

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting reviewed a number of key themes related to urban planning in the wilayat.

MEETING DISCUSSES DEVELOPMENT OF AL RUSTAQ STRUCTURAL PLAN

AL RUSTAQ: A meeting was held in Al Batinah South Governorate, chaired by Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, and attended by representatives from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Municipality of Al Batinah South, along with the consulting firm entrusted with preparing the Al Rustaq Structural Plan. The session addressed the latest developments in the plan's preparation and the planning fundamentals aimed at advancing the urban infrastructure and strengthening the developmental assets of the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. The meeting reviewed a number of key themes related to the future of urban planning in the wilayat, including proposals for city

The session addressed the latest developments in the plan's preparation and the planning fundamentals aimed at advancing the urban infrastructure and strengthening the developmental assets

development that align with population and economic growth, while striking a balance between urban expansion and the preservation of heritage identity. Discussions also covered the expansion of residential neighbourhoods in accordance with modern planning standards, the establishment of industrial zones to diversify economic activities, and the development of the road network and basic infrastructure to enhance connectivity efficiency across various areas.

Furthermore, the meeting addressed the importance of rehabilitating and revitalising the wilayat's heritage areas, reflecting their historical and civilisational significance, while contributing to the stimulation of tourism activity and the attraction of investments, alongside supporting small and medium-sized enterprises linked to the tourism sector.

The meeting is part of Al Batinah South Governorate's ongoing efforts to support urban and economic development, adopt forward-looking planning visions that contribute to achieving comprehensive development goals, and enhance the quality of life in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. — **ONA**

To enjoy beauty of Khareef Dhofar, motorists must drive carefully

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
SALALAH, JULY 7

For thousands of visitors travelling by car to experience the beauty of Khareef Dhofar, the journey begins long before reaching Salalah. The long roads connecting different parts of Oman and neighbouring GCC countries with the south offer breathtaking views and memorable stops, but they also demand careful planning, patience and responsible driving. Road safety remains a key priority during the khareef season, as thousands of vehicles make their way towards Dhofar every year. However, traffic violations and risky behaviour continue to threaten road users. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) recently announced that two drivers were caught exceeding speeds of 200 km/h using mobile speed monitoring devices on Sultan Said bin Taimur Road towards Dhofar, with legal procedures being taken against them.

As families and visitors prepare for the journey, safety messages are being shared to ensure that the excitement of reaching Salalah is matched by a safe arrival.

At Wadi Hareet Police Station, one of the main gateways welcoming visitors to Dhofar, Lieutenant Hussain bin Ali

Road safety remains a key priority during the khareef season, as thousands of vehicles make their way towards Dhofar every year. However, traffic violations and risky behaviour continue to threaten road users

State Council discusses demographic structure



The session's agenda covered two studies presented by the Special Committee.

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, JULY 7

THE STATE COUNCIL held its tenth session of the third ordinary term of the eighth council period on Tuesday morning at its headquarters in Al Bustan, chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The session's agenda covered two studies presented by the Special Committee.

The first study addressed “Demographic Structure and its Impact on the Future of Development in the Sultanate of Oman”.

Dr Aisha al Darmaki, Chairman of the Special Committee, explained that the study examines demographic shifts among both Omani nationals and expatriates, noting that indicators up to 2040 point to declining fertility rates, a rising proportion of elderly citizens and a growing youth segment aged between 15 and 59. She said these shifts require advance preparation, development of basic infrastructure and strengthening of education and

The committee indicated that the study addresses the challenges facing the agricultural sector in the Sultanate of Oman, along with reviewing the latest technological developments in the agricultural sector

health services. She also highlighted that the impact of these changes extends to national identity, culture and economic growth, particularly as Oman continues to open up to investment. Mohammed al Ghassani, Rapporteur of the Special Committee, confirmed that demographic shifts affect the economy across four key areas: the labour market and growing demand for skills, investment and growth opportunities shaped by the size of the population, government spending on essential services including health, education and housing, and future preparedness through proactive policies and flexible institutions. He stressed that this is not a population crisis but a strategic economic issue that will define the future of development, adding that opportunities not seized will turn into challenges. The second study examined “The Agricultural (Plant) Sector in the Sultanate of Oman: Challenges and Solutions”. Dr Maryam al Awadi, Chairman of the Special Committee, explained that the study aims to

transform the agricultural sector from one focused on primary production to one built on added value and innovation, stressing that agriculture has become a strategic economic sector contributing to food security, income diversification and job creation. She noted that Oman holds promising agricultural potential, but faces challenges including developing legislative frameworks, improving water resource management, strengthening agricultural financing, developing value chains and supporting scientific research and innovation. Dr Abdullah al Ghafri, Rapporteur of the Special Committee, added that the study seeks to link the sector to Oman Vision 2040 and enhance its contribution to gross domestic product, pointing to gaps in food distribution chains that require attention. At the conclusion of its proceedings, the session discussed a number of reports and topics, in addition to reviewing the Secretariat General's report on the activities of the Council's bodies during the past period.



Travellers should also remain aware of unexpected hazards on the road.

Hardan from the Public Relations and Security Media Department of the Royal Oman Police highlighted the extensive preparations in place for the season. He explained that ROP has strengthened its presence along border crossings, highways and tourist locations to support visitors and ensure smooth traffic movement. Lieutenant Hussein stressed the importance of remaining alert due to changing weather conditions, particularly fog and rain along parts of the route towards Salalah. He warned against distractions such as mobile phone use while driving and urged

motorists to follow traffic rules, remain cautious on slopes and sharp turns, and ensure children stay safely inside vehicles throughout the journey. Khalifa al Falahi, HSE Officer, encouraged travellers to avoid rushing, reminding them that reaching their destination safely is more important than arriving quickly. He advised drivers to follow speed limits, maintain a safe distance, take regular breaks when feeling tired and avoid reckless behaviour behind the wheel. Similarly, Abdullah al Hashimi, an educator interested in social and volunteer work, highlighted the

importance of preparation before starting the journey. He encouraged motorists to check their vehicles, rest whenever needed and remember that a few minutes of stopping can help protect lives. Travellers should also remain aware of unexpected hazards on the road. The Omani Tent social media platform warned visitors about roaming camels, especially during the evening and night when visibility is reduced. Meanwhile, social media influencer Adel al Abri shared advice for visitors from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, encouraging them to plan their routes carefully, choose suitable roads and avoid excessive speeds during the long drive to Salalah. Vehicle readiness is another essential part of safe travel. Mazen al Qasmi, an automotive engineering specialist, advised drivers to inspect important vehicle components before departure to reduce the chances of unexpected breakdowns during the journey. The road to Salalah is the first chapter of the Khareef experience. By planning ahead, driving responsibly and respecting road safety guidelines, visitors can ensure that their journey begins and ends with memories of Oman's natural beauty rather than avoidable incidents.

SHORT TAKES



STRATEGIC EXERCISE
DECISION-MAKING 13
CONCLUDES

MUSCAT: The annual strategic exercise Decision-making 13, carried out by the National Defence College at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies, concluded on Tuesday.

The exercise was conducted by the participants of the 13th National Defence Course from various military, security, and civilian entities. The exercise was held under the auspices of Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service.

Lt Gen Al Hilali was briefed on the exercise and viewed a presentation outlining its phases, objectives and lessons learned. They toured the exercise cells, observed their tasks and learned about the results achieved.

The event was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), Major General Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police, Customs for Operations, and a number of senior officers from the military and security services, as well as members of the academic and administrative staff and advisers in the exercise.

AL SAN TELLS A
QUIETER STORY OF
DHO FAR KHAREEF

FROM PAGE 1

Seasonal farming also continues in parts of the area, as it has for generations. Residents prepare land according to the timing of rain and weather, growing seasonal crops that have long supported rural communities in Dhofar’s mountain belt. These practices may appear simple, but they carry knowledge built through years of observation: when to plant, how to use the land, and how to work with the short agricultural window created by the monsoon.

That is what gives Al San its deeper value. It is not only a place to photograph during Khareef. It is a living landscape where tourism, grazing, farming and memory meet.

As Dhofar continues to receive growing numbers of visitors during the season, areas such as Al San raise an important question for local tourism: how can quieter places be introduced without overwhelming them? Promoting lesser-known locations can help spread visitor movement beyond the busiest sites. It can also give tourists a richer understanding of Dhofar. But this must be balanced with respect for private property, grazing land, village roads and fragile green areas, especially during the monsoon when the land is softer and more vulnerable to damage.

Al San’s strength is its simplicity. Its green hills, grazing cattle and mist-covered roads show a side of Khareef that is less commercial and more deeply rooted in rural life. For visitors, it offers a calmer window into Salalah’s seasonal beauty. For local people, it remains part of a much older story — one shaped by rain, cattle, crops and the memory of a landscape they say has changed with time.

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 7

AL BATINAH NORTH Governorate officially launched its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan and unveiled its new promotional identity, marking a significant milestone in the governorate’s transformation into one of Oman’s leading destinations for sustainable economic growth, investment, innovation and quality of life in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The launch held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, reflects Al Batinah North’s determination to capitalise on its strategic location, diverse economic resources, thriving industrial base, tourism potential and investment opportunities with a slogan (Al Batinah North is a gateway of East and west). Together, the strategy and the newly introduced visual identity present an integrated vision designed to strengthen the governorate’s position as Oman’s gateway to opportunity, connectivity and sustainable development.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, described the newly launched identity as the product of extensive



The aim is to transform the governorate into one of Oman’s leading destinations for sustainable economic growth, investment, innovation and quality of life in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

collaboration between public institutions, private sector representatives and members of the community. “The identity is the outcome of dedicated work by multidisciplinary teams representing both the public and private sectors. It is founded on the governorate’s real strengths and investment opportunities, reflecting the ambitions of the people of Al Batinah North and presenting a promising vision for a governorate rich in opportunities,” he said.

He added that the unified visual identity serves as an institutional framework supporting the governorate’s economic aspirations, while the accompanying strategic

priorities, initiatives and projects provide a road map for aligning local development efforts with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The Al Batinah North Strategic Plan 2026–2030 sets out a comprehensive framework for the governorate’s development over the next five years. Its vision is “Towards leadership in sustainable development and improved quality of life,” while its mission focuses on leading the transition toward a sustainable economy through smart government services, high-quality public services, stronger partnerships and active community participation.

Built on the core values

of governance, partnership, quality, empowerment, innovation and sustainability, the strategy identifies five strategic priorities: sustainable economic development and investment, effective community partnerships, empowered institutional human capital, efficient government services and digital transformation, and governance driven by data and evidence.

The preparation process included 33 community meetings across the governorate’s six wilayats; Shinas, Liwa, Suhar, Saham, Al Khabourah and Suwaiq, along with 12 steering committee meetings, seven executive team meetings, five workshops, three institutional consultations, five surveys and questionnaires, four focus group discussions, seven analytical reports, and the participation of 40 experts in drafting the strategic framework.

The governorate also revealed its new promotional identity, developed through a six-stage process comprising research, listening, community engagement, design, concept refinement and public voting. Rather than functioning solely as a visual brand, the identity represents the governorate’s collective aspirations and reflects its coastal geography, rich heritage, six wilayats and future-oriented outlook.

Students develop smart robots for waste sorting



Al Reem al Issae and Al Noura al Ajmi have developed a project titled “Waste Sorting Using Robots.”

manual sorting difficulties. The project offers a technological solution to improve recycling efficiency through a robot that identifies waste types and directs them to the appropriate container.

Using robots helps reduce

mixed and contaminated waste and supports efforts to protect the environment and natural resources, she added.

Al Noura said the project is not limited to environmental benefits but also offers an applied educational experience

combining science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It involved programming, sensor installation, motor control and problem-solving.

She affirmed that the project developed creative thinking and teamwork skills, while opening the door to applying AI and computer vision to real-world problems.

Project supervisor Asma al Farsi said the innovation lies at the intersection of modern technology and environmental protection, offering a practical model for how robots can serve society and fostering a culture of innovation and sustainable solutions.

Such projects help prepare students for future skills, instil awareness of recycling, and reduce health risks associated with direct handling of waste during manual sorting, she added. — ONA

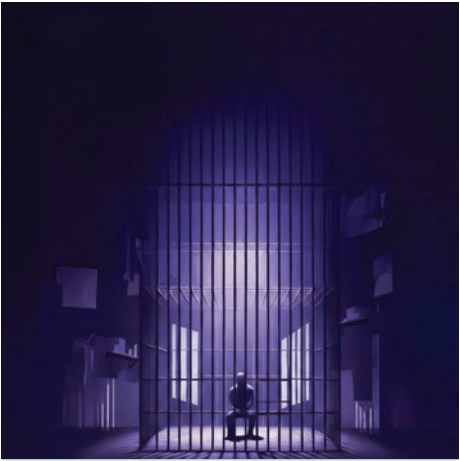
SQU study investigates whether alternative sentences can reduce crime

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

A study by Dr Juma bin Musallam al Azri from the College of Law at Sultan Qaboos University examines whether alternative criminal sentences can provide a more effective response to crime than imprisonment, particularly for minor offences.

According to legal scholars, justice in stable societies is measured not only by the severity of punishment, but also by its ability to promote rehabilitation, fairness and proportionality. At its core, justice is not an act of retribution but a means of protecting society while helping

offenders reform and reintegrate. Against this backdrop, the study asks a fundamental question: does imprisonment, the most common criminal sanction, truly achieve these objectives, or does it merely deprive offenders of their liberty without addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour? The study notes that, over several decades, countries have adopted a range of approaches to tackling crime. However, international experience suggests that punishment loses much of its value when it becomes an end in itself. Short-term imprisonment, in particular, has shown limited success in reducing reoffending. Instead,



The research highlights alternative sentences as a reflection of the growing maturity of modern criminal justice policy.

it has often contributed to family breakdown, psychological distress, higher rates of recidivism and significant financial costs associated with incarceration.

The research highlights alternative sentences as a reflection of the growing maturity of modern criminal justice policy. Rather than abandoning deterrence, these measures redefine it within a more balanced and humane framework that seeks to safeguard society while respecting individual dignity. Such alternatives include community service, electronically monitored home confinement, and restorative justice programmes that focus on

repairing harm and rebuilding relationships between offenders and the communities affected by their actions.

Although the legislation in Oman continues to prescribe imprisonment for many minor offences, the legal system has already introduced several alternatives, including suspended sentences and conditional release. The research argues, however, that the key challenge lies not in legislation itself but in expanding the practical application of these alternatives, particularly for low-level offences that pose little threat to public safety, such as begging and certain regulatory violations.

SPOTLIGHT

GETTING SHUT OUT OF SOCIAL MEDIA?

USING MODIFIED APPS, SENDING UNSOLICITED BULK MESSAGES OR SPAM, OR RECEIVING A HIGH NUMBER OF USER BLOCKS AND REPORTS WITHIN A SHORT PERIOD MAY ATTRACT BANS



Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa Advances Sustainable Hospitality Through Neighbourhood-Inspired Practices



JABAL AKHDAR, Oman – Perched 2,000 metres above sea level on Oman’s iconic Green Mountain Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa continues to advance sustainable hospitality through environmentally conscious practices deeply connected to the surrounding neighbourhood and local community.

Blending meaningful guest experiences with responsible operations, the resort has embedded sustainability into everyday practices, creating a hospitality model that prioritises environmental stewardship while reflecting the spirit of Jabal Akhdar.

A key initiative includes the resort’s in-house water bottling plant, supplying guests with drinking water in sterilised glass bottles and the resort has eliminated all single-use plastics. The resort has saved over 100 thousand plastic bottles overall since opening and its growing daily.

Sustainability extends to culinary operations through thoughtful measures designed to reduce environmental impact while maintaining high hygiene standards. The resort has eliminated individually packaged condiments, which has prevented over 2.5 million miniature glass jars from being sent to landfill. Waste has been further minimized through the use of eco-friendly, biodegradable sugarcane straws, replacing traditional plastic alternatives.

Further reinforcing its environmental responsibility, the resort operates an in-house Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), enabling treated water to be repurposed for landscape irrigation and shared with neighbouring villages. This initiative not only supports water conservation but also strengthens meaningful ties with the local community.

Energy efficiency remains central to the resort’s sustainability strategy. The property utilises 100% LED lighting throughout its facilities, complemented by advanced lighting control systems that adapt to natural daylight patterns to optimise energy consumption. Additionally, motion sensor technology installed in operational areas helps reduce unnecessary energy usage by activating lighting only when spaces are occupied.

Innovation also plays a role in the resort’s environmental initiatives. Through creative recycling programmes, the engineering team transforms repurposed materials into buffet displays, decorative installations, and seasonal creations, giving discarded items a second life while adding a distinctive character to guest experiences.

Recognising these efforts, Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa proudly holds a Level 1 Green Engage Certification, reflecting its commitment to responsible hospitality practices and continuous environmental improvement.

As IHG Hotels & Resorts’ first Hotel Indigo resort in the region, the property continues to redefine luxury hospitality by demonstrating that memorable guest experiences and sustainability can coexist seamlessly.

At Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa, sustainability is more than an initiative it is an ongoing commitment to preserving the natural beauty of Oman’s Green Mountain while creating positive impact for guests, communities, and future generations.

For reservations: reservations.indigojabalakhdar@ihg.com

KABEER YOUSUF

AHMED was taken aback when a message popped up saying, “This account can’t use WhatsApp soon after he forwarded a ‘good morning’ message to a couple of his friends on a sunny morning.

“I was really shocked to learn that my account was banned. I don’t know if one of them or many of them had clocked me or reported spam,” he said.

Similarly, a number of people who are into the habit of forwarding messages randomly reported that they too lost their WhatsApp account as well as their other social media handles.

“I am still trying to retrieve my lost Instagram account which was suspended after I shared my recent stage performance video with many of my friends. My friends say I need to wait for 25 days before I get it back,” an artist said.

In short, several users have been complaining that their social media accounts are getting suspended either temporarily or permanently after a couple of random messages that they sent to either groups or individuals, or after sharing a post with many users.

Tariq al Barwani, an IT expert, said the ban is most likely due to one of the recipients of the messages reported that you are sharing unsolicited message to him/her and similarly, if a number of people report the number and block them, WhatsApp takes note of it and bans the account.

“Another reason is that WhatsApp suspects that this particular person is sending out messages to those who have not saved the sender’s number or the recipients are not interested in it, or he/she is using the app for commercial purposes. Also, if one is sending out bulk messages to many people, that could

attract a temporary or permanent ban,” Tariq said.

When the Observer contacted WhatsApp, it said: “WhatsApp accounts are frequently closed or temporarily banned for violating their Terms of Service. Common triggers include using unofficial modified apps (like GB WhatsApp), sending unsolicited bulk messages or spam, or receiving a high number of user blocks and reports within a short period.”

If an account has been banned, one can open WhatsApp, tap the ‘Request a Review’ button and explain your case through the automated appeal prompt. Reviews generally take up to 24 hours. If the account is given a temporary restriction of either 24 or 48 hours, the account can automatically be regained once the timer expires.

How not to get banned?

1. Make sure that the recipient has your number saved before sending a message.
2. Avoid sending too many repetitive messages.
3. Communicate with known contacts and only send messages to those who have contacted you first or have requested you contact them on WhatsApp.
4. It’s better to give contacts your phone number so they can message you first.
5. Ask for permission to add a person to a group beforehand and respect boundaries.
6. Think twice before forwarding messages because WhatsApp has created a label for all forwarded messages and limits the number of times you can forward messages as a way to encourage users to reconsider before sharing.
7. Last but not least, if you add someone to a group and they remove themselves, honour their decision.

SHORTTAKES



Safe, eco-friendly and sensory, with different textures to distinguish between colours and non-toxic dyes which are suitable for children are used.

BLIND CAN FEEL COLOURS, THANKS TO THIS OMANI

FROM PAGE 1

She added that the innovation helps blind individuals form a mental and emotional image of colours through other senses, opening space for imagination, creativity and expression. The integration of senses significantly enhances memory, as the mind interacts more strongly with information linked to emotions and sensory experiences.

“When a colour is associated with a familiar scent or special texture, it becomes easier and deeper to remember than a purely theoretical description,” Al Malki said. “This creates a beautiful emotional relationship between the blind person and the world, giving them a greater sense of inclusion, confidence and the ability to express themselves.”

She explained that sensory colours can be used in schools and rehabilitation centres, not only for teaching colours but also for developing sensory skills, enhancing communication and stimulating artistic creativity. Global studies have shown that using touch, sound and scents helps visually impaired individuals understand and interact with colours more deeply.

She said that the innovation can also be applied in art therapy, drawing activities and classroom exercises, helping students express themselves and build confidence. Teachers and rehabilitation specialists can use it to develop more inclusive methods that consider diverse learning needs.

She pointed out that challenges included providing safe, high-quality materials that combine sensory and educational aspects, adapting the product for different age groups and degrees of impairment, raising awareness about sensory education and establishing partnerships with schools and rehabilitation centres.

Al Malki noted that modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and smart applications could further enhance the innovation, offering a more advanced educational experience. Global research is increasingly moving towards multisensory systems to help visually impaired individuals understand colours and arts more comprehensively.

She explained that the innovation could be extended to raised drawing, sensory stories, interactive exhibitions and educational tools based on different senses. It could also be applied in music, theatre and interactive arts, linking colours to emotions, sounds and textures for an integrated artistic experience. Specialised training programmes and workshops could help blind individuals discover their talents and participate more fully in creative fields.

She concluded that this innovation gives blind individuals a greater opportunity to interact with daily details linked to colours, arts, emotions and the environment. When colour becomes a tangible experience, a blind person feels closer to understanding the world around them — enhancing their sense of inclusion, independence and self-confidence, and opening the door to artistic expression and creative participation. — ONA

UTAS hosts training on AI in accounting

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), represented by the Training and Qualification Section at the Human Resources Department, organised a training program titled “Artificial Intelligence in Accounting and Financial Auditing” at City Seasons Hotel, with the participation of staff from the Finance Department and the Internal Audit Department.

The programme aims to

introduce participants to the latest AI applications in accounting and financial auditing, highlighting their role in improving financial processes, enhancing operational efficiency, and supporting digital transformation within the workplace.

The training covers key topics including AI fundamentals, digital transformation in financial operations, AI applications in accounting and auditing, and the future of AI in

the financial sector. It also explores practical applications that support financial automation, data analysis, and more effective decision-making.

Jasim bin Mohammed al Qaydi, Senior Training Officer at the University’s Training and Qualification Section, said the programme reflects UTAS’s commitment to equipping employees with the knowledge and skills needed to leverage emerging technologies.

Donate organs, gift a life

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 7

THE OMANI CENTER for the Regulation of Organ and Human Tissue Donation and Transplantation (OROHTDT), under the Ministry of Health, has made significant progress in organ donation efforts across the country. Since 2023, the centre has obtained consent from 14 families of brain-dead patients for organ donation, resulting in the transplant of 36 vital organs, including 26 kidneys, seven livers and three hearts, offering a renewed chance at life for many patients.

Three organ donors from brain-dead cases were registered this year. They donated six kidneys, two livers, and two hearts. As a single donor can save multiple lives and provide patients with a new opportunity to live.

OROHTDT’s Sami bin Mohammed al Numani said, “Promoting a culture of organ donation has become one of the most important solutions for patients awaiting life-saving transplants, particularly those suffering from heart and lung diseases.

Donations from brain-dead patients remain the primary source for such organs.” Organ donation has become a source of new beginnings for many patients, restoring hope and bringing joy to families who have spent years waiting for treatment and recovery. Ahmed al Jahafi, one of the people who received a heart transplant after a long wait, said: “No matter what I say, I will never be able to fully thank the donor’s family. I pray for mercy upon the donor and thank the family for this great humanitarian decision.

After Allah, they were the reason



The first thing that made me happy was that I could walk and breathe normally. I felt that I had come back to life. Today I am the first person to get a heart transplant in Oman, and my presence here is the greatest proof that organ donation changes people’s lives.

AHMED
AL JAHAFI
first person to get a heart transplant in Oman.



Sami bin Mohammed al Numani explaining about organ donation.

I was given a second chance at life, and that is something I will never forget for the rest of my life.

“Honestly, the waiting period was difficult. I would get tired from slight exertion, and even the simplest things in my day required a lot of effort. After I was informed that there was a heart donor for me, I felt a mixture of joy and fear.

I knew that this was an opportunity that could change my life, and indeed it did change. After the operation, my feelings were different. The first thing that made me happy was that I could walk and breathe normally. I felt that I had come back to life.

Today I am the first person to get a heart transplant in Oman, and my presence here is the greatest proof that organ donation changes people’s lives. One decision from you can be the reason for saving a person’s life.

I advise everyone who is thinking

about this to know the impact of this decision, because it really makes a big difference.”

One of the main reasons some families hesitate to consent to organ donation is a lack of understanding of brain death, as many people mistakenly confuse it with a coma. “Brain death is real and medically confirmed death; it is not a coma as many people believe,” Al Numani said.

Social misconceptions continue to influence some families’ decisions, including fears that organ donation may disfigure the body, delay burial procedures, or lead to negative societal perceptions.

Al Numani said over 30,000 individuals have registered to donate organs after death through the Shifa application, emphasising the importance of encouraging people to officially document their wishes and contribute to spreading a culture of giving within society.

In a major infrastructure upgrade, Part of Sultan Qaboos road in Salalah opens

BAKHIT AL SHAHRI
SALALAH, JULY 7

An 8-kilometre stretch of the Sultan Qaboos Road from Al Dahariz Roundabout to Al Hisn Signals opened to traffic on Tuesday. The move represents a major milestone in the project’s implementation and reflects the ongoing progress in completing one of the most prominent infrastructure projects in Dhofar Governorate.

The opening of this section is part of efforts to develop the road network and enhance the efficiency of the infrastructure. The road would improve traffic flow and increase safety on one of the most important main thoroughfares in the Wilayat of Salalah, given the increasing number of visitors and tourists during the Dhofar Khareef Season. It will help reduce



The newly commissioned section includes three major intersections equipped with modern traffic lights, designed to meet the latest traffic safety standards. Photo by Hamed al Kathiri.

traffic congestion and facilitate movement between different areas.

The newly commissioned section includes three major intersections equipped

with modern traffic lights, designed to meet the latest traffic safety standards. This enhances traffic management efficiency, facilitates vehicle movement, and improves

connectivity between residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas on both sides of the road. It also reduces travel time and improves traffic flow.

The Sultan Qaboos Road Project is one of the strategic initiatives aimed at developing the transportation system and upgrading the infrastructure in the Wilayat of Salalah, keeping pace with the urban expansion, economic growth, and tourism activity witnessed in Dhofar Governorate.

Upon completion of all phases of Sultan Qaboos Road, it is expected to enhance the efficiency of the road network, improve the quality of transportation services, and support sustainable development, in line with the governorate’s prominent tourism, economic, and developmental standing.



Announcement of the tender TND GSI G3 0010/07/2026 for the Supply, Fork Lift 3 ton capacity, for Al Ghubrah III IWP

GS INIMA (AL GHUBRA) LLC has been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of AL GHUBRAH III IWP in Oman, for CAPITAL DESALINATION COMPANY S.A.O.C.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price **for the supply of Fork Lift 3 ton capacity.**

To participate in the bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of SME card (if any), via e-mail to: **ghubrah.3.site@inima.com**, **subject: TND GSI G3 0010/07/2026 by 12th July 2026 1:00 PM.**

A reply with bid documents will be sent to candidates on the same day.

Bid closing date: **20th July 2026 1:00 PM.**

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



(C) Indian PM Narendra Modi, along with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, applauds as they pose for group photos at Indonesian Parliament building in Jakarta. — Reuters

INDONESIA, INDIA ANNOUNCE LONG-RANGE MISSILE DEAL

JAKARTA: India will supply Indonesia with long-range missiles, an Indian official said on Tuesday as their leaders agreed to deepen ties in defence, critical minerals and other areas. President Prabowo Subianto is hosting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Jakarta during a three-day state visit, with a deal on the BrahMos missile system topping the agenda. An agreement for “cooperation on BrahMos System” was struck during the visit, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

The two countries also reached an agreement on air-to-air missile cooperation that “enhances technology collaboration and defence capabilities”, he said. Details on the deal were not disclosed, and an Indonesian defence ministry spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Modi touted the “growing trust” between Jakarta and New Delhi after his meeting with Prabowo, which he said underpinned cooperation in “defence, security and maritime affairs”. “Today, we reached an agreement to enhance defence exchanges, disaster management, and industrial cooperation,” Modi told reporters. The coast guards of the two countries will also work together on maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean, Modi said. — AFP

ISRAEL, LEBANON TO HOLD TALKS IN ROME IN MID-JULY



A bricklayer restores the balcony of a building destroyed in an Israeli air strike in Tyre, southern Lebanon. — Reuters

ROME: Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors are due to hold direct talks in Rome this month, Italy’s foreign ministry said on Tuesday, after several rounds of discussions in Washington aimed at de-escalation. “We welcome with pleasure the announcement that the next round of talks between Israel and Lebanon mediated by the US will take place in Rome,” Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on X.

A ministry spokesman said the talks would take place at the ambassador level on July 15 and 16. This round of talks will be the sixth since the spring between the two neighbours, which do not have diplomatic relations and are technically in a state of war.

The two countries and the United States signed a framework agreement last month aimed at “lasting peace”, five days after the entry into force of a fragile ceasefire in the fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah that has been going on since March 2. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar confirmed on Tuesday that the next round of talks with Lebanon will take place in Rome. — AFP

MASSIVE OUTAGES IN BAMAKO FOLLOWING SABOTAGE

BAMAKO: Mali’s capital has been suffering from major water and power outages for two days following sabotage to a supply line, residents and officials said on Tuesday. The outage comes as members from Al Qaeda-affiliated JNIM have for months been imposing road blockades on key routes leading to Bamako, and torching dozens of buses, cargo trucks and fuel tankers in an effort to strangle the economy.

“Following an incident on the

power transmission network, the continuity of electricity supply is severely disrupted in several areas”, the utility company Energie du Mali (EDM) said in a statement on Monday, without specifying the cause of the incident. With no power, tap water is unavailable, forcing residents to turn to small-scale solar-powered water drilling installations. “There was sabotage on the high-voltage line supplying Bamako from the Manantali Dam on the Mali-Mauritania-Senegal

border,” an official from SOMAGEP, the Malian drinking water utility, said, though he was unable to identify the perpetrators. Women and children lined up at the solar-powered drilling installations and neighbourhood wells, carrying yellow plastic jerrycans or loading them onto pushcarts.

Mali has been grappling with a security crisis since 2012 by groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and the IS group and community-based criminal groups. — AFP

Syria, France eye central role for Damascus future

SYRIAN

PRESIDENT Ahmed al Sharaa and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday they were aiming for Damascus to become a transit hub for global trade, as countries look for alternatives to the Strait of Hormuz. During an economic forum on Syria’s post-war reconstruction attended by Macron in the Syrian capital, Sharaa said that “after the Strait of Hormuz crisis, the world realises the value of safe and stable corridors”. Sharaa said, “The strategic partnership that we are establishing today with France... is the model we want for the relationship with Europe and with the whole world”.

Macron, on the second day of a visit to Damascus, accompanied by several heads of major French companies, said he hoped to “make Syria a long-term regional hub”. “That is to say, a place where broader strategies can be developed, and in particular, where new logistics chains can be built, energy or data routes can be constructed,” Macron added.

The French leader said such a hub would “reduce the risks inherent in the functioning of the region today and what is still happening, even if at a lesser intensity, in the Strait of Hormuz”. But he stressed that Syria was facing several challenges in maintaining stability and spurring reconstruction. “The opportunities



France’s President Emmanuel Macron and Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa shake hands on the day they meet in Damascus. — Reuters

The two countries signed a number of bilateral agreements during the forum, although French investors appeared to be approaching the opportunities with caution. Macron said he hoped to “make Syria a long-term regional hub”

and interests of French companies are aligned with this challenge,” Macron said.

Syria’s President Ahmed al Sharaa said on Tuesday that he is counting on an “active French role” to halt Israeli escalations against his country.

During a joint press conference with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron in Damascus, Sharaa condemned “systematic Israeli attacks”, saying “we are counting on an active French role to stop this escalation and ensure respect for international agreements”.

The two countries signed a number of bilateral agreements during the forum, although French investors appeared to be approaching the opportunities

with caution. In May last year, Syria signed a 30-year contract with French logistics giant CMA CGM worth 230 million euros. A year later, it signed a memorandum of understanding with ConocoPhillips, France’s TotalEnergies and Qatar’s QatarEnergy, regarding offshore oil and gas exploration.

Addressing the French delegation at Tuesday’s forum, Sharaa said: “What we are asking of you today is to build and develop real and organic partnerships with the Syrian private sector”. “And most importantly, we hope to move today from memoranda of intent to executive contracts with specific timetables.”

Head of TotalEnergies Patrick Pouyanne, visiting Damascus alongside French President Emmanuel Macron, said on Tuesday that Syria could become an important transit country from Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea, offering “alternative routes” to the Strait of Hormuz. “Today, it’s clear that the security situation still doesn’t allow us to operate, but I think it is a positive initiative to come here, to Damascus,” he told reporters just before news broke of two bombs exploding near the hotel where French President Emmanuel Macron had spent the night. “It is a country at the crossroads of the Middle East,” he added on the sidelines of Macron’s visit. — AFP



DEATH TOLL FROM CHINA STORMS RISES TO 17

BEIJING: The death toll from devastating storms in parts of China rose to 17 on Tuesday, with hundreds more injured and tens of thousands evacuated, state media reported, as President Xi Jinping urged “all out” rescue efforts. Dramatic video shared by state broadcaster CCTV showed a torrent of muddy water rushing past the crumbled concrete walls of a reservoir dam that had burst in the southern region of Guangxi, the worst-hit area.

Rescue workers wearing life vests searched for missing people in inflatable boats, state media footage showed, while authorities erected emergency shelters to house those displaced. Intense rain and severe flooding from Typhoon Maysak killed at least six people in Guangxi, where authorities raised the flood control emergency response to its highest level in the regional capital, Nanning.

At least 130,000 people were evacuated but 11 are still missing, regional officials told a news conference, adding that the rain has damaged nearly 13,000 acres of agricultural land. — AFP

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

Sri Lanka opens prison riot probe



Sri Lanka launched an investigation into its deadliest prison riot in years, as the death toll from clashes between rival drug gangs rose to 27. Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara said that a criminal investigation had begun alongside a government-appointed commission. Police said the death toll was at least 27 people, including another inmate who died overnight. They also said a preliminary investigation has found that rival gangs clashed inside the prison. — AFP

CHECKPOST ARMED ATTACK

Gunmen kill 9 officers in southwest Pakistan



Gunmen killed nine police officers, and others are missing, following an attack on a checkpoint at a dam project in Pakistan’s restive southwestern Balochistan province, officials said. “Nine policemen are dead and many are missing after an attack on a checkpoint that was guarding the Mangi Dam project,” Abdul Qudoos, a senior district official, said. Paramilitary, police and counter-terrorism personnel had “successfully carried out the joint clearance operations” against the militants. — AFP

FACING PUBLIC UNREST

Kenya, Tanzania prevent annual protest



Kenya and Tanzania both deployed a massive police presence to prevent protests as the east African nations increasingly take a zero-tolerance approach to demonstrations. The two countries have both faced major bouts of public unrest in the last two years and have responded with brutal police repression. Activists called for peaceful demonstrations on July 7 — known as “Saba Saba” (seven seven) — which happens to mark historic protests in both countries. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Britain’s Prince Harry arrives at Chatham House in London. — Reuters

PRINCE HARRY
LOSES LAWSUIT
AGAINST DAILY MAIL

LONDON: Prince Harry and other high-profile British figures on Tuesday lost their privacy lawsuits against the Daily Mail’s publisher, which had alleged widespread unlawful behaviour. Harry, who was in Britain when London’s High Court gave its ruling, has brought several legal cases against the British press and has long railed against their alleged abuse of power.

The prince, 41, who has long blamed the press for the 1997 Paris car crash that killed his mother, Princess Diana, saw bringing the lawsuit against the Daily Mail publisher as his “public duty”.

Associated, however, said the allegations were smears and the claims against it were dismissed in their entirety on Tuesday, in what the publisher called “an overwhelming victory for the Daily Mail and its journalists”.

Judge Matthew Nicklin said in a summary of his ruling that the claimants had needed to prove that information published about them had been obtained unlawfully, but suspicion was not enough. — Reuters

EL NINO EXPECTED ‘ TO BREAK RECORDS ’



The current El Nino weather phenomenon is expected to break records for its overall strength, a top expert said on Tuesday, raising concerns about droughts, floods and other extremes linked to the event. Forecast models are pointing to an “extreme” event, said Tim Stockdale, an El Nino expert at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), an intergovernmental organisation. Stockdale said this year’s El Nino is unlike anything he had seen in more than three decades of tracking the phenomenon. — AFP

French court opens door for Marine Le Pen to run for president

PARIS: A French appeal court on Tuesday upheld Marine Le Pen’s conviction for misusing EU funds but shortened her ban on running for public office, in theory preserving a path for the far-right leader to run in the 2027 presidential election. However, the court also sentenced Le Pen to a three-year jail term: two suspended and one with an electronic ankle tag. This could make a presidential campaign politically and logistically difficult. It is now up to Le Pen to say if she will run to become modern France’s first far-right president. She is due to give a prime-time TV interview on TF1, in which she may make an announcement on her political future.

Le Pen previously said she would be reluctant to wage a presidential campaign while serving a sentence under electronic monitoring, arguing that it would interfere with campaigning and undermine her

credibility. But she is yet to confirm what she will do. As she left the courtroom, Le Pen was smiling but did not say a word. She then went to the headquarters of her party, the anti-immigrant National Rally (RN), to discuss what to do next. Le Pen had been convicted in March 2025 of embezzlement and banned for five years with immediate effect from holding public office, and thus from making her long-planned fourth bid for the Elysee Palace.

Tuesday’s appeal judgement, under which Le Pen is ineligible to hold public office for 45 months, 30 of which are suspended, means she will be eligible to stand when voters go to the polls in April 2027, because she has already served the 15-month ban, which has been running since last year’s ruling.

The decision is likely to trigger intense debate within the RN, which has spent months preparing for two possible futures: one led by Le



French far-right leader Marine Le Pen leaves the trial, at the Paris courthouse on the Ile de la Cite, in Paris. — Reuters

Pen and another by party president Jordan Bardella. The electronic tag was stipulated as part of a softened jail sentence, and means she would

not actually have to go to jail.

A sentencing judge will decide on the terms of Le Pen’s tag, setting out the hours when she can be away

THOUSANDS
WITHOUT
POWER IN
PACIFIC
ISLANDS AFTER
TYPHOON

WASHINGTON: Tens of thousands of people were without power on Tuesday on Guam and the Northern Marianas after a super typhoon tore through the US Pacific territories, with no deaths reported. The small island of Rota was the worst affected after a direct hit from Super Typhoon Bavi with winds up to 290 kilometres per hour, bringing down trees and power lines and knocking out water supplies.

Rota’s Mayor Aubry Hocog said she had been told that two people sustained non-fatal injuries but that

“there were no deaths confirmed.” Hocog said that over “50 per cent of our island has undergone damages, and it could be more,” adding that it could take “two to three months” to fully restore power supply. “There is still a very long line of our people lining up to get water. (Utilities company) CUC is rationing the water up to 25 gallons (95 litres) per household just so we can be sure to have enough for everybody,” she added.

Local media showed a long line of cars on Rota — home to some 1,500

people — queueing to get drinking water as temperatures hit a hot and humid 29C. Saipan and Tinian, the two main islands of the Northern Marianas home to around 40,000 people, also lost power as did parts of nearby Guam, a separate US territory home to major military bases.

On Guam, less than 80 kilometres from Rota, fallen trees, bits of streetlamps and rocks were strewn over the roads late on Monday and journalists saw at least one car flipped on its side. — AFP

Trump lands in Ankara to
join Nato leaders summit



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L) hosts US President Donald Trump for a state arrival ceremony at Bestepe Presidential Compound in Ankara. — AFP

Trump was then to be taken to Erdogan’s presidential palace where guardsmen dressed in historical warrior costumes were awaiting him on the steps outside. Nato allies have tried to showcase surging defence spending with new arms contracts worth billions in an effort to placate the mercurial US leader

Zelensky said that Ukraine’s battle-hardened forces would bolster Nato’s defences, as he renewed his argument for Kyiv to join, at the alliance’s summit in Ankara. At the same time, he urged Ukraine’s backers to step up help for the country’s air defences as it struggles with shortages of crucial interceptors to shoot down Russian missiles. “Do you really believe it would be right to live outside Nato, a country and a people with this level of defensive capability?” Zelensky said in a speech on the sidelines of the summit. “Ukraine in Nato is a source of extraordinary defensive capability.”

Zelensky renewed calls for Ukraine to be granted membership despite US President Donald Trump firmly shutting the door on Kyiv becoming part of the Western military alliance. The US leader has poured cold water on Ukraine’s long-standing push to join Nato as he has

sought to bring an end to more than four years of war with Russia.

Ukraine has recently appeared to turn the tide on the Kremlin in the conflict as it has stabilised the front line and carried out damaging strikes deep inside Russia. But despite being able to tackle the swarms of Russian drones targeting the country daily, Kyiv has difficulty shooting down ballistic missiles as its air defences run low. “We are capable of doing everything else ourselves, but when it comes to air defence, we need our partners’ determination,” he said. “Please let more determination and more decisions for air defence be one of the key outcomes of this Nato summit.”

The Ukrainian leader said current production levels of the US-made Patriot missiles were not sufficient as he called on allies to press Washington to let Kyiv produce them under licence. — AFP

OPINION

The summer our children really need



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

SUMMER in Oman brings a number of challenges for families. It is not only the screen we are dealing with. It is the heat, the boredom, the lack of structure, the long days indoors, the restless children, the overstimulated parents and the quiet pressure of everyone being together. Summer changes the rhythm of a home. School stops, routines loosen, bedtimes drift and movement becomes limited as the heat outside becomes sweltering at times. Children who were used to classrooms, friends and schedules suddenly find themselves indoors, looking for somewhere to put all the energy their body still carries. This is where many parents begin to feel stretched because summer asks a lot of families. It asks parents to entertain, organise, soothe, occupy and stay calm, often while they are still working, tired, hot and overstimulated themselves. The child says, “I’m bored,” and underneath that sentence is a nervous system asking, “Where do I put all this energy?” It is easy to think children are being difficult when they become more irritable. The truth is, heat, poor sleep and too much time indoors affect their nervous system. A child who is melting down may simply

be living in a body that has had too little movement, too much screen time, too little structure and not enough emotional space. This is why screens become so tempting. A screen can quiet the noise quickly. It can stop the complaining, reduce the arguments and give everyone a moment of relief. Parents struggle too and nowadays, the reach for the screen helps everyone get through hard moments. The problem is when quick relief becomes the main guide of the day. A quiet child is not always a regulated child. Sometimes they are distracted. Sometimes they are overstimulated in silence. Sometimes their body is still carrying the frustration, boredom, or disconnection, and it comes out later as tears, defiance, sibling fights, or bedtime battles. What children need in summer is not constant entertainment. They need little moments of connection throughout the day that remind their nervous systems they are safe. Returning back to basics, without the constant need for instant dopamine stimulation, is essential. Some early morning or late evening outdoor play, an extended meal, card and board games, imaginative creativity, and lots of intended connections before the devices come out are necessary.

The real work of summer is not keeping children busy every second. Perhaps it is teaching them how to be with themselves without needing to escape

Parents often feel they need to create magical summers. Children do not need magic every day. They need presence. They need a parent who can say, “I know you’re bored, and boredom is okay.” They need to learn that discomfort does not always need to be escaped. Sometimes it can be moved through. That is where imagination begins. That is where resilience grows. Summer is also an invitation for adults to check in with themselves. Are we reacting because our children are being unreasonable, or because our own nervous system is overloaded? Are we angry at their screen use, or are we exhausted by the fact that we have no space to breathe? We cannot remove the heat. We cannot make summer feel like term time. What we can do is lower the noise, bring back simple structure, protect pockets of connection and remember that regulation is built through rhythm, relationship and repair. Perhaps the real work of summer is not keeping children busy every second. Perhaps it is teaching them how to be with themselves without needing to escape. A screen can fill the silence, but it cannot teach a child what to do with it. Heat may push us indoors, but it does not have to push us away from each other.

HOW TRUMP IS RESHAPING NATO’S RESPONSIBILITY

MAX DELANY

As doubts swirl over US President Donald Trump’s commitment to protecting Nato, both sides of the Atlantic agree: Europe needs to take more responsibility for its own defence. The shift away from relying on America’s might will be a key focus as leaders from the 32-country alliance meet for a summit in Ankara this week. From what’s happening to how far it could go, here are some of the key issues: Trump has not been shy about his criticisms of Nato - most recently lashing out at European allies over their response to his war against Iran. The mercurial leader has repeatedly undercut faith in the United States by casting doubt on whether he would stand by the alliance’s Article Five mutual defence clause. But it’s not just words coming from Washington now. Since Trump’s return to power, his administration has made it crystal clear it wants Europe to take the lead on defending the continent as the United States focuses on other parts of the globe. Washington rattled Nato by abruptly announcing in May that it would pull 5,000 troops from Germany and halt a deployment to Poland, before flip-flopping. The Pentagon then told allies it was scaling back the military assets it puts at Nato’s disposal and has announced a six-month review of its forces in Europe. “We’re doubling down on our effort to make Nato what it always was supposed to be, a balanced alliance with Europe in the lead for its own defence,” US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said. European countries started ramping up military budgets after Russia’s 2022 war on Ukraine - but pressure from Trump sent those efforts into warp speed. After decades of underinvestment by Europe, Nato leaders agreed at a summit last year to increase defence-related spending to 5 per cent of GDP by 2035. “There’s truly a revolution going on in the alliance,” said one European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. “This burden shifting that we decided will fundamentally change this alliance.” While the United States remains by far the biggest spender, Europe and Canada together are aiming in the coming years to match Washington’s budget. Powerhouse Germany has led the way, while spending by countries closest to Russia is already near Nato’s target. — AFP

How summer volunteering shapes tomorrow’s leaders

AMONG the most valuable activities for young people during the summer is volunteering. There is no doubt that engaging in volunteer work contributes significantly to their overall development by fostering social, emotional, and mental growth. It provides opportunities to develop essential life skills, strengthen empathy, build self-confidence, and cultivate a sense of responsibility and community engagement, making it a meaningful and enriching use of the summer break.

Structured volunteering programmes have been shown to enhance university students’ knowledge, attitudes, and volunteering practices. In their study, Saleh et al (2025) further highlight the importance of encouraging student participation in volunteer activities by increasing their awareness and providing opportunities for practical engagement. Based on these results, the authors recommend integrating structured volunteer training into extracurricular activities within higher education institutions in Oman and similar contexts. They also argue that promoting volunteerism among university students can make a meaningful contribution to sustainable development by fostering civic responsibility, community engagement, and active citizenship. According to Eglitis et al (2025), evidence from a systematic review of 26 studies involving 6,812 participants indicates that summer programmes



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Volunteering can play a protective role by maintaining social connections, strengthening positive behaviours, and supporting the development of skills that benefit both individuals and the wider community

have the potential to promote the mental, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children and adolescents. The review categorised outcomes into mental health (including psychological well-being, anxiety, depression, distress, and self-perception, such as self-esteem and confidence), social emotional well-being (including communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and social skills), and cognitive functioning (such as memory, attention, and executive function), alongside additional outcomes related to substance use, personality traits, and values. Although the meta-analytic results showed only small or statistically non-significant effects on anxiety, depression, psychological distress, self-esteem, and self-worth, the narrative findings consistently indicated positive trends in mental health, self-perception, social and emotional skills, and cognition. In addition to these psychological and developmental outcomes, broader literature highlights that structured summer programmes and youth camps can also support academic achievement by reducing excessive technology use during the summer period and improving performance in subjects such as mathematics, reading, and science, ultimately contributing to higher grade point averages (GPAs) compared with non-participants. Furthermore, evaluation studies report improvements in social and emotional development, including increased prosocial behaviour, self-confidence, and cooperativeness, alongside reductions in aggressive

behaviour, behavioural problems, and disciplinary issues. Collectively, these findings suggest that engagement in structured summer activities may not only support personal development, but also contribute to broader social benefits, including improved cooperation, reduced negative behaviours, and enhanced community participation. To conclude, although school holidays provide a necessary break for students and families from academic demands, extended time away from school can also reduce access to structured support systems, which may negatively affect children’s mental health. Research indicates that during long summer breaks, some children may experience loneliness, boredom, and feelings of emptiness. Furthermore, negative peer interactions during this period have been associated with increased antisocial behaviours such as bullying and victimisation, while reduced social contact may also lead to lower engagement in physical activity. Within this context, structured activities such as volunteering can play a protective role by maintaining social connections, strengthening positive behaviours, and supporting the development of valuable skills and competencies that benefit both individuals and the wider community. Similarly, Eglitis et al (2024) emphasise the role of structured summer programmes in promoting mental, social, emotional, and cognitive development among children and adolescents.

Towards an environmentally responsible growth



SAMUEL KUTTY

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CLIMATE change, urban pressure, and a lack of disaster preparedness are increasingly transforming natural hazards, resulting in significant loss of life and economic damage. The situation is already dire.

Aside from the catastrophic impact on the environment — such as the depletion of natural resources, frequent and intense droughts, and extreme weather events — failure to address these threats will exacerbate health and social inequalities and push millions of people into extreme poverty.

Most nations, along with their developmental achievements, have long since established laws and formal governmental structures to address environmental problems; however, few have been successful in alleviating these issues.

But the Sultanate of Oman stands out for its commitment to balancing economic growth with environmental protection. The country believes that by safeguarding its environment and resources, it can not only mitigate the economic costs associated with environmental degradation, but also foster a more sustainable economy.

Oman's commitment to protecting its natural environment dates back to the early 1970s under the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who consistently prioritised the environment even while promoting economic growth.

"It is the responsibility of all of us — a responsibility that knows no political boundaries. Therefore, every person, wherever they live, must contribute to conservation and organise their life accordingly. This must be done in a planned,

rational manner, taking into consideration the numerous causes of pollution, whether natural, biological, industrial, chemical, or physical," he said while addressing the International Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil in 2013.

Through Oman Vision 2040, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is firmly committed to environmental protection, embedding sustainability and climate action into Oman's national goals.

"The Sultanate of Oman firmly believes that addressing climate change is a collective responsibility requiring effective international partnerships and innovative solutions that balance development needs with environmental protection," he said while addressing a Unesco meeting last month.

However, the main threats to Oman's biodiversity include overgrazing, habitat loss, overexploitation and damage to coastal and marine ecosystems, invasive species, population growth, and the use of modern technology.

The Environment Authority, responsible for setting policies and implementing programmes to protect and sustain the nation's environment, recently affirmed that Oman continues to fulfil its national and international commitments to environmental protection and natural resources aligning with the Oman Environment Strategy and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

On the global stage, Oman reached a historic ascent of 94 positions in the Environmental Performance Index to attain 55th rank worldwide and second place regionally within both the Gulf and the Arab world.

This distinguished achievement was

Oman stands out for its commitment to balancing economic growth with environmental protection. The country believes that by safeguarding its environment and resources, it can not only mitigate the economic costs associated with environmental degradation but also foster a more sustainable economy

further crowned with the Arab Excellence Award, bestowed in recognition of the Authority's pioneering endeavours in sustainability and environmental guardianship.

According to the Authority, digital advancements played a crucial role in strengthening Oman's environmental infrastructure. "Digital achievements across several strategic pillars, most notably the natural resources and biodiversity pillar, saw a strategic expansion of the national network of nature reserves," it said during a review meeting last week.

The Authority's performance on the 'Modernity' sub-index reached an impressive 96.37 per cent in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index.

Oman has planted over 72 million trees as part of an aggressive national strategy to combat desertification and reduce carbon emissions. Driven by the Environment Authority, this effort drastically exceeded its original target of 10 million trees. The plantings include over 11.3 million mangrove seedlings and more than 856,000 wild trees.

In terms of air quality, Oman has been able to reduce its emissions to 94.7 million tonnes, as the share of green investment increased from 3 per cent to 27 per cent.

Looking ahead to the next 14 years of Oman Vision 2040, many challenges will arise in achieving a sustainable environment. However, by integrating green growth with economic diversification, Oman ensures that future economic benefits are both sustainable and environmentally responsible.

This balance supports the Vision's goal of establishing a knowledge-based economy while preserving natural resources.

AUSTRALIA’S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FALTERS IN TEEN AGE CHECKS

BYRON KAYE

Australia’s online platforms are stumbling at the very first step in implementing age checks for users, rendering a world-first teen social media ban ineffective, a study by a team that advised the government’s rollout of the curbs found.

Since December, Australia’s new social media law has mandated that platforms including Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube bar people under 16 years old from having accounts. Operators must take “reasonable steps” to comply, and the government has recommended using multiple checks to determine users’ age.

The ban, however, has been widely criticised, with studies suggesting most people under 16 are still able to access the platforms, prompting Australia to double the maximum fine last month and warn of court action against tech giants for non-compliance. A team of software testers, which last year trialled age-assurance software on more than 1,000 Australians, found that platforms did not ask for age proof on any of the 50 accounts it opened after the law came into force and on which it declared the age as 16, the researchers said.

The previously unreported finding reveals a largely overlooked flaw: while the process has so far focused on the accuracy of photo-based age-assurance software, the initial vetting stage - which guesses a person’s age range based on their general online activity - does not appear to be picking up young users for further checks.

“You should be asked to demonstrate how old you are, and not once have we been asked to verify our age or use age-assurance measures,” said Andrew Hammond, director at testing firm KJR, which ran the original trial in 2025.

All 50 test accounts are active and have been distributed among nine of the 10 platforms that are subject to the age restrictions, including Meta’s Instagram, Snap’s Snapchat, TikTok and Alphabet’s YouTube, Hammond said.

Some dummy accounts received advertisements for youth banking products, an indication the platform registered the person’s age range, Hammond said. One account which signed up to Elon Musk’s X claiming to be 16 was served pornographic content, he added.

None of the platforms let users sign up if they declared they were under 16. But just one, Australia-based live-streaming platform Kick, refused to let users create an account without proof of age, the follow-up study found.

Snap and TikTok declined to comment, while Google and X, which is owned by SpaceX, did not respond to requests for comment. — Reuters

Bigger spiders tell us that climate change is here

FOR many people, the sight of a spider scurrying across the living room floor is enough to cause panic.

Now imagine that spider being noticeably larger than the ones you remember growing up with. Across parts of Europe and the US, homeowners have increasingly reported seeing larger spiders, more webs and more egg sacs in their homes. Scientists say there is a simple explanation: climate change.

Warmer winters and longer summers are creating conditions in which many spider species can survive for longer, grow larger and reproduce more successfully. Higher temperatures also mean more insects, providing spiders with an abundant food supply. The result is not necessarily an invasion of dangerous spiders, but a visible reminder that our changing climate is affecting ecosystems in ways we often overlook.

For those who dislike spiders, this is unsettling. Most of us are used to seeing small house spiders tucked away in corners or quietly spinning webs in the garden. Larger spiders immediately trigger a different reaction. Humans naturally associate size with danger. A spider with long legs and a larger body appears more threatening, even if it poses virtually no risk. The irony is that the overwhelming majority of spiders are harmless to humans. According to the University of California Integrated Pest Management Programme, most spiders found in homes are beneficial because they feed on nuisance insects such as flies, mosquitoes, moths and cockroaches. Only a very small number of species are capable of causing lethal bites, and even these generally avoid human contact. In other words, the spiders people fear are often helping keep their homes free from more troublesome pests.



OMAN AL YAHYAI

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when something changes inside our own homes, when summers become unbearable, when insects arrive earlier, when spiders seem noticeably larger, the crisis suddenly feels personal.

That, however, does little to ease arachnophobia. A larger spider hiding behind the curtains or racing across the bathroom floor is enough to make many people uncomfortable regardless of how harmless it may be. The increase in spider sightings has therefore become an unexpected way in which ordinary people are noticing the effects of climate change in their daily lives. Scientists have observed similar patterns in several parts of the world. Research has shown that some spider species are becoming larger or reproducing more successfully as temperatures rise. In Arctic ecosystems, warming temperatures have contributed to larger wolf spiders. Other urban spider species have benefited from warmer winters that allow them to complete additional breeding cycles and produce more offspring.

This should not come as a surprise. Climate change is altering the timing of the seasons themselves. Springs are arriving earlier, autumns are lasting longer, and winters are becoming shorter and milder across much of Europe. Scientists refer to this phenomenon as “season creep”, and it is already affecting plants, birds, insects and countless other species. Spiders are simply adapting to the environment humans have created. Unfortunately, bigger spiders are among the least worrying consequences of a warming planet.

Europe is now experiencing repeated heatwaves almost every summer. Temperatures that once seemed exceptional are becoming increasingly common. Longer periods of extreme heat place pressure on hospitals, damage transport infrastructure, reduce agricultural productivity and increase the risk of wildfires. Climate change is also disrupting water supplies, biodiversity and food production across the globe.

Human activity continues to

drive this crisis. Greenhouse gas emissions remain high despite decades of scientific warnings. Pollution continues to damage ecosystems. Wars and conflicts contribute additional environmental destruction through fires, damaged infrastructure and enormous fuel consumption. Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence has created another environmental challenge. AI data centres require enormous amounts of electricity and water to power and cool increasingly powerful computing systems, placing additional pressure on already strained natural resources.

Most people cannot directly observe rising global temperatures or increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide. Climate change often feels abstract because it is measured through statistics, scientific reports and long-term projections. But when something changes inside our own homes, when summers become unbearable, when insects arrive earlier, when spiders seem noticeably larger, the crisis suddenly feels personal. Climate change is no longer something happening somewhere else. It is happening in our gardens, our cities and our living rooms.

The appearance of larger spiders therefore serves as an unexpected reminder that ecosystems are responding to environmental change far more quickly than many people realise. Animals are adapting. Plants are changing their seasonal cycles. Some species are expanding into new regions while others struggle to survive. If a few larger spiders make us uncomfortable today, they should also remind us of the far greater consequences that await if climate change continues unchecked. Bigger spiders are not the crisis. They are simply one of the many warning signs that the climate around us is changing and much faster than many of us would like to believe.



FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



Portugal coach Roberto Martinez reacts. — Reuters



Portugal's forward #07 Cristiano Ronaldo reacts after losing the 2026 World Cup round of 16 football match between Portugal and Spain. — AFP

PORTUGAL
COACH ROBERTO
MARTINEZ
CONFIRMS
DEPARTURE
AFTER LOSS

SAYING

Portugal's national team needs "a new voice," manager Roberto Martinez confirmed he is stepping down after the 1-0 loss to Spain on Monday in their round of 16 match in Arlington, Texas.

Martinez has coached Portugal since 2023 and planned to leave his post after the team's run to what he hoped was a World Cup championship. His contract was due to expire after the tournament.

"Yes, this is my last game with the national team," said Martinez, a native of Spain who turns 53 on July 13. "I'm proud. I've had 45 games, and I felt welcomed in Portugal and loved. It's a memory I'll take with me always."

"It was a pleasure, a source of pride and responsibility. It's hard, but it's the end of a cycle and in the context it makes absolute sense."

Martinez said, "It's important to have a new voice now" and added that it was fair for Portuguese Football Federation president Pedro Proenca, who was appointed last year, to be able to choose his own manager.

"I want to thank the president and the board for their support and for providing me and my coaching staff with all the necessary conditions," Martinez said. "I appreciate their strength and support, but it is the end of a cycle."

Portugal is a co-host of the 2030 World Cup along with Spain and Morocco and is automatically qualified.

Martinez managed Belgium's national team from 2016-22 and also coached Everton, Swansea City and Wigan

Athletic. He led Portugal to the 2024 European Championship quarterfinals, then the UEFA Nations League title in June 2025.

Portugal finished second in this World Cup in Group K, going 1-0-2 (5 points) with a 5-0 win over Uzbekistan and draws against the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1-1) and group winner Colombia (0-0).

Last Thursday, Portugal held off Croatia 2-1 in the round of 32 before elimination on Monday, which also marked the final World Cup game for legendary attacker Cristiano Ronaldo, 41.

"We didn't fail," Martinez said. "We lost a game against a team that's one of the favourites. We showed incredible individual talent. Winning or losing is about details in the big games, with big teams. ... You fail when you don't try to win, and we tried to win until the last minute."

Martinez said to those thinking Ronaldo should have been subbed for late in the game that he was physically capable of playing at least 90 minutes and delivering the needed goal.

"This is not the time to look for anything beyond the fact that we are talking about a football icon," Martinez said of Ronaldo.

"There aren't many Cristiano Ronaldos. I will forever appreciate what he tried to do in this World Cup, because his dream was to win it. He was an incredible example of a captain, both on a footballing level and a human level."

"His impact inside the dressing room and within the group of players is something the entire coaching staff and all the players will carry with us forever. He is an example of football, of an athlete and of the human being behind the athlete." — Reuters



‘I CELEBRATED IN BED’, NORWAY’S SOLBAKKEN STAYS GROUNDED AFTER BEATING BRAZIL



Norway players celebrate after the match as Norway qualify for the quarter finals of the World Cup. — **REUTERS**



Norway's head coach Stale Solbakken gives a press conference in Montclair. — **AFP**

NORWAY coach Stale Solbakken admitted on Monday he celebrated his team's historic World Cup win over Brazil by getting tucked up in bed and watching quarter-final opponents England come through a gruelling tie against Mexico.

"I celebrated in bed with a coke and chocolate while watching the game," said Solbakken the day after Norway's stunning 2-1 victory over the five-time World Cup winners in New Jersey.

Erling Haaland's late brace settled the game in Norway's favour and took them through to the quarter-finals for the very first time.

It will be the first competitive meeting of the nations since 1993, when Norway defeated England in Oslo in a qualifier for the following year's World Cup in the United States Norway went to that tournament, which is also the last one England missed.

"We have to study England but obviously we have seen them in their previous games in the tournament and they will be a very strong opponent but hopefully it will be a very even and tight game," Solbakken said of Saturday's showdown in Miami.

Haaland is currently the joint-top scorer at this World Cup with seven goals, level with Kylian Mbappe and Lionel Messi.

The Manchester City striker's goals have come in just four appearances at his first World Cup -- if he scores again in the quarter-finals, he would equal the feat of the late West Germany great Gerd Mueller, who netted in each of his first five World Cup appearances, in 1970.

"I think it is a good comparison with Gerd Mueller even if their bodies are not similar," Solbakken said.

"But he scored all his goals more or less inside the box as well and it says a lot about Erling's quality, and hopefully he can make it five in the game on Saturday," added the coach.

Solbakken played down the potential advantage of Haaland playing his club football in England.

"It doesn't hurt us that he plays there but I don't think that is a big thing for him or for us.

"He plays national games, Champions League games, Premier League games in the same manner."

Besides Haaland, one of the main features of Norway's first appearance at a World Cup since 1998 has been the "Viking Row" celebration of their supporters.

"I hope it is not only the rowing that has got us to the quarter-finals," joked the coach, who has been in charge since 2020.

"But I think it is a fun thing. The players have taken to it and the world has taken to it." — **AFP**

INAUGURATION TODAY

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FIFA WORLD CUP
2026



FRANCE READY FOR MOROCCO, SAYS COACH

STEPHAN SAYS FRANCE WILL BE STRONGER FOR PARAGUAY TEST

FRANCE HAVE APPEALED OLISE'S YELLOW CARD FROM PARAGUAY MATCH

THURAM WILL RETURN TO TRAINING ON MONDAY, TCHOUAMENI A DOUBT



France's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after the match. — Reuters

Morocco's defender Achraf Hakimi Shaffelburg fight for the ball during the 2026 World Cup round of 16 football match between Canada and Morocco at the Houston Stadium in Houstonc. — AFP

ASSISTANT

COACH Guy Stephan said France would be stronger for the physical test they faced against Paraguay and were preparing for a very different challenge when they take on Morocco in the World Cup quarter-finals on Thursday.

France romped into the second knockout round but had to scrap their way past a rugged Paraguay side with very little protection from the match officials in Philadelphia on Saturday to get into the last eight.

Stephan confirmed that the French federation had appealed against key

forward Michael Olise's yellow card, one of three shown to French players during the clash to one for the Paraguayans.

"I think that playing a match like that at this stage of the tournament was fruitful for us, because it gives answers about what the players are capable of in the face of that kind of adversity," he told reporters on Monday.

"It was a day when it would have been easy to lose control, and nobody lost control. So that is still proof of maturity, even if they are young players.

"It was a hard match, physically and mentally draining. Now we've moved on," he added.

GENUINE CLASS

Morocco will be aiming to reach the

semi-finals for second straight Cup in Boston on Thursday and said there was they were a team genuine class.

"It will be a completely different kind of opposition from what we just had," he said.

"It's a well-organised, well-structured team, a team with a certain solidity, and above all a team that is very good in transition that has scored a lot of goals .

"They also have individual strengths, whether on the right side or the left side, It's undeniably a quality team."

Stephan said forward Marcus Thuram, who missed France's last two matches with a calf issue, would return to training

on Monday but midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni was still struggling with an adductor injury he sustained before the Paraguay match.

"We'll see each day whether his injury is healing or not," said the 69 year old, who has been the right-hand man of coach Didier Deschamps since 2009.

"We are a bit pressed for time, it's true, because the match is on Thursday, but he is continuing his individual work today and tomorrow." Stephan, who took charge of the team for the third group match when Deschamps returned to France following the death of his mother, gave a succinct response to the racist tirade aimed at striker Kylian Mbappe by a Paraguayan senator. "In three words," he said. "It's disgraceful, vile, outrageous."

— Reuters

MUSCAT
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BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
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SHORT TAKES



Solidcore Resources will earn up to a 60% stake in the project through a phased investment structure.

MDO partners with Solidcore Resources to advance copper exploration project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 7

Minerals Development Oman (MDO) has signed a strategic partnership agreement with Kazakhstan-based Solidcore Resources, one of Central Asia's leading gold producers, to explore and develop a copper project in Al Batinah North Governorate.

Under the agreement, Solidcore Resources will earn up to a 60 per cent stake in the project through a phased investment structure tied to the achievement of defined technical and investment milestones, supporting a disciplined approach to exploration and project development.

The project is located within MDO's Block 11B concession, approximately 29 kilometres from Suhar. Over the past several years, MDO has completed extensive exploration work, including drilling campaigns, airborne and ground geophysical surveys, geological and geochemical studies, and satellite imagery analysis.

The results have confirmed promising copper and gold mineralisation of the Volcanogenic Massive Sulphide (VMS) type, together with additional exploration targets across the concession area.

Eng Mattar bin Salim al Badi, Chief Executive Officer of MDO, said the partnership reflects the company's strategy of accelerating the development of high-value mining assets through collaboration with globally recognised mining companies.

"Solidcore Resources was selected following a comprehensive evaluation of its operational track record, technical expertise and financial strength.

This partnership will accelerate exploration and project evaluation while attracting quality investment, strengthening local content, facilitating knowledge transfer and supporting Oman Vision 2040".

Vitaly Nesis, Chief Executive Officer of Solidcore Resources, described the agreement as the company's first exploration investment outside Kazakhstan, marking a strategic step in expanding its international portfolio.

Oman pharmaceutical market to hit \$1.24 billion

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 7

THE Sultanate of Oman is positioning its special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities to capture a larger share of the fast-growing pharmaceuticals and medical devices industry, as the domestic pharma market is projected to reach \$1.24 billion by 2031.

The market was valued at about \$752.4 million in 2024 and is forecast to grow at a compound annual rate of 7.4 per cent.

The figures were published in The *Duqm Economist* July magazine, citing data from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

OPAZ said Oman offers investment opportunities across generic drug manufacturing, research laboratories, active pharmaceutical ingredient production, vaccines, biopharmaceuticals, medical equipment, digital health solutions, surgical instruments and smart health monitoring devices.

The push comes as Oman seeks to deepen industrial diversification, reduce import dependence and build higher-value manufacturing clusters linked to healthcare, logistics and advanced technologies.

Pharmaceutical imports rose from \$565 million in 2021 to \$670.3 million in 2023, an increase of 8.9 per cent, underlining rising domestic and regional demand.

Around 11 major pharmaceutical projects and manufacturing facilities are currently operating across Oman's special economic zones, free zones and industrial cities, according to OPAZ. Salalah Free Zone has attracted pharmaceutical investments exceeding \$600 million, including Philex Pharmaceuticals, Dhofar Pharmaceutical Industries Company, the International Pharmaceutical Complex and Oman Pharmaceutical Products



The market was valued at about \$752.4 million in 2024 and is forecast to grow at a compound annual rate of 7.4%.



Oman offers investment opportunities across generic drug manufacturing, research laboratories, active pharmaceutical ingredient production, vaccines, biopharmaceuticals, medical equipment, digital health solutions, surgical instruments and smart health monitoring devices.

**PUBLIC
AUTHORITY
FOR SPECIAL
ECONOMIC ZONES
AND FREE ZONES
(OPAZ)**

Company.

Khazaen Economic City hosts investments estimated at about \$600 million, including the Integrated Pharmaceutical Industries Complex, the Veterinary Vaccines Factory, Opal Bio Pharma and Pharma City.

Madayn has attracted more than \$100 million through specialised projects including Menagen Pharmaceutical Industries, Global Ambassadors for Health, Al Farabi Veterinary and Agricultural Pharmaceuticals, and National Pharmaceutical Industries.

Sohar Freezone is also strengthening its pharmaceutical base through projects including Julphar Gulf Pharmaceutical Industries, Oman Pharmaceutical Products Company and Penicillin General Integrated Industrial Company.

OPAZ said the sector benefits from local value drivers, including gypsum for pharmaceutical excipients, water desalination and treatment, fish oils and squalene, limestone and dolomite, as well as the penicillin manufacturing project in Sohar.

The medical devices segment also offers scope for investment in medical polymers, rubber and latex, medical textiles

and adhesives. National Pharmaceutical Industries exports to more than 50 countries, while Dhofar Pharmaceutical Industries opened a new manufacturing facility in Raysut in 2024.

Philex Pharmaceuticals is one of the largest projects in the sector, with an investment of \$150 million and annual production capacity of one billion tablets and capsules.

OPAZ said incentives include tax exemptions of up to 30 years, customs exemptions on raw materials and equipment, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no minimum capital requirement, long-term residency visas for investors and usufruct agreements of up to 50 years, renewable.

Sector-specific incentives also include advance purchase agreements covering 10 to 20 per cent of production for several companies, as well as a 10 per cent price preference for selected national products in government tenders.

Globally, the pharmaceutical market is estimated at about \$1.2 trillion in 2025. North America leads with \$691.5 billion, followed by Asia at \$249.6 billion and Europe at \$205.2 billion. GCC markets account for about \$9.9 billion.

Carbon reduction to enhance Oman's investment appeal: MoEM

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 7

Oman aims to avoid approximately 9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 2030, according to Eng Hamoud bin Hamad al Sawafi, Director General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM).

He said the transition to a green economy has become a cornerstone for enhancing the competitiveness of the national economy, diversifying income sources and opening new horizons for the private sector and local and international investors.

These efforts, he noted, will also directly enhance Oman's attractiveness to foreign direct investment, particularly in low-carbon projects, which are experiencing rapid global growth.

According to Eng Mohsin bin Sulaiman al Jabri, Director General of the Oman Net Zero



The revised regulatory framework seeks to transform Oman's target of reducing emissions by 33 per cent by 2035 into tradable investment opportunities through carbon credits.

Centre, a regulatory framework for the carbon market represents a qualitative economic transformation. It transforms the Sultanate of Oman's target of reducing emissions by 33 per cent by 2035 into tradable investment opportunities through carbon

credits.

This will facilitate attracting international financing, open new avenues for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and create specialised jobs in the carbon economy.

The comments come as the

Ministry launches the updated version of its Net Zero Strategy and the regulatory framework for the carbon market.

The aim is to establish a national carbon market that attracts local and international capital to finance climate change mitigation and adaptation projects across seven strategic sectors, thereby transforming climate commitments into promising economic and investment opportunities.

Official data from the Ministry indicates that total greenhouse gas emissions in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 94 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2024.

This has prompted the acceleration of transformation programmes in the energy, industry and transportation sectors, alongside the expansion of renewable energy, green hydrogen and carbon capture technologies to reduce emissions and enhance

resource efficiency.

The global markets are increasingly favouring countries with clear policies for reducing emissions and implementing sustainability standards. This gives Oman a competitive advantage in attracting green investments, especially given the growing global demand for low-carbon products and sustainable financing.

As these initiatives are implemented more rapidly, sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman is transforming from an environmental commitment into an economic engine capable of attracting capital, enhancing investor confidence, diversifying the production base and consolidating Oman's position as a regional hub for sustainable investments and clean energy, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



BankDhofar reaffirmed its commitment to continued investment in innovation and digital transformation.

BankDhofar reaffirms support for financial sector development

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second-largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of branch network, expressed its pride in its strategic partnership with the Central Bank of Oman, which has contributed over the years to supporting numerous initiatives and projects aimed at developing the banking sector, enhancing its efficiency, and strengthening its ability to meet the needs of individuals and institutions.

The recent visit of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, to the Central Bank of Oman reflects the continuous attention given by the Omani government to the development of the financial sector and its vital role in supporting sustainable economic development in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The visit underscores the importance of the financial sector as a key driver of economic growth, a fundamental enabler of economic diversification, digital transformation and the enhancement of the national economy's competitiveness.

It also highlights the commitment of various stakeholders to continuously develop Oman's financial and banking ecosystem in accordance with international best practices and the rapidly evolving industry landscape.

BankDhofar reaffirmed its commitment to continued investment in innovation and digital transformation through the development of banking products and services and the adoption of advanced financial technologies. These efforts contribute to enhancing customer experience, promoting financial inclusion, and enabling various segments of society to benefit from modern banking services.

The bank also emphasised its ongoing collaboration with the Central Bank of Oman in supporting youth empowerment across different sectors and assisting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow, expand and access international markets, thereby contributing to economic growth and sustainable development.

BankDhofar continues to strengthen its presence through 145 branches, more than 400 ATMs, CDMs, and multi-service kiosks distributed across all governorates and wilayats of Oman.

Bank Muscat receives platinum award from Infosys Finacle

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the Platinum Award for Product Innovation by Infosys Finacle in recognition of its excellence in the instant loans automation through its mobile banking application, the first service of its kind in the Oman banking sector.

The award reflects the bank's leadership in driving digital transformation within Oman's banking sector. The service enables eligible customers to apply for a personal loan and complete all required procedures fully digitally within minutes, without the need to visit a branch or submit physical documents. Once submitted



The award reflects the bank's leadership in driving digital transformation within Oman's banking sector.

online application by customer successfully, the loan amount will be credited immediately.

Bank Muscat initially launched the instant personal loan service for customers employed in the government sector as part of its commitment to delivering a seamless and integrated banking experience.

The service has now been extended to employees of quasi-government entities as well.

The system performs an instant credit eligibility assessment and allows customers to complete the application process digitally with fileable steps and secure authentication through a One-Time Password (OTP). Loan documents and repayment schedules are also

made available digitally through the mobile application, enhancing speed and efficiency in completing banking transactions.

Commenting on the achievement, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager of Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are extremely proud to receive this prestigious award from Infosys Finacle.

This recognition is a testament to our ongoing commitment to innovation and delivering an exceptional banking experience to our customers.

This achievement is the result of the dedicated efforts of our teams, who continuously strive to reimagine banking services through innovative approaches and by leveraging the latest digital

technologies to provide seamless, secure, and flexible financial solutions."

He added: "At Bank Muscat, we believe that continuous innovation is the cornerstone of meeting our customers' evolving expectations in the digital era.

We will continue to adopt the latest technological innovations to further strengthen our leadership position in the banking sector."

The launch of this new service further reinforces Bank Muscat's position as a key driver of digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman by proactively adopting advanced banking technologies and developing smart solutions that meet customer expectations while enhancing service efficiency.

Experience the luxury of the Lincoln Corsair

LINCOLN Oman's seasonal "Signature Rewards" campaign continues to attract luxury enthusiasts across the Sultanate of Oman, turning the spotlight onto the agile elegance of the Lincoln Corsair.

Running until July 12, 2026, this ongoing summer showcase highlights the compact luxury SUV's brilliant balance of performance and refined styling, pairing its meticulous craftsmanship with an elite suite of promotional advantages.

Guests who select the Lincoln Corsair during this campaign period benefit from extensive ownership privileges designed to deliver absolute peace of mind.

The exclusive package features a comprehensive 5-year or 100,000 km service package covering 10 scheduled maintenance intervals, alongside a matching 5-year or 100,000 km manufacturer's warranty.

To further elevate the summer benefits, new owners receive complimentary first-year private vehicle registration, a collection of premium accessories, and a guaranteed 3M "Golden 7" Pack for advanced window tinting and ceramic surface protection.

The seasonal initiative also continues to feature unique lifestyle rewards, including an iPhone 17 raffle draw for test-drive participants and a grand raffle offering buyers a chance to win one of two iPhone 17 units.

Engineered for effortless cruising and precise handling, the Lincoln Corsair delivers a highly responsive performance perfectly suited for both urban streets and scenic coastal highways.

At its heart lies a potent 2.0-litre turbocharged engine that generates 260 hp and 396 Nm of torque, seamlessly mated to an advanced 8-speed automatic transmission



Guests who select the Lincoln Corsair during this campaign period benefit from extensive ownership privileges designed to deliver absolute peace of mind.

with SelectShift technology. For a personalised driving experience, the Lincoln Drive Modes allow the vehicle to seamlessly modify traction and steering response to adapt to varying road conditions.

The exterior greets guests with an exquisite sensory welcome, utilising approach detection and signature illuminated entry to project a beautiful sequential lighting display and a custom Lincoln logo welcome mat onto the ground.

This visual sophistication extends to the dynamic LED lighting and jeweled headlamps, which work in perfect harmony with the Lincoln Co-Pilot360 2.0 Vision safety suite.

This sophisticated protective ecosystem integrates a 360-degree camera, blind-spot detection, lane-keeping assist and intelligent adaptive cruise control to ensure high situational awareness and a relaxing

travel experience. Inside, the cabin opens up as a calm, curated sanctuary defined by a thoughtful horizontal architecture that emphasises physical space and airiness.

Hand-selected materials adorn the interior, beautifully accented by natural Paldao wood detailing and customisable ambient lighting.

Modern connectivity is anchored by the SYNC 4 infotainment system displayed on a crisp 13.3-inch touchscreen, while dual-zone climate control and a premium 10-speaker audio system establish a serene microclimate.

Complete with unique details like Symphonic Chimes and a panoramic Vista Roof, the Corsair creates a restorative retreat for those who appreciate fine luxury. Lincoln Oman invites all to visit the Lincoln showroom in Wattayah to explore the Signature Rewards programme in person.

SOHAR launches fourth edition of Maseer

SUHAR: SOHAR Port and Freezone launched its fourth edition of Maseer, its flagship summer program dedicated to equipping Omani youth from grades 5 to 11, with practical, future-ready skills through interactive workshops and project-based learning.

The programme, in collaboration with Kidsity, a national leader in youth education, will engage students from Suhar and Liwa throughout the months of July and August 2026. A strategic enhancement for this year is the introduction of a Ministry of Labour certificate for participants who complete the programme.

This formal accreditation links Maseer's learning outcomes to nationally recognised development pathways, strengthening the programme's value as a pathway to higher education and the workforce and supporting SOHAR's long-term talent development objectives. The fourth edition offers six focused workshops aligned with



The programme will engage students from Suhar and Liwa in July and August 2026.

the needs of the digital economy: Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation; Future Energy and Smart Technologies; Environmental Sustainability and Green Innovation; Smart Systems Engineering and

Arduino Programing; English Foundations for Academic Excellence (grades 5–8); and Academic English and Future Skills (grades 9–11).

The curriculum pairs hands-on projects and immersive learning with expert instruction to strengthen technical capability, creativity and problem-solving.

"Maseer continues to demonstrate sustainable impact by combining technology and sustainability education with real-world recognition," said Said al Balushi, Administration Government Relation Manager at SOHAR Port and Freezone. "This programme directly supports Oman Vision 2040 by developing an innovative, skilled youth workforce that contributes to the Sultanate's economic diversification."

"We are delighted to continue our partnership with SOHAR Port and Freezone to spark curiosity and ambition in young learners," said Abdulmajeed al Balushi, Managing Director of Kidsity Centre Suhar.

SHORTTAKES



General view of Aramco's oil field in the Empty Quarter, Shaybah, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

SAUDI WEIGHS RED SEA PIPELINE EXPANSION

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia is considering expanding the capacity of its East-West crude oil pipeline to the Red Sea by up to 2 million barrels per day (bpd), potentially allowing the kingdom and neighbouring Gulf producers to export more oil without relying on the Strait of Hormuz, sources familiar with the matter said.

The pipeline, built in the 1980s, has become strategically important following the disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz during the Iran conflict earlier this year. It currently carries up to 7 million bpd of crude from eastern Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Yanbu.

Sources said Saudi Arabia is holding preliminary discussions with neighbouring countries, including Kuwait, on expanding the system. One source said the project could also include a second, smaller pipeline dedicated to refined petroleum products.

The expansion, estimated at between 1 million and 2 million bpd, would require billions of dollars in investment and could take several years to complete, according to people familiar with the plans. The move comes as Gulf producers seek to strengthen alternative export routes after the conflict exposed the vulnerability of relying on the Strait of Hormuz. During the disruption, around 12 million bpd of Gulf oil production was affected before exports partially resumed following a preliminary US-Iran agreement.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Chief Executive Shaikh Nawaf al Sabah said last month the country was discussing with Saudi Arabia ways to expand pipeline infrastructure to accommodate Kuwaiti crude exports.

Analysts said the talks reflect a broader regional effort to improve energy security. "The recent talks about new pipeline corridors involving Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar reflect a broader strategic reality", said Zaid Belbagi, managing partner at Hardcastle Advisory. — Reuters

Oman launches research initiative to boost EOR

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 7

OMAN is stepping up its long-term strategy to maximise recovery from its mature oil fields through a new national research initiative focused on Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) technologies.

The initiative, announced earlier this week by the Research and Innovation Authority (RIA) in partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, underscores the growing importance of advanced extraction methods in sustaining the country's hydrocarbon output under Oman Vision 2040.

It sets out a comprehensive framework to fund and guide scientific research into technologies that can unlock significant remaining oil reserves trapped in complex and tight reservoirs across the Sultanate of Oman.

Titled "Technological Advancements in Enhanced Oil Recovery: A Framework for Maximising Hydrocarbon Recovery in Oman", the programme recognises that many of Oman's producing fields have entered a mature phase, where traditional primary and secondary recovery methods are no longer sufficient to maintain output levels. Officials said advancing EOR is now a "technical and economic necessity", rather than an optional strategy, as Oman seeks to optimise production from existing assets instead of relying solely on new discoveries.

The approach aligns with national priorities to improve resource efficiency, support



A key pillar of the programme is the evaluation of CO₂-based EOR, including its integration with CCUS systems.

fiscal stability and balance long-term decarbonisation objectives.

According to the Authority, Oman's geology presents both opportunity and challenge, with heavy oil reservoirs in the south and light oil in fractured carbonate formations in the north.

The initiative highlights that advanced techniques such as thermal injection, miscible gas injection and chemical EOR will be central to improving the ultimate recovery factor across fields.

A key pillar of the programme is the evaluation of CO₂-based EOR, including its integration with carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) systems.

The research framework will also explore the potential for coupling EOR operations with renewable energy sources, particularly solar thermal technologies, to reduce reliance on gas-fired steam generation and lower the carbon intensity of production.

Digital transformation is another core component, with the initiative calling for the development of machine learning models and real-time reservoir monitoring systems to optimise injection strategies and improve production forecasting. The use of artificial intelligence is expected to enhance operational efficiency and support more precise reservoir management.

The research programme also places strong emphasis on techno-economic evaluation, requiring studies to assess capital and operating costs, emissions reduction potential and overall economic viability under varying oil price scenarios.

Importantly, the initiative seeks to strengthen In-Country Value (ICV) by encouraging participation from Omani SMEs in supplying chemicals, sensors, maintenance services and other supporting technologies needed for advanced EOR deployment.

Officials noted that collaboration with industry stakeholders, including major operators such as PDO and OQ, will be essential in building a national EOR database and developing field-specific solutions tailored to Oman's diverse reservoir conditions.

The Authority said the programme will ultimately deliver a national roadmap for EOR deployment, identifying priority technologies, field applications and investment opportunities to support the next phase of Oman's upstream energy development.

Global LNG trade hits record in 2025

LONDON: Global trade in liquefied natural gas (LNG) reached a record high in 2025, driven by robust US exports and a sharp increase in European demand, although escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East threaten to slow growth this year, according to the International Gas Union (IGU).

The IGU said global LNG trade rose 6.3 per cent to 436.98 million tonnes last year, marking the fastest annual growth since 2022 as Europe increased purchases to replenish inventories and replace declining Russian gas supplies.

"The conflict in the Gulf has damaged LNG infrastructure, cast a shadow over the prospects for expansion projects in the region and created uncertainty for Asian buyers regarding flows and price increases",



A liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker is tugged towards a thermal power station in Futtsu, east of Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

IGU President Andrea Steger said in the report.

Europe recorded the largest increase in imports, with LNG purchases rising by 26.1 million tonnes to 126.2 million tonnes during the year. The Asia-Pacific region remained the world's largest LNG-importing market, receiving 168.7 million tonnes despite an

overall decline of 9.2 million tonnes. The fall was largely attributed to weaker demand in China and India.

China retained its position as the world's largest LNG importer, taking in 69.77 million tonnes, although imports fell by 8.9 million tonnes from the previous year as stronger domestic gas production and increased pipeline supplies from Russia reduced reliance on seaborne LNG.

Japan ranked as the second-largest importer with 67.37 million tonnes, while South Korea increased imports by 1.7 million tonnes to 48.67 million tonnes.

The report highlighted diverging trends across Asia, noting that while China's imports weakened, declining domestic production in parts of Southeast Asia increased

dependence on spot LNG cargoes.

The IGU warned that persistently high LNG prices could curb demand growth in emerging Asian economies, particularly across South and Southeast Asia, where affordability remains a key concern.

On the supply side, the United States retained its position as the world's largest LNG exporter, shipping 110.74 million tonnes in 2025. Qatar ranked second with exports of 81.51 million tonnes, followed closely by Australia with 80.32 million tonnes.

The IGU, which represents more than 130 organisations across over 90 per cent of the global gas market, said geopolitical developments and supply disruptions will remain key factors shaping LNG trade in the coming months. — Reuters

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

World Bank trims China outlook



The World Bank expects China's economic growth to slow to 4.4 per cent in 2026 and 4.3 per cent in 2027 as the property sector continues to adjust and consumer spending remains subdued.

The lender warned that a deeper downturn in real estate in China could further weaken investment and household demand, while maintaining that risks to the outlook remain broadly balanced. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold eases before Fed minutes



Gold prices edged lower as investors awaited the release of minutes from the US Federal Reserve's June policy meeting for clues on the future path of interest rates.

Spot gold fell 0.4 per cent to \$4,148.59 an ounce, while US futures slipped 0.2 per cent. Other precious metals like silver, platinum and palladium also declined in cautious trading. — Reuters

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil edges higher on outlook



Oil prices rose modestly as investors balanced stronger global supply against expectations for demand recovery. Brent crude gained 0.39 per cent to \$72.29 a barrel, while US crude rose 0.26 per cent to \$68.84.

Markets continued to monitor US-Iran talks, Gulf countries export recovery and an agreed production increase by OPEC and its allies beginning in August. — Reuters

OPINION

Wholesale and retail trade drive Oman’s logistics hub



ENG JASIM SAIF AL JADEEDI

The writer is Director of the Technical Office of the Under-Secretary of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

THE wholesale and retail trade sector continues to play a pivotal role in Oman's economic development, serving as one of the largest contributors to non-oil GDP and advancing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. As a key pillar of economic diversification, the sector connects manufacturers, importers, exporters, distributors, and consumers, ensuring the efficient movement of goods across domestic and international markets.

As one of the Oman most dynamic economic sectors, wholesale and retail trade makes a substantial contribution to commercial activity, private sector growth, employment generation, and supply chain resilience. It also plays a strategic role in supporting industrial development by improving market access for locally manufactured products and strengthening linkages between domestic production and global value chains.

According to the latest economic indicators released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the wholesale and retail trade sector recorded growth of 4.0% at current prices, increasing its contribution to RO 863.4 million during the first quarter of 2026 compared with the corresponding period of 2025.

At constant prices, which measure real economic growth by excluding inflationary effects, the sector expanded by 1.6% to reach

RO 801 million. These results demonstrate sustainable growth driven by higher commercial activity, stronger consumer demand, and improved market performance.

The sector also witnessed robust growth in investment. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increased by approximately 9.5%, reaching RO 302.4 million during the same period.

This reflects growing investor confidence in Oman's economy, supported by ongoing regulatory reforms, attractive investment incentives, strategic infrastructure development, and Oman stable and competitive business environment.

Another key indicator of the sector's strength is the continued expansion of re-export activities. Re-exports increased by 4.6% to reach RO 367 million during the first quarter of 2026, reinforcing Oman's strategic position as a regional trade, logistics, and distribution hub connecting markets across the GCC, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Transport equipment products were the primary driver of this growth, recording an exceptional increase of more than 120%, with re-export values reaching approximately RO 153 million. This remarkable performance highlights the increasing utilisation of Oman's world-class ports, integrated free zones, and advanced logistics infrastructure as regional gateways for international trade and supply chain operations.

The wholesale and retail trade sector also remains a significant source of employment

As one of the Oman most dynamic economic sectors, wholesale and retail trade makes a substantial contribution to commercial activity, private sector growth, employment generation, and supply chain resilience.

for Omani nationals. By the end of 2025, the number of Omanis employed in the sector had reached 67,316, demonstrating its important contribution to national workforce development and private sector employment.

Among them, 19,647 were employed in sales occupations, underscoring the sector's role in creating customer-facing career opportunities, enhancing national workforce participation, and supporting the localisation of commercial activities across Oman.

The sector's continued growth aligns closely with the government's efforts to strengthen Oman's competitiveness through the development of world-class logistics services, digital trade facilitation, customs modernisation, and investment-friendly policies.

Together, these initiatives are improving supply chain efficiency, reducing transaction costs, facilitating trade, and enhancing market accessibility for businesses operating in Oman.

Beyond its direct economic contribution, the wholesale and retail trade sector plays a vital role in supporting industrial expansion by providing efficient distribution networks for Omani products in domestic and international markets. It also contributes to strengthening food security, enhancing supply chain resilience, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation, and creating diverse employment opportunities across a wide range of commercial activities.

Memory giants install limited buffer against slump

ROBYN MAK

Memory chips may be in the midst of an historic if uncertain AI boom, but the risk of a painful downturn still looms. That may be why industry giants Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix are turning to multi-year contracts to help protect earnings.

It's prudent, given the South Korean duo's combined \$2.1 trillion long-term spending plans and broader warnings of faltering AI demand. Terms will matter, but such measures might only soften what may be a spectacular bust.

To appreciate just how severe the current shortage is in data storage chips, look no further than Samsung's second-quarter earnings. The \$1.3 trillion titan on Tuesday told investors that operating profit for the most recent quarter would probably hit nearly \$60 billion, an astonishing 19-fold surge from the same period last year.

That puts the company on track to deliver a more than 750% surge in full-year operating profit to \$243 billion. Cross-town rival SK Hynix looks likely to more than quintuple operating profit this year.

The shortage will probably last until at least the end of next year, when new capacity from Samsung and SK is expected to come online. By 2028, Samsung's average selling prices for dynamic random access memory, used in everything from data centre servers to PCs to smartphones, will more than halve, Bernstein analysts estimated last month.

Unlike in the previous market downturns, manufacturers are increasingly locking in customers with multi-year contracts. Details are not usually disclosed, but Micron executives recently revealed that many of these agreements are designed as "take-or-pay agreements".

These obligate customers to pay their annual volume commitments at a price within an agreed band whether they want the memory chips or not. Some agreements also include up-front cash deposits and other financial guarantees.

It's better than nothing. But these contracts seem unlikely to offer anywhere near full protection for chipmakers. Morningstar analyst Jing Jie Yu reckons most of these multi-year agreements only account for a fifth of total contract value and only span three years.

That means they will expire by 2028 when prices are expected to fall and the bulk of output is still exposed to market swings.

Moreover, Samsung and SK both recently announced massive long-term chip investment plans totalling \$2.1 trillion.

The pledges come as concerns over weakening investment appetite from US tech giants rise. Just last month, the Bank for International Settlements warned that disappointing AI returns could "turn the capex boom into a protracted investment bust".

Multi-year contracts leave memory chip giants only slightly less exposed. — Reuters

UK’s economic reckoning: Six PMs, same problem

THE resignation of Prime Minister Keir Starmer last week has reignited debate about Britain's political future. Yet the real story is not about one leader, one government or one political party. It is about an economy that has been struggling with the same underlying challenges for nearly two decades.

Markets appeared to understand this immediately. Sterling showed no dramatic collapse, government bond markets remained relatively calm, and investors avoided the panic often associated with major political upheaval. Their message was clear: Britain's problems are deeper than politics.

To understand the situation today, it is necessary to go back to the global financial crisis of 2008. Before that crisis, the British economy was growing by around 2.5 to 3 per cent annually. Public debt stood below 40 per cent of GDP, and labour productivity was increasing by roughly 2 per cent each year. Economic growth generated rising incomes, stronger public finances and greater fiscal flexibility.

The 2008 crisis changed that trajectory. Growth slowed significantly, productivity weakened, and the economy never fully regained its previous momentum. What followed was a series of economic shocks that gradually reduced the room for policy maneuver.

The first was a decade of austerity between 2010 and 2019. Governments succeeded in reducing budget deficits, but public services, local authorities and infrastructure investment came under increasing pressure.

The second was Brexit. Following the 2016 referendum, the United Kingdom formally left the European Union in 2020. While Brexit delivered greater control over national policies and regulations, it also introduced new trade frictions, labour shortages in some sectors and investment uncertainty.

Britain's Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that Brexit could leave long-term GDP around



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4 per cent lower than it otherwise might have been.

The third shock was the Covid-19 pandemic. To protect businesses and households, the government spent hundreds of billions of pounds through emergency support programs. As a result, public debt exceeded 100 per cent of GDP for the first time in decades.

Before the economy could fully recover, another challenge emerged. Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered an energy and inflation shock across Europe.

In October 2022, UK inflation reached 11.1 per cent, its highest level in more than forty years. To contain inflation, the Bank of England raised interest rates from 0.1 per cent to 5.25 per cent. Borrowing costs increased sharply for households, businesses and government alike.

Britain also became one of Ukraine's largest supporters. Since 2022, London has committed approximately £18 billion in military, humanitarian and economic assistance, including more than £13 billion in military support. In addition, the government has pledged around £3 billion annually in future military assistance and is moving towards defence spending equivalent to 2.5 per cent of GDP.

Individually, each of these developments was manageable. Together, they created a cumulative burden that is now shaping Britain's economic reality.

According to OECD forecasts, UK economic growth is expected to reach only 0.9 per cent in 2026 and 1.1 per cent in 2027. Public debt is approaching 95 per cent of GDP, while the fiscal deficit remains close to 5 per cent of GDP. The tax burden is at its highest level in around seventy years.

Meanwhile, waiting lists within the National Health Service exceed seven million cases.

Demographics are adding further pressure. Britain's population now exceeds 69 million people, while rising life expectancy is increasing demand for healthcare and pension spending. At the same time, around

nine million working-age adults remain economically inactive, limiting labour-market participation and constraining growth.

Yet behind all these statistics lies the most important issue of all: productivity.

Economists often describe productivity as the single most important driver of long-term prosperity. In simple terms, productivity measures how much economic value is created from each hour worked. When productivity rises, wages can increase, businesses become more competitive, tax revenues grow and living standards improve.

Britain's productivity problem has become its defining economic challenge.

Before 2008, productivity growth averaged close to 2 per cent annually. Today, it is barely moving. In the first quarter of 2026, labour productivity increased by only 0.4 per cent compared with a year earlier and stood just 2.6 per cent above its pre-pandemic level in 2019.

These numbers may appear small, but their implications are enormous. Weak productivity means slower wage growth, weaker tax revenues, lower business investment and reduced economic dynamism. It also explains why successive governments have struggled to meet public expectations despite higher spending and higher taxation.

This is the real reason why six prime ministers have found themselves confronting similar political difficulties. Britain is facing what could be called a productivity trap: healthcare costs are rising, defence spending is increasing, pension obligations are expanding, yet the economy is not generating growth quickly enough to support these demands comfortably.

However, writing off Britain would be a mistake.

The UK remains the world's sixth-largest economy. London is still one of the world's leading financial centres. The country hosts Europe's largest technology ecosystem, valued at more than \$1 trillion.

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ART/LIFE



BALDAT AL YEMEN REVIVING OLD COMMUNITY LIFE

> 20

ON SECOND **THOUGHT** LOOKING BEYOND WHAT WE CAN SEE



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

It is a scene I have witnessed more than once in shopping centre car parks.
A car pulls into a parking space reserved for persons with disabilities. The doors open and out steps what appears to be an ordinary family. The children laugh, run ahead and, to everyone watching, seem perfectly healthy.
Then come the whispers. “Why are they parking there?”*
“They don’t look disabled.”
It is a reminder of how quickly we judge what we do not understand. Not every disability is visible. And few conditions illustrate that better than autism.
Autism is called a spectrum for a reason. No two autistic people experience the world in exactly the same way. Some are highly verbal and live independently.
Others communicate differently or require significant support. That diversity is precisely why autism is so often misunderstood.

MY NEPHEW IS ONE OF THOSE CHILDREN.
At first glance, nothing tells strangers he is autistic. He is energetic, affectionate and happiest whenever he finds a swimming pool, the beach or any body of water. He laughs, plays and embraces life with boundless enthusiasm.
Only after spending time with him does his world begin to reveal itself.
He rarely makes eye contact. He does not respond when his name is called. He is non-verbal, yet he understands far more than he can express. He knows exactly what he wants, communicating in ways those closest to him have learned to recognise.
The World Health Organization estimates that around one in 127 people globally is autistic. In Oman, awareness has grown steadily, with the Ministry of Health introducing a national screening programme for autism and developmental disorders, alongside plans for a dedicated Autism Spectrum Disorder Care and Rehabilitation Centre.
Yet awareness has not always translated into understanding.
In the age of social media, children experiencing sensory overload are too often filmed without context. What looks to strangers like bad behaviour may, in reality, be a child overwhelmed by noise, bright lights or an environment they cannot process. For many autistic children, behaviour becomes the language they use when words are not available.

The same misunderstanding extends to disability parking spaces.
Autism is recognised as a disability, and many autistic individuals qualify for disability support even though nothing about them appears outwardly different. Invisible disabilities are no less real than visible ones.
Perhaps that is the lesson we all need to remember.
The next time you see someone using a PWD parking space or a child struggling in public, pause before making a judgement. You may only be witnessing a few seconds of a story that a family has spent years learning to navigate.
Sometimes, the kindest thing we can do is accept that not every disability can be seen.

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



CULTURE
Revellers sprint next to bulls during the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, Spain. The festival is best known for the Running of the Bulls. — Reuters



PREMIERE
British actor Robert Pattinson poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the world premiere of the film ‘The Odyssey’ in London. — AFP



FOLK DANCE
Dancers perform the traditional chotis, a Madrid folk dance, as tourists watch at Puerta del Sol square in Madrid, Spain. — Reuters

INSTA PICKS



Monsoon mist and vibrant green in Khareef Dhofar



Oriental Garden Lizard

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GEORGE CLOONEY’S CAREER TO BE CELEBRATED AT VENICE FILM FESTIVAL



Hollywood star and filmmaker George Clooney will be honoured with this year’s Venice Film Festival Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award, organisers announced on Monday.

Clooney, 65, is a Venice stalwart and made his first appearance at the film festival nearly three decades ago with “Out of Sight” in 1998.

The two-time Oscar-winner’s latest feature “Jay Kelly” premiered at Venice last year and he joined Brad Pitt on the festival’s red carpet for the world premiere of their movie “Wolfs” in 2024.

Clooney directed “Suburbicon”, “The Ides of March” and “Good Night, and Good Luck”, all launched at Venice and his other appearances include 2013’s festival opener “Gravity”, “The Men Who Stare at Goats” in 2009, “Burn After Reading” in 2008, “Michael Clayton” in 2007 and “Intolerable Cruelty” in 2003.

“I’ve had so many extraordinary moments in Venice. This festival is without question my favorite and to be given the Golden Lion is a tremendous honor.

It also probably means I’m old, but I’ll take it,” Clooney said in a statement shared by the festival.

Clooney, who shot to stardom with the hit 1990s medical drama series “ER”, married his wife, Amal, in a star-studded party in Venice in 2014.

“In his triple capacity as actor, director, and producer, George Clooney is a complete and charismatic artist, impassioned and original, who has transformed a deep vocation into one of the most luminous parabolas of contemporary film,” Venice Film Festival director Alberto Barbera said.

The 83rd edition of the Venice Film Festival will run from September 2 to 12, with the line-up announced later in July.

— Reuters



Dior unveils a garden-inspired couture dream in Paris.

DIOR’S COUTURE AFTER SWIFT WEDDING WIN



RIDING high after securing the bridal commission of the year - designing pop megastar Taylor Swift’s wedding dress - Dior creative director Jonathan Anderson sent shimmering, sheer gowns and pleated, sculptural handbags down the runway at the brand’s fall/winter haute couture show in Paris on Monday.

Christian Dior, a flagship label within luxury conglomerate LVMH’s empire, dressed both Swift and her husband Travis Kelce for their New York wedding on Friday, though photos of the outfits have yet to be released.

Front-row guests at the haute couture show, including actor Josh O’Connor, model Alexa Chung and film director Baz Luhrmann, cooled themselves with black bamboo fans that Dior sent with its invitations. The show took place in the gardens of the Rodin Museum as another heatwave hit France, with temperatures topping 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) and set to rise further.

Models emerged onto a black reflective catwalk dotted with large fern plants, and paraded looks including several constructed entirely of embroidered silk flowers,



exploring Anderson’s theme of nature and gardens. Inspired by the work of American sculptor Lynda Benglis, the collection featured four handbags created in collaboration with her. Pleats - a trademark of Benglis’ work - appeared in silk chiffon blouses, trousers, and jackets, while giant blue tulle fans were played across the front of a dress.

Anderson, previously creative director at Loewe, often works with artists and had previously featured Benglis’ sculptures in a show for the Spanish label in 2023.

Dior’s classic Bar jacket was reimagined in fern green tweed with a frayed fringe, or in grey houndstooth wool draped into a large bow, while another jacket was embroidered all over with white silk threads. Coats were also fluid and roomy, textured and fringed or featuring dramatic pleats and bows. The grey, white and silver colour palette was punctuated with vibrant greens and blues.

Bags inspired by Benglis were giant and sculptural, in metallic plissé, while shoes were decorated with floral embellishments or pleated metal bows.

Jewellery included pieces designed by artisans in Jaipur, India, according to the show notes.

— Reuters

FEATURES



AMAL AL RIYAMI

WHAT began as a modest community initiative in Baldat Al Yemen, in the Wilayat of Izki, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has grown into one of Oman's emerging heritage destinations, where tourism, culture and community life exist side by side without losing the spirit of an authentic Omani neighbourhood.

Located about 120 kilometres south-west of Muscat, the village has drawn increasing numbers of visitors seeking a slower, more genuine experience. Driven largely by local residents and community support, the project has revived the area while preserving the character that has defined it for generations.

Walking through Baldat Al Yemen feels like stepping into a living village rather than an open-air museum. Children weave through narrow alleyways, neighbours gather over coffee and cats lounge in shaded corners. Daily life continues much as it always has, making the area as much a home as it is a destination.

Instead of relying on extensive construction, the transformation has focused on thoughtful enhancements. Freshly painted facades, decorative window frames, lighting installations and inviting public spaces have breathed new life into the neighbourhood while respecting its heritage. Among its standout attractions is the Palm Shade Walkway, a scenic route bordered by farms and date palm groves that has become a favourite among visitors.

According to Omar al Bahlani, head of the team overseeing the initiative, infrastructure works have reached around 60 per cent completion, while aesthetic improvements currently stand at approximately 10 per cent.

"We are still in the early stages of the beautification phase and work is continuing to improve the visual landscape and add new aesthetic elements", Al Bahlani said.

Recent additions include cooling mist systems installed in service areas to improve visitor comfort during the summer.

Several major projects are also underway, including the reconstruction of a historic mosque to serve as a women's prayer facility and heritage landmark, the construction of public restrooms, expansion of agricultural roads linked to the main walkway and completion of a protective embankment to safeguard the nearby valley from soil erosion. Al Bahlani described the valley protection project as one of the area's largest ongoing developments.

The initiative has so far attracted investments of approximately RO 193,000, supported largely by Baldat Al Yemen residents and charitable contributors from Izki. Beyond financial donations, some residents contributed land for expansion, reflecting a strong spirit of community partnership. Government field visits have also helped create opportunities for tourism and commercial investment.

Today, the area features around 11



BALDAT AL YEMEN

REVIVING OLD COMMUNITY LIFE



Baldat Al Yemen in Izki is emerging as a unique heritage destination, where community-driven development, local businesses and authentic village life come together to preserve the spirit of old Oman.

businesses and attractions, including cafés, artisan shops and Souq Al Sikkah, one of its main visitor draws. The main walkway stretches nearly three kilometres, excluding secondary paths, with further extensions planned. Around 500 lighting poles and more than 200 trees have also been added as part of the beautification effort.

During national and religious holidays and festivals, visitor numbers climb into the tens of thousands, according to Al Bahlani.

Yet Baldat Al Yemen's greatest attraction lies beyond its restored buildings and landscaped walkways. It is the rare opportunity to experience a place where heritage is not staged but lived and where the warmth of community remains at the heart of everyday life.

