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OMAN'S TRADE SURPLUS RISES 37.2% TO OMR3.4BN BY MAY END


Indian Embassy celebrates Independence Day with grandeur
A4

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN
No oil spill impact on Masirah Island

1 The Environment Authority continues to carry out monitoring, follow-up and response operations regarding the oil pollution. The latest field results indicate that the extent of shorelines affected by pollution in the Ras Madrakah area is approximately 12km. >A2

OMAN
Tourism sector adds 2.9 percent to GDP

2 Oman's tourism sector continued to record positive growth indicators during the first quarter of 2026, with its contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices rose to 2.9%. >A3

MARKET
Sur Industrial City signs six contracts

3 Sur Industrial City, operating under the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has successfully signed six investment contracts. >B1

The merchandise imports rose marginally by 0.8 percent, reaching OMR7.22 billion, compared with OMR 7.20 billion during the same period last year

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's trade balance recorded a surplus of OMR3.4 billion by the end of May 2026, registering a 37.2 percent increase compared with OMR2.5 billion during the same period in 2025.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the total value of merchandise exports rose by 10.1 percent, reaching approximately OMR10.6 billion by the end of May 2026, compared with OMR 9.6 billion during the corresponding period of 2025.

The increase was supported primarily by higher oil and gas exports, whose value rose 8.4 percent to OMR6.8 billion, compared with OMR6.3 billion a year earlier.

Re-exports recorded the strongest growth, increasing by 64 percent to OMR 1 billion, up from OMR 623 million during the same period of 2025.

Meanwhile, Oman's non-oil exports increased by 1.5 percent to OMR2.74 billion, compared with OMR2.70 billion at the end of May 2025.

On the imports side, the value of merchandise imports rose marginally by 0.8 percent, reaching OMR 7.22 billion, compared with OMR 7.20 billion during the same period last year.

OMR10.6 BILLION **MERCHANDISE EXPORTS** BY THE END OF MAY

OMR6.8 BILLION **OIL AND GAS EXPORTS**

OMR2.74 BILLION **NON-OIL EXPORTS**

UAE REMAINED LEADING DESTINATION FOR **OMAN'S NON-OIL EXPORTS** WORTH OMR645 MILLION

SAUDI ARABIA RANKED SECOND WITH EXPORTS VALUED AT OMR283 MILLION

INDIA CAME THIRD WITH EXPORTS WORTH OMR280 MILLION

UAE leads non-oil export destinations

The United Arab Emirates remained the leading destination for Oman's non-oil exports, receiving goods worth OMR 645 million by the end of May 2026. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ranked second with exports valued at OMR 283 million, followed by India with OMR 280 million. >A5

STUDY

Tobacco use among Omani adolescents remains a concern

Times Exclusive

MUSCAT: Tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke remain concerns among young people in Oman, with a new study finding that 7.5% of male adolescents surveyed were current smokers and 17.6% had experimented with tobacco products.

Published in the Oman Medical Journal, the cross-sectional study surveyed 227 male students aged 14 to 21 from government schools in Sohar between January and March 2024. The researchers used a questionnaire based on the World Health Organization's Global Youth Tobacco Survey.

The study found that tobacco experimentation often started at the age of 14 or 15. More than 40% of participants said they had been exposed to secondhand smoke in both indoor and outdoor settings.

While awareness of tobacco-related health risks was relatively high, with 61.7% of students considering tobacco use probably or definitely harmful, misconceptions about secondhand smoke and the social acceptability of smoking persisted.

Social factors were also found to play a significant role. Peer smoking, exposure to smoking within families and perceptions of tobacco use in social settings were among the factors linked to greater susceptibility among adolescents.

The findings also showed stronger support for restrictions on smoking in enclosed public places than for bans in outdoor areas, highlighting the need to improve awareness of the risks of secondhand smoke in different environments.

The researchers recommended strengthening smoke-free policies in areas frequented by adolescents and introducing targeted prevention programmes, particularly for those aged 14 and 15. They also stressed the need to address peer pressure and family smoking habits alongside conventional awareness campaigns.

The study called for long-term research to track changes in tobacco-use patterns and evaluate prevention programmes. It also recommended expanding future studies to include female students, private schools and other regions of Oman.

The research, titled "Prevalence of Tobacco Use and Secondhand Smoke Among Omani Male Adolescents and the Sociodemographic Correlates: A Cross-sectional Study," was conducted by researchers from the National University of Science and Technology, Sultan Qaboos University, the Oman Medical Speciality Board and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

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39° MUSCAT

COMMENTARY

Maritime Liens under Oman's Maritime Law

Maritime trade involves shipowners, ports, seafarers, and suppliers, each with important rights and obligations. Oman's Maritime Law, issued under Royal Decree 19/2023, protects these interests through a framework for maritime liens, giving certain claims priority and allowing recovery directly against the ship.

Speaking exclusively to the Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Chairman of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, said that, "a maritime lien is a legal right that arises against the ship by operation of law.

It allows creditors, such as seafarers owed wages, port authorities owed fees, and parties entitled to compensation for marine accidents, or for damage to persons, goods, and luggage on board the ship, to recover the amounts owed to them from the ship itself." "The Law not only governs these liens but also establishes their order of priority. Judicial expenses, port and pilotage fees, loading fees, state taxes, and other specified claims rank first; followed by employment claims, maritime rescue amounts, general average losses, compensation for marine accidents or damage to persons, goods, and luggage, and claims arising from contracts made by the master outside the port of registration and necessary to complete the voyage. These liens attach to the ship regardless of who currently owns or operates it, except in cases where the owner lost possession through an unlawful act and the lien holder acted in bad faith," he said.

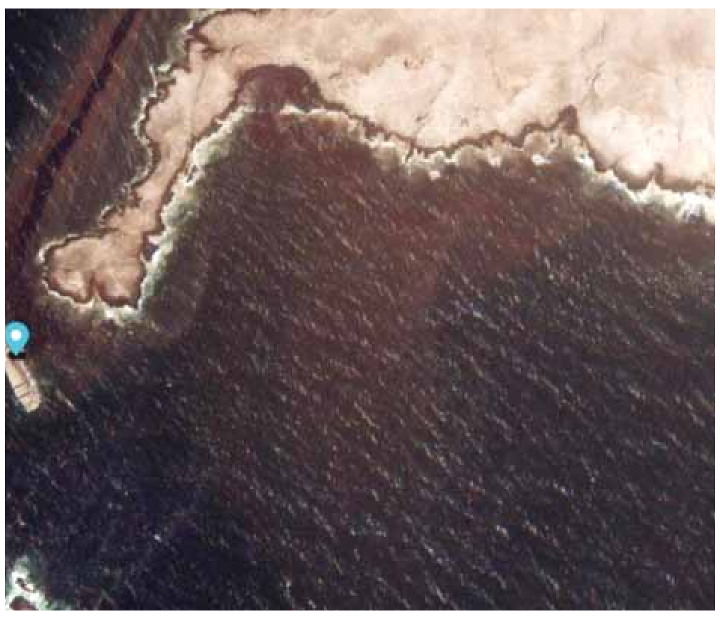
He further noted that, "the Law also requires creditors to act promptly. Maritime liens lapse by the passing of one year from the date they arise, subject to exceptions provided under the Law. A notable exception applies to contracts made by the master outside the ship's port of registration and necessary for the completion of the voyage, which are subject to a shorter limitation period of 180 days. Where the ship cannot be attached within the territorial sea of the Sultanate of Oman, the periods referred to above are extended to three years."

These strict limitation periods are designed to provide legal certainty, encourage the swift resolution of maritime disputes, and ensure that ships are not burdened by stale claims, thereby keeping them available for commercial operations, he concluded.

(Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm (info@mohammedibrahim.net), (+968 244 87 600) was established on 14th December 2006 and is serving clients through its offices in Muscat and Sohar, as well as operating on a request basis in other areas. It offers legal representation across a wide range of practice areas that include Labour Law, Corporate, Commercial, Contracts, Banking and Finance, International Trade, Foreign Investment, Insurance, Maritime Law, Construction and Engineering Contracts, International Arbitration, Intellectual Property and more).

Authorities continue to monitor oil pollution along Oman's coasts

The authority said field teams are currently working to address the affected areas, while no significant traces of pollution have been detected at other locations



MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) is continuing to monitor and respond to oil pollution along Oman's coastline, with the latest field assessments showing that about 12 kilometres of beaches in the Ras Madrakah area have been affected.

The authority said field teams are currently working to address the affected areas, while no significant traces of pollution have been detected at other locations.

Monitoring results also confirmed that the oil pollution has not reached the coasts of Masirah Island, including its southern areas, which lie within the potentially affected zone.

The oil slick observed at sea continues to move along its monitored path in the open waters southeast of Masirah towards the high seas.

Authorities are tracking its movement using updated monitoring data and models, taking into account changing marine and atmospheric conditions.

The Environment Authority, in coordination with relevant government agencies, is continuing field inspections, monitoring developments and implementing measures aimed at limiting environmental impacts and protecting Oman's marine and coastal ecosystems. As part of ongoing field efforts to address developments related to the oil spill, Maj. Gen Sulaiman Ali Al Husseini, Chairman of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and Head of the Hazardous Materials Handling Sector at the National Committee for Emergency Management, alongside Dr. Abdullah Ali Al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, conducted a field visit on Friday to the shorelines affected by the oil spill in Ras Madrakah area of the Wilayat of Duqm.

The visit aimed to follow up on the progress of operations to address the effects of the oil spill, assess the latest field developments and review the efforts and measures being taken to manage the impacts of the contamination, in a manner that ensures rapid response and effective coordination among the relevant authorities.

These efforts are being undertaken through joint cooperation and coordination among the relevant entities, under the umbrella of the National Committee for Emergency Management, with the aim of closely monitoring the field situation and implementing the necessary measures to contain the pollution's impact and safeguard the affected environment and coastal areas. -ONA

GROUNDED VESSEL

National efforts continue to contain oil spill from vessel

MUSCAT: Integrated national efforts continue to address the effects of the oil spill resulting from the grounded vessel incident off the Al Hallaniyat Islands, through the various sectors of the National Committee for Emergency Management, encompassing response, cleanup, monitoring, follow-up and ongoing environmental assessment.

The Committee's Hazardous Materials Handling Sector, represented by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and the Environment Authority, in coordination with the relevant entities, is intensifying its efforts to mitigate the impacts of the oil spill in Ras Madrakah area.

The Sector is deploying specialised personnel to the affected areas and those requiring heightened readiness, based on monitoring results and technical assessments, to carry out cleanup and follow-up operations.

On Masirah Island, monitoring, follow-up and readiness-enhancement activities continue as part of precautionary and proactive measures to address any potential developments related to the oil spill. Monitoring results to date confirm that the pollution has not reached the island's shores.

As part of efforts to strengthen field preparedness, specialised response mechanisms and equipment have been provided, in coordination and cooperation with the relevant authorities, to ensure rapid response to any potential developments.

Specialised teams continue to carry out monitoring and shoreline surveillance on the island, alongside tracking the movement of the spill and updating its projected trajectories based on available data and models, while continuing to take the necessary preventive measures to protect the marine and coastal environment of Masirah Island.

With regard to developments in the Essential Services Sector (Waste Management), Be'ah (Oman Environmental Services Holding Company) is implementing a number of measures to handle waste generated from shoreline cleanup operations.

Designated sites have been identified at Duqm engineered landfill to accommodate waste from shoreline cleanup activities, in coordination with the company's Industrial Hazardous Waste Section and the Environment Authority.

A dedicated site has also been designated at Masirah Island waste transfer station to receive such waste, which will subsequently be assessed by the competent section and disposed of through appropriate means.

Coordination has been undertaken with the Environment Authority to provide personnel and equipment to contribute to shoreline cleanup operations through the operating companies contracted with Be'ah, and work is currently underway to secure the required resources.

The Essential Services Sector (Water) has enhanced its readiness to address any potential impacts related to the grounded vessel incident off the Al Hallaniyat Islands, while maintaining ongoing follow-up and coordination with the Hazardous Materials Handling Sector.

In Ras Madrakah and Duqm, necessary tests are being conducted on a daily basis, and all results have shown that samples are safe and compliant with approved specifications. Field response teams remain present at their posts at full readiness to respond to any emergency, with contingency plans in place in the event of any impact.

In the Wilayat of Masirah, the Sector continues to raise its readiness to address any potential impacts through the implementation of a number of measures, including the preparation of coastal wells for use as an alternative water source in the event that the seawater intakes of the desalination plant are affected.

These efforts are part of the integrated national response framework for addressing developments related to the grounded vessel incident, monitoring affected areas and those at risk, and taking the necessary measures to limit the effects of the pollution and protect the marine and coastal environment. -ONA

MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Oman intensifies monitoring of fish amid oil pollution

MUSCAT: The Food Safety and Quality Centre is continuing field monitoring, investigation and control operations as part of ongoing efforts to assess developments related to oil pollution in Oman's marine environment.

The measures aim to determine the extent of the pollution's impact on fishing areas and verify the safety of fish and fish products available in the market.

As a precautionary measure, the center has intensified monitoring operations at fish landing sites, factories and fish markets, while tracking landing movements and the sources of catches.

The centre is also collecting fish samples for laboratory testing to assess their safety and ensure compliance with food safety requirements.

The measures aim to determine the extent of the pollution's impact on fishing areas

In addition, specialised technical teams have been formed to conduct field monitoring of coastal areas and fish landing sites in governorates along the Arabian Sea.

The measures are part of Oman's continued response to the marine oil pollution incident and efforts to safeguard public health, fisheries and the marine environment. -ONA

Tourism sector contributes 2.9% to Oman's GDP at current prices

Total tourism output reached OMR610.4 million by the end of the first quarter of this year, an increase of 9.7%

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's tourism sector continued to record positive growth indicators during the first quarter of 2026, with its contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) increasing, further strengthening its role as one of the key sectors supporting economic diversification and enhancing the contribution of non-oil activities to the national economy.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the tourism sector's contribution to GDP at current prices rose to 2.9% by the end of the first quarter of 2026, compared with 2.6% during the same period in 2025.

Direct tourism GDP increased to OMR293.8 million, recording a growth of 6.5%.

Total tourism output reached OMR610.4 million by the end of the first quarter of this year, an increase of 9.7%. Meanwhile, the sector's total direct gross value added rose to OMR286.4 million, registering growth of 6.6%.

The data indicated that the sector's contribution to economic activity continued to expand, supported by growth across most tourism-related activities.

Accommodation services recorded the largest share of total direct tourism value added at 24.8%, followed by travel agency and reservation services at 19.7%, transport services at 18.7%, and restaurant services at 18.3%. This reflects the diversification of growth sources within the sector and the benefits extending to economic activities associated with tourism.

At constant prices, direct tourism GDP reached OMR279.9 million, compared with OMR272.3 million during the same period last year, representing growth of 2.8%.

The sector's contribution remained at 2.9% of GDP, reflecting continued real growth alongside the increase recorded at current prices.

The results extend the upward trajectory witnessed by the tourism sector in recent years. Its contribution to GDP increased from 1.6% in 2020 and 2021, to 2% in 2022, 2.5% in 2023, and 2.7% in both 2024 and 2025, before reaching 2.9% by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

This reflects the sector's sustained growth and its expanding role among promising economic sectors.

The sector's performance is aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seek to increase tourism's contribution to GDP to 3.5% by 2030 and 5.3% by 2040, as part of Oman's efforts to diversify sources of income and enhance the contribution of high-value-added sectors to sustainable growth.

The tourism sector is expected to maintain its growth trajectory in the coming period by capitalising on growing demand for tourism experiences and attractions in Oman, which offers diverse natural, cultural and heritage assets and has the potential to attract more visitors from targeted markets.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is also continuing efforts to develop tourism services, improve the quality of visitor experiences and strengthen integration between the public and private sectors.

These efforts aim to increase tourism spending, extend visitors' stays, and support the creation of new employment and investment opportunities in the sector.

The Ministry's plans include diversifying tourism markets by promoting Oman's various attractions and targeting new markets alongside traditional ones, with the aim of increasing visitor numbers and stimulating tourism activity throughout the year.

The plans also include strengthening tourism promotion and development, as well as leveraging modern technologies and data to better understand visitor trends and market needs, supporting more effective decision-making and sustainable sector growth.

Azzan bin Qassim Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said the indicators recorded by the tourism sector during the first quarter of 2026 reflect the sector's continued gradual growth and the positive results of efforts to develop tourism assets, promote investment and diversify tourism products and experiences.

In a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA), His Excellency affirmed that the Ministry is proceeding with the implementation of its programmes and initiatives in partnership with various entities, contributing to enhancing the competitiveness of Oman's tourism destination, increasing the sector's contribution to GDP and achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, while supporting economic development across the governorates.

He added that the indicators recorded during the first quarter of this year further strengthen the position of tourism as an economic sector with a growing impact, given its links to a broad range of activities, including transport, accommodation, hospitality, travel and cultural services. This expands the scope of economic benefits, supports the growth of small and medium enterprises, and strengthens the private sector's contribution to development.

BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP

Omani-Pakistani Friendship Association celebrates Pakistan Independence Day

MUSCAT: The Omani Pakistani Friendship Association (OPFA) organised a distinguished gathering to commemorate Pakistan's Independence Day, celebrating the enduring bonds of friendship, goodwill, and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The event was attended by Senior Government Officials, Officials of the Embassy of Pakistan, members of the OPFA Board, and prominent members of the Pakistani community.

This event comes to provide an important platform to celebrate the shared values, cultural heritage, and historic relationships between Oman and Pakistan, while promoting greater cooperation, understanding, and meaningful engagement at the community and institutional levels.

Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Founder and President of the Oman Pakistan Friendship Association, expressed his sincere appreciation to the distinguished guests and reaffirmed OPFA's commitment to further strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two brotherly countries.

He also expressed his profound appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, for His Majesty's visionary leadership and continued commitment to fostering friendship, understanding, and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

He emphasised that such occasions provide an important platform to celebrate the shared values, cultural heritage, and historic relationship between the peoples of Oman and Pakistan, while promoting greater cooperation, understanding, and meaningful engagement at the community and institutional levels.

The Omani Pakistani Friendship Association continues serving as a bridge between the two nations and offers consistent support to initiatives that promote friendship, cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and stronger people-to-people relations.

Indian Embassy celebrates 80th Independence Day with grandeur

The ceremony began with a rendition of India's National Song, Vande Mataram, performed by students of Indian School Al Maabela

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated India's 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour and witnessed a grand community participation, as over thousand members of the Indian diaspora and friends of India gathered at the Embassy premises early this morning to mark the occasion. The ceremony commenced with a rendition of India's National Song, Vande Mataram, performed by students of Indian School Al Maabela, setting the tone for a morning of national pride and celebration.

India's Ambassador Prashant Pise unfurled the Indian Tricolour in the presence of community members and friends of India under the theme "Surya Path Tiranga", an initiative by the Government of India featuring a global digital relay of the Indian Tricolour as part of the Independence Day 2026 celebrations. Following the flag hoisting, the Ambassador addressed the gathering and shared key excerpts from the Hon'ble President of India's Address to the Nation, reflecting on India's remarkable journey and aspirations for the future.

A curated cultural programme showcasing the diverse talent enthralled the Indian community in Oman. The occasion also recognised the invaluable contribution of the Indian workforce in Oman, representing the diversity of India and symbolising the important role of the community in strengthening India-Oman ties.

In the run-up to the 80th Independence Day under the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign, the Embassy organised a Painting Competition, Quiz Competition and Bharat Ko Janiye (BKJ) Quiz, Photography Competition "India Through My Lens" and Phad Painting Workshop and "My India, My Story" initiative inspired by the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. The winners and outstanding participants were felicitated, while awards were also presented to students associated with the Science India Forum, as well as academic and other distinguished achievers from various streams across Indian schools in Oman. The celebrations brought together many faces of the Indian community, its young achievers, artists, students, media personalities, professionals and Indian workforce united by their shared pride for the nation and our journey.

As India looks ahead towards Viksit Bharat 2047, the Embassy of India, Muscat, joins all Indians in Oman and across the world in extending its warmest greetings and best wishes on this occasion of India's 80th Independence Day.

LOCAL CONTENT PROGRAMMES

117 companies benefit from Oman's CAA contracts

Times News Service

MUSCAT: About 117 companies have benefited from contracts and purchases under local content programmes implemented by Oman's Civil Aviation Authority, while small and medium enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 39 percent of total contracts and purchases, highlighting their growing role in supporting the national economy.

Hussain bin Salem Al Rahbi, Director General of Support Services at the Civil Aviation Authority, said the Authority is working to establish local content as a fundamental pillar for supporting the national economy and enhancing economic sustainability by empowering Omani companies and increasing their participation in projects and services related to the civil aviation sector.

Speaking to Oman News Agency, Al Rahbi said the increase in the number of companies benefiting from contracts and purchases demonstrates the effectiveness of the policies and initiatives adopted by the Authority to strengthen local content.

He said the Authority gives priority to increasing the participation of the national private sector by providing fair and competitive opportunities, incorporating local content requirements into contracts and procurement processes, and supporting knowledge transfer and the development of national capabilities.

These efforts, he added, contribute to improving the efficiency of the civil aviation sector and enhancing service quality, in line with national development objectives and efforts to strengthen the competitiveness of the Omani economy.

Supporting national companies

The Authority considers local content an important tool for supporting the national economy and developing domestic capabilities. It contributes to the growth and sustainability of national companies, creates employment opportunities for citizens, facilitates the transfer of knowledge, expertise and modern technologies, strengthens local supply chains and reduces dependence on foreign markets.

Local content also increases the private sector's contribution to gross domestic product and serves as an important pillar of economic and social sustainability by encouraging innovation and stimulating investment in strategic sectors. Within the civil aviation sector, local content is regarded as a key enabler of partnership between the Authority and the private sector, helping to develop services and improve their efficiency in accordance with best practices and approved standards.

Priority for qualified local firms

The Civil Aviation Authority said it is committed to adopting best practices that support local content by giving qualified local companies priority when tendering projects and bids.

The Authority also encourages the use of national products and services whenever they meet the required quality standards, while incorporating local content requirements into contracts and purchases.

SMEs are being encouraged to participate in a wider range of business activities, while the employment and qualification of national talent is included among the key criteria used to evaluate companies.

The Authority also provides training and development programmes to meet institutional requirements and strengthen the capabilities of local businesses.

According to the Authority, implementing local content policies provides national companies with broader opportunities to participate in projects and services, strengthening their business sustainability and contribution to economic development.

Enabling SMEs and local suppliers

The Authority is supporting local companies through several measures, including opening opportunities to compete for tenders, improving companies' operational and financial stability through contracts, facilitating knowledge and expertise transfer, and improving the quality of services in the civil aviation sector.

Other measures include empowering SMEs, encouraging local investment, building strategic partnerships, increasing reliance on local suppliers and developing national supply chains.

The Authority has also introduced facilities aimed at making it easier for local businesses to participate, including simplified registration and qualification procedures, transparent access to project and tender information, appropriate implementation timeframes and enhanced direct communication with suppliers.

It also encourages partnerships between Omani companies and international counterparts to expand local capabilities and facilitate the transfer of expertise.

The Civil Aviation Authority affirmed its continued commitment to implementing initiatives and policies that strengthen local content, support the private sector and contribute to the achievement of Oman's strategic economic and development objectives.

Indomie Noodles Wins Best Brand in Customer Experience Award in Instant Food

Indomie Noodles was felicitated with the 'Times of Oman Best Brand Award in Instant Food' at the Oman Best Brands Awards 2026.

The awards presentation was co-located with the Oman CX Forum 2026, held at Kempinski Hotel Muscat. The premier event brought together over 325 senior CX leaders, business professionals, and industry experts from across Oman.

A remarkable achievement for Indomie Noodles and Catering Solutions Trading LLC (CST). Winning the Times of Oman Best Brand in Customer Experience Award at the Oman CX Awards 2026 reflects not only Indomie's popularity but also CST's strong distribution network and customer-centric approach. With over 75% market share in Oman's noodles category, Indomie has established a dominant presence through consistent availability, quality, and consumer trust.

Originating in Indonesia in 1972, Indomie has grown into a global cultural icon, available across 80+ markets worldwide. Its success is built on affordability, strong distribution, and flavours adapted to local preferences.

Sourced from Pinehill Arabia Food Ltd in Saudi Arabia and PT Indofood CBP Sukses Makmur Tbk in Indonesia, Indomie benefits from a robust supply network. Together with CST's dedicated distribution efforts, the brand continues to combine global quality with local relevance, making it a trusted household name in Oman.

With a focus on quality, innovation, and evolving consumer preferences, Indomie continues to strengthen its position as a leading brand, meeting the changing needs of consumers while delivering a consistent experience across every serving.

The Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Awards are instituted by Times of Oman, in collaboration with Muscat Media Group, Gulf Leaders Circle and TEvents. They are presented to the leading brands that are ahead of the curve in meeting and exceeding the customers expectations. The winners are selected based on an extensive consumer survey conducted by the Times of Oman.

TRADE POSITION

UAE top re-export destination

< FROM A1

The UAE also topped the list of countries receiving Omani re-exports, with a total value of OMR 432.7 million.

Re-exports to the UAE were led by natural or cultured pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, precious metals and their products, jewellery and coins, valued at OMR 271.4 million.

This was followed by machinery, mechanical appliances, electrical equipment and parts thereof, valued at OMR 79.1 million.

Iran ranked second among re-export destinations, with goods valued at OMR 172.8 million. Food, beverages, liquids, tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes accounted for the largest share at OMR 83.5 million, followed by machinery, mechanical appliances, electrical equipment and parts at OMR 31.6 million.

Saudi Arabia ranked third, with re-exports valued at OMR 164.6 million. Vehicles, aircraft, ships and related transport equipment accounted for OMR 148.4 million, while miscellaneous goods and products were valued at OMR 4.6 million. Oman's re-exports to Hong Kong reached OMR 18.5 million. The largest category comprised optical, photographic, measuring, testing, medical and surgical instruments and devices, as well as watchmaking and musical instruments and their parts and accessories, valued at OMR 11 million. Pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, precious metals, jewellery and coins accounted for OMR 6 million.

Re-exports to Russia stood at OMR 16.2 million, led by antiques, collectors' pieces and works of art worth OMR 14.1 million, followed by machinery, mechanical appliances, electrical equipment and parts valued at OMR 1.7 million.

UAE remains Oman's largest import source

On the import side, the UAE remained Oman's largest trading partner, supplying merchandise worth OMR 1.9 billion by the end of May 2026.

China ranked second with imports valued at OMR 986 million, while Turkey ranked third with OMR 550 million.

The latest figures highlight the continued strength of Oman's external trade position, with export growth significantly outpacing the increase in imports during the first five months of 2026.

SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE

Traditional horse show highlights Omani heritage at Al-Ashkhara Forum 2026

Times News Service

AL-ASHKHARA: A traditional horse show was held in Al-Ashkhara district of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate as part of the Al-Ashkhara Forum 2026, drawing wide participation from horse owners and riders from several governorates across Oman, alongside visitors and tourists from abroad.

The event aimed to showcase Omani heritage in a living form while providing horsemen and traditional groups with an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and cultural practices before the public.

Organisers said such heritage events contribute to preserving Oman's traditions while enriching the visitor experience, stimulating local economic activity and supporting the development of tourism infrastructure in the region.

Organised by the Ajwaa Al-Ashkhara Forum Committee in cooperation with the Al-Asayel Equestrian Club, the event featured more than 100 horses and riders from Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and other wilayats in South Al Sharqiyah, as well as participants from North Al Sharqiyah.

The programme showcased a variety of equestrian skills, including horse riding, handling, racing, taming, tent pegging and other horsemanship displays.

Children and young riders also took part in the demonstrations, providing an opportunity for younger generations to engage with traditional equestrian practices and helping ensure that these skills are passed down through generations.

The event also featured traditional Omani arts, including Al-Razha, Al-Bar'a, Al-Azi and maritime arts, creating a cultural showcase combining horsemanship with Oman's rich artistic heritage.

The programme attracted a large audience, with spectators particularly welcoming the displays of horsemanship and athletic skills presented during the Al-Ardha race.

FRANCE

Top watchdog blocks social media ban for children

PARIS: France's highest constitutional authority on Friday struck down the ban on social media for children under 15.

The Constitutional Council ruled that the flagship policy of President Emmanuel Macron's second term infringed on freedom of expression.

"By prohibiting minors under the age of 15 from accessing certain online services, the law inherently requires every person, even an adult, to prove their age before accessing them," it said in its decision.

The Council is a review body that ensures laws comply with the Constitution.

Macron still wants social media ban for children

French lawmakers last month approved legislation that barred children under 15 from opening social media accounts from September 1. Beyond that, platforms would have until the start of 2027 to close children's existing accounts.

The law would also have banned the use of mobile phones in high schools and required social media platforms to introduce age-verification measures in accordance with France's privacy regulator.

The Council, however, found lawmakers had failed to set out clear rules on how people should prove their age and what limits should apply, meaning there were not enough legal safeguards in place.

Macron has instructed Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu to revise the bill to address the Constitutional Council's concerns, the Elysee Palace said. It added the president wanted the reform in place before France's 2027 presidential election.

Australia became the first country in the world to ban social media for under-16s in 2025. France was the first in Europe.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last month pledged to pursue an EU-wide social media ban for children following a recommendation by an expert group to restrict access for under-13s.

"Our children need time in the real world. Time to play, time to build friendships, time to make mistakes. Time to shape their own identity, their own personality, before an algorithm shapes them instead," von der Leyen told reporters in Brussels.

"This is not about whether children can access social media. It is about whether and when social media can access our children," she said.

A number of other countries have announced plans to consider similar bans, including Brazil, the UK, Canada, Norway and Denmark.

— DW

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OCHA STATEMENT

Physical obstacles impair aid delivery in West Bank: UN

UNITED NATIONS: Humanitarian partners warn that aid work is being delayed and restricted in the West Bank by a network of over 900 physical obstacles, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on Friday.

The obstacles, including checkpoints, gates, roadblocks and other restrictions, hinder humanitarian access and leave people in need underserved, said OCHA.

Partners have been unable to deliver critical supplies for a fourth day to three Palestinian families in a West Bank village affected by an Israeli settler blockade, said the office.

"Today (Friday), aid and municipal workers have been struggling to secure access to three Palestinian families in Qusra village of the Nablus governorate. These families have been trapped there since Tuesday, following the establishment of a settlement outpost next to their homes and the tightening of access restrictions in the area," it said.

Along with municipal workers, partners have been trying to deliver food, water, infant formula, medicines and hygiene items to those trapped inside. But these attempts have been unsuccessful, said OCHA.

The office said its partners reported that efforts to protect Palestinians have been ineffective. Settlers reportedly reinstalled a tent that Israeli forces had dismantled.

In the northern West Bank, OCHA said, the humanitarian situation remains particularly severe. Child protection partners have provided vital assistance, including psychosocial support, case management, and services for children with disabilities, to nearly 30,000 children and 15,000 adults since the start of this year. In Gaza, humanitarians are delivering vital aid despite persistent insecurity and restrictions, said OCHA.

Last week, the United Nations and its partners mobilised rapid support for people who had lost their shelters or were displaced again due to attacks, domestic fires and other incidents.

"In more than a dozen reported incidents, people were displaced and lost their belongings due to attacks, affecting nearly 290 households," OCHA said. "Two households were affected by domestic fires, often linked to unsafe cooking in shelters in the absence of proper energy sources."

— Xinhua

7.7 magnitude earthquake kills at least 38 in Indonesia's Flores region

The US Geological Survey said that the earthquake struck Indonesia's Flores region at 5:58am, with its epicentre located roughly 68km north-northwest of Ende city in East Nusa Tenggara province

JAKARTA: At least 38 people were killed after a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck eastern Indonesia on Saturday, triggering a tsunami warning that was later lifted, according to media report.

"Thirty-eight people have been confirmed dead, two were seriously injured, 11 sustained minor injuries, and approximately 2,000 people have evacuated on their own," Indonesian National Disaster Mitigation Agency chief Suharyanto said at a news conference, according to CBS News.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) said that the earthquake struck Indonesia's Flores region at 5:58 am (local time), with its epicentre located roughly 68 kilometres north-northwest of Ende city in East Nusa Tenggara province. Several aftershocks followed the initial quake.

Authorities initially issued a tsunami warning and urged coastal residents to move to higher ground. The warning was later lifted after Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency found no significant sea-level changes posing a threat to coastal communities.

The head of the Maumere Search and Rescue Agency, Fathur Rahman, said rescuers continued searching for two villagers believed to be buried under mud following a landslide triggered by the earthquake.

East Nusa Tenggara Police Chief Rudi Darmoko said the earthquake caused severe damage and collapsed buildings. Power outages in cities and villages disrupted communication and hampered search and rescue operations.

According to CBS News, Darmoko said, "We are continuing to collect reports of damage and casualties, but there are communication disruptions."

Landslides in Ende regency also cut off the Trans-Flores Highway, a roughly 700 km paved mountain road spanning Flores Island from Labuan Bajo to Larantuka.

Footage on local television showed patients being evacuated from several hospitals as a precaution. Hospital staff moved equipment, including beds, IV stands, and oxygen cylinders, outdoors and established temporary treatment areas.

The Indonesian National Disaster Management Agency deployed a helicopter to assist with logistics and emergency response operations, including possible evacuations.

The air support is considered crucial because East Nusa Tenggara consists of numerous islands, creating significant transportation and access challenges.

Around 2,000 villagers in Nagekeo regency also fled their homes and moved to temporary shelters, CBS News reported.

Video shared on social media from Maumere, the main town in Sikka Regency on Flores Island in eastern Indonesia, showed part of a building collapsing in a cloud of dust and rubble as people screamed and ran into the street.

"Many buildings here were damaged ... I saw that the waiting room at the Pelni port terminal in Maumere had collapsed," Yohanna Embu, a resident of Sikka, a regency within East Nusa Tenggara province, told AP.

Residents evacuated, tsunami warning lifted

The initial jolt was followed by a series of aftershocks in the same area, including one of magnitude 6.1.

BMKG issued a tsunami warning for part of East Nusa Tenggara, West Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi provinces, urging residents to stay away from beaches and riverbanks.

Before the tsunami warning was lifted, residents of Maumere on Flores Island were told to move to higher ground, according to AFP.

State television also showed hundreds of people evacuating in nearby Nagekeo regency.

Local TV footage showed a hospital in the district of Ende in East Nusa Tenggara Province moving patients outside.

Authorities assessing damage, casualties

The quake caused severe damage and collapsed buildings, causing power outages in cities and villages, severely hindering rescue operations.

"We are continuing to collect reports of damages and casualties, but there are communication disruptions," East Nusa Tenggara police chief Rudi Darmoko said.

Local television reports showed patients at several hospitals being evacuated from buildings as a precaution.

"Our students and nuns ran out in panic beneath a collapsing roof," Guidelbertus Tanga, rector of Ritapiret Seminary on Flores said. "At least one priest suffered a broken leg after jumping from the second floor of a building during the quake." **— Agencies**

CENTCOM

62 commercial vessels redirected

WASHINGTON, DC: The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Friday that its forces had redirected 62 commercial vessels, disabled three, and boarded two others while enforcing the US blockade against Iran in the Arabian Sea.

CENTCOM stated that the actions were taken to ensure compliance with the blockade.

"A US Sailor directs an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter during nighttime flight operations aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG 59) as the ship sails in the Arabian Sea and enforces the US blockade against Iran. As of Aug. 14, CENTCOM forces have redirected 62 commercial vessels, disabled 3 and boarded 2 to ensure compliance," CENTCOM said.

The development comes amid ongoing tensions between the US and Iran as both countries continue to stake claims of control over the Strait of Hormuz.

On Thursday, US War Secretary Pete Hegseth warned that the United States would continue its naval blockade on Iranian ports "indefinitely" and for as long as needed, as reported by Al Jazeera. Speaking to reporters in Panama City, Hegseth emphasised that the US Navy can keep the blockade in place by rotating ships in and out of the region as required.

"Indefinitely, the United States Navy can maintain a blockade like that because we'll rotate ships in and out, as we have, and we'll continue to," he said.

US President Donald Trump claimed that the United States exercised "total control" over the Strait of Hormuz and that he "will keep it" amid stalled negotiations with Iran regarding the reopening of the strategic conduit. Trump asserted, "The USA has total control over the Strait of Hormuz. I THINK WE WILL KEEP IT! Our Naval Blockade is being called, by everyone, 'A WALL OF STEEL,' and there is nothing Iran can do about it." **— ANI**

INTENSIVE AIRSTRIKES AND SHELLING

'Israel must halt this escalation': Lebanon Prime Minister condemns Israeli strikes

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and President Joseph Aoun on Saturday condemned Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon, while Qatar denounced "escalating violence" by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Salam condemned the Israeli escalation in Nabatieh, Ansar, Deir Zehrani, and neighbouring villages, saying the strikes were undermining efforts to stabilise the situation in southern Lebanon.

In a post on X, Salam said,"The Israeli escalation that the city of Nabatieh, the town of Ansar, Deir Zehrani, and the neighbouring villages have been witnessing since dawn today, accompanied by intensive airstrikes and shelling and the intimidation of residents in their homes, is a matter of utmost gravity and undermines efforts to stabilise the situation in the south."

Referring to the seven people killed in an Israeli airstrike on Ansar, Prime Minister Salam said they were not military targets.

"The seven martyrs of the Israeli airstrike on the town of Ansar are not 'military infrastructure,' nor are the children and women killed in it military targets," he said.

Seven people were killed

The condemnation came as at least seven people were killed and three others injured in an Israeli airstrike on a house near Ansar in southern Lebanon on Saturday, as Israel intensified overnight strikes on areas it said were linked to Hezbollah infrastructure. The Israeli military said the strikes were carried out in response to an action by Hezbollah against Israeli troops operating in the Ali al-Taher Ridge area, which the IDF described as part of a "Security Zone."

Heightened tensions

The strikes came amid heightened tensions along the Israel-Lebanon front, particularly on the southern side of Lebanon, with the IDF saying its operations are aimed at targeting Hezbollah's military infrastructure and preventing attacks on Israeli forces.

Salam said any military structures on Lebanese territory must be dealt with by the Lebanese state through its army and legitimate institutions.

"The responsibility for dealing with any military structures, if they exist on Lebanese territory, lies exclusively with the Lebanese state, through the Lebanese army and its legitimate institutions, and their existence does not grant Israel the right to violate Lebanese territory or endanger civilians," he said.

"Israel must halt this escalation. For the security of our people and their right to life on their land are not subject to negotiation or bargaining," Salam added.

In a post on X, President Aoun also condemned the ongoing Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon, particularly in the Nabatieh area and its surroundings.

Aoun said the strikes violated the Framework Agreement (signed on June 26), the work of the Military Coordination Group, and international laws protecting civilians, leading to the "martyrdom of an entire family from the town of Ansar."

Aoun considered the violations "a clear message to the negotiation track and to the American efforts aimed at implementing this agreement."

Meanwhile, Qatar condemned the escalation of alleged attacks by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, calling the "violence" against civilians a "violation of international law and legitimate international resolutions". **— ANI**

EXTENDED DEPLOYMENT

USS Abraham Lincoln to return to US after more than 250 days

WASHINGTON DC: The US aircraft carrier, USS Abraham Lincoln, is set to return to the United States after an extended deployment of more than 250 days, Acting US Navy Secretary Hung Cao said, as reports of low morale and mental health concerns among sailors aboard the aircraft carrier have drawn scrutiny from US Congress and families of the sailors.

Cao, in a statement on Friday, said the carrier had "crushed their deployment" and would return home soon as part of a planned rotation, while stressing that the safety and security of sailors and Marines remained the Navy's priority.

"The USS Abraham Lincoln crushed their deployment and will return home soon as part of a planned rotation. Details will come, but let me be clear: the safety and security of our Sailors and Marines always comes first. Mission accomplishment. Troop Welfare. This is how we lead," Cao said in the statement.

The carrier's prolonged deployment has come under scrutiny amid reports concerning the conditions faced by sailors aboard the ship.

According to CNN, reports of low morale and mental health concerns among sailors have raised questions from members of US Congress and families this week.

CNN reported that the Abraham Lincoln has been deployed for more than 250 days after being redirected to West Asia to support US operations in the war with Iran, which is now entering its sixth month. The carrier has not made a port call in more than 200 days.

Cao said that the Lincoln's deployment was extended because operational requirements demanded it, while acknowledging the difficulties associated with prolonged combat deployments.

"The Lincoln was extended because the mission demanded it. Deployments are hard. Combat operations make them harder. War is hell and normal routines are disrupted," he said.

He said prolonged deployments inevitably involve changes and uncertainty and that military leaders must balance operational requirements with the welfare of personnel.

"One of the hardest aspects about warfighting beyond knowingly placing our service members in harm's way is that even with the best planning and communication, change and uncertainty will always be in play. Our success depends on how we adapt," Cao added.

According to Cao, the carrier has spent 266 days deployed, including 200 days in a combat zone. During that period, the carrier conducted more than 10,000 sorties and dropped 1.5 million pounds of ordnance, he said.

He also said retention rates aboard the Abraham Lincoln were among the highest of all aircraft carriers.

At the same time, Cao acknowledged that a small number of mental health cases had been treated during the deployment, although he said there had been no loss of life.

"A small number of mental health cases were treated with no loss of life," Cao said.

He also said meal plans had been adjusted when fresh supplies were unavailable and that calls home had been restricted at times because of operational threats. **— ANI**

SPORTS

Padikkal's maiden century leads India's dominance against hosts

The new No.3 scored an unbeaten 131 while Rahul retired hurt on 77 as India ended the rain-hit opening day with 288 for 2 against Sri Lanka in Galle

GALLE: India ended their 20-Test wait for a century from No.3 on a dominant but rain-curtailed first day with Devdutt Padikkal coming back into the team with a commanding unbeaten 131 off 178 balls in the first Test against Sri Lanka.

When Padikkal brought up his century, at the other end was Shubman Gill, India's last centurion from No.3 and on the day the only wicket a bowler took, even though five men batted for India.

Yashasvi Jaiswal was run-out for 32 when he looked good for a big score, and KL Rahul retired hurt with a forearm cramp on 77 as India scored 288 runs on a day that was cut short to 73 overs thanks to two rain breaks.

What will worry Sri Lanka, who have lost each of their last five home Tests against India, is that there was turn available even though flatness was expected out of the track.

Especially in the second hour and towards the stump, spinners got appreciable turn, which might suggest it wasn't the early moisture at play. There was a good chance this could become the typical Galle turner towards the end of the Test.

When it all started, though, Gill won only his third toss in nine Tests as captain and sent Jaiswal and Rahul to bat on a proper beauty with no swing or seam available for the new ball.

At the stroke of the first hour, Sri Lanka benefitted from the only mode of dismissal that had seemed possible: a run-out. Rahul hit debutant off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha to deep mid-on and set off for what looked like an easy single but found Jaiswal on the ground as Nuwantha dived into him.

Jaiswal got up and set off, possibly cue for Rahul to keep going but stopped after one step. Both ended up at the non-striker's end, but Jaiswal didn't compete with Rahul to make it back first.

Wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella, making a comeback after three years, looked at his captain for any spirit-of-cricket doubts, and proceeded to claim a wicket that was rightfully theirs.

It brought in another comeback, Padikkal, who last played on a treacherous track in Perth two years ago and scored a 23-ball duck and a 71-ball 25.

Probably deserving the best conditions of this Test as law of averages, he hit a six and scored 21 by the time he faced 23 balls here.

This was also the time when the ball was doing a bit for the spinners, but he was assisted by the odd leg-side delivery, which he gracefully glanced away for fours.

At the other end, Padikkal's Karnataka team-mate Rahul used the method he has successfully employed to seamers against spin: play for the straight ball and don't follow with your hands the ones that turn.

Like Padikkal, he too charged Prabath Jayasuriya and hit him for a straight six. It did seem to be a plan to upset Sri Lanka's biggest threat, who also happens to be slow in the air, which allows the batter to step out of the crease.

It was the inaccurate Nuwantha who kept producing deliveries that looked like they could get wickets. In the 43rd over, he got some dip and turn to draw a bat-pad from Rahul, already on 52, but the ball fell to the left of short leg.

In the 46th, he drew an outside edge from Padikkal on forward-defence but it didn't carry to slip. Overall he drew the most false shots - 18 - but was also inconsistent, which kept releasing the pressure as he went for 98 in his 21 overs.

Padikkal was always ready and willing to cash in on errors in length, comfortably out-pacing the more classic Rahul. A cramp in the arm towards tea possibly made Rahul get more urgent with the scoring as he took 13 off the last nine balls he faced in the session.

Rahul tried to resume post tea, but struggled to even hold the bat properly. He was replaced by someone who tends to struggle with cramps, but Gill didn't last long enough to test that aspect of his fitness.

He continued with what seemed like a plan to charge and attack Jayasuriya but was beaten in the flight and holed out to deep mid-off for 16. Not before he had unfurled two sumptuous cover-drives and seen Padikkal get his maiden Test hundred. A second rain break left Padikkal and Rishabh Pant a possibly tricky 40 minutes to play out. They ended up adding 48 runs in those thanks to the poor length control from the spinners.

Brief scores: India 288/2 (Padikkal 131*, Rahul 77*) vs Sri Lanka. - Agencies

FIRST TEST IN DARWIN

Bangladesh eye victory against mighty Australia

DARWIN: Four Australian wickets, including two more for Hasan Mahmud, in the second half of the third day kept Bangladesh on course for a famous victory in Darwin. Australia finished on 161 for 4 at stumps on day three of the first Test on Saturday, still trailing by 67 runs, with Cameron Green and Alex Carey carrying their hopes of a turnaround.

Green was unbeaten on 43 off 86 balls while Carey gave him company on 19 off 50 balls. A huge moment came midway through the final session when Australia lost Steven Smith, chipping a catch to Mehidy Hasan Miraz who had earlier helped Bangladesh extend their first innings to 426, a lead of 228.

Australia had lost both their openers quickly when they finally got to bat on the third day. Jake Weatherald fell for a third-ball duck when he was cramped for room by Mahmud and chopped into his stumps, heaping further pressure on his position at the top of the order. Travis Head did a similar thing to the same bowler for 17, before curiously placing the bail back in the groove after he was bowled.

Marnus Labuschagne scratched around for an hour and a half until he played across a full delivery from left-arm spinner Taijul Islam. He struck two fours in his 59-ball stay but hardly looked convincing. There had been a big lbw appeal first ball, although it was missing leg stump, and Bangladesh reviewed when Labuschagne padded up to Taskin Ahmed but it was going over.

Smith, who had top-scored with 71 in the first innings, tried to take the attack back to Bangladesh, but they remained patient in their approach. They were unlucky when a Taskin delivery brushed Green's leg stump off the inside edge, but the bails didn't dislodge, much to everyone's dismay.

Then came the big wicket. Mehidy, delivering the ball from considerably behind the popping crease, got Smith to poke one back at him. Mehidy swallowed a fine return catch, and the Bangladesh fielders ran wild around him. At that point, Australia were still 106 runs adrift but Green and Carey carried them to the close without further damage.

Bangladesh had earlier batted through 138 overs in their first innings, including seeing out the first session of the third day to pile on the agony for Australia.

Mehidy kept the visitors' tail together for 52.3 overs, himself making 65. He had been the only batter with substantial runs ahead of the Test after he made a century in the warm-up match against the CA XI. Mehidy reached his tenth Test fifty from 117 balls and signed off the opening session by hooking Green for six.

Australia didn't help themselves by dropping five catches in total, though, including two in a Pat Cummins over towards the end of the first session - Smith went first, dropping a sitter at deep-backward square-leg off Taskin, and Mehidy was then let off by Head, a much tougher opportunity running back from midwicket.

Mehidy farmed the strike during his partnerships with Mahmud, Taskin and Taijul but his teammates provided excellent support.

Mahmud batted out 92 balls, while Taijul struck Josh Hazlewood for a six in his 23-ball 17. Taskin batted for an hour and 42 minutes for his unbeaten 14. Hazlewood took the wickets of Mehidy and Ebadot Hossain in quick succession after the lunch break to move past 300 in Tests, becoming the ninth Australian bowler to do so.

Brief scores: Australia 198 and 161/4 (Green 43*, Carey 19*) trail Bangladesh 426 (Tanzid 101, Shanto 84, Mehidy 65, Hazlewood 6-89) by 67 runs - Agencies

AGAINST BANGLADESH

Australia still 'thinking of win' despite on the back foot

DARWIN: Australia still believe they can find a route to victory in Darwin despite being significantly behind Bangladesh at the end of day three.

The home side was four wickets down in the second innings and trailed by 67 at stumps, with Cameron Green and Alex Carey having nursed them to the close with a stand of 39 that will need to swell considerably on Sunday if Australia are to forge a remarkable recovery.

"Once we tick those [runs] off, hopefully we're still four down and you can start to build the pressure," Josh Hazlewood said, on the day he joined the 300-wicket club. "I'm not sure how the wicket will play. Obviously we haven't played much in Test cricket [here].

"It was showing a little bit of signs of up and down. If we can bat deep into tomorrow and potentially even the whole day maybe, there's always opportunities to take 10 wickets on the final day if the wicket is a little bit up and down.

"So [the] win is still definitely in our mind, and always is pretty much. So we'll look to do whatever we can to move towards that."

To win, they would have to overturn their highest first-innings deficit at home of 228 - the previous was the 206 they trailed by against Pakistan at the SCG in 2010 - while there have only been two larger ones anywhere.

The biggest deficit Australia successfully overcame was when they turned trailing by 291 against Sri Lanka in Colombo in 1992 into a 16-run victory, defending a target of 181 in what is a likely model of how they would have to do it in Darwin. That game was famous for the first match-winning impact Shane Warne had in his Test career.

"You definitely need luck in cricket, that's for sure," Hazlewood said. "I think his intent has been good. He's looked to score from the outset. I thought even in the first innings, it was probably just summing up the situation more so in that time, just before whatever break it was.

"I think he's shown good intent from ball one in both innings. [He] looked to score, put the pressure back on the bowler. Yeah, a little bit of luck goes a long way sometimes. So you never know.

Bangladesh all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who followed his half-century with the massive wicket of Steve Smith, was confident the visitors could keep the target small, though he acknowledged the opening session of the four day would be vital.

"We are playing on a good wicket so all we want to do is bowl in the right areas," he said. "We have to work hard for each wicket. We had to do a lot to get those four wickets today. We are trying to give away as few runs as possible. If we can take at least three or four wickets within these [67] runs, then we won't have a difficult target coming up.

"We want to give them as few runs as possible. They have a lot of good batters still remaining so getting at least three more wickets is our first priority. I don't want to predict the future, but we must own the first session on day four." - Agencies

CORPORATE PRELOADED CARD

Reinforcing this approach, Sohar Islamic has launched its new Corporate Preloaded Card, offering businesses and public sector institutions a secure and structured way to manage spending across day-to-day operations.

MSX INDEX REACHES ITS BEST

The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded its best level in four weeks at the end of trading session on Thursday, exceeding the 7,500-point mark amid several positive indicators.

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

Net profits of MSX-listed insurance and takaful firms exceed OMR20mn

MUSCAT: The net profits of insurance and takaful companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose in the first half of this year to OMR20.9 million, recording a growth of 5 percent compared to the same period last year, which amounted to OMR19.9 million.

The financial results indicated an improvement in the performance of most listed companies, while 3 companies recorded a decline in their net profits. Liva Group topped the list with net profits of OMR4.4 million, but at the same time it recorded a decline from the profits it recorded in the first half of last year, which exceeded OMR8.8 million.

Dhofar Insurance Company recorded a net profit increase of approximately 55 percent, rising from OMR2.6 million to OMR4 million. Oman Reinsurance Company also recorded a growth of 49.5 percent in its net profit, which rose from OMR2.2 million to OMR3.3 million. Oman United Insurance Company recorded a remarkable growth in its net profit, which rose from 991,000 to OMR3.2 million.

The net profit of the Omani Qatari Insurance Company increased from OMR1.8 million to OMR2.7 million, and the net profit of Al Madina Takaful Company increased from 813,000 to OMR1.629 million.

The sector's profits were affected by the decline in net profits of Arab Falcon Insurance Company, which fell from OMR1.53 million to 491,000, and the decline in profits of Takaful Oman Insurance from OMR1.17 million to OMR1.669, recording the lowest level of net profits among insurance and takaful companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Insurance and Takaful companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange confirmed in reports submitted to their shareholders the improvement in the overall performance of the sector, expecting continued growth in the second half of this year. However, they pointed to several challenges facing the sector, including the rise in claims, especially in the property and vehicle insurance branches, explaining that this rise put pressure on profits during the first half of this year.

The companies are working to reduce the impact of these challenges by working to enhance overall performance, intensifying its efforts to develop its business, increasing investment returns, focusing on developing claims management, enhancing underwriting discipline, and improving the quality of the insurance portfolio. They are also continuing to diversify its business areas to maintain its competitiveness in light of the many challenges facing the sector resulting from climate change and geopolitical conditions and the pressures they place on the sector's performance.

The improvement witnessed by the sector was reflected in the market value of insurance and takaful companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, which rose at the end of last June to OMR334.9 million, compared to OMR306.4 million in December 2025, recording market gains of OMR28.5 million. Liva Group topped the list with a market value of OMR143.4 million, Dhofar Insurance came in second with a market value of OMR39.5 million, while Oman United Insurance came in third with a market value of OMR36.1 million, Oman Qatar Insurance came in fourth with a market value of OMR29.6 million, and Oman Reinsurance came in fifth with a market value of OMR28.1 million.

At the level of stock prices, Dhofar Insurance shares recorded the highest rise, increasing by 103 baisa from 237 baisa in December to 340 baisa in June. Liva Group shares rose by 30 baisa to close at the end of June at 360 baisa. Al Madina Takaful shares rose from 96 baisa to 121 baisa. Oman United Insurance shares rose from 339 baisa to 344 baisa. Arab Falcon Insurance shares rose from 135 baisa to 140 baisa. Takaful Oman Insurance shares rose from 60 baisa to 64 baisa. Oman Reinsurance shares remained stable at their previous level of 85 baisa. Oman Qatar Insurance shares recorded a decline from 192 baisa to 184 baisa. Muscat Insurance shares declined from 790 baisa to 580 baisa. -ONA

Sur Industrial City signs six contracts worth over OMR56mn

Covering a total area of more than 60,000 sqm, these newly secured projects span a diverse range of key sectors, including tourism, energy, gas, telecommunications, and food production

MUSCAT: Sur Industrial City, operating under the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has successfully signed six investment contracts during the first half of 2026 with a total investment value exceeding OMR56 million.

Covering a total area of more than 60,000 sqm, these newly secured projects span a diverse range of key sectors, including tourism, energy, gas, telecommunications, and food production.

Eng. Nasser bin Hamoud Al Mabsali, Director General of Sur Industrial City, stated that the total cumulative investment in the city rose to OMR2.3 billion by the end of the first half of 2026. The city currently employs 1,843 workers, of which 1,076 are Omani nationals. "Madayn is preparing to implement a lineup of key future projects in Sur Industrial City. These developments include the maintenance of Wadi Crossing No. 6, extending irrigation water to the Green Belt area in the city, and the infrastructure development for the ship docking area dedicated to shipbuilding and maintenance industry," Al Mabsali pointed out.

Al Mabsali informed that the first half of 2026 saw the completion of detailed designs for the ship docking facility, along with the general and detailed design for the city's master plan. Trial operations also began at the 'Sur-1' solar power plant. "Aligning with Oman Vision 2040, the city remains focused on building strong infrastructure, attracting investments, and supporting economic diversification. As part of Madayn's efforts to strengthen institutional performance and support sustainable growth, the city recently launched the Institutional Excellence Competition. Meanwhile, Sur Industrial City is preparing to unveil investment opportunities across training, medical, quarry operations, and labour accommodation sectors," he added. -ONA

REVIEW OF BANK'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Sohar International's MSX discussion session reinforces growth strategy

MUSCAT: Sohar International held a Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) discussion session on 10 August 2026, reaffirming its commitment to transparent dialogue with shareholders and the larger investment community.

Organised in coordination with the MSX and conducted virtually, the session brought together shareholders, analysts, and market participants.

The session included a review of the bank's financial performance for the six months ended 30 June 2026 and outlined strategic priorities for the period ahead in the context of the current economic environment as well as current and evolving risks and opportunities. The presentation and interactive Q&A session featured Abdulwahid Al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer, Craig Bell, Chief Financial Officer and Fahad Al Zadjali, Chief Islamic Banking Officer.

Commenting on the session, Abdulwahid Al Murshidi said: "This session is part of how we build trust through transparency. Beyond the numbers, it's about showing investors the thinking behind our decisions and how we are positioning the bank for the next phase of growth. We are managing the business with discipline across capital, risk, and opportunity, while investing in digital, people, and customer experience. Our focus remains on delivering sustainable value to shareholders and playing a constructive role in the development of Oman's financial sector in line with Oman Vision 2040."

To ensure broad access, the session was delivered via a digital platform. The format supported real-time questions and direct interaction with senior management, underscoring Sohar International's approach to open and consistent stakeholder engagement. Discussion covered key financial performance metrics across profitability, credit risk, funding & liquidity and capital.

As the bank continues to strengthen its institutional capabilities, it remains focused on sustaining performance momentum and capturing opportunities in an evolving financial landscape. Through disciplined execution and alignment with national priorities, Sohar International continues to support Oman's economic growth and contribute to the resilience of the banking sector.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

'India was, is and will be one of fastest-growing economies'

NEW DELHI: India has demonstrated economic resilience through successive global and domestic challenges and will continue to be among the world's fastest-growing economies, SBI Research said in a special report marking the country's 80th Independence Day, pointing to strong growth, rising credit and deposits, robust corporate performance and an improving monsoon outlook.

"India was. India is. And India will continue to be one of the fastest-growing economies in the world," SBI Research said, while describing the country's macroeconomic story as one of resilience despite elevated global uncertainties.

SBI recently projected real GDP growth at 8 per cent in the first quarter of FY27. It said credit demand remained strong, with credit growth at 19.3 per cent for the fortnight ended July 31, while bank deposit growth rose to 15.4 per cent.

The research also highlighted the impact of foreign currency inflows under the special FCNR(B) deposit mobilisation scheme. As of August 13, FCNR(B) deposits mobilised stood at USD 52.3 billion, while total mobilisation, including overseas foreign currency bonds and external commercial borrowings, reached USD 56.8 billion.

Even after the scheme's one-month truncation, SBI Research expects FCNR(B) mobilisation to reach USD 65-70 billion by its end, with total mobilisation including OFCBs and ECBs potentially reaching USD 80-85 billion. It said the RBI had recouped around USD 31 billion in foreign currency assets as of August 7.

The report said the stronger deposit and foreign-currency funding position could also support the government securities market, with the 3-7 year segment likely to benefit most from lower supply pressure and maturity matching, followed by the 7-10 year segment.

SBI Research also pointed to a reversal in foreign portfolio investor flows following measures announced by the RBI and government. Among 2,257 listed non-BFSI companies, net sales, EBITDA and profit after tax grew 24 per cent, 9 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, in Q1 FY27.

The rural outlook has also improved. The nationwide monsoon deficit narrowed to around 13 per cent in July and the deficit in June was partly offset by surplus rainfall in July and normal rains in August. -ANI

Muscat Stock Exchange index reaches its best level in 4 weeks

The index rose 140 points during the week and closed at 7,508 points, recording its best level since July 15

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded its best level in four weeks at the end of trading session on Thursday, exceeding the 7,500-point mark amid several positive indicators. In addition, several companies also announced the distribution of interim dividends to their shareholders during the coming weeks.

The index rose 140 points during the week and closed at 7,508 points, recording its best level since July 15. Sectoral indices recorded a collective rise, led by the financial sector index, which rose 190 points and closed above 13,150 points. The industrial sector index rose 75 points and closed at 9,517 points. The services sector index climbed to the 3,000-point level, recording a weekly increase of about 2 percent, equivalent to 57 points. The Sharia index recorded an increase of 12 points and closed to near the 600-point level.

The Muscat Stock Exchange benefited from the positive atmosphere following the completion of the announcement of the financial results for the first half of this year. Also, the announcement of distribution of profits to their shareholders during the coming period by OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), Asyad Shipping and Pearl Real Estate Investment Fund also lifted the sentiments on MSX.

While investors are waiting for the determination of the distribution date of Al Anqa Energy, which announced last month that it intends to distribute special cash dividends of 81 baisa per share after completing the refinancing of existing financing facilities through local banks. The company noted that it is working on auditing the financial statements for the period ending on June 30, and will then call for a meeting of the Ordinary General Assembly to consider this proposal after obtaining the necessary approvals.

This atmosphere boosted further the optimism in the week's trading, leading to a rise in the shares of many leading companies such as Abraj Energy Services, Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), OQ Exploration and Production, Al Anqa Energy, National Bank of Oman, Omantel, OQ Basic Industries, Al Jazeera Steel Industries, Bank Sohar International, and many other shares whose gains were reflected in the stock exchange indices and supported the atmosphere of optimism.

During the week, the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded gains in its market capitalisation estimated at OMR360.7 million, concluding trading at OMR38.18 billion.

The week also saw a 7 percent decline in trading value, which fell to about OMR246.1 million compared to OMR264.5 million in the week before. The Muscat Stock Exchange also recorded a 6.2 percent decline in the number of transactions executed which fell to 41,760 during the week compared to more than 44,000 in the previous week.

Bank Sohar International topped the list of most traded companies in terms of trading value, with trades worth OMR50.5 million, representing 20.5 percent of the total trading value. Bank Muscat came in second with trades worth OMR42.3 million, OQ Basic Industries came in third with trades worth OMR37.1 million, Omantel came in fourth with trades worth OMR32 million, and OQ Exploration and Production came in fifth with trades worth OMR30.2 million, representing 12.2 percent of the total trading value.

During the week MSX saw the rise in the prices of 37 securities, most notably Oman Packaging, whose share rose by 10 percent and closed at 220 baisa, Abraj Energy Services, whose share rose by 9.9 percent and closed at 398 baisa, Ominvest, whose share rose to 425 baisa, an increase of 8.9 percent, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, whose share rose by 7.6 percent and closed at 140 baisa, National Detergents, whose share rose to 650 baisa, recording an increase of 4.6 percent, and OQ Exploration and Production, whose share rose by 4.4 percent and closed at 470 baisa.

In contrast, MSX also saw a decline in the prices of 34 securities, most notably Oman Finance Free Bonds 2022, which fell by 13 percent and closed at 87 baisa. Al Madina Investment Holding shares fell by 11.4 percent and closed at 62 baisa, Sohar Power shares fell to 220 baisa, recording a decline of 9 percent. Takaful Oman Insurance shares fell by 4.7 percent and closed at 60 baisa, and Al Sharqiyah Desalination shares also recorded a decline of 4.7 percent and closed at 161 baisa.

RISING SUMMER TREND

Industrial tourism redefines China's summer family getaways

SHENYANG: On a sweltering summer day, Zhao Mingyu stepped into the air-conditioned workshop of BMW Brilliance's production base in northeast China's Shenyang, where yellow robotic arms moved in rhythmic motion, flipping and welding components as sleek car bodies took shape.

A recent high school graduate, Zhao walked along a fully enclosed viewing corridor through the smart workshop, observing four core manufacturing processes: stamping, body assembly, painting and final assembly.

"I used to think cars were mostly assembled by workers piece by piece. But seeing so many robots working together with such precision really got me thinking about studying mechanical engineering or artificial intelligence in college," Zhao said.

This summer, BMW Brilliance, the German automaker's joint venture in China, opened its plants in Shenyang, capital city of Liaoning Province, for free factory tours for national college and high school entrance exam takers.

For people like Zhao, their exam admission certificates became passes to the cutting-edge smart manufacturing workshops at BMW Brilliance, the largest production base operated by the BMW Group globally.

His visit is part of a rising summer trend, in which Chinese families are trading traditional sightseeing spots for immersive industrial tours to escape the heat while gaining new knowledge and insights.

As schools across China closed for the summer, a two-month travel rush took off. Statistics from Tongcheng Travel, one of China's leading online travel agencies, show that families and students remained the two dominant traveler groups this summer.

Known as one of the country's oldest industrial bases, Shenyang has seen a boom in industrial tourism, driven by its modern factories and renovated industrial heritage sites.

BMW Brilliance's plant in the Tiexi District of Shenyang is now a signature attraction for travel in Liaoning, having hosted more than 140,000 visitors since 2017, when it became China's first automobile manufacturing plant approved as a national 4A-rated tourist attraction, just below the highest 5A rating.

A Coca-Cola production workshop at COFCO Coca-Cola World in Tiexi District is another of the city's landmark tourist sites. Behind a panoramic glass viewing corridor, visitors can watch beverage bottles speed through a fully automated production line. Filling, capping, coding, labeling and packaging are completed in minutes, with robotic arms stacking finished products neatly.

Liu Zihan, a 10-year-old primary school student from Shenyang, stood on tiptoes to watch this production scene, curious to learn more about how the popular bottled beverage is processed and packaged before leaving the factory. His father filmed the automated operations while explaining to him how carbon dioxide is infused into the beverages.

"Food safety was just textbook knowledge for my child," said Wang Xue, another tourist from the city of Anshan in Liaoning. "Seeing the automated production and rigorous testing equipment helps him understand the strict standards behind every bottled drink." -Xinhua

SHARIA-COMPLIANT SOLUTIONS

Sohar Islamic broadens its corporate banking proposition with new preloaded card

MUSCAT: As organisations place greater emphasis on financial oversight and efficient expense management, Sohar Islamic is continuing to broaden its portfolio of Sharia-compliant payment solutions. Reinforcing this approach, the bank has launched its new Corporate Preloaded Card, offering businesses and public sector institutions a secure and structured way to manage spending across day-to-day operations.

Commenting on the launch, Fahad Al Zadjali, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar Islamic, said, "As organisations continue to evolve, effective financial management increasingly depends on the ability to balance operational agility with robust oversight. The introduction of the Corporate Preloaded Card reflects our commitment to providing practical, Sharia-compliant solutions that empower businesses to manage spending with greater control, transparency, and efficiency. By enabling organizations to allocate spending authority within clearly defined parameters, the solution supports stronger governance while simplifying day-to-day financial operations. At Sohar Islamic, we remain focused on developing innovative banking solutions that respond to the changing needs of our clients and contribute to their long-term growth and success."

Translating this philosophy into a practical solution, the Corporate Preloaded Card is designed to accommodate a broad range of organizational structures and operating models, enabling businesses and public sector institutions to issue multiple cards under a single primary account for approved employees. The card supports a wide range of business-related expenses, including official travel, government and statutory payments, vendor settlements, procurement activities, office-related purchases, and both in-store and online transactions.

To support effective financial governance, the Corporate Preloaded Card can also be configured to align with each organization's internal policies, giving businesses the flexibility to determine how cards are utilized, including the ability to apply spending controls and merchant category restrictions where required. By allowing transactions to be funded directly from company-allocated balances, the card provides an effective alternative for organisations seeking the functionality and convenience associated with corporate payment cards without relying on conventional credit facilities. At the same time, it helps streamline internal expense management by reducing reliance on cash transactions and minimizing reimbursement processes.

Complementing its expense management capabilities, the Corporate Preloaded Card is supported by flexible fund reloading and card administration features, enabling organizations to manage and adapt card usage in line with changing operational requirements. The card also supports secure local and international transactions, with global acceptance across merchant networks and online payment channels. Transaction security is reinforced through established chip and PIN protection standards, helping ensure a safe and reliable payment experience.

The introduction of the Corporate Preloaded Card reflects the growing demand among institutions for payment solutions that combine operational agility with greater transparency and accountability. By continuing to expand its suite of Sharia-compliant corporate banking solutions, Sohar Islamic is helping organizations simplify financial processes while reinforcing the governance and control that underpin long-term growth.

CITI ANALYSIS

Textile-apparel exports fall 1.84% to $11.96 billion in April-July 2026

NEW DELHI: India's textile and apparel exports declined 1.84 per cent year-on-year to $11.96 billion during April-July 2026, with a sharp fall in apparel shipments offsetting growth in textiles, according to an analysis by the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI).

Apparel exports fell 10.52 per cent to USD 4.95 billion during the first four months of the financial year, while textile exports rose 5.38 per cent to USD 7.01 billion, the analysis showed. The overall textile and apparel segment had recorded exports of USD 12.18 billion in the corresponding period last year.

The July data, however, showed some improvement in the combined segment. Textile and apparel

exports grew 1.44 per cent year-on-year to USD 3.14 billion, as textile shipments increased 5.94 per cent to USD 1.87 billion. Apparel exports, though, remained under pressure, declining 4.48 per cent to USD 1.28 billion.

Within textiles, cotton yarn, fabrics, made-ups and handloom products recorded 8.4 per cent growth in July to USD 1.11 billion, while man-made yarn, fabrics and made-ups rose marginally by 0.45 per cent to USD 424.13 million.

Handicrafts, excluding handmade carpets, recorded the strongest growth among the listed textile categories, with exports rising 15.55 per cent year-on-year to USD 177.06 million in July. In the April-July period, exports of this segment surged 30.48 per cent to USD 719.88 million.

However, some segments remained weak. Jute manufacturing exports, including floor coverings, fell 14.95 per cent in July and 13.8 per cent during April-July. Carpet exports declined 1.47 per cent in July, though they remained marginally higher by 0.27 per cent during the four-month period.

The analysis also showed a rise in imports of raw cotton and waste, which increased 46.01 per cent year-on-year to USD 175.67 million in July. During April-July, such imports rose 53.63 per cent to USD 588.75 million. Imports of textile yarn, fabric and made-up items increased 1.64 per cent in July but declined 0.99 per cent during April-July.

Overall merchandise exports grew 19.63 per cent in July and 17.04 per cent during April-July, while the share of textiles and apparel in total exports stood at 7.11 per cent in July and 6.88 per cent during April-July, the CITI analysis said. -ANI

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MECHANICAL ENGINEER (Indian)
B.Tech with 14 yrs of Oman experience as an Estimation Engineer, specializing in steel sheet metal fabrication. Currently in India, available for immediate joining.
WA/Call: +968 95945230, +91 7356745478
Email: arungopalakrishnan85@yahoo.com

VIDEO EDITOR
An Indian video editor with 6 months experience and proficiency in **ADOBE PREMIERE PRO** and **ADOBE AFTER EFFECTS** is looking for suitable job.
Contact: +968 97411676

PROCUREMENT
Procurement, postgraduate 15+yrs experience in Oman oil & gas, EPC, PEB & structural steel projects also has sound knowledge in import, customs clearance and freight & logistics.
Contact : 75123132

SALES & MARKETING
Seeking a suitable position in
SALES, MARKETING
having 16 yrs of experience in Oman & 25 yrs of total experience in the field of Infrastructure, Industrial and Building material products.
BE Mechanical, DIM, Valid D/L
Contact: 9497 6056

PROCUREMENT
PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY CHAIN PROFESSIONAL
18+ years' GCC experience in Procurement, Supply Chain, Warehousing & Logistics. Available for suitable positions in Oman.
Contact : 91257663

FINANCE
Experienced ICWA/CMA (India), M.Com & OACPA certified professional with 15+ years in Costing, Manufacturing Finance, Corporate Planning & Strategy, MIS and Budgeting.
Email: harindranath.7891@gmail.com
Contact : +968 96098863

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Looking for a good practical knowledge skill carpentry Foreman, who can lead a full fledge workshop. 5 to 7 years' experience in the Middle East, who can work independently and handle all type of carpentry work with Knowledge of costing & coordinate with Clients. Valid D/L is an advantage.

Send detailed resume to sbtmne@gmail.com

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AVAILABLE
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Indian male, well experienced in accounts including finalization and audit seek suitable positions, can join immediately. Contact: 92824146, 94953826

Indian male MBA Finance, with +8 yrs of Accounting & finance experience seeks for audit associate position. NOC available & DL. Contact: 72420067

Indian female CA inter, 3 yrs in accounts. Contact: 94863876, Email: id-j4jinuonly@gmail.com

Male Indian MBA finance accountant 7 yrs Oman experienced with Oman D/L looking for suitable position. Contact: 95819242, 71099237 Email: Shemeejvp@gmail.com

ACCOUNTS/FINANCE
M.Com with 4 yrs of experience in the accounting, admin executive. Seeks a suitable job with D/L. Presently in Oman & can join immediately. Contact: +968 78585714 Email:sifath774@gmail.com

Finance Manager, 32+ yrs expertise in accounting, taxation, financial management, and ERP implementation. Proven record in enhancing performance, ensuring compliance, and driving efficiency. Seeking suitable leadership position. Contact: 94676186

ADMINISTRATION
Indian male graduate with 20 yrs experience seeks job for executive secretary, admin or any other suitable post. Presently available in Muscat. Contact 91410074.

DESIGNER/AUTOCAD D/MAN
Interior Designer with 15+ yrs Oman experience in Interior fit-out, AutoCAD, 3D visualization, shop drawings & site visits with sales. D/L. Contact: 95060377

DRIVER
Experienced driver heavy and light 20 yrs of driving experience. Contact: 97412505, 78385517

Driver with 12 yrs experience looking for job. Contact: 76383815

Bangladeshi with 10 yrs experience looking job. Contact: 78096017

ENGINEER
Electrical Engineer (B.Tech) with more than 2 yrs of experience in Oman, seeking an opportunity in the Electrical or MEP field, valid Oman D/L and available to join immediately. Contact: 75220047 Email: harikrishnanmini@gmail.com

ENGINEER
Civil, project engineer (Indian Male) 10 yrs Oman experience in building construction having valid D/L looking for suitable opportunity. Contact: 76423164. Email : sjn112020@gmail.com

Cep electrical engineer. Contact : 94768845

Mechanical engineer 11+ yrs experience in Oman HVAC /MEP, projects, facility management. Ready to join immediately. Contact: 91690765

Mechanical HVAC Engineer 4+ yrs Oman experience. Design, execution, commissioning for oil & gas and commercial projects. ASHRAE associate member. with valid D/L Seeking a suitable job. Contact: +968-75020107

ENGINEER
Sri Lankan, Quantity Surveyor with 12+ yrs Oman & GCC experience seeking position in a reputed firm. Call 96039602, ympr2026@gmail.com

IT
Indian male B.Sc., 20+ yrs Oman IT exp, seeks IT specialist, system administrator position. Immediate joining. Contact: 93642216

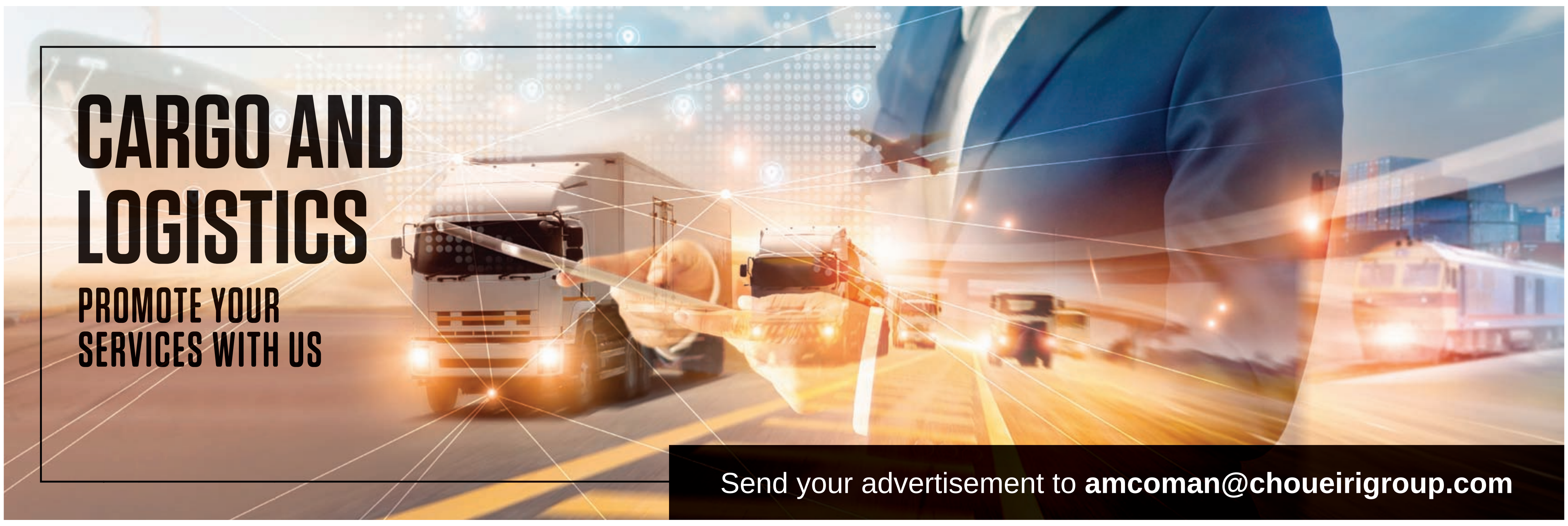
MANAGER
Project Manager with 24 yrs Gulf experience, including 12 years in Oman extensive expertise in MEP project management, project execution, electrical and mechanical installation, testing & commissioning, team leadership, and project coordination. Contact: 76925100

MANAGER
Finance Manager with 7+yrs Oman experience in accounts & finance, ERP knowledge, MIS reporting, VAT, audit, budgeting and financial management. Seeking suitable placement. 92368095

MISCELLANEOUS
Indian male looking for job, building watchman, office boy, personal driver(house,office). Currently in Oman, speak English & Hindi.Contact 96781899

SALES/MARKETING
Indian young male having 3 years Experience (sales & admin). Contact-78855168

Indian Male, BBA, 20 years experience in Sales & Marketing in Oman. Holding valid Oman driving license seeks suitable placement Contact No : 93011232 Email: jitinjoshua920@gmail.com



WORLD

PM Modi outlines India's resilience and vision on 80th Independence Day

PM Modi emphasised how the government successfully insulated citizens and farmers from global shocks, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to ongoing geopolitical conflicts in West Asia, while steering the country toward its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision

NEW DELHI: Addressing the nation from the iconic ramparts of the Red Fort on India's 80th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a firm message of national resilience, economic foresight, and ambitious growth.

Highlighting a decade of strategic preparation, PM Modi emphasised how the government successfully insulated citizens and farmers from global shocks, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to ongoing geopolitical conflicts in West Asia, while steering the country toward its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

PM Modi criticised those who were 'spreading rumours' about how the country will face problems over energy, fuel, fertilisers, and other such necessities, but the foresight in preparing for any such eventuality was already thought of a decade ago, and that has helped in keeping the country safe and self-reliant. In the face of rumours and global economic unpredictability, PM Modi highlighted the strength of India's long-term planning and insulation from global crises: "Nagrik Devo Bhava."

Countering panic over potential fuel and supply shortages during the West Asia crisis, PM Modi assured that strategic reserves and thoughtful planning over the last 10-12 years kept petrol, diesel, and gas readily available.

"We came out of Corona, and we saw conflicts across the world. So many people predicting the future spread so many rumours; some people are looking to keep people worried, scared. Some people like to see all that from people. West Asia's crisis came; petrol pumps will not give petrol or diesel; people will not get diesel," PM Modi said.

Guided by the mantra of Nagrik Devo Bhava (Citizen is Divine), the administration prioritised absorbing financial shocks rather than passing the burden onto the public.

Despite global disruptions driving international urea prices to around 3,000, the government continues to supply it to Indian farmers for just 300, heavily subsidising vital inputs like DAP to protect agricultural livelihoods.

"But the people of the country know how our thoughtful preparations for the last 10-12 years helped us now. After such a crisis, we kept the 'nagrik devo bhava' mantra and took multiple steps; we did not think such a problem would come, but now these preparations came in handy. Now there is gas, petrol, and urea. Urea's price in the world is around Rs 3000 in the world, but we are not letting people bear this burden; instead, we are bearing the cost. Urea, which is Rs 3000, is being given to farmers at Rs 300. Even DAP, we are giving our farmers DAP at a low price," the Prime Minister said. PM Modi also highlighted how defence production has increased nearly four times.

"In the last 12 years, defence production has increased nearly fourfold, while output from Khadi and village industries has grown almost fivefold. Electronics manufacturing has expanded nearly sevenfold. The production of modern railway coaches has risen 21-fold, and mobile phone production has surged 33-fold. Beyond that, we have made our mark in the realms of digital technology and innovation," he said.

PM Modi further expressed strong confidence that India will become a developed nation by 2047. In his Independence Day address, the Prime Minister asked the citizens to work towards realising the dream of Viksit Bharat.

The Prime Minister urged citizens to dream big and work towards making those dreams a reality. "A nation becomes great and achieves its goals when it moves forward driven by its dreams, its resolve, and its inherent strength. Small dreams will no longer suffice. We must dream big, for big dreams expand our thinking and broaden the horizons of our vision. Our resolve must be steadfast; when our resolve is firm, the capacity to carve a path forward--even amidst difficulties and disasters--naturally emerges." —ANI

Chief Ministers across states hoist Tricolour

NEW DELHI: Chief Ministers and senior leaders across several states hoisted the Tricolour at official Independence Day ceremonies on Saturday as the country celebrated its 80th Independence Day.

In Gujarat, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel hoisted the national flag in Amreli as part of the state's Independence Day celebrations. The ceremony marked the occasion with the unfurling of the Tricolour and reaffirmed the spirit of patriotism and national unity.

In Vadodara, Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi also hoisted the Tricolour during an Independence Day ceremony.

In Haryana, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini hoisted the national flag at Government College in Hansi. The ceremony was held as part of the state's celebrations marking 80 years of India's independence.

In Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai hoisted the Tricolour at the Police Parade Ground in Raipur. The flag-hoisting ceremony formed part of the state's main Independence Day programme.

In Odisha, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi hoisted the Tricolour in Bhubaneswar, joining citizens and officials across the state in commemorating the country's Independence Day.

In Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hoisted the National Flag at the Veterinary College in Guwahati. The ceremony marked the state's participation in the nationwide celebrations.

Across the states, the flag-hoisting ceremonies served as a reminder of the sacrifices made during India's freedom struggle and the country's continuing journey towards development and progress.

From Gujarat and Haryana to Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Assam, the participation of state leaders in the celebrations reflected the nationwide spirit of Independence Day, with the Tricolour flying at official venues and public institutions across the country. — ANI

UNLAWFUL INJUNCTION

Trump administration asks Supreme Court to allow ballroom project

WASHINGTON DC: The Trump administration on Friday asked the US Supreme Court to allow construction to continue on the president's $400 million White House ballroom.

It comes a week after an appeals court ruled Donald Trump's ballroom project, planned for the site of the White House's East Wing after it was demolished, lacked congressional approval and ordered above-ground construction to stop.

"This case involves an extraordinary and unlawful injunction that will halt the ongoing construction of the integrated military complex, including a totally secure ballroom space, at the East Wing of the White House, which is vitally required by national security," Trump's Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote in a petition to the Supreme Court.

Chief Justice John Roberts set a deadline of Tuesday for a response by plaintiffs challenging the ballroom project.

The nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation first brought the case after the East Wing was torn down and work began on a 90,000-square-foot (8,360-square-metre) ballroom.

In a 2-1 ruling on August 7, the DC Circuit upheld a lower-court judge's order directing the administration to halt above-ground construction.

"Whether or not a massive ballroom should be constructed is for Congress to decide and is not a matter for Executive self-help," the appeals court panel wrote.

To justify the need for a secure ballroom, Justice Department lawyers pointed to the July 8 missile threat against Air Force One when Trump was flown out of Türkiye aboard a secret flight and other recent assassination attempts.

The filing also claims the project is on time and under budget, funded by about $400 million in private donations. Democrats, however, say Trump's tax law is helping pay for the ballroom, while lawmakers in Congress have not approved a request by the administration for additional funding.

Responding to the petition, the trust accused the White House of trying to "outrun the courts" by accelerating construction. It cited plans to install 1 million pounds (453,592.37 kilograms) of rebarand pour 3,000 cubic yards (81,000 cubic feet, 2,293.66 cubic metres) of concrete over the next week.

"The Administration's transparent efforts to evade the rule of law, frustrate judicial review, and limit the availability of meaningful relief in the courts must stop here," the plaintiffs said.

The National Trust has urged the Supreme Court to reject the administration's appeal.

NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTRE

Hawaii under state of emergency ahead of major historic hurricane

HONOLULU: Residents on the Big Island of Hawaii, which gives its name to the volcanic US Pacific archipelago, are preparing for a potentially historic weather situation with a tropical storm gathering hurricane-level strength as it approaches.

The US Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Hurricane Centre (NHC) on Friday said Lala, a powerful tropical storm at the moment, should be at hurricane strength by the time it approaches the Big Island on Saturday.

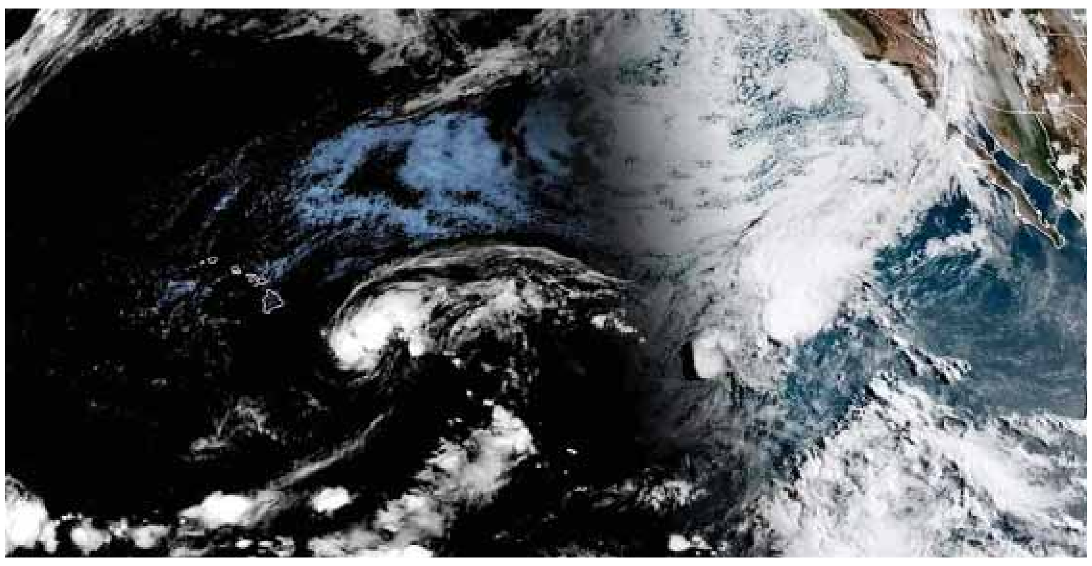
Hawaii Governor Josh Green, who called the storm "enormous," declared a state of emergency on Friday in an effort to make sure the state and its counties "have sufficient resources to clear debris, secure infrastructure and take other measures to prepare."

Currently, a hurricane warning is in effect for Hawaii County, which covers the Big Island. The islands of Maui, Molokai and Kahoolawe to its northwest are under a tropical storm warning.

Should the storm make landfall as expected, it would be the first time the Big Island has been hit by a hurricane since 1871.

The storm is expected to bring winds, rainfall and heavy surf, spurring government and residents to prepare for the worst.

Shelters have already been set up and residents encouraged to remain vigilant and get themselves and their families to safe spaces before they become trapped.



What if Lala doesn't make landfall?

Experts say a direct hit is not necessarily the concern here, with meteorologist Vanessa Almanza of the National Weather Service (NWS) in Honolulu cited by the Associated Press as saying: "It doesn't take landfall to create destruction. A lot of the impacts are felt outside of the hurricane."

The National Hurricane Center predicts 8 to 12 inches (20.3 to 30.5 centimetres) of rain across Maui and the Big Island this weekend, with maximum totals as high as 25 inches (63.5 centimetres) in some Big Island locations.

The NHC also warned that the storm could bring "life-threatening flooding and mudslides, especially in areas of steep terrain," as well as dangerous storm surges and ocean swells, "likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions."

Conditions trigger fear of floods and fires

As of Friday afternoon, Lala was located about 275 miles (440 kilometres) east-southeast of South Point, Hawaii, according to the NHC.

Data showed the storm had maximum sustained winds of 65 miles per hour (100 kilometres per hour) and was moving toward the west-northwest at 14 miles per hour. The wind-speed threshold for a Category 1 hurricane is 74 miles per hour.

Beyond fear of flooding, which the island of Oahu experienced in March, dry and windy weather has increased fear of wildfires as the storm picks up pace.

In 2023, the Maui town of Lahaina burned during extreme winds caused by a hurricane passing by far to the south.

Pointing to 1992's Hurricane Iniki as a tale of warning

The last hurricane to make landfall on the archipelago was Iniki, a category 4 storm, in 1992 — also an El Nino year.

On Friday, Governor Green reminded residents that Iniki made landfall after changing its path, "so we just can never know if a storm is going to turn."

While urging vigilance, Green said: "It did $3 billion (€2.6 billion) in damage. It destroyed thousands of homes and it did kill six people."

Green implored residents: "If you feel now that your house does't have a great roof or might not be able to withstand hurricane force winds, then first things first you go to a family or friend's house and you kind of hunker down there."

The southern end of Hawaii is remote and rural but its affordability has attracted a growing population, some of whom live off-grid in unpermitted structures.

Prepare, don't wait, say authorities

On neighbouring Oahu, Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi said Friday: "I am asking everyone to finish your preparations today. Don't wait for the weather to deteriorate. Stay informed, stay away from dangerous areas and make sure your family knows what to do if conditions worsen."

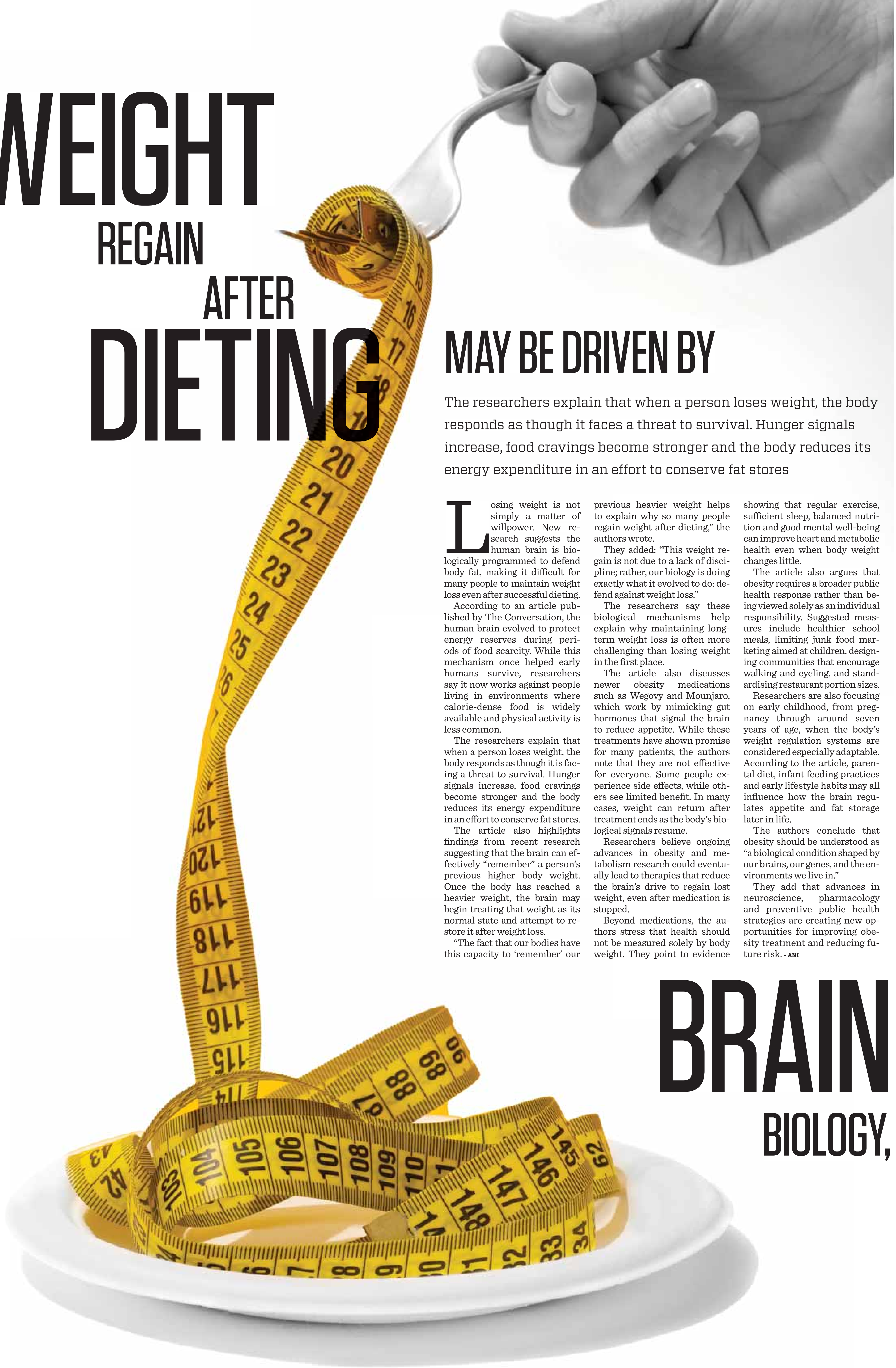
Residents were encouraged to clean gutters and drains, clear any hanging branches or debris from yards and seal their doors, with emergency services adding, "Stay away from beaches and coastal areas where rough surf and rip currents could sweep you away."

This year's Pacific Ocean El Nino has already attained temperatures so high that when it peaks between October and December NOAA says there is a 69% chance of a "historic event that would exceed the strength of previous El Nino events dating back to 1950."

The natural climate pattern occurs when ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific become unusually warm. This tends to fuel hurricane activity in the Pacific while retarding it in the Atlantic.

LIFESTYLE

WEIGHT REGAIN AFTER DIETING MAY BE DRIVEN BY BRAIN BIOLOGY, RESEARCH FINDS



The researchers explain that when a person loses weight, the body responds as though it faces a threat to survival. Hunger signals increase, food cravings become stronger and the body reduces its energy expenditure in an effort to conserve fat stores

Losing weight is not simply a matter of willpower. New research suggests the human brain is biologically programmed to defend body fat, making it difficult for many people to maintain weight loss even after successful dieting.

According to an article published by The Conversation, the human brain evolved to protect energy reserves during periods of food scarcity. While this mechanism once helped early humans survive, researchers say it now works against people living in environments where calorie-dense food is widely available and physical activity is less common.

The researchers explain that when a person loses weight, the body responds as though it is facing a threat to survival. Hunger signals increase, food cravings become stronger and the body reduces its energy expenditure in an effort to conserve fat stores.

The article also highlights findings from recent research suggesting that the brain can effectively "remember" a person's previous higher body weight. Once the body has reached a heavier weight, the brain may begin treating that weight as its normal state and attempt to restore it after weight loss.

"The fact that our bodies have this capacity to 'remember' our previous heavier weight helps to explain why so many people regain weight after dieting," the authors wrote.

They added: "This weight regain is not due to a lack of discipline; rather, our biology is doing exactly what it evolved to do: defend against weight loss."

The researchers say these biological mechanisms help explain why maintaining long-term weight loss is often more challenging than losing weight in the first place.

The article also discusses newer obesity medications such as Wegovy and Mounjaro, which work by mimicking gut hormones that signal the brain to reduce appetite. While these treatments have shown promise for many patients, the authors note that they are not effective for everyone. Some people experience side effects, while others see limited benefit. In many cases, weight can return after treatment ends as the body's biological signals resume.

Researchers believe ongoing advances in obesity and metabolism research could eventually lead to therapies that reduce the brain's drive to regain lost weight, even after medication is stopped.

Beyond medications, the authors stress that health should not be measured solely by body weight. They point to evidence showing that regular exercise, sufficient sleep, balanced nutrition and good mental well-being can improve heart and metabolic health even when body weight changes little.

The article also argues that obesity requires a broader public health response rather than being viewed solely as an individual responsibility. Suggested measures include healthier school meals, limiting junk food marketing aimed at children, designing communities that encourage walking and cycling, and standardising restaurant portion sizes.

Researchers are also focusing on early childhood, from pregnancy through around seven years of age, when the body's weight regulation systems are considered especially adaptable. According to the article, parental diet, infant feeding practices and early lifestyle habits may all influence how the brain regulates appetite and fat storage later in life.

The authors conclude that obesity should be understood as "a biological condition shaped by our brains, our genes, and the environments we live in."

They add that advances in neuroscience, pharmacology and preventive public health strategies are creating new opportunities for improving obesity treatment and reducing future risk. - ANI

SPORTS

Pérez and Fiorini set world race walk records in Birmingham

Both set new world marks in the women's half marathon and marathon race walks respectively on a sensational morning at the European Championships on Saturday

BIRMINGHAM: Spain's Maria Perez and Italy's Sofia Fiorini set world records for the women's half-marathon and marathon race walks respectively when winning gold medals at the European Athletics Championships on Saturday.

Perez's time of one hour 30 minutes and six seconds was well inside the world record standard set by World Athletics, and the Spaniard claimed European gold for the first time since winning the 20-km race in 2018 in setting the inaugural record. Fiorini stormed to gold in the marathon, lapping most of the other competitors to finish in three hours 15 minutes and 11 seconds, surpassing her previous best time by over 10 minutes.

The half-marathon and marathon race walks became official distances from January 1 and World Athletics set 1:30:30 as the world record performance standard required for the inaugural women's half-marathon and 3:17:00 for the women's marathon.

Perez, the world record holder for the 35-km event and a four-time world champion, beat Italian Alexandrina Mihai in second, with Ukraine's Lyudmila Olyanovska taking bronze, in the half-marathon race walk which replaces the 20-km race.

Fiorini finished second at the World Athletics race walking team championships in Brazil in April in a time of 3:25:42, but in Birmingham on Saturday her rivals had no answer once the Italian made her move with less than 10 km remaining. Poland's Katarzyna Zdzieblo stuck with Fiorini for much of the race and took silver, coming in over 4-1/2 minutes behind the Italian, with Spain's Raquel Gonzalez finishing third.

Fiorini's performance also improved her own European U23 record and previous best of 3:25:42 – set when she took silver at the World Race Walking Team Championships in Brasília in April – by 10 minutes and 31 seconds.

Battocletti completes distance double-double

Following up her 2026 European Athletics Championships 5000m on Tuesday, Nadia Battocletti took the 10,000m crown on Friday to become the first athlete ever to complete the 5,000m and 10,000m double in two consecutive European Championships.

Already the only Italian woman to have three gold medals at the European Championships, she comes away from Birmingham 2026 with four, making her the first Italian to win a quartet of European gold.

It was another masterclass from Italy's middle-distance queen, who was in complete control in the event that she won Olympic and Tokyo World Championship silver in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

In a cagey and tactical race which would always play into the hands of the reigning champion, the 26-year-old stood tall with a last lap for the ages which destroyed her challengers.

The final 200 metres was covered in a blistering 28.2 seconds. Astonishing after 25 punishing laps at Alexander Stadium.

Hodgkinson beaten by Swiss Werro

Keely Hodgkinson was forced to settle for European silver as Switzerland's Audrey Werro denied the Briton a third consecutive title in a thrilling women's 800m final.

The most eagerly anticipated event of the championships culminated in the expected three-way battle for supremacy between Hodgkinson, Swiss 22-year-old Werro and Dutch star Femke Broeders-Bol in front of a captivated sellout crowd of 23,000 inside Alexander Stadium. Having this season become the fastest athlete since the world record was set 43 years ago, Werro finished strong to land her first senior international title in a championship record one minute 54.81 seconds to her rival's 1:55.01. - Agencies

Rising golf star, 18, dies after brain haemorrhage

BANGKOK: Jessica Bang, a promising Australian golfer, has died at the age of 18 after suffering a brain haemorrhage.

Bang, who won her first professional event in just her fifth start earlier this year, was preparing for a tournament in Thailand on 1 August when she collapsed.

She was rushed to a hospital in Bangkok and had emergency brain surgery. After being in intensive care for nearly two weeks, she died on Thursday.

The WPGA Tour of Australasia said Bang, who turned professional at the end of 2025, was an "outstanding young talent".

"The thoughts and prayers of everyone at the WPGA Tour of Australasia and the broader Australian golf community are with Jessica's family, friends and all those who knew and loved her at this incredibly difficult time," a statement read.

Bang qualified to start her rookie season in the WPGA last November. She shot a final-round 65 to win a regional qualifying event in February to reach the NWS Women's Open (Ladies European Tour), where she missed the cut. - Agencies

GOLF

LIV likely to cancel season-ending Team Championship in Michigan

LONDON: LIV Golf players have been warned that the season-ending Team Championship later this month is set to be cancelled, BBC Sport has been told.

Tickets for the event in Michigan cannot now be purchased online, with LIV's official website stating both ground passes and hospitality passes are "no longer available".

As first reported by the Telegraph, next week's tournament in Indiana looks increasingly likely to be the final event in the 2026 campaign.

However, LIV Golf is yet to make an official announcement, amid further reports that former world No.1 Jon Rahm could soon leave the league.

European golf's DP World Tour is warning members who are also LIV players that it is highly unlikely they will be granted conditional release agreements for 2027.

Nine players - including Rahm - agreed such deals this year, allowing them to feature on both tours without facing fresh disciplinary action. But they could face heavy fines and tournament suspensions if they want to continue appearing in a reduced LIV programme next season.

Last week, the LIV series said it had secured an unnamed lead investor to keep the competition running in 2027 after the withdrawal of Saudi Arabian financial backing.

The Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) said in April it would end its multibillion dollar bankrolling of the breakaway tour at the end of the season, plunging the future of the series into doubt.

Chief executive Scott O'Neil said a signed agreement with a new investor is in place and has been approved by the LIV Golf board, with the transaction expected to be completed in September. Until then, LIV bosses are said to be taking a disciplined approach to support its long-term sustainability and maintain operations.

No details of the amount of money that will be invested were announced. PIF has pumped in more than $5bn (£3.71bn) since the league launched in 2022. O'Neil added LIV will make its players "majority equity holders" in the competition, calling it "a first for a major global sports league". - Agencies

NEED A BALANCE

World Athletics president Coe warns on interference in sport

BIRMINGHAM: World Athletics President Sebastian Coe Sebastian has a simple approach to avoiding political interference in global sport.

"The balance is keeping the politicians on the bus but not letting them anywhere near the steering wheel," Coe said at the European championships Friday.

The World Athletics president was responding to a question about avoiding political turmoil at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics while speaking to journalists. Other topics included track and field's ban on Russian athletes, private equity in sports and FIFA's credibility crisis following a controversial overturned red card at the World Cup.

FIFA was criticised after US President Donald Trump made a phone call to FIFA president Gianni Infantino urging that US forward Folarin Balogun's red-card suspension be overturned.

World football's governing body lifted the suspension. Trump will be nearing the end of his second term when the LA Games take place.

The 69-year-old Coe, a two-time Olympic gold medalist, led the 2012 London Olympics bidding and organising committees.

"I ran the London Games. I know it's really important that you have really good working relationships with government, prime ministers," said Coe, a former elected member of the British parliament. "The delivery of the Games is in large part predicated on those relationships — with Treasury, Defence, Homeland Security, in our terms the Home Office."

But with phone calls to influence a sporting matter, it's "entirely down to the resilience of a sporting organisation to say, 'I hear what you say, but thank you and goodnight,'" Coe said, noting about keeping politicians out of the driver's seat.

"I think I probably achieved that quite well in London. But not having those relationships is dangerous. Of course, there's a balance."

Private equity in track and field?

Infantino's failed plan to sell World Cup profits to private equity investors has landed the FIFA president in a battle to retain his post.

Coe said the idea was "not as unfamiliar territory as people tend to think."

"For the last decade, private equity or sovereign wealth funds have been investing in sports," he said.

The ambitions of each member federation, he added, are tied to their ability to raise revenues.

"Private equity is a big play in many sports. There are individual athletics federations at this very moment I know are discussing partnerships with external sources of revenue including private equity," Coe said. "That's the way it should be, and that's what I've encouraged our federations to look at."

"What you want to absolutely make sure," Coe said of private investors, "is when that does take place that your sport has the kinds of governances and checks and balance and the type of consultation that allows people to understand the rationale, the ambition and what the execution looks like. That is critical."

Coe noted that World Athletics has broadcast and sponsorship deals expiring in 2029, so seeking external sources of revenue is "an absolutely critical conversation to have. ... That debate has been taking place for two or three years, particularly at executive board level."

Coe to defend ban on Russian athletes

Coe plans to be on hand at the Court of Arbitration for Sport to defend World Athletics' ban on Russian athletes.

In July, the International Olympic Committee lifted a suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee and advised Olympic sports bodies they no longer need to vet Russian athletes for permission to compete as neutrals. But World Athletics said it will maintain the ban it imposed shortly after Russian forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

Russian Athletics has asked Switzerland-based CAS to overturn the sanctions. - Agencies

SPANISH LA LIGA

Atlético Madrid gets Argentina defender Romero from Spurs

MADRID: Atlético Madrid confirmed the signing of Argentina defender Cristian "Cuti" Romero from Tottenham for a fee reported to be 40 million euros ($46 million) on Saturday.

The 28-year-old centre-back signed a five-year deal through June 2031, the Spanish club said.

Romero played for the Argentina team that lost the World Cup final to Spain, and he was a member of the side that won the tournament in 2022. He has played 58 games for Argentina.

Romero captained Spurs last season, making 32 appearances to take his tally to 156 since he joined the club from Atalanta in 2021, Tottenham said. He arrived on loan initially, then in a permanent deal a year later. However, he was criticised for his disciplinary record — four red cards in five Premier League seasons — while injuries also took their toll.

Atlético described Romero as "an experienced defender who is highly physical, quick to anticipate danger and decisive in the tackle, with considerable authority and leadership on the pitch."

He also previously had spells at Genoa and Juventus after leaving hometown club Belgrano in 2018.

The 28-year-old said goodbye to Spurs fans on Friday after five years in north London.

He was named man of the match when the club ended a 17-year trophy drought beating Manchester United to win the 2025 Europa League.

Romero acknowledged "the journey wasn't perfect" in his leaving message, but said he was departing with a "heart full of memories" and "enormous pride".

Romero arrives days after compatriot and fellow World Cup winning defender Nahuel Molina left Atletico for Serie A side AS Roma, for a fee reported to be 17 million euros.

PSG bolster attack by signing World Cup winner Ferran Torres

The Barcelona striker inked a five-year deal with the French giants on Saturday

PARIS: Champions League titleholders Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) bolstered their star-studded attack by signing World Cup hero Ferran Torres from Barcelona on a five-year contract Saturday. PSG announced the signing in a statement without giving financial details. Sports Daily *L'Equipe* said the club was paying the Spanish champion 50 million euros ($58 million) for Torres. The French team said he will wear the No.9 jersey.

The 26-year-old Torres scored Spain's winning goal during extra time of the World Cup final against a robust and physical Argentina side. Brought on as a second-half substitute, he pounced on a bouncing ball and drove a left-foot shot under the crossbar.

It was his only goal of the competition and he said it was "scored by 47 million people," referring to Spain's population.

The transfer to PSG is his second big move. Barcelona signed Torres from Manchester City during the January 2022 transfer window for a reported fee of 55 million euros. Before joining City in 2020, he played for Valencia.

More of a roaming forward than a prolific scorer he netted 65 goals in 207 games for Barcelona, including a career-high 21 in all competitions last season.

But his contract was set to expire next year and Barcelona reportedly had to pay a fee to City if he was to extend it. Torres had played briefly alongside PSG forward Ousmane Dembélé when the France star was at Barça.

The move reunites Torres with Spanish coach Luis Enrique, who gave the player his international debut in 2020 when he was in charge of Spain. Enrique took over at PSG in 2023 and has led the team to back-to-back Champions League titles as well as the French league title in each of his three seasons in charge.

Enrique has multiple options in attack, with Ballon d'Or winner Dembélé, Désiré Doué, Bradley Barcola — who has been linked with a summer move to Liverpool — Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and new signing Maghnes Akliouche.

Dembélé set up Doué for PSG's winner against Aston Villa in the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday after Kvaratskhelia had given PSG the lead in a 2-1 victory.

It's the first of a possible six trophies this season for PSG, who became the first team to win back-to-back Super Cup titles since Real Madrid. PSG face French Cup winner Lens on Sunday in the Trophée des Champions, which is a match between last season's league and cup winners. - Agencies

EURO 2020 WINNER

Former Italy striker Immobile retires after 17-year career

PARIS: Former Italy and Lazio striker Ciro Immobile has retired from professional football, his club Paris FC said on Friday.

"Immobile expressed his wish to devote most of his time to his loved ones after 17 years as a professional," the French club said in a statement.

The 36-year-old striker joined Paris FC from Bologna in February and made 12 Ligue 1 appearances, scoring twice.

He scored 306 goals in 599 club matches in all competitions, also netting 17 times in 57 appearances for Italy.

The forward was part of Italy's Euro 2020-winning squad and scored twice during the tournament, which concluded with victory over England in the final at Wembley in July 2021.

Immobile enjoyed his greatest success during his eight seasons at Lazio, becoming the club's all-time leading scorer with 207 goals in 340 appearances. He won the Coppa Italia and two Italian Super Cups with the Rome club.

In 2020, he won the European Golden Shoe after equalling Gonzalo Higuain's single-season league record of 36 Serie A goals, and he finished as Serie A's leading scorer four times.

He also played for Italian clubs Juventus, Pescara, Genoa and Torino, Germany's Borussia Dortmund, Spain's Sevilla and Turkish side Besiktas. - Agencies

PREMIER LEAGUE

Manager Arteta tells Arsenal fans not to fret over his future

LONDON: Mikel Arteta insisted that Arsenal fans have no reason to worry about his future as he heads into the final year of his contract.

Arteta ended Arsenal's 22-year wait to win the Premier League in May and was expected to sign a new contract as a reward for that historic success.

With Arsenal set to begin its 2026-27 campaign against Manchester City in the Community Shield on Sunday, there have been few signs of the Spaniard getting close to putting pen to paper.

But Arteta, who joined Arsenal in 2019, last agreed a new contract with the north London club in 2024 and he has no doubts another deal will eventually be signed.

"They don't have to worry about any of that, because I want to be here," he told reporters on Friday.

"I am extremely happy. I feel very grateful to work with the people that I work with and when we have the possibility, we will resolve that. And that's it." Hinting Arsenal's busy close-season transfer activity has been his priority instead of the contract, Arteta reassured supporters not to fret.

"There is always another priority, I think! That's the way we have been treating it, I think everybody feels comfortable that the time on the contract is not going to be an issue," he said.

"I think because my will, certainly, is to be here and I am very happy here. My feeling from the club is the same one. That is why everyone is doing things in a really organic way." - Agencies

FORMER MAN UTD AND VILLA GOALKEEPER

European Cup winner Rimmer dies at age 78

BIRMINGHAM: Jimmy Rimmer, a goalkeeper who won the European Cup with English teams Manchester United and Aston Villa 14 years apart, has died. He was 78.

Villa announced Rimmer's death on Friday without giving any more details. The club described him as "one of the finest goalkeepers of his generation, and arguably one of the unluckiest when it came to big occasions."

Rimmer collected a European Cup winner's medal with United in 1968 after being on the bench, as the backup to Alex Stepney, for its 4-1 win over Benfica in the final at Wembley Stadium.

In the 1982 final, Rimmer started for Villa in a 1-0 win over Bayern Munich in Rotterdam, Netherlands, but came off with a neck injury after nine minutes and was in tears in the locker room. He was able to join the post-match celebrations, though, after Peter Withe's winner.

Rimmer started all nine of Villa matches in the competition that season, after being an ever-present in its English league title-winning campaign the previous season.

He was at United from 1965-74 and then had three years at Arsenal before playing for Villa from 1977-83.

Rimmer played once for England — a friendly against Italy in 1976.

In a post on X, United said it was "deeply saddened" by Rimmer's death, adding: "Our thoughts are with Jimmy's loved ones at this difficult time." - Agencies

Fallen French giants Bordeaux moves closer to extinction

BORDEAUX: Bordeaux, once one of France's leading football clubs and the team where the country's new head coach Zinedine Zidane made his name, lurched further into trouble on Friday.

After years of crippling financial problems, the spectre of judicial liquidation is looming over the Girondins after the French National Olympic and Sports Committee (CNOSF) rejected the club's latest appeal against exclusion from the national leagues.

The measure, notified to the club on Friday, according to its vice-president Arnaud De Carli, means the six-time French champion is barred from playing in the fourth tier in the coming season, as it had hoped.

It has instead been relegated to the sixth tier. Bordeaux has 15 days to file an appeal, but the fourth-tier season starts on August 22.

It was sanctioned for failing to provide the roughly €10 million ($11.6 million) needed for the 2025-2026 financial year and meet debt payments. - Agencies

Kia announces 2.22% interest rate and 2 free EMIs on new purchases

Kia Oman announces the launch of its 'New Identity, New Savings' campaign, marking an exciting new chapter for the brand with a lineup of special benefits designed to make owning a Kia more rewarding than ever

MUSCAT: As the summer vacation winds down and schools reopen, we know your priorities shift, which is why we are bringing you a whole new purchase experience and have made owning your next Kia easier than ever. Because you deserve more than just a great car.

Kia Oman announces the launch of its 'New Identity, New Savings' campaign, marking an exciting new chapter for the brand with a lineup of special benefits designed to make owning a Kia more rewarding than ever.

At the heart of the campaign is a reduced interest rate of 2.22% for financing deals of 2 to 4 years, and 3.33% for 5 years agreements. These rates apply to the Sportage, Seltos, Sonet, K4 and K3 (2026 MY) and are available exclusively to individual retail customers, subject to credit approval and clearance by select finance companies (Terms & Conditions Apply).

Adding further value to this offer, Kia will cover the first two EMIs for customers financing under the reduced interest rate scheme, translating to savings of up to OMR 605 on a Sportage for a 5 year deal. Customers can also benefit from a Welcome Bonus of up to OMR 2500, adjusted directly against the price of the vehicle as a special discount, in addition to the standard Cash Gift offer already applicable on eligible models.

To provide continued peace of mind after purchase, all models come with a service package of 30,000 km or three years, whichever comes first (30,000 km or two years for EVs). One year of complimentary registration is also included on all models, with the exception of EVs.

Kia line-up

Today's Kia line-up brings together design, technology and performance to match every lifestyle. The Sonet leads the way in the city with its compact, efficient character, while the Sportage L takes things further with a spacious, high-performance edge for those who need more room to roam. The Seltos, K3 and K4 add a sharper, more connected feel to everyday driving, and Kia's EV range, including the EV6 and EV9, stands at the forefront of the brand's electric future, delivering sustainable performance without compromise.

Kia Oman invites customers to visit their nearest showroom before the offer ends to explore the 'New Identity, New Savings' campaign and discover more than just a car.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the official distributor of Kia in Oman, continues to deliver a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

The company was ranked #1 by Kia in 2024 for Sales Customer Satisfaction in the Middle East and Africa, reflecting its commitment to providing exceptional products, facilities, and customer service across the Sultanate.

AT SELECTED OUTLETS

Lulu India Utsav brings colours, flavours and spirit of India to Oman

MUSCAT: India comes alive at Lulu Hypermarket as India Utsav 2026 gets underway across Oman, turning the celebration of India's 80th Independence Day into a vibrant week of food, culture, traditions and community.

More than a retail festival, India Utsav is a celebration of what makes India so wonderfully diverse, from the flavours of its many regions and the energy of its street food to its traditions, art and the stories that connect generations. It also celebrates the warm and enduring cultural ties between India and Oman, built over centuries of friendship and exchange.

The festival was inaugurated by Prashant Pise, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of Lulu Group senior officials, members of the Indian community and local dignitaries.

Speaking at the launch, the ambassador highlighted the enduring friendship and close people-to-people connections between Oman and India.

Anwar Sadhath, Regional Director – Lulu Hypermarket, Oman said: "India Utsav is our way of bringing a little bit of India to everyone in Oman, not just through food and shopping, but through the sights, flavours and experiences that make India so special. It is a celebration for the Indian community, but also an invitation to everyone to discover, enjoy and celebrate the incredible diversity of India. At Lulu, we are delighted to create a space where cultures come together, families have fun and communities celebrate together."

From fragrant spices and regional staples to fresh produce, traditional sweets and festive favorites, Lulu's India Utsav brings together the flavours of India under one roof. Shoppers can explore specially curated displays, live hot-food counters serving regional dishes and street-food favourites, along with a vibrant selection of Indian traditional and contemporary ethnic wear for women, men and children, celebrating the country's diverse styles and colours.

India Utsav 2026 is being celebrated at selected Lulu Hypermarket outlets across Oman, with curated products, festive offers and special experiences available throughout the campaign. Selected India Utsav offerings can also be explored through Lulu's online shopping channels.

For Lulu, the celebration is also a reflection of Oman's wonderfully multicultural community. With its network of hypermarkets and express stores across the Sultanate, Lulu has become a familiar meeting point for communities from different backgrounds, offering everything from fresh food and groceries to household essentials, electronics, lifestyle products and ready-to-eat options.

Lulu is inviting Oman to taste, discover and celebrate India with food, fashion and unique experiences.

AUGUST 15 | INDEPENDENCE DAY OF

INDIA

SUNDAY,
AUGUST 16, 2026

TIMES OF OMAN SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Honouring Freedom, Inspiring the Future

Message by Ambassador HE Prashant Pise on the occasion of 80th Independence Day of India

As we celebrate the 80th Republic Day of India, I extend my warm greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, all Indian nationals, our dear Omani friends and all well-wishers of India in the Sultanate of Oman.

The glorious occasion of India marking 8 decades of Independence is a moment of immense pride and joy for all Indians, both in our homeland and across the world, including here in the Sultanate of Oman. As India marches towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047, we celebrate the spirit of freedom while inspiring citizens, especially the youth, to contribute towards building a stronger, self-reliant, innovative, and future-ready India.

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from an agrarian nation burdened by colonial rule into a global powerhouse and the world's largest democracy. Over the decades, the country has achieved remarkable milestones, including securing food self-sufficiency through the Green Revolution, eradicating polio, and building a robust economy overcoming a critical period marked by COVID pandemic and achieving a status of fastest growing economy.

This journey has been defined by a relentless drive towards modernisation, reflected in the establishment of world-class scientific and technological institutions, significant advancements in space exploration, and a digital revolution that has reshaped infrastructure and financial inclusion. Socially, India has made significant strides in expanding access to education and improving public health, with life expectancy and literacy rates rising substantially, even as the nation continues to navigate the complexities arising from the current geopolitical situation.

Today, India stands as a critical player on the global stage, characterized by its economic resilience, innovative spirit, and an enduring commitment to its democratic ideals.

Over the last decade, India has transformed from a digital consumer market into a global technology manufacturer by leveraging the foundational Digital India programme to build robust infrastructure, foster indigenous innovation, and invest in mission-mode initiatives like Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, and supercomputing. Through strategic policy support and large-scale connectivity expansions, the country has developed a trusted Digital Public Infrastructure that enables population-scale digital services, positioning developed India as a reliable, inclusive, and globally competitive hub for emerging technologies on its path towards Viksit Bharat 2047. Governance reforms, technological democratization, and citizen-centric policies have fundamentally transformed the way Indians perceive their prospects.

India's trade journey reflects a powerful shift from participation to leadership in global commerce. With 9 landmark trade agreements, India is building resilient economic bridges that unlock opportunities, deepen trust, and position the nation as a key global growth engine. The India–Oman CEPA marks a new chapter in this journey, strengthening the longstanding bonds between the two nations and opening new pathways for trade, investment, services and economic cooperation. By creating greater market access and opportunities for businesses and professionals, the agreement reinforces India and Oman's shared vision of a more connected, resilient and prosperous future.

India's space startup ecosystem has grown from a single-digit number of startups a few years ago to around 400 today, with one startup recently attaining unicorn status. The next phase of growth for India's space economy, currently valued at nearly $9 billion, is expected to expand to approximately $45 billion over the next seven to eight years as the country advances towards the goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Over the past twelve years, the government has fundamentally reshaped India's international trajectory, transforming the nation into an assertive and influential global power anchored in the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("The World is One Family"). Central to this rise has been India's proactive leadership of the Global South, most notably evidenced by its successful advocacy for the African Union's permanent membership in the G20. This diplomatic momentum has been mirrored by a robust human-centric approach to foreign policy, positioning India as the "Pharmacy of the World" through extensive vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic and as a reliable "first responder" in nearly 30 major disaster relief operations across the globe.

Beyond traditional diplomacy, India has emerged as a vanguard for sustainable and digital development. By co-founding the International Solar Alliance and promoting global initiatives such as Mission LiFE and the International Year of Millets (Shri Anna), India has prioritized climate action and food security on the world stage.

INDIA - OMAN
عُمان والهند
عامًا من العلاقات الدبلوماسية
70
YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Concurrently, the nation has leveraged its technological prowess to export the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as a global digital standard. Together, these initiatives spanning cultural outreach, infrastructure, innovation, and sustainable development, illustrate a comprehensive strategy that has firmly established India as a pivotal player in shaping the global order.

India and Oman stand as partners with a deep commitment to a shared future of peace and shared prosperity. Every milestone achieved is a step forward in strengthening a relationship that is as enduring as it is dynamic. India and Oman have shared an unbreakable bond of deep friendship for centuries. Our mutual closeness is not limited to geography, but is also reflected in our trade spanning thousands of years, our culture, and our common priorities. Oman is a crucial pillar of India's West Asia politics and its oldest regional strategic partner.

The Indian Community in Oman has played an integral role in shaping its economic and social landscape. With over 7,00,000 Indians registered in Oman today, deeper Indo-Omani community ties have flourished.

As we commemorate India's 80th Republic Day, we celebrate not only our nation's achievements but also the ever-strengthening bonds between India and Oman. Our shared history and the collaborative endeavors in the present day continue to drive our partnership towards new and better horizons.

Long live India-Oman Friendship!

A GATEWAY

India-Oman CEPA opens new trade and investment frontier, says Pise

MUSCAT: India and Oman are entering a new phase of economic partnership, with the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) opening the door to wider trade, investment and professional opportunities and giving Indian businesses a stronger platform to use Oman as a gateway to the wider region.

The landmark agreement came into force on June 1, 2026, and Indian Ambassador to Oman HE Prashant Pise says its impact is already beginning to be felt, with Indian companies using CEPA provisions for shipments to Oman.

The agreement provides India with duty-free access for 98.08% of Oman's tariff lines, covering 99.38% of India's export value, according to India's Ministry of Commerce.

It also opens opportunities across a broad range of goods and services, while creating greater scope for professional mobility.

Pise said the immediate priority is to ensure that businesses understand the agreement and make full use of the opportunities it creates.

"We need to do a lot of campaign and publicity campaign so that the investors as well as the traders know what the provisions are and what are the fields in which they should take advantage," he said.

The Indian embassy has already been engaging business leaders, investors, export promotion councils, chambers of commerce and government authorities through meetings, webinars and roundtables to accelerate implementation.

For Indian companies, the opportunities extend well beyond conventional exports.

Pise identified logistics, warehousing, metals and minerals, chemicals, manufacturing and pharmaceuticals among the areas with strong potential.

Oman's ports and strategic location could also help Indian companies build supply chains serving markets beyond the Sultanate.

The ambassador said Indian companies could establish warehousing, packaging and value-addition facilities in Oman, allowing them to strengthen their supply chains and potentially qualify for preferential treatment under CEPA's rules of origin.

"Logistics and supply chains, as we rightly say it is. Another thing is warehousing," Pise said, describing these as areas where Indian companies could do particularly well.

Port development is another potential growth area. Pise said Indian businesses are looking at opportunities involving cargo terminals and other port facilities, while Oman's mineral and metals base could create further scope for industrial cooperation.

Pharmaceuticals could become a major new pillar.

India's strength in pharmaceuticals combined with Oman's location and market access could encourage Indian companies to establish manufacturing operations in the Sultanate and use it as a base for exports and re-exports.

For Pise, however, CEPA should ultimately be measured not simply by tariff reductions but by the investment and supply chains it generates.

He sees the agreement as a platform for Indian companies to establish a deeper presence in Oman while also encouraging Omani investors to look towards India.

Bilateral trade is already around US$11 billion, according to the ambassador, but he believes there is substantial room for growth. He wants both sides to consider ambitious targets, including significantly increasing trade and investment.

The agreement comes as the two countries look to diversify their economic relationship beyond traditional energy trade.

Renewable energy, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure and financial technology are among the emerging areas highlighted by Pise.

India's expanding digital economy could also offer opportunities for cooperation with Oman, particularly in areas such as digital governance, financial technology and local-currency settlement mechanisms.

The strategic value of CEPA is equally important.

Oman's geographical position gives Indian companies access not only to the Omani market but potentially to wider Gulf, African and other regional markets.

India's Ministry of Commerce has described the agreement as opening opportunities in minerals, chemicals, base metals, machinery, plastics and rubber, auto components, instruments, glass, ceramics, marble and paper, among other sectors.

Pise believes the agreement should therefore be seen as part of a much broader transformation in India-Oman economic ties.

For Indian exporters, it offers a new market-access advantage.

For Oman, it brings the prospect of greater Indian investment, manufacturing activity, technology and supply-chain integration.

And for both countries, it provides a framework to turn decades of political and people-to-people trust into a deeper economic partnership.

The CEPA, in that sense, could become one of the defining economic instruments of the India-Oman relationship as the two countries look towards the next phase of their strategic partnership.

COMMENTARY

Trade between Oman and India Capturing Newer Heights

India Becomes Only the Second Nation After the United States to Secure a Comprehensive Bilateral Trade Pact with Oman. The future of trade between India and Oman is exceptionally bright, anchored by the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which officially entered into force on June 1, 2026. Building on bilateral trade that reached $11.18 billion in FY 2025–26, the pact provides zero-duty access for 99.38% of Indian exports to Oman and tightly integrates both nations into a secure economic corridor

Aligned Visions: The partnership directly supports long-range developmental blueprints, including India's Viksit Bharat 2047 and Oman Vision 2040, emphasizing robust economic diversification and digital-maritime trade infrastructure. A direct framework to protect supply chains—including essential energy imports like oil, gas, and urea—and bypasses chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz. Ongoing modernisation of maritime and logistics systems will be central to driving this trajectory forward.

Pharmaceutical products already approved by premier global regulatory agencies will receive local marketing authorization within 90 days under the newly operationalized trade framework Fast-Track Market Access for Pharmaceuticals: USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA and TGA-approved Products to Receive Marketing Authorization within 90 Days. For pharmaceutical exporters, this pathway establishes an elite tier of market predictability. Instead of compiling entirely unique, localized safety portfolios, companies can leverage their existing clinical datasets and western reference licenses to unlock swift, low-tariff distribution networks in emerging economic zones.

127 services sub-sectors

Oman has opened up 127 services sub-sectors to Indian entities, representing the most comprehensive services offer ever made by any Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country to India. This landmark pact creates legally binding mobility pathways, relaxes foreign investment rules, and eliminates trade barriers to unlock substantial growth for Indian professionals, startups, and knowledge-led enterprises.

Professional Services: Cross-border delivery and local practice setups for accounting, taxation, architectural planning, urban engineering, and legal consultancies.

Healthcare & Life Sciences: Eased operating norms for Indian medical practitioners, dental specialists, veterinary doctors, and nursing staff.

Education & Training: Opportunities for Indian universities and skill-development institutes to set up campuses or training modules in Oman.

Other Core Sectors: Research & Development (R&D), audio-visual services, telecommunications, financial services, tourism, and advanced construction engineering

India's Export Inspection Council (EIC)

Oman mandatorily accepts quality certificates issued by India's Export Inspection Council (EIC) at all Omani maritime gates and ports. This historic policy directive is part of the newly active India–Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). It removes traditional non-tariff barriers, fast-tracks customs operations, and eliminates redundant, duplicative laboratory testing upon arrival. New regulatory provisions enforce standard, accelerated cargo clearance windows to preserve shelf-life for agricultural items.

Unified Organic & Halal Acceptance: Oman formally extends state-level validation to India's National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) and domestic Halal certification frameworks. Labour-intensive sectors of Agriculture, and Marine Products, Textiles, Gems and Jewellery, Pharmaceuticals, Engineering Goods, Footwear and Automobiles Poised for Strong Export Expansion with full tariff elimination and Competitive Advantage.

Full tariff elimination provides a massive competitive advantage for labour-intensive sectors. Removing tariffs allows these industries to lower prices, increase export volumes, and expand their global market share.

Oman's total gems and jewellery import market is $1.07 billion annually. India's exports to Oman in this sector stood at $25.78 million in 2025, comprising $18.48 million in polished natural diamonds and $6.67 million in gold jewellery. It is projected that exports could increase sixfold to $150 million within three years.

The zero-duty status - Broader Access: Products like natural honey, mixed condiments, basmati rice, cashews, sweet biscuits, and potato products now bypass Omani customs entirely duty-free. With a 94% share in boneless meat and a 98% share in fresh eggs, India already serves as Oman's primary poultry and livestock partner.

Oman's total marine import market is valued at $35.3 million. The zero-duty status is projected to rapidly accelerate seafood shipments from major Indian coastal hubs. Tariffs on shrimp, fish, and cuttlefish are instantly eliminated.

Oman is India's second-largest trading partner in the Gulf region and serves as a strategic gateway to the wider GCC market through its advanced port infrastructure.

Bilateral trade between India and Oman reached $11.18 billion in FY2025-26, up from $10.61 billion in FY2024-25. Trade Value Projection: Expected to reach approximately $21 billion to $25 billion by 2030.

Citizen-centric diplomacy of India

BY AMBASSADOR JEITENDRA KUMAR TRIPATHI (RETD.)

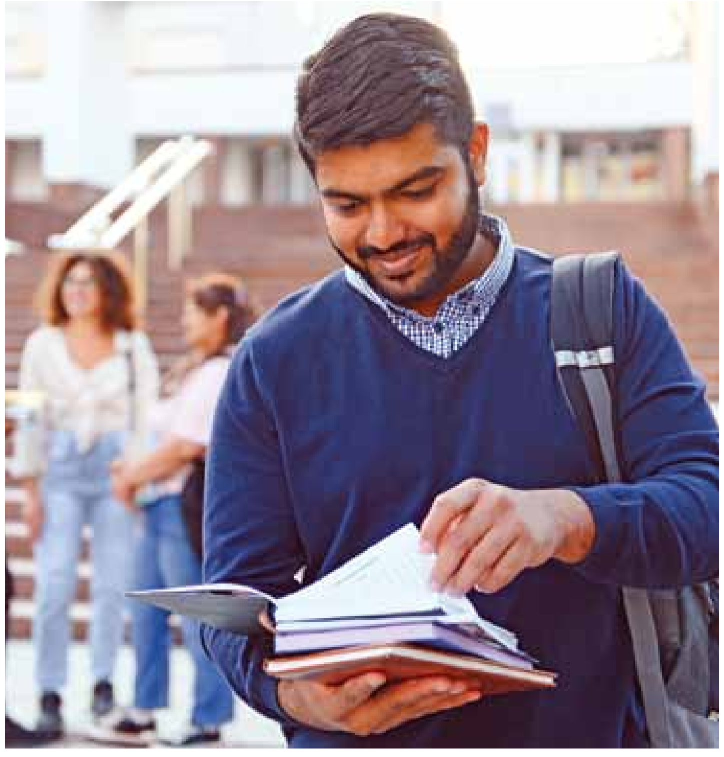
Diplomacy had been traditionally understood as conduct of bilateral relations between the states focussing on the negotiations only in political, economic and security related drivers. However, the advent of the current century, having witnessed a sea change in the ground realities due to the globalisation, rapid scientific and technological development and increased mobility, transformed and expanded the scope of diplomacy focussing on the new dimensions. India also could not remain untouched by this transformation and adopted a foreign policy with the citizen-centric diplomacy at its heart. This policy places the welfare, security and interest of the country's citizen at its core making Indian citizens an important part of its external engagements which has made, in turn, the Ministry of External affairs more responsive to their needs.

How did it evolve?

Until the turn of the last century, the Indians living abroad (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin had no place in the policies of the government as they were considered to be the persons, migrated out of India for their own individual interest with no contribution towards the development of India. However, at the beginning of the current century, it was realised that these Indians not only contribute to the economy of their homeland by way of remittances and investments but also play a significant role in the governments of their residence. The importance of Indian diaspora can be understood by the fact that currently the Indian diaspora, with the population of more than 35.4 million (more than the combined population of Australia and New Zealand) has remitted US$ 135.46 billion in the last financial year! Moreover, many persons of Indian origin have risen to important positions in academic institutions and in their governments which underlines their importance in our foreign policy calculus. However, lately the Indian governments started paying more attention to this vast reservoir of talent and resources. The annual Pravasi Sammelan and Pravasi awards had given momentum to the outreach to the eminent personalities of Indian diaspora. The Ministry of External Affairs has taken many initiatives to ensure the welfare of Indian citizens visiting abroad for employment, business or educational purposes.

Key features of the citizen-centric diplomacy

These initiatives cover the period from the application for passport to visa, travel, safe stay and return to India. In view of the growing number of Indians willing to visit abroad, the Government has opened new passport offices, passport application centres in all districts, digitised the procedure and opened more international



airports to facilitate international travel. PDOT (Prior to Departure Orientation and Training) programs are in place, a Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojna has been started to ensure the health insurance of Indians abroad, Migration and Mobility Partnership pacts have been signed with eight countries and Social Security agreements have been signed with nineteen countries to ensure the proper work environment for Indian workers. An e-migrate application has also been launched to educate such citizens about the rules and regulations. MADAD, a multi-lingual help portal, works round the clock to assist Indian citizens in need. It also examines the employment visas, the employer's status and the insurance cover provided by him to the prospective worker. The government has opened more embassies and consulates to cater to the needs of Indian citizens abroad. An Indian community wing, separate from the Consular wing, has been established to ensure well-being of the Indians living in that jurisdiction. Indian Community Welfare Fund has been established in all our diplomatic missions and posts abroad to assist our citizens in case of emergency through temporary shelters, legal assistance and air tickets to India for the destitutes/stranded Indians. Besides, open houses are being organised in India embassies at regular intervals to listen to and address the grievances of Indian community. Moreover, the government conducted a number of successful rescue operations for the Indian citizens stranded in violence -hit areas. Ukraine, South Sudan, Yemen have been some of such recent operations.

Challenges

The citizen -centric diplomacy also faces its own challenges. The growing number of Indians visiting abroad for various purposes has put a heavy pressure on our missions which already suffer from a shortage of manpower and resource-crunch. Effectively assisting the Indian community in a war-torn country also becomes a challenge in view of unstable situation. Misinformation by Indian touts and social media, and different local legal systems compound the problems.

The way forward

Allocation of sufficient staff and funds at the disposal of our missions abroad and their adequate training before posting there can mitigate the challenges. The pre-departure orientation should be made compulsory for every Indian going abroad for employment or education. A curb on touts misleading such Indians is imperative.

Conclusion

It is heartening that the importance of citizen in our diplomacy has finally been realised and the Government is addressing their issues with an objective and positive attitude. With allocation of more resources and strict action against the touts, our citizen-centric diplomacy will certainly bear more fruits.

Global tricolour relay, landmark illuminations, and worldwide felicitations mark 80th Independence Day

NEW DELHI: As India marks its 80th Independence Anniversary, Indian embassies, high commissions, and international partner nations across the globe have rolled out vibrant celebrations, cultural showcases, and high-profile diplomatic gestures.

From flag-hoisting ceremonies in East Asia to landmark illuminations in South America, missions worldwide have united in commemorating the historic milestone.

The Indian consulates across the United States reported wide-ranging recognition from American governors and state leaders.

> As part of the global Har Ghar Tiranga movement, missions across Asia participated in a synchronised sunrise relay of the national flag

The Embassy of India in the US extended greetings on the occasion and framed the celebration at a national level.

"Today, we celebrate 80 years of India's journey--a tribute to our democratic values, diverse heritage, and the global spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.' We join the Indian diaspora across the United States in marking this historic day with pride and joy. #IndependenceDay2026 #IndiaAt80," the Embassy wrote on X.

In a post on X, the Consulate General of India in New York expressed gratitude to Governor of Connecticut Ned Lamont for designating India's 80th Independence Day as "India Day."

"Sincere gratitude to Hon'ble Governor of Connecticut, Mr. Ned Lamont @GovNedLamont, for officially designating August 15, 2026, as 'India Day' on the occasion of India's Independence Day and for recognising the contributions of the vibrant Indian-American community to Connecticut. We are also grateful for his leadership in establishing the Connecticut India Trade Commission and for recognising the India-USA Trade Facilitation Portal as an important initiative to further strengthen trade, investment and economic ties between India and the United States," the post read.

The consulate also acknowledged Pennsylvania leadership.

"We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Governor Josh Shapiro @GovernorShapiro for his warm greetings on the occasion of India's 80th Independence Day. The message warmly recognizes the significant contributions of the Indian-American community to Pennsylvania's diversity, culture and prosperity, and its enduring role in the progress and success of the State," the Consulate wrote.

Meanwhile, the Consulate General of India in Seattle also thanked the Governor of Washington State, Bob Ferguson, for wishing India its Independence Day and reaffirming the bilateral ties with Washington.

"Thank Hon'ble Bob Ferguson @GovBobFerguson, Governor of Washington State, for his warm greetings on India's 80th Independence Day: reaffirming Washington State's deep ties with India, and acknowledging the Indian American community's contributions to the state's culture and economy, and their commitment to innovation and learning," the post read.

Emphasising grassroots participation across Central America, the Indian Embassy in Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica wrote on X, "Colleagues from the Embassy enthusiastically joined the #HarGharTiranga campaign, running till 17 August. Let's hoist the Tricolour at home and pay tribute to the spirit of Vande Mataram."

At the Embassy of India in Japan, Ambassador Nagma Mallick hoisted the national flag and read out the President's address to the nation. The ceremony featured special recognitions for winners of the "Bharat Ko Jaaniye" (Know India) Quiz held to commemorate Independence Day.

In a spectacular gesture of friendship, the Government of the City of Buenos Aires illuminated four iconic Argentine landmarks, the Floralis Generica, Puente de la Mujer (Women's Bridge), Planetario Galileo Galilei, and Palacio Lezama, in the vibrant saffron, white, and green hues of the Indian Tricolour.

Ambassador Ajaneesh Kumar and the Indian mission expressed profound appreciation for the display, celebrating the enduring democratic partnership between India and Argentina.

"The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in India warmly extends its sincere congratulations and best wishes to the Government and the friendly people of India on the occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of India. The longstanding and historic relations between Iran and India are rooted in the deep civilisational, cultural, and historical bonds between the two nations and have always been based on mutual respect and friendly cooperation. We hope that the relations and cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India will continue to expand in all fields, and that the two countries will enjoy ever-greater peace, progress, prosperity, and development," the Embassy wrote in a post on X.

"The Embassy of India, Oslo, extends warm greetings on the auspicious occasion of India's 80th Independence Day. As we commemorate this historic milestone, let us celebrate the spirit of freedom, unity, and progress that continues to inspire our nation. Together, we honour the sacrifices and achievements of our past while looking ahead with confidence and hope towards a brighter and more prosperous future," the Embassy in Norway wrote.

As part of the global Har Ghar Tiranga movement, missions across Asia participated in a synchronised sunrise relay of the national flag.

Passing the mantle from regional hubs like Jakarta to the Embassy of India in Hanoi, Vietnam, diplomatic personnel and local diaspora communities ensured the Tricolour caught the first light of dawn across borders, inspiring global participation in the festivities.

"After the rise of the Tiranga with the morning sun over the Republic of Korea, it is now over to Embassy of India, Beijing@EOIBeijingto continue this historic journey of #SuryapathTiranga, carry the Indian Tricolour from one sunrise to the next inspire Indians to spread the fervour of #HarGharTiranga," the Embassy of India in Seoul wrote.

"The Tiranga rises from our shores at the break of dawn. Over to @IndianEmbJkt to continue this historic journey of #SuryapathTiranga. Carry the Indian Tricolour from one sunrise to the next, and inspire Indians to spread the fervour of #HarGharTiranga," the Embassy of India in China wrote.

"The Tiranga rises from our shores at the break of dawn. Over to Embassy of India Kathmandu @IndiaInNepal to continue this historic journey of #SuryapathTiranga. Carry the Indian Tricolour from one sunrise to the next, and inspire Indians to spread the fervour of #HarGharTiranga," the Embassy of India in Bhutan wrote on X.

"The Tiranga is set to rise from our shores at the break of dawn. Over to Embassy of India, Hanoi to continue this historic journey of #SuryapathTiranga, carry the Indian tricolour from one sunrise to the next and inspire Indians to spread the fervour of #HarGharTiranga," the Embassy of India in Indonesia wrote on X.

Meanwhile, Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam also extended his greetings to President Droupadi Murmu on India's 80th Independence Day.

"On behalf of the people of Singapore, I extend my warmest congratulations to Your Excellency and the people of India on the joyous occasion of India's 80th Independence Day. Singapore and India share a robust and forward-looking Comprehensive Strategic Partnership underpinned by close people-to-people ties. Our cooperation is multifaceted, expanding into new areas including skills development, digitalisation, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing.

By drawing on our complementary strengths, I am confident that our two countries will continue to identify fresh opportunities for the benefit of our peoples," he wrote in a letter.

Meanwhile in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hoisted the National Flag at Red Fort on the 80th Independence Day.

The hoisting of the National Flag was synchronised with the 21-Gun Salute by the gunners of the 1721 Field Battery (Ceremonial). The ceremonial battery, utilising the indigenous 105mm Light Field Guns, is commanded by Major Pawan Singh Shekhawat, and the Gun Position Officer is Naib Subedar (Assistant Instructor in Gunnery) Anuthosh Sarkar. – ANI

From bicycles at Thumba to lunar South Pole: India marks 80th Independence Day with major space expansion

NEW DELHI: As India celebrates its 80th Independence Day, the nation marks a defining turning point in its journey towards the stars. From transporting rocket components on bicycles through the coastal village of Thumba to becoming the first country to soft-land near the Moon's unexplored South Pole, India's space programme has evolved into a globally competitive, multi-billion-dollar ecosystem driven by cutting-edge science and private enterprise.

The dawn of this new era was underscored on July 18, 2026, when Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram 1 Test Flight 1 successfully reached Low Earth Orbit at approximately 450 kilometres and deployed its payloads.

Developed by a team of young Indian engineers with an average age of 28, the maiden flight of Vikram 1 made Skyroot the first Indian private company to place a rocket into orbit, signalling a massive structural shift in how the country reaches space.

This achievement stands in stark contrast to the country's humble beginnings. In 1962, under the visionary patronage of Vikram Sarabhai and physicist Kalpathi Ramakrishna Ramanathan, the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) was established.

Just a year later, on November 21, 1963, India made its space debut by launching a small sounding rocket for upper atmospheric studies from the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station in Kerala.

In those early days, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and the launch team faced basic logistical hurdles, negotiating land acquisition from a local church, resettling villagers, and transporting rocket components to the launch pad on bicycles, all before successfully launching in the presence of distinguished scientists, including Dr Homi Bhabha.

INCOSPAR laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 1969. Guided by visionaries like Sarabhai and Satish Dhawan, the space programme gradually expanded its ambitions.

Early international collaboration played a critical role, notably with the erstwhile Soviet Union, which launched India's first satellite, Aryabhata, on a Kosmos 3M rocket in 1975 and provided training in satellite communications and mission operations during the 1960s and 1970s.

By the 1990s, India achieved a major leap with the development of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). Despite an initial setback in 1994, the PSLV went on to accomplish a remarkable streak of over 50 successful missions.

Astronomical research gained momentum when India approved its first astronomy satellite in 1996--two decades after Sarabhai's passing--which eventually launched in 2015.

The turn of the century saw India set its sights on deep space. Chandrayaan 1, launched in 2008, created global history in 2009 by detecting water ice and hydroxyl on the lunar surface.

Interplanetary capabilities were further demonstrated with the Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan), launched in 2013, which entered Martian orbit on September 24, 2014, and operated for over eight years despite a planned six-month lifespan.

Science capabilities continued to scale with AstroSat, the solar mission Aditya-L1--positioned 1.5 million km away at the L1 point with over 27 TB of public solar data released--and XPoSat in January 2024 for X-ray polarisation astronomy.

Lunar exploration reached an unprecedented peak on August 23, 2023, when Chandrayaan 3 created history as the first spacecraft to soft-land near the Moon's South Pole, an achievement now commemorated annually as National Space Day.

Today, India's space ecosystem is powered by both its national space agency and a thriving private sector. Strategic reforms initiated in 2020 opened the sector to non-government entities, followed by the Indian Space Policy 2023, liberalised FDI rules in February 2024, and the Norms, Guidelines and Procedures (NGP) 2024 framework.

These reforms have defined the roles of key institutions. NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), ISRO's commercial arm, has seen its revenue rise from Rs 321.77 crore in FY 2021-22 to over Rs 3,000 crore in FY 2024-25, signing 118 Technology Transfer Agreements for 83 ISRO technologies.

Simultaneously, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) acts as a single-window regulator, facilitating 71 ISRO technology transfers as of January 2026 and granting 113 authorisations to 52 Non-Government Entities by mid-2026.

Financial support mechanisms--including the IN-SPACe Seed Fund Scheme, the Rs 1,000 crore Venture Capital Fund, the Rs 500 crore Technology Adoption Fund, and the Rs 75 crore Satellite Bus as a Service (SBaaS) Scheme--are giving space start-ups the capital required to scale. - ANI

From 'Maa Tujhe Salaam' to 'Ae Watan': Eight patriotic songs to celebrate India's 80th Independence Day

MUMBAI : India is celebrating its 80th Independence Day on August 15, with celebrations taking place across the country. From flag-hoisting ceremonies and cultural programmes to patriotic events, the day brings people together to remember India's freedom struggle and celebrate the country.

Music has always been an important part of these celebrations. Over the years, several patriotic songs have become closely linked with Independence Day, with some of them continuing to remain popular across generations.

From classics such as 'Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon' to newer songs like 'Ae Watan' and 'Teri Mitti', here are some songs that can be part of your Independence Day playlist.

1. Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon

One of India's most loved patriotic songs, 'Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon' is remembered for its tribute to Indian soldiers. The song remains a popular choice during Independence Day and Republic Day programmes.

2. Maa Tujhe Salaam

A.R. Rahman's 'Maa Tujhe Salaam' has become one of the best-known patriotic songs in modern Indian music. Its powerful music and lyrics make it a popular choice for Independence Day celebrations.

3. Vande Mataram

A.R. Rahman's rendition of 'Vande Mataram' brings a strong feeling of national pride. The song continues to be played at patriotic events and cultural programmes across the country.

4. Ae Watan

Featuring in the film 'Raazi', 'Ae Watan' is a soulful song about love for the country. Its emotional lyrics have made it a popular choice for Independence Day performances and tributes.

5. Teri Mitti

From 'Kesari', 'Teri Mitti' pays tribute to soldiers and their sacrifice for the country. The emotional song has become a familiar part of patriotic playlists.

6. Sandese Aate Hain

The song from 'Border' focuses on the emotions of soldiers who are away from their families. 'Sandese Aate Hain' remains closely linked with India's armed forces and patriotic occasions.

7. Bharat Humko Jaan Se Pyara Hai

Featured in 'Roja', 'Bharat Humko Jaan Se Pyara Hai' celebrates the country and its beauty. Its simple lyrics and soothing music make it a fitting choice for Independence Day.

8. Yeh Jo Des Hai Tera

From 'Swades', 'Yeh Jo Des Hai Tera' captures the emotional bond between a person and their homeland. The song offers a quieter and more reflective choice for an Independence Day playlist. – ANI

Viksit Bharat 2047: A roadmap to becoming a developed nation

BY DR MANOJ KUMAR
Former Ambassador to France

It is creditable that the Government of India has set for itself and the nation a crucial goal: That India should become Viksit Bharat by 2047, which would be the one hundredth year anniversary of India's independence. While there is general agreement that the term Viksit Bharat denotes a developed country, it is still necessary for public policy purposes to break the concept down to know what it entails. What follows is an attempt to do so.

A 10 trillion-dollar economy: While India can be legitimately proud of being the fourth largest economy in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world, the fact remains that for a population that is approaching 1.5 billion, the present GDP of $4.5 trillion is a little below par. So, if India must become "Viksit" in the real sense of the term, the GDP must grow significantly to attain the figure of at least 10 trillion dollars. This is entirely achievable if we can do a couple of things. First, 40 per cent of our GDP is foreign trade, so our share of international trade must simply double. In particular, our share of global exports, which hovers around 2 per cent, should rise to 10 per cent. Second, our Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which for the latest year is a little short of $100 billion, must also grow manifold. In order for the above two things to happen, Government of India must carry out deep seated economic reforms in areas such as land, labour, power, agriculture, infrastructure and regulatory obstacles.

Inclusive Economic Growth: While there is no question that the GDP must accelerate, as mentioned above, that alone is not enough. Growth must be inclusive which is to say that it must percolate to the downtrodden people who are at the bottom of the pyramid. The government has conceived excellent schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. But going beyond that, job creation for the youth must become a national mantra for both the Central and State Governments. Since it is not possible for the Government alone or even the organized sector to provide all the jobs that are necessary, it is vitally important to enable an ecosystem where the youth become entrepreneurs and job creators rather than be mere job seekers. Present levels of economic inequality are unsustainable and efforts must be made to make the society much more egalitarian.

Skilling: It is well recognised that our education system relies heavily on rote learning and it churns out thousands of graduates every year who may not be immediately employable. In this context, skilling and re-skilling of graduates becomes crucial. The idea of vocational training, industry-academic collaboration and imparting tech skills (including Artificial Intelligence) for our graduates must assume mission-mode importance. Spending on education, in both the public and private sector must increase exponentially, especially in states that lag the national average. In parallel, Research and Development must be given prime importance in all relevant institutions. It is indeed true that a population that is close to 1.5 billion can be a demographic dividend for India. But that is true only if the population is skilled enough to face the challenges of a knowledge economy.

Health: India's healthcare system is undergoing dramatic transformation, driven by digitalisation and by infrastructure expansion. But challenges remain on account of rising medical costs and a growing chronic disease burden. Government has undertaken significant efforts such as Ayushman Bharat and Ayushman Arogya Mandir schemes which have made a big impact on providing healthcare in the country. Medical college seats have more than doubled since 2014, in an attempt to bridge the doctor-patient gap. Successful attempts have also been made to promote India as a global hub for medical tourism. Despite all this, serious challenges remain. Public spending on healthcare still lags desired levels. India also runs the risk of becoming the global capital for heart disease and diabetes. India therefore needs to continue its massive transformation of public health infrastructure to make it accessible, affordable and quality-driven for the vast majority of its population. The National Health Mission is doing a commendable job. It simply needs to be strengthened and streamlined.

Conclusion: India is indeed well positioned to become Viksit Bharat by 2047. But the country needs to be on mission-mode and a whole-of-government approach is required to make sure that no stone is left unturned in this national endeavour. By any reckoning, the next twenty years will be the most crucial period in India's history.

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India: The trusted first responder

BY SUCHITRA DURAI
Former Ambassador of India to Thailand and Former High Commissioner of India to Kenya

When a giant wave of seawater struck Chennai's Marina Beach on the morning of 26 December 2004, pulling in its wake fisherfolk and a group of children playing cricket, little did their brethren know that an entire region had been struck and that, across the Bay of Bengal, local people and foreign tourists on Thai and Indonesian beaches had also been swept away.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004 was a natural catastrophe of a magnitude not experienced by humanity in recent times. It resulted in the death of almost a quarter million people and displacement of a couple of million people in 14 countries of the Indo-Pacific.

It also marked the coming of age of India's HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) institutional capacity. India not only dealt with death and destruction in its mainland, particularly in the coastal states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu as well as major devastation in its island territories of Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) islands but also provided speedy assistance to countries in south and south-east Asia including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia. Simultaneously, India launched five HADR operations, two national and three international – Operation Madad (coastal south India), Operation Sea waves (A&N), Operation Castor (Maldives), Operation Rainbow (Sri Lanka) and Operation Gambhir (Indonesia). These involved the three defence services and the Indian coast guard – more than 40 ships, several transport aircraft and helicopters as well as more than 20,000 military personnel were deployed.

India's actions led to its recognition as a credible first responder in the Indo-Pacific region. Soon thereafter, the Disaster Management Act of 2005 was adopted by the Indian parliament providing the legal and institutional framework for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response, a three-layered structure at the national, state and district level and the establishment of a dedicated force, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to respond to such calamities.

The 2004 Tsunami also saw the coming together of the navies of four countries – Australia, India, Japan and the US – to coordinate the delivery of assistance in a collaborative effort that eventually evolved into the Quad.

India has handled several major natural disasters in the last few decades both in its immediate neighbourhood as well in distant lands.

In December 2014, India undertook one of its most complex humanitarian missions, Operation Neer, to supply drinking water to the Maldives after that country's only desalination plant broke down. Indian Air Force aircraft and Indian naval ships worked round the clock to supply more than 1,500 tonnes of drinking water to the Maldives becoming the first country to respond to the request from the Maldives.

In April 2015, when a massive earthquake hit Nepal, India launched a comprehensive rescue and relief mission in the form of Operation Maitri within six hours of the initial tremors. Several thousand stranded Indians and foreign nationals were evacuated by air and land routes and hundreds of tons of essential material were delivered. Several field hospitals were set up. After the relief operations were completed, India launched a major rehabilitation and reconstruction package of around USD 2 billion for Nepal.

> By providing need-based and rapid assistance during emergencies and through its efforts to develop capacities for mutual benefit, India is seen as a reliable first responder and a force for global good

Following a devastating earthquake that struck Myanmar in end March 2025, India launched Operation Brahma, a huge tri-services combined with NDRF mission that supplied over 750 MT of materials and equipment including essential medicines and food aid. Field hospitals were set up in Mandalay, while engineering teams were deployed for reconnaissance and assessment of structural damage. Op Brahma was a classic whole-of-government HADR endeavour by the Government of India.

In end 2025, India provided massive support under Operation Sagar Bandhu to Sri Lanka that was hit by cyclone Ditwah. Food, equipment, medicines and other essential items were provided and more than 1000 tons of dry rations were supplied.

Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, India also responded with alacrity to requests from Turkiye and Syria when they were struck by earthquakes in 2023. Under Operation Dost, India was a first responder sending large Search and Rescue (SAR) teams of more than 250 personnel along with medical teams and dog squads to both countries as well as materials support.

In March 2019, India provided HADR to cyclone-hit Mozambique and in 2023 provided assistance to Malawi which was affected by a tropical cyclone.

Recently, on 26 June, 2026 India undertook its most ambitious HADR initiative when 30 tonnes of humanitarian relief materials accompanied by a 41-member team comprising experienced rescue personnel and medical professionals arrived in two C-17s to earthquake hit Venezuela.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, India supplied 300 million doses of vaccine to 99 countries and 2 United Nations entities under the Vaccine Maitri initiatives since January 2021, along with essential medicines and medical support.

For India, HADR has moved from being an episodic activity to a continuous global engagement. It is an essential feature of India's foreign and security policy that was formally enunciated in the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine announced by Prime Minister Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015 which underpins India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region; it became an intrinsic part of our Indo-Pacific Vision and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) announced in 2019 and evolved into the MAHASAGAR vision outlined by PM Modi in March 2025.

India's approach is not merely reactive. It has also put in place frameworks for international cooperation in the area of prevention and mitigation through contributing towards the setting up of an international tsunami warning system as well as the launch of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). The CDRI (comprising 60 member states) works with 25 small island developing states to build disaster resilient infrastructure including schools, hospitals and homes.

By providing need-based and rapid assistance during emergencies and through its efforts to develop capacities for mutual benefit, India is seen as a reliable first responder and a force for global good.

IPL franchises extend greetings and celebrate spirit of India

NEW DELHI: Several Indian Premier League (IPL) franchises extended Independence Day greetings to the nation on Friday, celebrating the spirit of freedom, unity and patriotism on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day.

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) took to social media platform X and wished fans on the occasion, saying, "Let the tricolour fly high! Here's to the freedom, togetherness and spirit that make India what it is. Happy 80th Independence Day!"

Rajasthan Royals (RR) wrote, "Entering the 80th year of writing our own story. Vande Mataram, India!"

Punjab Kings (PBKS) also extended their greetings, posting, "Apne Tirange ko dil se salaam. Wishing everyone a #HappyIndependenceDay."

Delhi Capitals (DC) shared a message highlighting the team's aspirations for the country, writing, "We still need to win more for the country."

Mumbai Indians (MI) posted a brief Independence Day message, "Our Tricolor."

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) shared a tribute to India's journey since Independence, writing, "From a dream of freedom to a nation of dreamers.

"For every dream that was fought for, every dream that was realised, and every dream that still lies ahead. Happy 80th Independence Day, India."

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) also joined the celebrations, posting, "One flag. A billion emotions. United by one love, we say, Ami India."

The messages came as India celebrated its 80th Independence Day, commemorating the country's independence from British colonial rule on August 15, 1947. — ANI

COMMENTARY

India's space sector: A launchpad for global partnerships

BY GURJIT SINGH
Former Ambassador and author

Growing competition in outer space provides India with a unique opportunity to shape a narrative in which collaboration, rather than confrontation, drives space exploration. Recognised as a trustworthy and cost-effective spacefaring nation, India is now well placed to transform its technological advances into enduring international partnerships that contribute to scientific progress, economic growth, and sustainable development.

India's journey into space has been distinctive.The programme was conceived as an instrument of national development. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai anchored India's space vision in practical applications that would improve the lives of ordinary people. Under his leadership, satellites were developed to strengthen communications, weather forecasting, disaster management, healthcare, agriculture and education. This development-oriented philosophy remains central to India's space programme and resonates strongly with the needs of countries in the Global South, which seek practical applications of space technology rather than prestige alone.

Today, India's achievements extend beyond developmental applications. The Chandrayaan missions, the Mars Orbiter Mission, the Aditya-L1 solar observatory, and the forthcoming Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme have established India as a nation capable of executing sophisticated and reliable space missions. Chandrayaan-3's successful soft landing near the Moon's south pole placed India among an exclusive group of space powers while demonstrating that world-class innovation can be achieved at comparatively modest cost.

India's growing credibility comes at a time when the global space economy is expanding rapidly. Valued at over US$600 billion today and projected to approach US$1.8 trillion by 2035, the sector is increasingly driven by commercial activity in satellite communications, Earth observation, navigation, climate services, broadband connectivity, and emerging fields such as in-orbit servicing and lunar exploration. Many countries aspire to participate but lack indigenous capabilities. They seek dependable long-term partners rather than merely launch providers.

India possesses the capabilities to meet these requirements. The liberalisation of the space sector in 2020 transformed the ecosystem by opening it to private participation. The establishment of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), the expanding commercial role of NewSpace India Limited, and the growth of private enterprises have created one of the world's most dynamic emerging space ecosystems. Indian startups are developing launch vehicles, satellite platforms, geospatial applications and propulsion technologies that are attracting global investment and customers. Companies such as Skyroot Aerospace, Pixxel and Agnikul Cosmos have demonstrated that Indian private enterprise can compete internationally in advanced space technologies.

The next step is to internationalise this ecosystem. Rather than positioning itself only as a low-cost launch destination, India will offer comprehensive partnerships encompassing satellite design, launch services, mission operations, ground stations, astronaut training, capacity building and downstream applications in agriculture, disaster management and maritime security. Such integrated partnerships would be valuable for countries across the Global South and the Indo-Pacific seeking affordable, customised and reliable technologies to meet their development priorities.

India has demonstrated the diplomatic value of such cooperation. Through the South Asia Satellite, it provided communication and developmental benefits to neighbouring countries. Indian launch vehicles have successfully placed hundreds of foreign satellites into orbit for governments, universities and commercial operators around the world. India's decision to join the Artemis Accords reflects its willingness to participate in the peaceful exploration of the Moon through international collaboration. Cooperation with NASA, the European Space Agency and JAXA has strengthened India's scientific and technological capabilities.

These partnerships reinforce India's standing as a leading voice of the Global South. India offers development partnerships based on affordability, reliability and mutual respect rather than creating technological dependence. Space cooperation has therefore become an increasingly important instrument of Indian diplomacy, strengthening bilateral relationships while delivering tangible developmental benefits.

To realise its full potential, India will aim to sustain the momentum of reform. Faster regulatory approvals, greater access to venture capital, stronger intellectual property protection, and closer collaboration among research institutions, industry and academia will be essential. Public procurement policies would continue supporting Indian startups, enabling them to scale up, innovate and integrate into global supply chains.

India is positioned to play a larger role in shaping the governance of outer space. Orbital congestion, space debris, responsible resource utilisation and equitable access to emerging space opportunities are becoming pressing international concerns. As space activities expand, there will be an increasing need for countries capable of building consensus on responsible norms and practices. India's long-standing commitment to the peaceful uses of outer space, combined with its growing technological capabilities, equips it to contribute meaningfully to the development of rules that promote transparency, sustainability and equitable access.

The coming decade will determine not only which countries lead in space but also how space is governed. With its scientific capabilities, entrepreneurial ecosystem and international credibility, India is uniquely placed to bridge the gap between established and emerging space nations. By building collaborative partnerships founded on inclusivity, mutual benefit and innovation, India can transform its space programme into a major pillar of its global engagement.

In an increasingly divided world, India's space sector offers a powerful reminder that the greatest achievements in space are those that bring nations together. That may well become India's most enduring contribution to humanity's next frontier.


10:38
Times OF OMAN
GOLDEN JUBILEE
51
LEGACY
Made in Oman, for Oman.
Maal
The National Payment Card
'SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS NOW NEEDED FOR A LASTING PEACE'
The 'Workable' Peace – Diplomacy or a Tactical Trap?
OMR3.3bn investments in logistics
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TO CONTINUE READING THE FULL EDITION, PLEASE
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