Sanchez, according to electoral authorities. The 51-year-old came head-to-head with Sanchez in a June 7 runoff, under the still-divisive legacy of her father who ruled Peru in the 1990s. Fujimori’s surname is recognised across the Andean nation, which has had eight presidents since 2016.

Poised and polished, with a sharp pantsuit and practiced smile, Fujimori looks like someone raised for politics. A business administrator educated in the United States, she has served as a lawmaker and leads her party. She became first lady at 19, after her mother publicly broke with Alberto Fujimori, and grew up alongside heads of state and foreign leaders. Alberto Fujimori led Peru through the turbulent 1990s, crushing Maoist Shining Path rebels and taming hyperinflation. But he was later disgraced, exiled and jailed for corruption and crimes against humanity. For decades, the Fujimori name has helped and haunted Keiko, giving her instant recognition, loyal voters and deep political networks — but also plenty of critics. “I miss him,” she said in April. “But everywhere I go, people remind me of him and tell me anecdotes.”

Millions of Peruvians hold darker memories of her father and refuse to vote for anyone bearing the Fujimori name, blocking her path to the presidency three times. Critics blame her and her party for much of Peru’s political instability, citing Fuerza Popular’s heavy influence and deal-making in Congress. This was her first presidential campaign without her father, who died in 2024. With crime now the top concern for voters, she leaned into his legacy under a single word: “order.” Those close to Fujimori describe her as persistent, disciplined and relentless. “Every blow life has dealt her has not broken her, it has made her stronger than anyone could imagine,” her vice-presidential running mate Miki Torres said. She spent more than a year in pretrial detention while under investigation for alleged money laundering linked to the Odebrecht corruption scandal. The case remains unresolved. Long seen as confrontational, Fujimori has tried to soften her image and present herself as more conciliatory. “I have made mistakes,” she said during a presidential debate. “I learned from them and came back much stronger.” — AFP

The contradictions of America’s World Cup

EVERY WORLD CUP comes with controversy, but few have arrived under political circumstances as divisive as the 2026 tournament in the US. What should be a celebration of football has instead become another debate about immigration, human rights, international relations and who is welcome to enter the country. When a nation hosts the world’s largest sporting event, its politics inevitably become part of the conversation. Long before the tournament began, controversy surrounded the US as a host nation. The debate was not simply about football infrastructure or ticket prices. It was about whether a country facing growing criticism over immigration policies, military involvement abroad and domestic political divisions could genuinely host what is supposed to be the world’s most inclusive sporting event. The irony is difficult to ignore.

When Qatar hosted the 2022 World Cup, much of the Western media focused intensely on the country’s human rights record. Politicians, journalists and activists called for boycotts. Critics argued that football’s biggest competition should not be held in a country accused of human rights abuses. Whether one agreed with those criticisms or not, the principle seemed clear: host nations should be judged not only on their stadiums but also on their values. If that standard were applied to Qatar, people are now asking why it should not also apply to the US. The Trump administration’s immigration policies have become one of the defining stories of the country’s second Trump presidency. Critics argue that these policies have created an atmosphere of exclusion at precisely the moment the US is supposed to be welcoming the world. One of the most widely discussed cases involved Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan, who was selected by FIFA to officiate at the tournament. Despite holding a valid visa and being named Africa’s referee of the year in 2025, Artan was denied entry to the United States after arriving in Miami and was unable to participate in the World Cup. US authorities cited



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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The denial of entry to referees, officials and supporters raises uncomfortable questions about who gets to participate in what is meant to be the world’s game.



A fan wearing a Messi jersey at the Central Market in San Jose, Costa Rica. — AFP

unspecified “vetting concerns,” while Fifa acknowledged that immigration decisions ultimately rest with the host country. The incident sparked criticism not only because of its impact on Artan’s career, but because it raised larger questions about fairness and accessibility. Artan’s case was not isolated. Reports have documented visa complications affecting players, officials, photographers and supporters from various countries. Iranian officials reportedly faced visa difficulties, while fans from several nations have encountered barriers linked to US immigration policies. This creates a fundamental contradiction. The World Cup is marketed as a celebration of global unity. Fifa’s slogan has long centred on bringing people together through football. Yet that vision becomes difficult to realise when some participants face greater obstacles to entry than others because of their nationality or geopolitical circumstances. The controversy also reflects a broader reality: the US itself has become increasingly polarising on the international stage. Debates over immigration enforcement, political violence and military involvement abroad have damaged the country’s image among many observers. The ongoing tensions involving Iran have further intensified criticism, with opponents arguing that Washington

continues to involve itself in conflicts far beyond its borders. Against this backdrop, the World Cup inevitably becomes more than a football tournament. It becomes a reflection of the host nation and its policies. The criticism directed at Qatar demonstrated that many people believe sporting events should reflect broader ethical standards. If that principle is to have any credibility, it must be applied consistently rather than selectively. Human rights concerns do not become irrelevant simply because the host nation is a Western democracy. The 2026 World Cup has already delivered memorable football. Yet it has also highlighted how global sporting events are shaped by the political realities surrounding them. The denial of entry to referees, officials and supporters raises uncomfortable questions about who gets to participate in what is meant to be the world’s game. Perhaps the lesson is that football and politics were never separate to begin with. The World Cup has always reflected the world in which it is played, with all its divisions, contradictions and inequalities. The challenge is not pretending those realities do not exist. It is ensuring that the values football claims to represent, fairness, inclusion and equal opportunity, are consistently applied.



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



WORLD CUP HYDRATION: SPORTS OVER COMMERCE



FIFA president Gianni Infantino has defended the introduction of hydration breaks at the World Cup, insisting that for football's governing body they are driven purely by sporting considerations and not commercial interests.

Mandatory three-minute breaks, introduced in the 22nd and 67th minutes of every match at the tournament, have drawn criticism from players, coaches and fans since the opening round of fixtures.

The breaks, introduced to help players cope with high temperatures across North America, have opened up additional advertising windows for broadcasters.

This has fuelled debate over their impact on the game, with some viewers complaining about being exposed to commercials during the three-minute stoppages.

"There is no additional revenue for Fifa, as all commercial agreements were signed well in advance. So, this is not a financial issue for us. For us, it is purely a sporting matter," Infantino said in a statement on Wednesday.

The breaks allow coaching staff to give in-game tactical instructions, a shift critics say disrupts match momentum and fundamentally alters the nature of the game.

England manager Thomas Tuchel said the additional break "interrupts and changes the identity of the football match", while Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa said dividing matches into shorter segments takes away the fundamental characteristic of the game.

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente and Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk have supported the intent behind the rule in extreme heat, but questioned the need for it in cooler conditions and at covered venues.

"The main reason is the heat, but we also have to understand that in a competition like the (Fifa) World Cup, played over 39 days, with teams potentially playing eight matches in those 39 days, having a moment to rest is extremely important," Infantino said.

"What matters even more to us is ensuring that all teams, in every match, are playing under the same conditions.

"It's very difficult to accept that a coach might have the opportunity to influence a match by making adjustments simply because it's hotter, while in another match, where the temperature is slightly lower, the same coach doesn't have the same opportunity."

Infantino added that the breaks had not reduced the intensity of matches, suggesting players were able to maintain a high level of performance throughout games. — Reuters

France's Kylian Mbappe takes a drink during a hydration break. — Reuters



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



DIASPORA WORLD CUP CHAMPIONS
DIVERSITY OVER DIVISION



Spain's forward #17 Nico Williams enters the pitch during the 2026 World Cup Group H football match between Spain and Saudi Arabia at the Atlanta Stadium. — AFP

KIERAN

CANNING When Sweden's Yasin Ayari scored seven minutes into his World Cup debut he raised his arms in apology rather than celebration out of respect for Tunisia, where his father is from.

The case of the Brighton midfielder is far from unique at a World Cup awash with players who could play for multiple nations via birth or ancestral roots. "It was a special game for me, that's why I didn't celebrate in the first goal because I feel a lot for the country (of Tunisia), I love this country," said Swedish-born Ayari, who could also have represented his mother's nation Morocco.

Scouting and recruiting dual-national players has become vital to achieving success on the global stage.

Nearly a quarter of the 1,248 players selected for the 2026 World Cup represent a country other than their birthplace.

Morocco became the first African nation to reach a World Cup semifinal four years ago and harbour hopes of at least matching that feat in the coming weeks.

During an impressive performance to hold Brazil 1-1 in their tournament opener, they became the first side in World Cup history to at one point field a full foreign-born 11.

GOOD COMBINATION

Curacao's fairytale appearance on the global stage owes much to the ties between the Caribbean island of 160,000 people and the Netherlands.

Of the Blue Wave's 26-man squad, 25 are Dutch-born and they are led by former Netherlands boss Dick Advocaat. "We have the heart of our homeland. And we've gone through the Dutch youth academy. That's a good combination," forward Jurgen Locadia said after Curacao stunned Ecuador to secure their first World Cup point with a 0-0 draw.

Curacao's Leandro and Juninho Bacuna are one of seven sets of brothers taking part at the World Cup, four of which are representing different nations.

Paris Saint-Germain's Desire Doue forms part of France's star-studded attack, while his older brother Guela Doue is part of the Ivory Coast squad.

Centre-back siblings John and Harry Souttar play for Scotland and Australia respectively.

Nico Williams chose to represent Spain, while older brother Inaki plays for Ghana, alongside Derrick Luckassen, the half-brother of Dutch forward Brian Brobbey.

Cape Verde have been the revelation of the tournament, holding former winners Spain and Uruguay to draws in their first two World Cup matches.

At the heart of the Blue Sharks defence has been Roberto 'Pico' Lopes. Born in Dublin to an Irish mother and Cape Verdean father, Lopes was

recruited via networking site LinkedIn, but only at the second attempt.

Lopes had ignored the first message sent by then coach Rui Aguas nine months earlier as it was sent in Portuguese, a language the Shamrock Rovers centre-back did not speak.

Nestory Irankunda, who scored Australia's opening goal in a 2-0 win over Turkey, was born in a refugee camp in Tanzania to Burundian parents, who had fled civil war before moving to Perth when the winger was still a baby.

Those stories that champion the power of immigration are particularly poignant in a World Cup that began against a backdrop of exclusion.

Somali referee Omar Artan was denied entry to the United States, while four of the participating nations — Haiti, Iran, Ivory Coast and Senegal — are subject to US travel bans and visa restrictions.

OLISE ENRICHED BY UPBRINGING

By contrast, Fifa have moved towards a more understanding approach to players facing difficult choices on who to represent, often while still teenagers.

Now players under 21 can switch allegiance if they have three or fewer senior caps and have not played in a major tournament.

But it is not just smaller nations taking advantage of the change in rules.

England's Declan Rice, who will win his 75th cap against Ghana on Tuesday, played three times for the Republic of Ireland before the call came to represent the Three Lions.

Jamal Musiala represented England at youth level where he grew up before being snapped up by Germany.

Bayern Munich star Michael Olise was born in London to a British-Nigerian father and Franco-Algerian mother.

"I actually come from four countries: France, Algeria, Nigeria and England. I consider myself very lucky to possess these four parts, which all enrich me," Olise told an interview with Bayern's members magazine. France won the battle for Olise's services, which could just prove vital to who wins the World Cup. — AFP



Ghana's forward Inaki Williams reacts after a draw in the 2026 World Cup Group football match between England and Ghana at the Boston Stadium. — AFP



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



NETHERLANDS GUN FOR TOP SPOT AGAINST HAPLESS TUNISIA

NETHERLANDS TOP GROUP F AHEAD OF JAPAN
DUE TO GOALS SCORED

TUNISIA ALREADY ELIMINATED AFTER TWO
HEAVY LOSSES

KOEMAN MAY HAVE TO SHUFFLE ATTACKERS
DUE TO INJURIES



Netherlands' forward Brian Brobbey celebrates after scoring the opening goal during the 2026 World Cup Group F football match between the Netherlands and Sweden. — AFP

THE NETHERLANDS complete their Group F campaign at the World Cup with a clash against a Tunisia side in disarray in Kansas City on Thursday, looking to cement top spot in the pool and manage several strikers carrying knocks. Tunisia have already been eliminated after two heavy losses that have seen them concede nine goals and draft in coach Herve Renard mid-tournament, while the Netherlands romped to a 5-1 success over Sweden in their last fixture. The Dutch top the Group F table on goals scored from Japan, with both teams garnering four points and a +4 goal-difference. Sweden have three points and Tunisia's horror campaign sees them yet to get off the mark.

Netherlands are likely to welcome back midfielder Quinten Timber, who missed the win over Sweden with a concussion.

BROBBEY AND DEPAY CARRYING KNOCKS
The form of striker Brian Brobbey, who scored twice in the last game, has covered for the fact that Memphis Depay is still working his way back to full fitness from a thigh problem.

Depay is the leading scorer for the Netherlands in international football with 52 goals and a key part of the Dutch side, but came off the bench in the first two Group F games. Coach Ronald Koeman is keen to have him start, but Brobbey has proven an able deputy, though he is also carrying a slight hamstring problem.

If Brobbey is forced out and Depay not able to



The goals we made (against Sweden) will make opponents fear us. We have a lot of speed and quality when we go on the attack, which makes us incredibly dangerous.

RONALD KOEMAN
Netherlands coach

start, it would likely see Donyell Malen move to a central striking position and the electric Crysencio Summerville return to the starting line-up as a wide attacker, though he too received a blow to the head against the Swedes after coming off the bench.

"We have different types of attackers and can change them around where we think we need to. It gives us a lot of options," Koeman said.

"The goals we made (against Sweden) will make opponents fear us. We have a lot of speed and quality when we go on the attack, which makes us incredibly dangerous."

COULD BE RENARD'S LAST GAME IN CHARGE
Tunisia have conceded 14 goals in their last three games, including a 5-0 warm-up loss to Belgium and heavy defeats to Sweden (5-1) and Japan (4-0) in their World Cup fixtures. They sacked coach Sabri Lamouchi after the Sweden defeat and rushed in Renard, but their systematic issues run deeper than who is in the dugout.

For a side that qualified with 28 points out of a possible 30 and no goals conceded in those 10 games, it has been a heavy fall from grace.

Renard suggested on Monday this would be his last game in charge of the side.

"I came for a mission related to the World Cup. I haven't signed anything beyond that," he was quoted by ESPN.

But a strong performance against the Dutch could change the thinking of everyone involved. — Reuters



Tunisia's defender Montassar Talbi reacts at the end of the 2026 World Cup Group football match between Tunisia and Japan. — AFP

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,348.491

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$66.09
BRENT \$75.34
LIGHT \$71.58



Concession pact for Block 80 signed

THE Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) signed a concession agreement on Wednesday for Block 80 with OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) - Musandam Offshore and Turkish Petroleum Overseas Company Limited (TPOC).

This comes within the framework of the Ministry's efforts aimed at developing and utilising energy sources with high efficiency and innovation, and maximising the benefit from hydrocarbon resources to support economic growth and boost the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. On behalf of OQEP - Musandam Offshore, it was signed by Mahmoud bin Salim al

Hashmi, CEO of the company, and on behalf of Turkish Petroleum Overseas Company Limited by Cagri Sirin, the company's Head of International Projects.

Block 80 is located in Musandam Governorate, spanning an area of approximately 5,737 square kilometres. It includes the producing Bukha and West Bukha fields, making it a strategically important area in the exploration and production sector. Under the agreement, OQEP will operate the block with a 50 per cent stake, while Turkish Petroleum holds the remaining 50 per cent, reflecting the confidence in the Sultanate of Oman's oil and gas sector and its ability to attract specialised international partnerships and investments.

The exploration programme for the block includes two main phases. The first phase, spanning



The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Mahmoud bin Salim al Hashmi, and Cagri Sirin.

four years, includes conducting 3D seismic surveys over 500 square kilometres and drilling two exploration wells and one appraisal well, with mandatory estimated investments of no less than \$60 million.

The second phase, also spanning four years, includes drilling an additional exploration or appraisal well based on the results of the first phase, with mandatory estimated investments of no less than \$30 million.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, emphasised that signing the concession agreement for Block 80 represents a new step in the development of promising offshore areas in the Sultanate of Oman. It reflects the growing confidence of international companies specialised in exploration and production in the investment environment of the oil and gas sector.

He pointed out that the block lies within a maritime zone of strategic importance and promising geological potential, benefiting from data and expertise accumulated in neighbouring offshore areas, particularly in Musandam Governorate, which contains fields that have proven their economic viability, most notably the Bukha and West Bukha fields. — ONA

Work begins on Oman's latest \$550m petrochemicals project



The project will be established at dual locations within SOHAR Port and Freezone (Picture for illustration).

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

Construction work has commenced on Oman's newest petrochemicals project at SOHAR Port and Freezone — a \$550 million venture focused on the production of Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) and Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), essential raw materials for the global packaging industry.

Sohar Petrochemicals (SOHARPET) is being established by MAK Germany GmbH, a Hamburg-based trading company specializing in plastics, chemicals and related machinery. Partnering with the German investor is OQ Group, whose Liwa Plastics Industries Complex at Sohar Port will be a key source of paraxylene feedstock for the project.

“Following the successful launch of MAK Sohar Chemical Industries for the production of elastomers, we have reached another important milestone with the founding of SOHARPET — a key part of our long-term plan to strengthen our presence in the Middle East”, MAK Germany said in a statement.

“Since the beginning of this year, we have

been working with great determination to establish a new production site for PTA and PET in Suhar. This is made possible through close collaboration with our local partners, including Sohar Freezone, OQ and Ladayn”, the firm added.

MAK Sohar Chemical Industries, a wholly owned subsidiary of MAK Germany, currently operates a specialised facility at Ladayn Polymer Park that manufactures thermoplastic elastomers (TPE) and engineering compounds for polymer producers. These materials are used in the automotive, medical and packaging sectors.

SOHARPET marks the “next chapter” in MAK Germany’s “success story” in the Sultanate of Oman, the company said, noting that the new project builds on agreements signed with various Omani stakeholders and partners in April this year.

Under those agreements, the petrochemicals complex will be established across two locations: an 11.9-hectare site within Sohar Port and a 53.6-hectare plot within Sohar Freezone. This dual-location development model will integrate port infrastructure with

manufacturing facilities, the company said, adding that PTA and PET assets currently based in Rotterdam will be relocated to Suhar as part of the project.

While the facility will utilise paraxylene (PX) supplied by OQ as its primary feedstock, additional raw materials, including monoethylene glycol (MEG) and acetic acid, will be imported through Sohar Port.

The integrated setup is designed to enhance supply-chain efficiency through pipeline-based logistics and optimised material handling.

“By utilising locally available feedstock, the project aims to convert raw materials into higher-value products within the Sultanate of Oman, supporting the national objective of maximising in-country value and enhancing industrial integration”, MAK Germany said.

“The SOHARPET project is expected to contribute to job creation, the development of technical expertise and the reinforcement of SOHAR’s position as a key hub for petrochemicals and advanced manufacturing”, the company added.



TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2026/018	Renewal of Tenable Security Center license for a period of one year	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/019	Perform an independent External Quality Assessment	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/020	Team Building Event Organizer	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/021	Provision of Training Services for 2026 Training Plan - Finance, Governance & Compliance Package	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/022	Provision of Training Services for 2026 Training Plan - Customer, Marketing & Stakeholder Excellence Courses	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/023	Provision of Training Services for 2026 Training Plan - Soft Skills & Personal Effectiveness Package	06/07/2026	15/07/2026	Specialist	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om , using the inquiry form found in the tender document.(05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om, under NESC VENDOR/ E-Tender.				
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date.				
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - A certificate confirming Organization achievement, bidder who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local - Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				



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ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Registration for the programme will remain open until Wednesday, July 1, 2026.

BANK MUSCAT AND OTC LAUNCH DOWN SYNDROME TRAINING PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman and Oman Tourism College, represented by the Oman Tourism Academy have announced the opening of registration for a specialised training programme dedicated to individuals with down syndrome.

The Bank had previously unveiled this unique community initiative during a signing ceremony held recently at its Head Office in Airport Heights, attended by officials from both organisations. Registration for the programme will remain open until Wednesday, July 1, 2026.

This programme serves as a qualitative initiative implemented between both institutions and a number of hotels across the Sultanate of Oman, which have expressed their readiness to offer employment opportunities to participants upon successful completion of the training programme, in collaboration with the Oman Down Syndrome Association.

The program aims to qualify 20 beneficiaries through two training tracks: Hospitality Support Services and Housekeeping, enabling them to acquire professional skills that open doors to financial and professional independence.

Under the agreement, Oman Tourism Academy will design and deliver the training courses in line with international hospitality standards, while providing a supportive and integrated learning environment, tailored to the needs of this group, supervised by experienced trainers. The courses will also include practical training placements within hotel establishments.

Bank Muscat remains committed to strengthening its strategic partnerships with educational institutions, community organisations and the private sector, recognising that collaboration is a key driver for achieving sustainable impact and expanding the reach of developmental initiatives.

Through these partnerships, the bank continues to support impactful programmes that empower various segments of society and create new opportunities for their active participation in the nation's development journey.

Bank Muscat also places high priority on customers with disabilities by providing them with the best banking services.

The bank has equipped 73 of its branches across various governorates and wilayats with facilities tailored to people with disabilities and remains committed to incorporating such features in new branches.

3-day flash sale on the luxurious Tiggo 9 ICE

CHERY Oman is delighted to announce an exclusive 3-day flash sale, offering customers across the Sultanate of Oman a limited-time opportunity to own the brand's flagship premium SUV, the Chery Tiggo 9 ICE, at an exceptional value. The special promotion will run for a strict 72 hours only, from June 23 to June 25, 2026.

During this exclusive event, Chery Oman is extending significant direct savings across the entire Tiggo 9 ICE range. Under this limited-time cash offer, the Tiggo 9 Luxury FWD is available starting from RO 8,699, while the versatile Tiggo 9 Luxury AWD is offered from RO 9,849.

For drivers seeking the ultimate expression of premium mobility, the top-tier Tiggo 9 Flagship AWD is available at an exclusive price of RO 10,599.

The Tiggo 9 features a bold and powerful exterior inspired by the majestic posture of a roaring tiger. Inside, the ultra-wide cabin serves as a sanctuary of serenity, featuring premium suedette upholstery, premium interior trim and an extra-large space designed for personalised comfort.

The vehicle delivers an incredibly quiet ride thanks to double-layer silent glass and active noise reduction, with a premium 14-speaker sound system, a 12-way electrically adjustable driver's seat and front seats with massage, ventilation and heating functions.

Beneath its luxurious exterior, the Tiggo 9 is powered by a highly efficient 2.0T GDI engine paired with a fluid 8-speed automatic transmission. This powertrain delivers an impressive 187 Kw of power and 390 N.M of



Chery Oman is extending significant direct savings across the entire Tiggo 9 ICE range.

torque, achieving a 0-100 km/h acceleration in just 8 seconds. To ensure seamless control across Oman's diverse landscapes, the flagship SUV features a Full Scene Intelligent 4WD system with selectable driving modes tailored for everyday roads as well as challenging sand, mud and snow conditions.

Safety and intelligent technology remain at the heart of Chery's engineering philosophy. The Tiggo 9 is built on a rock-solid foundation of high-strength steel and comes heavily equipped with 10 safety airbags and Bosch drive-by-wire braking technology. The advanced digital cockpit

features a 15.6-inch HD screen powered by a high-performance smart chip, supporting wireless charging, remote vehicle control and online navigation.

Furthermore, driver confidence is maximised through 19 Advanced Driver Assistance Systems functions, including automatic parking and a comprehensive 540-degree panoramic camera system.

Chery Oman encourages all prospective buyers to visit their nearest showroom early to secure these premium variants at special flash sale prices before the promotion concludes on June 25, 2026.

NBO concludes 2nd fintech accelerator programme

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has successfully concluded the second cohort of its Fintech Accelerator Programme with a Demo Day that reaffirmed its commitment to fostering fintech innovation while accelerating Oman's digital transformation journey.

Six participating start-ups showcased a diverse range of fintech innovations at the event, which brought together leading innovators, regulators, government representatives, financial institutions and fintech stakeholders from across the Sultanate of Oman.

These included Rushd Capital, a Sharia-compliant digital wealth advisory platform; Payce, a QR-based payment and bill-splitting solution for the hospitality sector; CardO, a virtual disposable payment card designed to enhance online transaction security; Cxingularity, an AI-powered financial due diligence and



Six participating start-ups showcased a diverse range of fintech innovations.

credit decisioning platform; Bayzati, a personal finance management application tailored for Oman and the GCC; and Aman, an automated fraud monitoring platform developed under Oman's Research and Innovation Authority's Upgrade Programme. Across both cohorts, participants achieved

key milestones, including product validation, pilot testing, strategic partnerships and investor engagement, demonstrating the programme's success in transforming innovative ideas into market-ready solutions.

Participating start-ups also secured investments of up to

\$1.8 million. To date, the accelerator has graduated 11 start-ups, including five from the inaugural cohort and six from the second cohort.

The Demo Day marked the culmination of months of collaboration and innovation, providing founders with the opportunity to showcase their solutions to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and key decision-makers across the banking, investment and government sectors.

The event highlighted the rapid growth of Oman's fintech ecosystem while reaffirming NBO's commitment to fostering innovation, nurturing local talent and supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by strengthening the sector with innovative solution providers, enhancing public-private collaboration and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Sohar International signs electronic waste recycling pact

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to responsible business practices, Sohar International has signed a service agreement with Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub Services LLC for the collection, recycling and secure disposal of electronic and battery waste generated across the bank's operations.

The agreement was signed by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, underscoring the bank's continued focus on initiatives that support its broader environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives. The initiative also aligns with



The agreement establishes a framework for the management of identified electronic and battery waste.

Oman Vision 2040's emphasis on sustainability, resource management and environmental protection.

The agreement establishes a framework for the management of identified electronic and battery waste in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements and recognised industry standards.

The initiative also incorporates secure destruction measures for data-bearing electronic equipment where required, reflecting the bank's dual focus on responsible environmental practices and the protection of confidential information throughout the disposal process.

Eng Aisha al Saifi, Chief Transformation Officer at Sohar International, said, "At Sohar International, sustainability is increasingly reflected in the decisions we make across our operations and the way we manage our resources.

This agreement reflects our commitment to translating environmental responsibility into tangible operational practices. As organisations continue to rely on technology to drive efficiency and innovation, it becomes equally important to ensure that electronic assets are managed appropriately once they reach the end of their operational life cycle".

SHORTTAKES



Eng Saïd bin Hamoud al Maawali with Saif Al Nasr al Tijani, Sudan's Minister of Infrastructure and Transport

OMAN AND SUDAN
BOOST PORTS TIES

MUSCAT: Oman and Sudan have agreed to strengthen cooperation in ports, maritime transport and logistics following talks between senior officials and the signing of a memorandum of understanding aimed at enhancing connectivity and supporting economic development.

Eng Saïd bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, met Saif Al Nasr al Tijani, Sudan's Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, who is visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides discussed opportunities to expand cooperation in transport, ports and logistics services, as well as ways to develop partnerships that serve the economic interests of both countries.

The discussions were accompanied by the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Asyad Ports and Free Zones, a subsidiary of the Asyad Group, and Sudan's Sea Ports Corporation. The agreement is intended to strengthen collaboration in port management, maritime transport and logistics services while supporting supply chain development and maritime integration between Oman and Sudan.

Under the memorandum, the two parties will cooperate in areas including port planning and development, maritime infrastructure and the exchange of technical and administrative expertise. The agreement also provides for training programmes, workshops and reciprocal visits aimed at building institutional capabilities and sharing operational experience between the two countries. A key focus of the partnership will be digital transformation within the ports sector. The two sides agreed to explore the adoption of modern technologies and international best practices in port management and operations to improve efficiency and service quality.

Officials said the memorandum would create a framework for exploring future joint projects and investment opportunities that could strengthen maritime trade links and enhance logistical connectivity between Oman and Sudan. — ONA

Oman launches 5m community solar plan

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

OMAN on Tuesday launched a RO 5 million community solar energy programme aimed at expanding access to renewable power, cutting electricity costs for households and encouraging greater private-sector participation in the country's energy transition.

The Imtidad Community Solar Power Stations Programme, launched under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, will support the development of community solar projects with a combined generation capacity of around 20 megawatts, according to the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

The initiative is expected to provide savings of up to 40 per cent on electricity bills for beneficiaries of the National Electricity Support Scheme while increasing the contribution of renewable energy to Oman's power sector.

APSR Chairman Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai said the programme represented a new model for broadening public access to renewable energy.

"The Imtidad programme is not merely an electricity generation project. Rather, it presents an innovative national model that delivers tangible benefits to members of society by enabling beneficiaries to access and utilise solar energy easily and conveniently", Al Hinai said. He said the programme would help expand the use of renewable energy, improve resource efficiency and transform part of government support spending



The programme will support the development of solar projects with a combined generation capacity of around 20 MW.

into productive assets capable of generating long-term value for beneficiaries and the national economy.

The first phase of the programme involves the establishment of community solar stations with generation capacity exceeding 20 MW. APSR said the initiative would support beneficiaries of the national electricity subsidy system while creating economic, social and environmental benefits.

The launch also marked the inauguration of Imtidad 1, the Sultanate of Oman's first community solar power station. Located in Al Wadi Al Kabir in Muscat Governorate, the facility has a generation capacity of 1.46 MW and is equipped with nearly 2,000 solar panels.

Project officials said the station was developed at an investment of approximately RO 300,000 and is intended to serve as a pilot model for future community solar projects across the Sultanate of Oman.

The project was delivered through a competitive tender process involving Omani SMEs and renewable energy companies, reflecting

the programme's focus on strengthening local content and developing domestic capabilities in the clean energy sector.

Sumaya al Rawahi, Chief Executive Officer of Green Universe Enterprise, said the project demonstrated the ability of Omani SMEs to participate in large-scale renewable energy initiatives. "We were very proud to be one of the SMEs selected to execute this project. The objective was to have an Omani SME deliver the project and we were able to meet both the technical and commercial requirements", she said.

Al Rawahi said the project provided valuable experience for local companies and would help strengthen national capabilities in the renewable energy sector as similar community solar projects are rolled out across the Sultanate of Oman.

Meanwhile, Nasser al Jabri, Chief Operating Officer of Nafath Renewables, said the initiative could open new opportunities for renewable energy developers, investors and contractors.

"For developers, it is a chance that they can invest in these projects and generate revenue. For companies like Nafath, it provides opportunities to construct and support the growth of renewable energy infrastructure in Oman", he said.

Al Jabri added that community solar projects could also create employment opportunities for Omani engineers and technical specialists, supporting efforts to develop national talent for future energy industries.

According to APSR, the programme is based on a partnership model involving government entities, private-sector companies and local communities, with the aim of ensuring broader participation in the country's clean energy transition.

"The programme also represents an important opportunity to stimulate investment in the renewable energy sector, strengthen local content, empower national companies and create high-quality employment opportunities for Omani talent", Dr Al Hinai said.

‘Inspire Oman’ initiative to showcase success stories, attract investment

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

A new initiative to document Omani business and entrepreneurial success stories and promote the Sultanate of Oman as an investment destination has been launched by Mefriend, a digital initiative of a regional media house, with strategic support from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The 'Inspire Oman' initiative aims to highlight, document and promote outstanding Omani achievements in economic and social development, both locally and globally, while attracting foreign capital by showcasing investment opportunities in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The initiative was unveiled at a



Representatives of OCCI and Mefriend at the press briefing.

press conference at the Chamber's headquarters in Muscat, attended by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI); Shaikh Saud bin Ahmed al Nahari, OCCI board member; Abdul Latif Mohiuddin Khonji, OCCI board member and chairman of its Foreign Investment Committee;

representatives of Mefriend; and a number of business owners and entrepreneurs.

Al Rawas said Omani success stories represented one of the national economy's most important strengths. "Every successful project, every entrepreneur, every investor and every institution that has contributed to building this nation

is part of a success story worthy of being told, documented and shared with the world", he said, describing Oman as an attractive destination for business and a trusted investment partner.

Khonji said the initiative sought to present a comprehensive picture of Oman's investment environment by showcasing economic achievements, highlighting the experiences of entrepreneurs and national companies; and introducing investment opportunities across sectors. Building an inspiring national narrative, he added, would help strengthen investor confidence and improve the business environment.

The initiative is built around three pillars: a "Commemorative Publication" will document

significant business journeys, milestones and leadership experiences; a "Celebrating the Experience" digital campaign will share videos, interviews and success stories across online platforms; and an "Inspire Oman Investors Summit" will convene officials, experts and investors from Oman, India and other countries for strategic dialogue, networking and collaboration.

Mohammed Ambalan, director of Mefriend, said the initiative aimed to document Omani success stories and pass on the lessons drawn from them. "We seek to transfer the expertise and lessons learned from these experiences in a way that enhances the culture of innovation and ambition among future generations", he said.

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil extends weekly decline



Oil prices fell more than 1 per cent, extending losses as prospects for increased Middle East exports eased supply concerns.

Brent crude dropped to \$76.12 a barrel, while US crude fell to \$72.29. Markets have come under pressure after Washington granted Tehran a temporary sanctions waiver, raising expectations of higher Iranian oil exports. — Reuters

MARITIME TRADE

Japan shipping costs surge



Japan's sea freight rates rose to a record high for a third consecutive month in May, according to data from the Bank of Japan.

The shipping component of the services producer price index jumped 61.8 per cent year-on-year to 241.3. Higher tanker rates, driven by elevated oil prices and recent Middle East tensions, were among the main factors behind the increase. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold weakens on strong dollar



Gold prices fell as the US dollar strengthened and expectations of higher US interest rates weighed on investor sentiment.

Spot gold slipped 0.5 per cent to \$4,087.68 an ounce, its lowest level in more than two weeks, while US futures declined 1.1 per cent. Markets are awaiting US inflation data for further indications on the Federal Reserve's monetary policy path. — Reuters

OPINION

Learning quality a strategic imperative for Oman’s future



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

IN today’s rapidly evolving global economy, education is no longer viewed solely as a means of acquiring knowledge. It has become a strategic pillar for economic growth, social progress and national competitiveness. Countries that invest in the quality of education are, in reality, investing in their future prosperity, innovation capacity and human capital. Oman is no exception.

The Sultanate of Oman has long recognised that sustainable development depends on the strength of its people. Since the beginning of the modern renaissance in the 1970s, education has remained one of the nation’s highest priorities. Schools, universities, colleges and specialised institutes have expanded across the country, providing opportunities that previous generations could scarcely imagine.

Today, however, the challenge is no longer access to education alone. The greater challenge is ensuring the quality of learning and its relevance to the demands of a changing world. As Oman pursues the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040, the education sector must continue to evolve to prepare graduates for emerging industries, advanced technologies and knowledge-based economic activities.

Quality education plays a vital role in developing human capital, which remains the most valuable asset of any nation. A well-educated workforce contributes directly to productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship

and economic diversification.

It also helps reduce unemployment by equipping individuals with the skills required by modern labour markets. Beyond economics, quality learning promotes social stability, civic responsibility and greater community engagement.

The importance of educational quality has become even more evident with the rise of artificial intelligence, digital transformation and advanced technologies. Future careers will increasingly require analytical thinking, digital literacy, creativity and adaptability.

Educational systems must therefore move beyond traditional teaching methods and focus on developing critical skills that enable students to thrive in a competitive global environment.

Encouragingly, Oman has taken important steps in this direction. Educational reforms have focused on modernising curricula, strengthening technical and vocational education, expanding scholarship opportunities, supporting research and innovation; and promoting partnerships between educational institutions and the private sector.

These initiatives reflect a growing recognition that education and economic development are deeply interconnected.

Equally important is helping students make informed academic and career choices. Effective guidance services, transparent admission systems and access to accurate information can assist young people in

selecting fields of study that align with both their aspirations and the future needs of the national economy.

Recent admission data indicates that many students are increasingly choosing disciplines linked to business, engineering, information technology, healthcare and other sectors that are expected to drive future growth.

As student enrolment in higher education continues to expand, ensuring academic readiness becomes increasingly critical. Educational institutions must continue enhancing assessment systems, strengthening foundational skills and supporting students as they transition into university life and professional careers.

Ultimately, improving learning quality is not the responsibility of educational institutions alone. It requires a comprehensive national effort involving government agencies, universities, schools, employers, families and civil society. The goal should not simply be to graduate more students, but to prepare capable, innovative and highly skilled individuals who can contribute meaningfully to Oman’s future development.

The investment made today in learning quality will determine the nation’s economic strength, social resilience and global competitiveness tomorrow. For Oman, maintaining this commitment is not merely an educational priority — it is a strategic necessity.

Quality education plays a vital role in developing human capital, which remains the most valuable asset of any nation. A well-educated workforce contributes directly to productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship and economic diversification.

CHINA’S FROTHY TECH HOMECOMINGS POSE A DILEMMA

KA SING CHAN

If China wants AI to revive its sluggish stock markets, officials may have to indulge some animal spirits. Regulators are paving the way for more high-tech listings in Shanghai, including supporting some Hong Kong-listed firms to float onshore.

That will help channel capital back home but will test Beijing’s longstanding aversion to market froth and volatility.

China’s top securities regulator last week vowed to “actively embrace” a new phase of technological revolution.

Besides the upcoming high-profile debuts of humanoid robotics darling Unitree and memory-chip champion CXMT, high-flying firms like Knowledge Atlas Technology, known as Zhipu AI and MiniMax may soon also sell shares in Shanghai – a rare move for a Hong Kong-listed company.

Their homecomings should be welcome. Only a handful of state giants like China Mobile and Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation have made the leap from Hong Kong to the mainland, where more stringent regulatory oversight and capital controls have deterred most private-sector firms from trying.

Cash-burning MiniMax and Zhipu may be less discerning. More AI and tech listings will boost the country’s CSI 300 Index, which is up a paltry 6% this year, versus the double-digit percentage gains in the United States, Japan and elsewhere.

China may not boast titans like Elon Musk’s \$2 trillion SpaceX or OpenAI, but the hype around artificial intelligence is just as prevalent.

Zhipu’s Hong Kong stock has surged over 1,500% since its January debut; with a market value of \$125 billion, the company trades on more than 90 times its annualised revenue run rate for 2026, per Jefferies analysts.

At the same time, authorities have been cracking down on cross-border stock trading, hoping to bring capital back onshore to engineer what they call a “slow bull market”.

It’s a potentially huge pool: as of June last year, investors from mainland China and Hong Kong held more than \$600 billion of US equities, nearly double 2020 levels, according to US Treasury data. — Reuters

IMF tells Reeves to make ‘fundamental’ tax reform

THE UN’s global financial fund has called on Chancellor Rachel Reeves to drop the triple lock pension and draw up ‘contingency’ tax measures to ensure that public debt is reduced as a share of GDP.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said that there are ‘risks’ around spending forecasts and tax receipts, criticising the Chancellor for relying on “ambitious efficiency savings targets”.

It added that the increases in receipts depend on “sizeable but uncertain yields” from HMRC administrative efforts to narrow the tax gap.

Its latest report on the state of UK public finances and the wider economy the group said: “In case the consolidation is pushed off course, contingency measures on both sides should be formulated in advance”.

It said the government should consider simplifying the tax regime by broadening the VAT base and reforming property taxes, echoing similar demands from OECD.

The fund’s economists also said the welfare bill should have better controls in order to keep planned deficit reductions in place.

One key reform recommended over the longer term would be to replace the triple lock pension “with a policy of indexing the state pension to the cost of living”.

The triple lock means the state pension rises by whichever is higher out of wage growth, inflation or 2.5 per cent. Several leading economists including Office for Budget Responsibility chiefs, have labelled the mechanism “unsustainable” for public finances as it has cost three times as much as originally predicted.

Pressures for higher defence spending, supporting an ageing population and net-zero expenditure could add to constraints on public finances over the coming years.

IMF analysis suggested these factors could raise public spending by about six per cent of GDP by 2050.

Further increases in taxes to



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said that there are ‘risks’ around spending forecasts and tax receipts, criticising the Chancellor for relying on “ambitious efficiency savings targets”. It added that the increases in receipts depend on “sizeable but uncertain yields” from HMRC administrative efforts to narrow the tax gap.



Britain’s Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves is seen at the media briefing room of 9 Downing Street, central London, in this file photo. — Reuters

support spending increases could be problematic given the tax burden was rising to a post-World War 2 high, making sweeping tax reforms and introducing further spending efficiencies “fundamental” for reducing the deficit.

The government spent around £110 billion on servicing debt, with ongoing Labour leadership speculation fuelling concerns that the cost interest payments to lenders could spike further and add constraints on public finances.

The IMF slightly revised up its growth forecast for the year to one per cent while suggesting that inflation would peak at “just below four per cent later this year” before easing in mid-2027.

The last IMF report said growth this year would be 0.8 per cent as the UK suffered a bigger downgrade than any G7 nation.

Chancellor Reeves said: “The IMF upgrading its growth forecasts and backing our fiscal strategy is yet more proof that this government has the right economic plan”.

On a separate issue — the introduction of a Wealth Tax is heavily debated but there is no decision yet.

A new Institute for Fiscal Studies report has said annual wealth tax would create “complexity, distortions and unfairness” as policymakers have been advised to consider the trade-offs involved in addressing inequality.

The IFS’ Denton Review which involved research conducted over six years found that an annual levy on wealth would have “serious drawbacks” and lead to problems across policymaking.

Researchers at the non-partisan think tank warned that politicians would need to better define inequalities they seek to tackle before introducing radical policies.

The new report will serve as a fresh warning for thinkers across the soft-left flank of British politics.

Last year’s Budget was mired by wealth tax speculation amidst widespread calls from Green Party campaigners and Labour MPs for a new levy to be introduced.

Green Party leader Zack Polanski claimed before last year that a wealth tax of one per cent on assets over £10 million could raise tens of billions of pounds a year.

The report said that valuing wealth would be a “huge undertaking”.

“Wherever the boundary was drawn between what did and did not constitute taxable wealth, any feasible annual wealth tax would inevitably create complexity, distortion, and unfairness around the boundary”, the report said.

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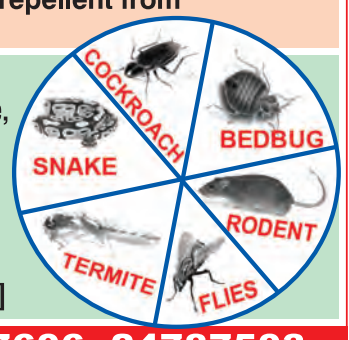
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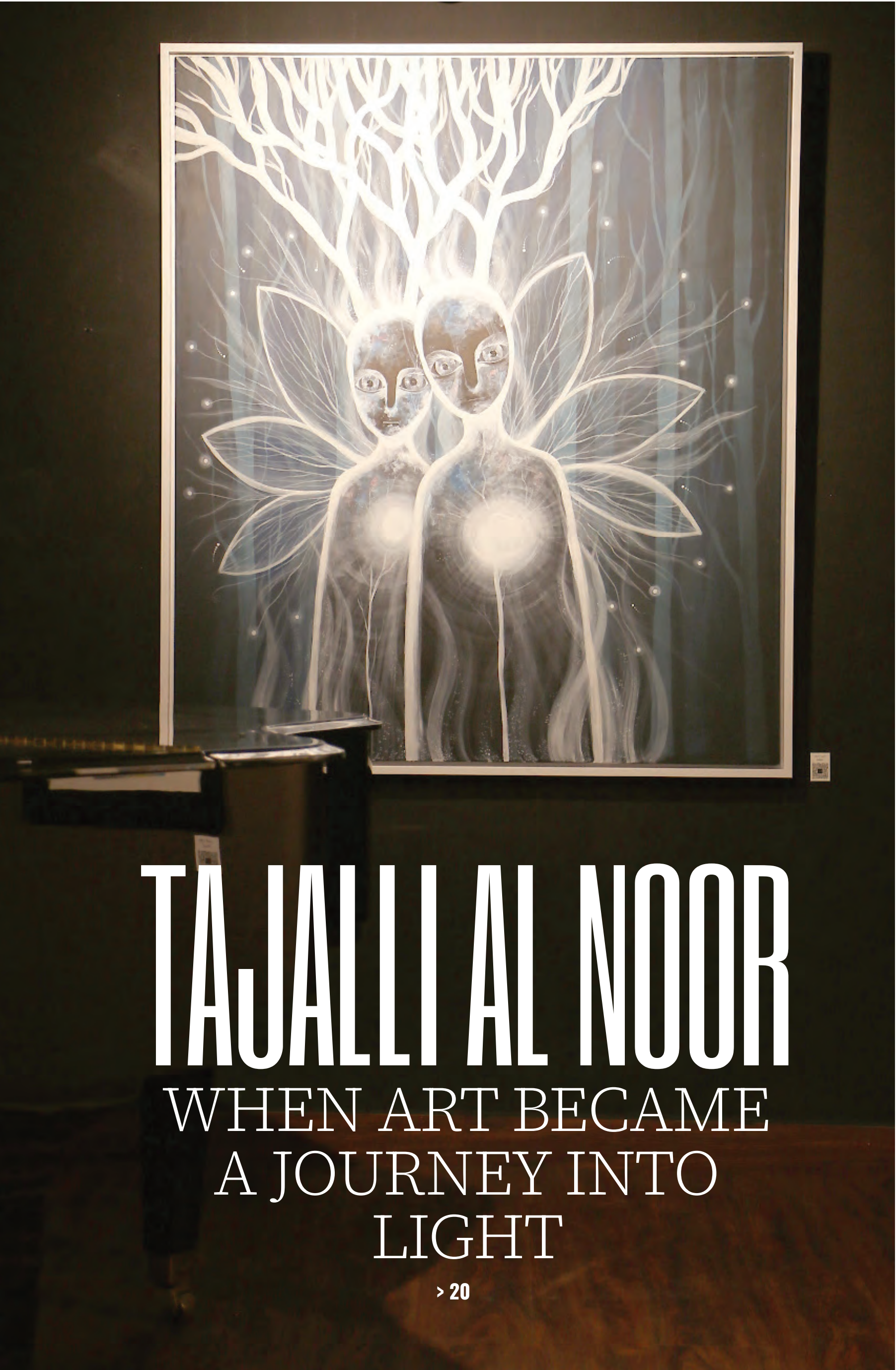
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ART/LIFE



TAJALLI AL NOOR WHEN ART BECAME A JOURNEY INTO LIGHT

> 20

CHANGING WORLD STOP OVERTHINKING SUMMER VACATION



**SHADDAD
AL MUSALMY**
*The writer is a
Senior Editor at
Oman Daily Observer*

I used to plan summer trips the way I plan how to spend my monthly salary. Twenty browser tabs open, every “Top 10 destinations” list bookmarked, then I’d stare at the screen until the cheap flights disappeared and I’d tell myself “maybe next year”. Last summer I decided to try something different. I stopped starting with what I loved and started with what I hated. Turns out that’s faster. I hate humidity that makes my glasses fog up, so Southeast Asia in July was out immediately. I can’t handle three-hour airport queues, so the big European hubs got cut too. I also don’t want to pack jackets in summer, so Europe’s mountains were gone. Just like that, 70 per cent of the world disappeared and my brain felt lighter. Summer is only a week or two and it’s too short to spend it in a place that annoys you.

Then I let the weather make the call for me. July in Muscat is 45°C, so my body was already voting for “cool”. I started picturing myself in Georgia where the air is 20°C and the mountains are green. Or Azerbaijan, where you can drink tea without sweating through your shirt. Salalah during Khareef was also on my mind because green cliffs and drizzle feel illegal when you live in Muscat. If I wanted heat but not Gulf heat, I’d think sea breeze instead of desert: Portugal, Greece, or Kerala. Weather is the one thing money can’t fix, so I put it first.

I also gave myself a “pain budget” instead of just a money budget. How much hassle am I willing to deal with? Zero hassle meant Salalah or Dubai. Short flight, no visa, back home if something goes wrong. Some hassle meant Tbilisi. Visa-free for Omanis but still a four-hour flight and a new currency. More hassle meant somewhere like Japan. Amazing, but I’d need a month to plan it. Last year my work was already chaotic, so I picked low-pain. I was on vacation to recover, not to manage another project.

Here’s the trick that actually worked: I booked backwards. I picked my dates first, then checked what SalamAir was flying from Muscat that week. Sometimes the destination chooses you. Last year I found RO 99 tickets to Baku and built the whole trip around that price. A good flight deal can make an okay city feel like you won something.

I also gave myself permission to be basic. I don’t need to discover a hidden island no one’s heard of. Salalah is basic because it works. Türkiye is basic because it has everything. Georgia is basic Europe without Europe prices. Basic places are popular for a reason. I can save the adventure for a long weekend later.

The last thing I do now is the ten-minute test. I close my eyes and imagine telling someone “I spent my summer in X”. If I smile, that’s the one. If I feel tired just thinking about explaining it, I keep looking.

Summer isn’t about finding paradise. It’s about finding seven days where the weather doesn’t fight you, the food doesn’t stress you and you come back actually rested. Pick the place that feels like a deep breath. Everything else is just Google tabs.

QUICK FEATURES



FUNFAIR

Members of the public attend The Hoppings funfair, believed to be one of the largest travelling funfairs in Europe, in Newcastle.

— AFP



SUMMER SOLSTICE

A woman wears a vinok, a wreath woven from wildflowers, during the Ivana Kupala holiday celebration, an ancient tradition with roots in olden times. — Reuters



GASTRONOMY

This photo shows Kenji Suzuki, second-generation owner of Suehiro Japanese Restaurant in Los Angeles, California, lifting natto from a bowl with chopsticks. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“A date with the date palm trees in Suroor Village”



“Precision, grace and a bit of wild attitude — this Hoopoe is officially the MVP of the field today”

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OLIVIA RODRIGO UNVEILS ALL-WOMAN FESTIVAL

Olivia Rodrigo has announced the launch of her own music festival, featuring an all-women lineup made up of what she describes as her “heroes and friends”, including Chappell Roan, Doechii and Stevie Nicks.

The 23-year-old singer-songwriter, best known for her breakthrough hit “Drivers License”, revealed the star-studded lineup on Monday. The festival, titled Daisy Chain Fields, will also feature performances by K-pop group Katseye, British singer-songwriter Rachel Chinouriri, Canadian musician Sarah McLachlan and several other artists.

The event is scheduled to take place on August 29 in Irvine, California and all net proceeds will be donated to organisations dedicated to advancing opportunities and advocating for the rights of women and girls.

Rodrigo shared the announcement with fans through an Instagram post featuring the festival’s official poster. The artwork includes a flower made of colourful pins, one of which bears the slogan “Bans Off Our Bodies”, a reference to a campaign supporting abortion rights in the United States.

Expressing her excitement, Rodrigo wrote: “I’ve had a dream of doing this festival for years and I am so ecstatic it’s finally coming true”. Daisy Chain Fields features



an all-women lineup and 100 per cent of the net proceeds will go to charities dedicated to advancing and advocating for women and girls. “The lineup is truly incredible and full of my heroes and friends. I firmly believe that joy, community and music can be drivers of meaningful change, and I’m hopeful this festival will be just that”. The announcement comes shortly after Rodrigo released her third studio album, *You Seem Pretty Sad* For A Girl So In Love, further cementing her place among the most influential young artists in pop music. — dpa



Ancient Greek theatre revives legendary Callas opera Medea

SIXTY-FIVE years after it last hosted an opera performance, Greece’s ancient theatre of Epidaurus is revisiting the landmark 1961 production of *Medea*, which starred legendary soprano Maria Callas in one of the defining moments of her career.

The one-night, sold-out performance features Italian soprano Anna Pirozzi, who says she wants to honour Callas’s legacy while bringing her own interpretation to the role.

“I don’t want to copy or imitate Maria Callas”, Pirozzi said before a dress rehearsal. “I admire the way she interpreted the role and I have borrowed a few of her gestures because they are so dramatic”.

The opera opens the 2026 Athens Epidaurus Festival. Luigi Cherubini’s *Medea*, first performed in 1797 and inspired by Euripides’s tragedy, was largely forgotten until Callas revived interest in the work through her acclaimed performances.

Director Panaghis Pagoulatos believes both singers share a similar artistic truth. “They share the same sincerity in their singing and acting”, he said. “But they are completely different personalities with very different voices”.

Greek National Opera director Giorgos Koumendakis described the 1961 production as “legendary”, noting that it generated international acclaim. Recreating it required three years of research, with teams studying original notes, costume designs and stage plans to reproduce the performance as faithfully as possible.

“The challenge was capturing the aesthetic of the period while ensuring it still felt relevant today”, Koumendakis said.

The production relied heavily on surviving records from director Alexis Minotis and artist Yannis Tsarouchis, who designed the original costumes and sets. However, no video footage of the



1961 performance exists, forcing the team to work mainly from black-and-white photographs.

The ancient theatre, one of the best-preserved in the world, also required special protection. Every stone seat was covered with a wooden casing to prevent damage during the production.

Costumes presented another challenge. Around 150 garments from the original production have been preserved, with some incorporated into the revival. Baritone Tassis Christoyannis, who plays Creon, will wear his character’s original 1961 costume.

Costume supervisor Tota Pritsa said sourcing fabrics proved difficult because some materials, including silk jersey, are no longer produced. Others were repeatedly washed to recreate the appearance of aged textiles.

“The colours of the original costumes are incredible in sunlight”, she said. During rehearsals, even



Pagoulatos struggled to distinguish between original and newly created costumes.

The Epidaurus archaeological site is also hosting an exhibition dedicated to the August 1961 performances. One noticeable difference in the revival is the reduced number of extras. In 1961, soldiers completing military service were recruited to fill the stage.

“Back then the stage was packed”, Pagoulatos said. “Today, we can’t simply go to a barracks and ask everyone to perform in the theatre”.

— AFP

FEATURES

TAJALLI AL NOOR

WHEN ART BECAME A JOURNEY INTO LIGHT

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FOR seven days in June, a quiet corner of Al Athaiba became a space of reflection, emotion and human connection. Hosted at Film Café from June 10 to 17, artist and writer Jawaher al Maqbali's exhibition Tajalli Al Noor (Manifestation of Light) was more than a display of paintings. It was an invitation to pause, to feel and to encounter something often lost amidst the rush of daily life, light in its deepest sense.

From the moment visitors entered, they stepped into a world shaped by colour, storytelling and introspection. What made the exhibition distinct was not only the artworks, but the way they were experienced.

Beneath each piece was a QR code leading to a written narrative behind the work. Instead of gathering around labels or discussing interpretations, visitors quietly scanned and engaged with the stories in solitude. This quiet interaction became central to the exhibition's purpose.

"Our focus was to let people not just see, but truly experience love, connection and light", said Al Maqbali. "We wanted each person to have a personal experience with the artwork".

The response went beyond expectation.

"My initial intention was simply to allow light to reach people and witness its beauty", Al Maqbali reflected. "What surprised me most was that not a single day passed without someone crying from the intensity and beauty they felt".

Visitors often stood silently before works, moved by stories that stirred memory and emotion in unexpected ways. The exhibition became less about observation and more about inner reflection.

Audiences also travelled from beyond Oman, including visitors from the United Arab Emirates, while inquiries and artwork orders arrived from Jordan. For Al Maqbali, one of the most meaningful outcomes was reconnecting with people she had not seen in years.

"People I hadn't seen in over six years showed up", she said. "This exhibition showed me what love and light can do".

Among attendees was Kulthum al Balushi, a civil engineer and project manager who travelled from the UAE specifically to attend. She had long followed Al Maqbali's work online and wanted to experience it in person.

"From the moment I entered, I felt a deep sense of belonging", she said.

As she moved through the gallery, she found her own emotions reflected in the artworks. What began as admiration turned into something deeply personal.

"While moving between the works, I felt hope", she recalled. "Someone had once felt what I was feeling and overcome it. In that moment,

something inside me expanded".

By the time she returned home, she sensed a shift within herself.

"I don't know exactly what changed", she said. "But I hope it was my first spark of light".

For Qasim al Yaqoubi, a student affairs specialist at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, the exhibition revealed the connection between visual art and storytelling. He described the works as living texts where colour and narrative merged into emotional depth.

Behind each canvas, he said, seemed to be a hidden story, a dream, or a quiet human truth. The works, he added, did not simply invite viewing, but dialogue.

"They spoke to us and awakened questions about beauty and existence", he said.

Although the exhibition ended on June 17, its impact continues. Messages still arrive from those who wished it had been extended, while others returned multiple times during the week, drawn back to the experience.

In a world filled with noise and distraction, Tajalli Al Noor offered something rare: a space where art became a conversation with the self and where light was not only seen, but felt.



Jawaher al Maqbali is an Omani visual artist and author whose work explores light, emotion and human connection. Her exhibition "Tajalli Al Noor" blends painting and storytelling to create deeply reflective, emotional experiences for visitors.