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ACADEMIC YEAR 2025/2026



The Honourable Lady delivers address to top achievers in General Education Diploma

MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed Al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, delivered an address to the top-achieving students of the General Education Diploma for the academic year 2025/2026.

The full text of the address reads as follows:

“Our beloved sons and daughters, the students,

With hearts full of pride and esteem, we share in your joy of this outstanding achievement and congratulate you on

this distinguished accomplishment in the General Education Diploma for the academic year 2025/2026.

Behind this success lay sincere determination, unwavering effort and the generous support of families who believed in their children and stood by them. Equally, teachers — both men and women — alongside educational and administrative staff, played a truly commendable role in guiding, mentoring, and instilling in you a love of knowledge and a spirit of perseverance. **>A5**

NEW REGULATION

Sultanate to roll out sick leave insurance scheme from today

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's Social Protection Fund has issued a new decision making the Sick Leave and Extraordinary Leave Insurance branch mandatory for all non-Omani employees.

The new regulation applies to expats working in government entities, public legal bodies, and private sector establishments covered by the Labour Law.

According to Article Three of Decision No. 13/2026, the mandate will officially come into effect on July 19, 2026.

The decision was issued pursuant to the Social Protection Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 52/2023 and its Executive Regulations, following the formal approval of the Fund's Board of Directors.

Under the newly issued framework: Article One outlines that



compulsory coverage will apply to all non-Omani employees in units of the State Administrative Apparatus and other public legal entities, as well as non-Omani workers employed in private sector establishments subject to the Labour Law.

Article Two stipulates that any prior provisions inconsistent with this new decision are officially repealed. The decision was signed by Eng. Salim bin Nasser bin Said Al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund.

FOOTBALL FEVER GRIPS THE NATION AHEAD OF FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL

Holders Argentina take on Spain in a mouth-watering title clash in New York on Sunday night

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Football fever is sweeping across Oman as malls, hotels, restaurants and cinemas gear up for Sunday night's FIFA World Cup 2026 final between Spain and Argentina in New York. The match kicks off at 11pm, Oman time.

From giant screens and themed menus to special promotions and extended seating, venues across the Sultanate are gearing up to welcome thousands of football fans eager to witness the biggest match in world football.

Spain's Ambassador to Oman, F. Javier de Istúriz, expressed his excitement ahead of the final. “Reaching the final is already a great achievement for us. Football



ball is a sport that unites people, and in that spirit, I hope fans everywhere enjoy a memorable match,” he said.

Popular venues including Sheraton Oman, Mall of Oman, Oman Avenues Mall, VOX Cinemas, Crowne Plaza Muscat, Kempinski Muscat and Al Falaj Hotel in Ruwi are all expecting capacity crowds, with many reporting

that reservations are filling up rapidly.

Rejin Thomas, Hotel Manager at Sheraton Oman, said the hotel's Hive Lounge is fully prepared for the occasion.

“Gather your friends and family and enjoy the World Cup final live at Hive Lounge. Catch every moment on the big screen while enjoying exciting offers and your favourite bites.

“Whether you're cheering for Argentina or Spain, or simply soaking up the atmosphere, Hive Lounge is the perfect place to watch, relax and celebrate together.” **>A5**

WORLD CUP 2026

UPCOMING MATCHES

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ARGENTINA

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TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Oman's FDI rises 8.7% to OMR32.2 billion

1 The Sultanate of Oman recorded an 8.7 percent increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) by the end of the first quarter of 2026, with total investments reaching OMR 32.197 billion. **>A2**

OMAN Atin Square, Shaat Viewpoint opened

2 Dhofar Governorate has officially opened activities at Atin Square and Shaat Viewpoint, offering visitors two of the season's premier destinations as part of the expanded tourism programme. **>A5**

WORLD Skyroot's Vikram-1 reaches orbit

3 Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 Test Flight-1 has successfully reached orbit on Saturday, marking the maiden flight of India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket. **>A7**

RAO showcases Omani heritage in Basel

A2

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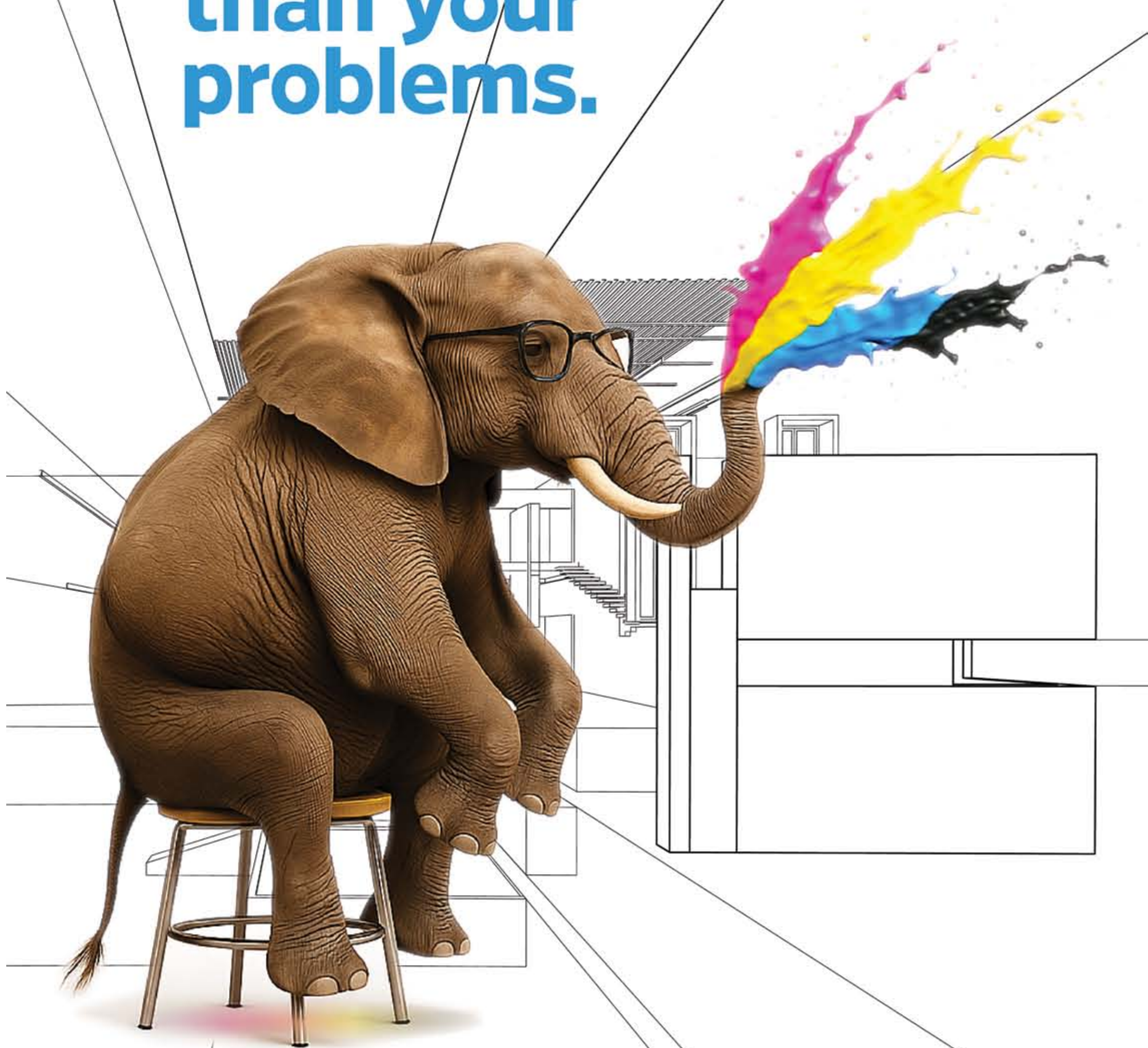
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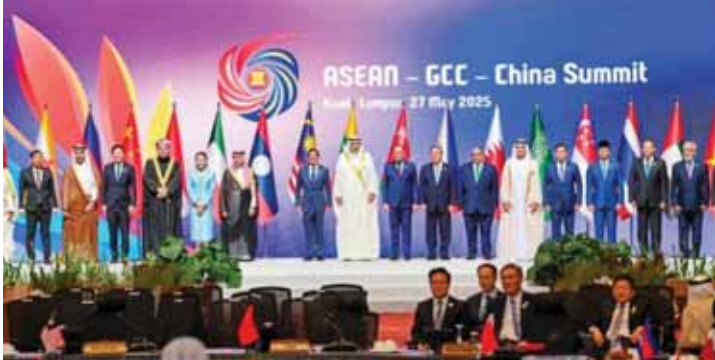
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ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

Oman to participate in ministerial meeting in Manila

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is participating this week in the ministerial meeting in Manila commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). On the sidelines of the meeting, Oman will also hold a series of high-level bilateral meetings aimed at advancing political and economic partnerships, expanding trade and investment opportunities, and strengthening cooperation on regional priorities of mutual interest. Oman's participation reflects its growing engagement with South-east Asia and reinforces its role as a trusted partner connecting ASEAN with the Gulf, Africa and wider international markets. The meeting



also provides an important opportunity to advance cooperation across priority sectors, including logistics, maritime transport, energy and green hydrogen, food security, tourism, digital transformation, advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies. The participation also supports Oman Vision 2040 by strengthening international partnerships, attracting quality investment and reinforcing the Oman's position as a globally connected trade and

logistics hub. Relations between Oman and ASEAN member states continue to grow steadily across trade, investment and people-to-people ties. Collectively, ASEAN represents one of the world's most dynamic economic regions, with a population of more than 684 million people and trade in goods exceeding USD 3.8 trillion in 2024, presenting significant opportunities to deepen Oman's economic partnerships across Southeast Asia. Bilateral trade with Singapore reached approximately OMR511 million by the end of October 2024, while Thailand's PTT signed a long-term agreement to purchase 300,000 metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually from Oman

LNG beginning in 2025. Oman is also home to around 50,000 Filipino nationals, whose contributions across healthcare, aviation, hospitality, construction and professional services reflect the deep and enduring human ties between the two regions. These growing economic and people-to-people links provide a strong foundation for expanding collaboration in trade, investment, innovation, education, research and cultural exchange. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) was signed in 1976 as ASEAN's foundational framework for promoting peaceful relations, dialogue and regional cooperation. Oman acceded to the Treaty in 2022 through Royal Decree No. 7/2023,

reaffirming the principles that have long guided its foreign policy, including dialogue, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, adherence to international law and constructive international engagement. These shared principles continue to underpin closer cooperation between Oman and ASEAN member states in support of regional stability, sustainable development and long-term prosperity. Supported by its strategic location at the crossroads of global trade routes, integrated logistics ecosystem, world-class ports and free zones, and competitive investment environment, Oman offers ASEAN businesses a gateway to the Gulf, Africa and wider international markets. **-ONA**

Oman's FDI rises 8.7% to OMR32.2 billion



FDI inflows during the January-March 2026 period amounted to approximately OMR 2.567 billion



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded an 8.7 percent increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) by the end of the first quarter of 2026, with total investments reaching OMR 32.197 billion, reflecting continued investor confidence in the country's economy. According to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), FDI inflows during the January-March 2026 period amounted to approximately OMR 2.567 billion. The oil and gas extraction sec-

tor remained the largest recipient of foreign investment, attracting OMR 25.889 billion, up 9.5 percent from the same period a year earlier. Investment inflows into the sector totalled OMR 2.238 billion, underscoring its continued dominance in Oman's investment landscape. The manufacturing sector ranked second, with FDI reaching OMR 2.870 billion, marking a 5.4 percent year-on-year increase. The sector attracted investment inflows of OMR 146.7 million dur-

ing the quarter. The financial intermediation sector followed, recording foreign investments worth OMR 1.565 billion, up 9.6 percent compared to the first quarter of 2025. Investment inflows into the sector stood at OMR 137.7 million. Among investing countries, the United Kingdom retained its position as the largest foreign investor in Oman, with investments rising 9.9 percent to OMR 16.885 billion by the end of the first quarter. Foreign direct investments from

the United States increased by 10 percent to OMR 8.696 billion, while investments from Kuwait rose 4.6 percent to OMR 1.444 billion. China's investments also posted strong growth, increasing 9.3 percent to OMR 901.5 million. The latest figures highlight Oman's success in attracting foreign capital across key sectors as it continues to pursue economic diversification and strengthen its investment climate under Oman Vision 2040.

CULTURAL IDENTITY



RAO music band showcases Omani heritage in Basel

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman's (RAO) music band is representing the Sultanate at the Tattoo Basel Military Music Festival in Basel, Switzerland, taking place from July 17 to 25, alongside military bands from countries around the world. The participation underscores the band's growing reputation at international military music events and reflects Oman's commitment to showcasing its rich cultural identity and distinguished military musical heritage on the global stage.

The festival provides an opportunity for the Royal Army of Oman band to exchange expertise and strengthen ties with military music ensembles from different nations, while highlighting the traditions and artistic excellence of Omani military music. The participation also reinforces the Sultanate's international presence and reflects the prestigious standing Oman enjoys in cultural and military engagements worldwide, according to the Oman News Agency. **-ONA**

GROWING INVESTOR CONFIDENCE

Total capital of investment and real estate funds in Oman last year amounted to OMR1.2 billion

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The total capital of real estate and investment funds in Oman rose sharply by 89.9 percent in 2025, reaching OMR1.2 billion, up from OMR630.8 million in 2024, reflecting growing investor confidence in the country's regulated investment market. According to data released by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the expansion was driven primarily by investment funds, whose capital jumped 125.4 percent to OMR 993.7 million, compared with OMR 440.8 million a year earlier. Real estate funds also maintained steady growth, with their capital increasing 7.4 percent to OMR 203.9 million from OMR 190 million in 2024, underlining the sector's continued appeal as a long-term investment option. The FSA said the figures demonstrate increasing confidence among investors in collective investment vehicles, which enable

individuals to pool their capital under professional fund management, offering greater diversification and access to investment opportunities than many retail investors could achieve independently. The sector also posted strong gains in net assets. Total net assets attributable to unit holders in real estate and investment funds climbed 71.9 percent to OMR 1.36 billion in 2025, compared with OMR 793.69 million the previous year. **Net assets rising 94.6%** Investment funds accounted for the bulk of the increase, with net assets rising 94.6 percent to more than OMR 1.14 billion, while real estate funds recorded a 6.6 percent increase to approximately OMR 218.2 million, reflecting stable and balanced growth. Profitability also improved significantly. Combined net profits of investment and real estate funds rose 82.1 percent during 2025 to

OMR 57.3 million, up from OMR 31.49 million in 2024. Investment funds led the earnings growth, with profits soaring 162.5 percent to around OMR 41 million, while real estate funds generated OMR 16.34 million, an increase of 2.9 percent, supported by steady returns from property assets. The Financial Services Authority said it continues to strengthen the regulatory framework governing investment and real estate funds through enhanced disclosure, transparency and corporate governance standards to safeguard investors' interests. The authority added that it is aligning the regulatory environment with international best practices to boost the attractiveness of the Omani market, broaden the range of investment products, encourage savings, expand the investor base and support the long-term growth and sustainability of the country's non-banking financial sector.



COMMENTARY

Oman’s Legal Framework on Fair Market Competition and Monopoly Prevention

The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 67/2014, as amended up to Royal Decree No. 22/2018, sets out Oman’s rules for protecting free competition and preventing monopoly.

Speaking to the Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Chairman of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, explained that “the law applies to all production, trade, and service activities in the Sultanate, and to any economic or commercial activities carried outside the Sultanate that have an impact within it. It also applies to the misuse of intellectual property rights, trademarks, patents, and publications, where this leads to adverse effects on competition. The law does not apply to public



utilities wholly owned and managed by the state, and to research and development activities conducted by public or private bodies.”



“The law prohibits any agreement or practice aimed at preventing, limiting, or weakening competition, including price-fixing, market division, and

limiting production. A person or group of persons is considered dominant where its share of the relevant market exceeds 35 percent. A dominant person is also prohibited from selling below actual cost to obstruct or exclude competitors, or from restricting supply to create an artificial shortage, he said.”

Dr. Al Zadjali stated that “any person intending to carry out a disposal that results in an economic concentration must submit a written request to the Centre before proceeding. The Centre must issue a decision within 90 days of receiving the request, failing which the request is deemed accepted. No concentration shall be approved if it results in the acquisition of more than 50 percent of the relevant market.”

“Violations of the provisions on monopolistic agreements, anti-competitive practices, and abuse of dominance carry imprisonment of three months to three years and a fine equivalent to the profits gained from selling the violating products, or either of them, in addition to a percentage of between 5 and 10 percent of the violator’s total annual sales of those products in the last completed fiscal year. Violations concerning economic concentration and obstruction of investigators carry imprisonment of one month to three years and a fine of OMR 10,000 to OMR 100,000, or either of them, he said.”

This framework reflects the Sultanate’s commitment to a transparent, competitive marketplace that protects both

businesses and consumers from monopolistic harm, 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).

Oman sees surge in industrial design registrations as innovation grows

34 applications were registered by the end of 2025, while 32 applications were filed during the first half of 2026 alone, reflecting growing public awareness of the importance of protecting industrial designs

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has highlighted the growing importance of registering and protecting industrial designs, saying the practice plays a key role in boosting the national economy, encouraging innovation, supporting creative industries, and



creating new employment and export opportunities.

The ministry, represented by the National Intellectual Property Office, said demand for industrial design registration is rising among individuals and companies across a wide range of sectors.

These include packaging, containers, home furniture, woodwork, lighting products, jewellery, electronic and electrical devices, textiles and clothing, ceramics, handicrafts, pictorial symbols and

user interface designs.

Nidaa bint Yaqoub al Tamimiya, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department at the National Intellectual Property Office, said industrial design registration applications have increased steadily in recent years.

A total of 34 applications were registered by the end of 2025, while 32 applications were filed during the first half of 2026 alone, reflecting growing public awareness of the importance of

protecting industrial designs.

Al Tamimiya stressed that industrial designs are as important as patents and trademarks, noting that registration provides legal protection by granting owners exclusive rights to prevent others from copying, registering or selling their designs without permission.

She said legal protection helps combat imitation and unfair competition, safeguards a company’s reputation, and makes it easier for rights holders to pursue legal ac-



competitive advantage, and improves their prospects in local and international markets.

She explained that industrial design protection periods vary by country but are generally no less than 10 years. In Oman, industrial designs are protected for 15 years, with registration renewed every five years.

Al Tamimiya added that industrial designs are valuable not only for their aesthetic appeal but also for their economic impact.

By increasing the added value of products and strengthening their marketability, registered designs contribute to economic growth and support the development of innovative industries in the Sultanate.

tion when necessary.

Registering industrial designs also enhances the commercial value of products, strengthens their

THIRD PHASE

Nama Water’s Sohar sewerage project reaches 67% completion

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services has completed 67 percent of the third phase of Sohar’s sewerage network expansion, a strategic OMR 19 million infrastructure project aimed at strengthening wastewater services, supporting urban growth and enhancing environmental sustainability in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The project forms part of the company’s broader strategy to build a more efficient, resilient and sustainable sewerage system capable of meeting the demands of rapid urban and economic development while improving the quality of life in the governorate.

The expansion covers the areas of Al-Hambar, Ghayl Al-Shaboul, Al-Tarif and Al-Waqiba, as well as the coastal localities of Al-Sabara, Al-Shizaw and Al-Hazeera. Once completed, the upgraded network is expected to improve wastewater management, increase operational reliability and support continued urban and economic development in Sohar.

Nama Water Services said the project has also generated OMR 1.5 million in local added value so far through the participation of local businesses and the employment of Omani expertise, reinforcing the company’s commitment to supporting the national economy and increasing local content in infrastructure projects.

Engineer Mohammed bin Harb Al-Makhmari, Director General of Sector Projects Implementation in North Al Batinah Governorate,



described the project as one of Nama Water Services’ key strategic investments to strengthen infrastructure readiness.

He said the initiative reflects the company’s vision of developing a flexible and sustainable sewerage system that can accommodate future growth while contributing to environmental protection and improving the quality of public services in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Project Manager Engineer Mohammed Al-Muqbali said construction is progressing according to schedule while maintaining the highest standards of quality and safety.

The first phase includes the construction of 40 kilometres of sewerage pipelines, 3 kilometres of aerial discharge networks, 3 kilometres of pumping lines, a pumping station in Al-Tarif, a lifting station in Ghayl Al-Sha-

boul, completion of works at the Al-Hambar (1) pumping station, aerial discharge stations in Al-Hazeera and Al-Shizaw, and the upgrading of several existing pumping stations. This phase is scheduled for completion during the second quarter of 2027.

The second phase will focus on household connections, linking 3,432 residential, commercial and government units to the expanded sewerage network and wastewater treatment plant. It is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2028.

According to Nama Water Services, the completed project will significantly improve the reliability and efficiency of Sohar’s sewerage system while delivering long-term environmental and economic benefits, strengthening infrastructure resilience and supporting sustainable urban development across North Al Batinah.

ENVIRONMENT GUARDIANS

266 vehicles removed from green spaces during Khareef season



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority’s Environment Guardians initiative continues its field operations across Dhofar Governorate, stepping up efforts to protect natural sites and promote environmentally responsible behavior during the Khareef season.

According to the latest statistics released on July 16, the initiative has recorded tangible progress through its joint efforts with Dhofar Municipality and the Royal Oman Police.

The campaign has removed 266 vehicles from green spaces to prevent damage to vegetation, closed 65 locations to protect environmentally sensitive areas, and handled 26 public reports related to environmental violations.

In addition, the initiative documented 13 reports of overflowing waste bins, dealt with seven stranded vehicles, and carried out four media awareness activities aimed at encouraging visitors to



preserve Dhofar’s unique natural environment.

The Environment Authority said the initiative reflects its ongoing commitment to safeguarding the governorate’s ecosystems during the popular monsoon season, while raising public awareness and encouraging compliance with environmental regulations to ensure the sustainability of Dhofar’s natural landscapes.

Oman accelerates road infrastructure drive with 61 projects under way



2026 has been an exceptional year for road infrastructure, with several major projects already completed or opened during the first half of the year



Taimur bin Faisal Road, the Izki-Nizwa dual carriageway, and the Al Abila-Al Fayyad Road.

Looking ahead, the ministry is preparing to launch a number of new projects under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. These include the first phase of the Empty Quarter dual carriageway in Al Dhahirah, completion of the Sant-Wadi Al A'la Road, road rehabilitation and flood protection works in Jabal Al Akhdar, and paving roads serving villages in North Al Sharqiyah.

Dr. Saif bin Said Al Sinani said tendering procedures are also nearing completion for the 132-kilometre Sinaw-Mahout-Duqm Road connecting Mahout to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, as well as the expansion of the Muscat Expressway, with construction expected to begin before the end of the year.

Among the flagship projects is the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road in Musandam, linking Dibba, Lima and Khasab, which has exceeded 73 percent completion. The project is expected to significantly improve connectivity and support tourism and economic activity in the governorate.

Work is also progressing on the 400-kilometre Sultan Said bin Taimur Road between Haima and Thumrait. Parts of the highway are expected to open in the first half of 2027, while full completion is targeted for the second half of 2028.

The ministry is also implementing major road projects across Dhofar, North and South Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and the Al Batinah governorates, alongside upgrades in Muscat, including the redevelopment of Al Mouj Street and 18 November Street, where roads will be widened and roundabouts converted into signal-controlled intersections to improve traffic flow.

Dr. Al Sinani added that road maintenance remains a key priority, with more than OMR 230 million allocated for periodic maintenance contracts, repairs and rehabilitation of roads damaged by adverse weather, ensuring the long-term sustainability and efficiency of Oman's expanding road network.



MESSAGE

The Honourable Lady’s message for achievers

< FROM A1 Our dear children, Carry this excellence with humility, continue your journey with confidence, and let your noble character and your love for Oman be a light

that accompanies you along the path of knowledge and life. The nation rejoices in your achievements and looks to you for beneficial knowledge and sincere endeavour. May the Almighty Allah bless

your steps, open before you the doors of goodness and success, and may He always make you the pride of your families and a source of honour for Oman and its people.” — OMA

KHAREEF SEASON

Atin Square, Shaat Viewpoint opened to visitors in Dhofar

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Dhofar Governorate has officially opened the activities at Atin Square and Shaat Viewpoint, offering visitors two of the season’s premier destinations as part of the governorate’s expanded tourism and entertainment programme during the Khareef season. The opening forms part of a broader initiative to enhance visitor experiences through upgraded recreational facilities and integrated infrastructure, reinforcing Dhofar’s position as one of the region’s leading summer tourism destinations. At Atin Square, visitors can enjoy newly developed public spaces featuring innovative entertainment activities, family-friendly attractions, and modern facilities that blend contemporary design with Oman’s rich cultural heritage. The project complements the redevelopment of the Al Haffa waterfront, creating vibrant leisure destinations for residents and tourists alike. Meanwhile, Shaat Viewpoint in Rakhyut (Wilayat) offers breathtaking panoramic views of Dhofar’s dramatic cliffs and coastline, where the seasonal mist merges with lush green mountains during the Khareef season. The site provides dedicated viewing platforms, walking trails, and photography opportunities,



making it one of the governorate’s most iconic natural attractions. The developments are supported by significant improvements to Dhofar’s transport infrastructure, including expanded strategic road networks designed to ensure safer and smoother travel between mountains, natural springs, beaches, and tourist landmarks. This year’s Khareef season also features 125 international and local events, including theatre and sculpture festivals, live artistic performances, cultural activities, and family entertainment programs catering to visitors of all ages.

Sultan Qaboos University announces discovery of a new plant species

The species has been named after Oman to reflect the country where it was first discovered and documented. It is native to the limestone plateaus



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Life Sciences Unit at the College of Science, has announced the discovery of a new plant species, Adenosciadium omanensis, which had not previously been recorded in the World Flora. The species has been named after Oman to reflect the country where it was first discovered and documented. It is native to the limestone plateaus along the coast, particularly in the eastern Hajar Mountains of northern Oman. The newly identified species belongs to the Apiaceae (carrot) family and shares some characteristics with Adenosciadium arabicum, a related species found in southern Oman and extending into Yemen. However, Adenosciadium omanensis differs in several morphological characteristics that evolved as a result of differences in climate and environmental terrain—factors that drive evolution and the emergence of new species. Among the most distinctive features of the new species are its



velvety-textured leaves and kidney-shaped leaflets with serrated edges. It also produces a greater number of flowers and differs from Adenosciadium arabicum in the shape and size of its seeds. The new species has been officially recognised internationally through its publication and formal description in the Edinburgh Journal of Botany, one of

the world’s leading peer-reviewed botanical journals. The journal is affiliated with one of the world’s foremost herbaria and is renowned for its expertise in plant taxonomy, particularly species documented from the Arabian Peninsula. A specimen of Adenosciadium omanensis has also been preserved in the Sultan Qaboos University Herbarium, where it

SADAD International Wins ‘Excellence in B2B Services – Customer-Centric Debt Recovery & Credit Evaluation’ Award



SADAD International was felicitated with the ‘Excellence in B2B Services – Customer-Centric Debt Recovery & Credit Evaluation’ Award at the Times of Oman CX Awards 2026. The awards presentation was co-located with Times of Oman CX Forum 2026, held at Hotel Kempinski, Muscat. The premier event was attended by over 325+ CX leaders across sectors in Oman. SADAD International has distinguished itself through its customer-centric approach to debt recovery, credit evaluation, and business support services. By combining industry expertise, technology-driven solutions, and ethical business practices, the company has helped organisations strengthen financial performance while maintaining positive customer relationships and protecting brand reputation. With a strong focus on transparency, professionalism, and compliance, SADAD International delivers tailored solutions that support businesses in mak-

ing informed credit decisions, mitigating financial risk, and improving collections efficiency. Its commitment to innovation, operational excellence, and responsive client service has earned the trust of organisations across a wide range of industries. Through continuous investment in digital capabilities, skilled professionals, and best-in-class processes, SADAD International continues to raise the standard for customer-centric B2B services. Its ability to balance commercial objectives with a respectful, relationship-focused approach has positioned the company as a trusted partner in debt recovery and credit evaluation. Instituted by Times of Oman in association with Muscat Media Group, Gulf Leaders Circle and TEvents, the Oman Customer Experience (CX) Awards celebrate exceptional professionals, organisations, and brands that have distinguished themselves through excellence in customer experience.

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FOOTBALL

Restaurants and cafes to broadcast match

< FROM A1 Beachfront venues are also joining the celebrations. Restaurants and cafes along Qurum Beach will broadcast the match on large indoor and outdoor screens, giving football fans the opportunity to enjoy the final in a lively seaside setting. Restaurant operators say the World Cup has brought together football enthusiasts from across Oman, with supporters of both finalists, as well as neutral fans, expected to watch the match side by side. “We’ve seen tremendous demand throughout the tournament, but the final is on another level,” Thomas added. “Tables have been booked days in advance, and we expect a full house, with fans proudly wearing their national colours. The atmosphere is going to be electric.” Many venues have introduced themed food platters, match-night promotions and interactive activities, while decorating their interiors with national flags and football-inspired displays to recreate the excitement of an international fan zone. The excitement follows weeks of memorable football that has captivated fans across Oman. Social media has been buzzing with match predictions, celebrations and photos from viewing parties, while restaurants and sports lounges have reported a sharp increase in footfall since the knock-



“

May the best team win today.

F. Javier de Istúriz
Spain’s Ambassador to Oman

out stages. As Spain bid for another World Cup title and Argentina seek to reclaim football’s biggest prize, Oman is set for one of its busiest sporting nights of the year, with thousands of fans expected to gather across the country to witness the crowning of the 2026 FIFA World Cup champions. “And now,” Ambassador F. Javier de Istúriz said, “may the best team win.”

ANNOUNCEMENT



This is to inform all concerned that **MR. CYRIL PINTO**, holder of **Indian Passport No. B9790195 Resident card No. 61047454** has been terminated from our company **ALI AHMED AL KHARUSI TRADING LLC** from 23/02/2026. Therefore, all the concerned are requested to stop dealing with the above named in favor of the company. If anyone is dealing with him, it is at their own risk and the company will not take any responsibility hereafter. If anybody has any claim, he/she should report to the company within next 3 working days.

Oman helps Tanzania with new data centre

The project includes the opening of an integrated data centre designed to strengthen the infrastructure of the Tanzanian National Archives

Times News Service

DAR ES SALAAM: The Sultanate of Oman has reinforced its archival cooperation with Tanzania by supporting the establishment of the Tanzanian National Archives through the provision of technical expertise, advanced technology and a fully equipped data centre in Dar es Salaam.

The project, implemented by Oman's National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), includes the opening of an integrated data centre designed to strengthen the infrastructure of the Tanzanian National Archives and enable it to operate in line with international standards and best practices.

The initiative reflects Oman's commitment to sharing its expertise in records management, archiving and digital preservation with partner countries, while helping safeguard documentary heritage and preserve national memory.

As part of the support, the NRAA supplied dedicated servers for document digitisation, modern computers and printers for the researchers' service hall, and a comprehensive security monitoring system featuring surveillance cameras and specialised



protection systems to ensure the safety and sustainability of the digital archive.

The cooperation programme also includes technical assistance, training and capacity-building for Tanzanian National Archives staff, allowing them to benefit from Oman's experience in document management, digital archiving and digital transformation.

Speaking at the inauguration, Ridhiwani Kikwete, Minister in

the Office of the President of Tanzania for Public Affairs and Good Governance, expressed his country's appreciation to Oman for its support and expertise, describing the project as a significant step towards strengthening Tanzania's archival capabilities.

He said the new technical infrastructure would help preserve national documents in accordance with the latest professional standards while opening broader

avenues for cooperation between the two countries in archiving, documentation and institutional capacity building.

Dr. Hamad Mohamed Al Dhawani, Chairman of Oman's National Records & Archives Authority, said the project reflects the deep historical ties between Oman and Tanzania and demonstrates the Authority's commitment to supporting archival institutions in friendly countries.

He noted that the new data centre and technical infrastructure mark a major milestone in building a modern archival system capable of preserving Tanzania's documentary heritage for future generations, while reinforcing co-operation in protecting the shared historical legacy of both nations.

The project forms part of a broader series of joint Omani-Tanzanian initiatives aimed at documenting shared history, strengthening archival institutions and expanding scientific and cultural cooperation, further highlighting the role of archives in preserving national identity and collective memory.



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IRANIAN ATTACKS

Kuwait says major damage at oil facility

DUBAI: Kuwait says major damage at oil facility after 'repeated' Iranian attacks.

The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday reported significant damage to one of its oil facilities after "repeated Iranian attacks," according to the state news agency.

"A vital location in the oil industry was struck by repeated brutal Iranian attacks that resulted in a number of injuries and significant material losses," news agency KUNA cited the KPC as saying.

Earlier, Kuwait's Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy reported an Iranian attack on a power plant and a water desalinization plant.

The attacks come after Iran on

Friday threatened to attack infrastructure in Gulf countries allied with the US.

Kuwait's Foreign Ministry accused Iran of "endangering the lives and safety of civilians" with the attacks on vital infrastructure.

"The Ministry affirms that the repeated targeting of these vital facilities reveals a systematic pattern of aggression against civilian objects and essential infrastructure," a statement posted on X in Arabic said.

"This constitutes a flagrant violation of international law ... the Ministry holds Iran fully responsible for this brutal aggression and its consequences, demanding an immediate cessation of such attacks," it added. -nw



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Have suspended all commitments under MoU after US violations: Iran

According to Fars news agency, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi stated that the Islamic Republic is no longer fulfilling its obligations, attributing it to the US' "aggressive actions", which he said violated the terms of the MoU



TEHRAN: Amid the escalating regional tensions, Iran has officially declared the suspension of its commitments to the 14-point Memorandum of Understanding signed with the US.

According to Fars news agency, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi stated that the Islamic Republic is no longer fulfilling its obligations, attributing it to the US' "aggressive actions", which he said violated the terms of the MoU.

"We were in negotiations. Unfortunately, the Americans themselves took these aggressive actions, violating their commitments under the memorandum of understanding in this regard. Practically, America has trampled on all its commitments and suspended them all. We have also suspended all our commitments under that memorandum of understanding, known as the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, and we are not currently fulfilling those

obligations," he stated.

He further recognised the ongoing Iranian action as "united and decisive defence." Asserting that the path chosen by Washington is irrational, the Deputy Foreign Minister reaffirmed Tehran's resolve to "teach a lesson to aggressors."

"What we are currently facing is a united and decisive defence of our country, and I believe the Americans have already received their answer this time--that their

aggressive actions won't lead anywhere. In fact, if they were wise, they should have chosen other solutions. But for us, the path forward is a decisive defence of our country and teaching a lesson to the aggressors," he affirmed.

The 14-point agreement, signed between the US and Iran and mediated by Qatar and Pakistan last month, provided for an immediate cessation of military operations, including in Lebanon, and committed both countries to pursuing

a final agreement within 60 days.

It also included provisions for the removal of the US naval blockade, safe passage of commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, phased sanctions relief, the release of frozen Iranian assets and a US-backed economic development programme for Iran worth at least USD 300 billion.

Earlier in the day, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) issued an explicit warning to nations hosting American troops, stating that they must prepare for a "corresponding response" amid escalating regional conflicts, according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency.

The military wing demanded that these host nations "activate their civil defence units to protect their citizens and move them away from potential military targets", accusing regional governments of allowing their territories to be used as launchpads for aggression against Iran.

In an initial execution of this threat, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported the IRGC's claims that its ground forces utilised unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles to strike an American military logistics centre situated at Camp Arifan in Kuwait, asserting that the operation inflicted casualties among the personnel deployed at the installation.

Simultaneously, the group stated that its forces launched an offensive against the US Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, asserting that the cross-border operation successfully disabled radar systems while destroying a weapons maintenance hangar and a drone facility at the site.

These hostile manoeuvres follow a severe escalation in regional hostilities, as the United States and Iran exchanged a fresh wave of military strikes on Saturday.

The latest military actions involved American strikes against Iranian defensive positions, alongside retaliatory Iranian missile and drone deployments targeted across the Gulf region.

According to the US Central Command, American forces conducted a seventh consecutive night of aerial operations aimed at diminishing Iranian military capabilities late Friday.

In a statement released early Saturday, the military command confirmed the operations had successfully targeted "surveillance sites, military logistics infrastructure, underground weapons storage, and maritime capabilities."

Following these operations, Iranian state television reported that the American airstrikes caused significant damage to transport links in Bandar Khamir, located within the southern Hormozgan province on the Strait of Hormuz. The bombardment of crucial highway and railway infrastructure appeared intended to isolate the major port city of Bandar Abbas from key logistical routes leading to central Iran and Tehran.

On the other hand, addressing the American public on Thursday evening, US President Donald Trump had commented on the progress of the military campaign, stating, "We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labour very, very shortly." – ANI

US EMBASSY IN DHAKA



US Army, Bangladesh Armed Forces to launch Tiger Lightning bilateral exercise

DHAKA: The US Army and Bangladesh Armed Forces will officially kick off the annual Tiger Lightning exercise on Sunday, the US Embassy in Dhaka said on Saturday.

This bilateral exercise unites over 160 service members from both countries, enhancing collaboration and the ability to operate in real-world scenarios, it added.

Tiger Lightning 26 includes training that focuses on jungle operations, counter-terror, and tactical combat casualty care, offering both nations a chance to understand each other's capabilities, the statement said.

This bilateral exercise is part of the United States Army Pacific's Theatre Army Campaign Plan and security cooperation objectives aimed at enhancing professional relationships, improving military operations, increasing readiness, and fostering interoperability between the US Army and the Bangladesh Army, it said.

Tiger Lightning is a bilateral exercise between the US Army and the Bangladesh Armed Forces that started in 2017, the US Embassy said.

It was briefly paused during the pandemic but then continued concurrently for the past five years. The exercise will take place in a variety of classroom and field environments, culminating in a field training exercise.

Last year, the opening ceremony of the joint military exercise Tiger Lightning (TL)-2025, jointly organised by the Bangladesh Army and the United States Army Pacific Command (USARPAC), was held at the Para Com-

mando Brigade, Jalalabad Cantonment in Sylhet on July 25.

According to the ISPR Directorate of the Bangladesh Ministry of Defence, the event was graced by Major General Ascot A. Winter, Deputy Commanding General of USARPAC, as the Chief Guest. This exercise is being jointly supervised by the Para Commando Brigade of the Bangladesh Army and the Nevada National Guard under the United States Army Pacific Command.

The six-day-long exercise continued till 30 July 2025.

Bangladesh and the United States maintain mutual cooperation in regional and global security, counter-terrorism, disaster management, and humanitarian assistance. Bangladesh remains committed to confronting natural disasters and global threats and continues to work collaboratively with the United States and other partners.

As part of this cooperation, Tiger Lightning 2025 is conducted with the aim of enhancing mutual collaboration, improving joint operational capabilities, and strengthening preparedness.

A total of 66 personnel from the Nevada National Guard of the United States and 100 personnel from the Bangladesh Army's Para Commando Brigade participated in the exercise in 2025.

Senior officials from the Bangladesh Army, including the Director of Army Air Defence Directorate, the Director of Military Training Directorate, and the Commander of the Para Commando Brigade, were present at the inauguration ceremony. - ANI

MISSION AAGAMAN

Skyroot's Vikram-1 reaches orbit, marks new era for India's private space sector

SRIHARIKOTA: Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 Test Flight-1 has successfully reached orbit, marking the maiden flight of India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Skyroot Aerospace on the successful launch.

The rocket completed its final burn and injected its payloads into a nearly 450-km orbit, making India the third country in the world with private orbital launch capability.

The mission, named "Mission Aagaman", was executed from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. The 24-metre carbon-composite rocket completed all planned flight stages, including stage separations and the firing of its Orbital Adjustment Module (OAM).

The Orbital Adjustment Module fired its 3D-printed liquid engine for the final push to orbit. The module is designed to start, stop and restart in space.

During the flight, Kalam-1200, the solid first stage, carried the rocket through the thickest part of the atmosphere before separating cleanly. The payload fairing was then separated, exposing the satellites to space for the first time.

The second stage, Kalam-250, completed its burn and separated, followed by the ignition of Kalam-100, the smallest and highest-flying solid stage of Vikram-1.

The solid-propulsion phase concluded with the separation of Stage 3, paving the way for the Orbital Adjustment Module to complete the mission.

The Vikram-1 rocket, powered by three solid-fuel stages and a liquid orbital adjustment module, is designed to deploy payloads up to 350 kg into a 450-km Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

The maiden flight carried multiple payloads, including the "Diamond Lotus", a lab-grown diamond from Bengaluru-based Cosmos Diamonds.

PM Modi congratulates Skyroot Aerospace on Vikram-1's successful launch

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday congratulated Skyroot Aerospace on the successful launch of Vikram-1, describing it as a defining moment in India's space journey and saying the growing participation of the private sector is opening new frontiers and accelerating innovation.

In a post on X, PM Modi said he spoke to the Skyroot Aerospace



team and congratulated them on the successful launch of Vikram-1.

"Spoke to the team of Skyroot Aerospace and congratulated them on the successful launch of Vikram-1. This is a defining moment in India's space journey. The growing participation of our private sector is opening new frontiers and accelerating innovation. This achievement will encourage countless youngsters to dream bigger and innovate fearlessly," PM Modi wrote on X.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah also hailed the launch, calling it a major milestone for India's space ambitions.

"India's space ambition reaches new horizon. Heartiest congratulations to @SkyrootA

Aerospace on the successful launch of Vikram-1, India's first privately developed launch vehicle. A firm step towards realizing Modi Ji's vision of making space more accessible, this innovation will further strengthen India's space sector elevating its stature as a global leader," he wrote on X.

Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 Test Flight-1 has successfully reached orbit, marking the maiden flight of India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket.

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tiiple payloads, including the "Diamond Lotus", a lab-grown diamond from Bengaluru-based Cosmos Diamonds.

ISRO chairman Narayanan congratulates Skyroot Aerospace

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V Narayanan on Saturday congratulated Skyroot Aerospace after its Vikram-1 Test Flight-1 successfully reached orbit, describing it as a major milestone for India's private space sector.

Narayanan said the successful mission marked the first time an Indian private rocket had been placed in orbit. "This is the first successful attempt by an Indian private rocket to reach orbit. First of all, I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

He credited the 2020 space sector reforms for enabling greater private participation and said the achievement reflected the success of those policy initiatives.

"The space sector reforms announced in 2020 have made this possible. The Prime Minister has always guided us, and I thank him for his support," he said.

Congratulating the Skyroot Aerospace team, Narayanan said the company and its employees deserved appreciation for the achievement. - ANI

SPORTS

Antonelli bags Belgium pole

The Mercedes driver left team-mate George Russell trailing in fourth at the Belgian Grand Prix on Saturday

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS: Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli took a scintillating pole position at the Belgian Grand Prix on Saturday, leaving team-mate and title rival George Russell trailing in fourth, more than 0.5 seconds adrift.

The Italian, who leads the championship from Russell by 25 points, beat Red Bull's Max Verstappen by 0.317secs, even though the four-time champion had the help of a tow from team-mate Isack Hadjar.

McLaren's Lando Norris was an impressive third, 0.440secs back, despite bailing on his final lap, but the world champion has a 10-place grid penalty for exceeding his allowance of engine parts.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton were fifth and sixth, ahead of McLaren's Oscar Pi-



astri and the upgraded Racing Bull of British rookie Arvid Lindblad.

Antonelli has looked the man to beat since topping Friday practice and he delivered on his potential with his sixth pole position in 10 races so far this year.

On the slowing down lap, he sent his best wishes to his father Marco, who is celebrating his 61st birthday on Saturday.

Red Bull employed Hadjar to help Verstappen with a slipstream on the long flat-out section to the final chicane as the Frenchman has a 30-place grid penalty for taking a new engine, which puts him over the limit for the year.

Verstappen said: "It was definitely helping me otherwise I would not be standing here, it would be P6 or something."

"Isack, knowing he had a penalty and would be starting at the back, he helped me. I will be looking in my mirrors tomorrow. But we are happy to be on the front row with

how we executed it as a team."

Norris and McLaren had not been expecting much when they arrived at Spa, thinking they would continue as the fourth fastest team.

But the car has worked well all weekend and Norris has been especially competitive - he was 0.215secs quicker than Piastri despite not doing a second lap.

"We haven't changed anything, we are just a little quicker here," said Norris, who will start 13th. "It's a shame we are not starting here but there is plenty of opportunity, it is a long race and it's good for overtaking, hopefully we can put on a good show tomorrow." - Agencies



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BRIEFS

West Indies legend Sobers dies aged 89



KINGSTON: Legendary former West Indies all-rounder Sir Garfield Sobers, regarded as one of the greatest cricketers of all time, died on Friday aged 89. Sobers played 93 Tests between 1954 and 1974, scoring 8,032 runs and taking 235 wickets. An entertaining left-handed batter, Sobers scored 365 not out against Pakistan in 1958 - an effort which stood as the record Test score for 36 years. He was also a brilliantly versatile bowler, who bowled spin and seam. Sobers, who also played county cricket for Nottinghamshire, was knighted for his services to cricket in 1975. He was also named one of Wisden's five cricketers of the 20th century. During his stint at Nottinghamshire in 1968, Sobers became the first player to hit a six off all six balls in an over in a first-class match. He made his first-class debut for Barbados aged 16 and was capped by West Indies aged 17. He was initially more successful as a bowler than batter - he bowled left-arm finger-spin and occasional wrist-spin as well as pace - but went on to score 26 Test centuries and finished his career with a batting average of 57.78. He scored 28,314 in his first-class career, including 7,041 for Nottinghamshire. He took 1,043 first-class wickets and was also a superb fielder. Though not as successful as a skipper as player, he was West Indies captain between 1965 and 1972. He also captained Rest of the World XIs during tours of England and Australia. The president of the ICC, Jay Shah, said cricket had lost one of its "greatest icons" and the "finest all-rounder the game has ever known". "His remarkable ability to influence a match in every facet of the game set him apart from his peers," Shah said.

Herbert and Burns match record at the British Open



SOUTHPORT: Lucas Herbert and Sam Burns each matched the major championship scoring record of 62 on Friday in the British Open, with one celebration far different from the other. Herbert missed a 5-foot par putt on the tough 18th hole at Royal Birkdale that would have given the Australian the record alone. Two groups later, Burns capped off an astonishing birdie-birdie-birdie finish when the American holed out from a greenside bunker for his 62 on the par-70 Royal Birkdale links. It was the first birdie of the day on the 18th hole. The record was first set by Branden Grace in 2017, also at Royal Birkdale. It had been matched four times since then at two majors. It was reminiscent of Rickie Fowler becoming the first player with 62 in the US Open at Los Angeles Country Club in 2023, and two groups later Xander Schauffele matching the record.

BCCI secretary Saikia dismisses speculation on Rohit's ODI future



MUMBAI: BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia has dismissed the speculation that the Lord's ODI between England and India on Sunday could be Rohit Sharma's last international match. "There are a lot of speculations going on in the media about Rohit Sharma's future. I want to firmly assert that there has been no such discussion that Rohit will be playing his last match at Lord's on Sunday," Saikia told PTI. "Rohit is a regular member of the Indian ODI team and he will continue to represent the country as long as he is in the scheme of things. In other words, Lord's ODI won't be his last match." Rohit had already become the oldest male cricketer to play an ODI for his country, surpassing Mohinder Amarnath during the Dharamsala fixture against Afghanistan in June. ODI cricket is the only format Rohit has played for India over the last 12 months, having retired from T20Is after leading his team to the 2024 T20 World Cup title and from Test cricket in May 2025. - Agencies

ISLAMIC BANKING ASSETS
Total assets of the Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman rose to approximately OMR9.8 billion by the end of May 2026 registering an increase of 9.2 percent compared to the same period last year.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX-LISTED BANKS
The net profits of local banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rose in the first half of this year to OMR305.2 million, recording a growth of 10.6 percent compared to the same period last year, which amounted to OMR275.9 million.

Oman’s natural gas production tops 24.1 billion cubic metres

Associated gas production increased by 3.8 percent reached 5.37 billion cubic metres until the end of May 2026, compared to 5.17 billion cubic metres for the same period of the previous year

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s production of natural gas – both local production and imports – witnessed an increase of 6.5 percent reaching 24.17 billion cubic metres until the end of May 2026 compared to 22.71 billion cubic metres during the same period in 2025.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that associ-

ated gas production increased by 3.8 percent reached 5.37 billion cubic metres until the end of May 2026, compared to 5.17 billion cubic metres for the same period of the previous year.

Non-associated gas production (including imports) also recorded growth of 7.2 percent, reaching 18.80 billion cubic metres by the end of May 2026, compared to 17.53 billion cubic metres for the same period in 2025.

Natural gas consumption in industrial projects increased by 8.2 percent to reach 12.39 billion cubic metres by the end of May 2026, compared to 11.45 billion cubic metres for the same period in 2025.

Gas consumption in power generation plants also increased by

13.3 percent until the end of May 2026, reaching 6.58 billion cubic metres, compared to 5.81 billion cubic metres for the same period in 2025.

In contrast, gas consumption in oil fields (including losses, metre differences and shrinkage factor) decreased by 3.9 percent, reaching 5.12 billion cubic metres until the end of May 2026, compared to 5.32 billion cubic metres in the same period of 2025.

Gas consumption in industrial areas (including industrial areas and consumption of the Oman LNG Company) also declined by 30.3 percent to record 79.4 million cubic metres by the end of May 2026, compared to 113.8 million cubic metres for the same period in 2025. -ONA



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

MSX records remarkable performance in first half of 2026

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange recorded a remarkable performance during the first half of 2026, benefiting from the growth achieved by the national economy and the injection of more liquidity into trading by local investment funds and institutions. These were reflected positively on the main index, sectoral indices, trading volumes and values, deals executed and market value.

Adel Walid, Director of Brokerage at United Securities Company, pointed out that the Muscat Stock Exchange performed well during the first half of this year, with the

main index rising by 28 percent, making it the best performing stock exchange among the Gulf stock exchanges and among the best stock exchanges globally.

He told the Oman News Agency that these results were driven by improved fundamentals for listed companies and their good profits during the first quarter of this year, in addition to the rise in oil prices above the average break-even price in the budget, which reached about \$89 per barrel during the first half of this year, which had a positive impact on the performance of listed stocks.



He explained that this improvement in the stock exchange's performance was accompanied by a strong rise in liquidity levels,

as the average liquidity during the first half of the year rose to about OMR58 million, compared to OMR25 million last year. The

stock exchange also witnessed a very strong improvement in the number of transactions executed, as the growth rate exceeded 200 percent, which reflects the expansion of the base of participants in the market from individual investors, in addition to local, foreign and Gulf institutions.

He further pointed out that expectations suggest that the Muscat Stock Exchange will continue to maintain the momentum it achieved during the first half of this year, with expectations of a greater recovery in trading volumes during the second half, especially with

the new listings, most notably the Omifco company, which succeeded in attracting more than OMR4.6 billion in subscription requests, which is the highest figure ever recorded in the history of the Muscat Stock Exchange, reflecting the growing confidence in the market by local and foreign institutions, in addition to individual investors.

He added that forecasts also indicate that oil prices will maintain their gains and remain stable above \$70 to \$75 per barrel, which will make this year an excellent fiscal year for the state's general budget. -ONA

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MARKET

Net profits of MSX-listed banks rise by 10.6% to top OMR300mn

This growth came amid a positive economic climate, with credit granted to individuals and companies growing, driven by economic activity and the implementation of numerous projects by the government and the private sector, along with a continued rise in deposits

MUSCAT: The net profits of local banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rose in the first half of this year to OMR305.2 mil-



lion, recording a growth of 10.6 percent compared to the same period last year, which amounted to OMR275.9 million. This growth came amid a positive economic climate, with credit granted to individuals and companies growing, driven by economic activity and the implementation of numerous projects by the government and the private sector, along with a continued rise in deposits.

This provided banks with stable sources of funding, helped expand lending operations, and thus increased interest income. At the same time, banks worked to improve asset quality to reduce provisions for non-performing loans. Banks also worked to diversify income sources, focus on wealth management, control operating expenses, and invest in digital services as part of their plans to

reduce costs. Preliminary financial results announced by banks on the Muscat Stock Exchange website indicated an increase in net profits for all banks except Bank Nizwa. Bank Muscat topped the list with profits of OMR137.4 million, followed by Bank Sohar International in second place with profits of OMR53 million, the National Bank of Oman came in third place with profits

of OMR39 million, Bank Dhofar came in fourth place with profits of OMR27.2 million, Ahli Bank came in fifth place with profits of OMR25.1 million, and Oman Arab Bank came in at sixth place with net profits rising from OMR14.6 million to OMR17.6 million. Bank Nizwa's net profits were affected by the increase in provisions for non-performing loans. Preliminary financial results indicated a 4 percent increase in operating profits from OMR14.9 million to OMR15.5 million. However, the increase in the provision for losses from OMR4.3 million to OMR9 million negatively affected the bank's net profits, which declined in the first half of this year to about OMR5.6 million, compared to OMR9.2 million in the same period last year. At the end of last June, local banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded a growth of 16.2 percent in total assets on an annual basis, rising to OMR50.1 billion compared to OMR43.1 billion in June of last year. Bank Muscat topped the list with assets of OMR16.3 billion, reaching 32.5 percent of the total assets of local banks. Bank Sohar International comes in second with assets of OMR10.2 billion, the National Bank of Oman in third place with assets of OMR6.2 billion, Bank Dhofar came in fourth place

with assets of about OMR6.1 billion, and Oman Arab Bank in fifth place with consolidated assets of OMR4.7 billion. During the first half of this year, banks worked on implementing a number of initiatives aimed at increasing their profits and maintaining their competitiveness by expanding lending and increasing financing provided to companies, as well as expanding digital banking services and improving the quality of assets and services provided to customers. This performance was reflected in share prices and market capitalisation, which rose to OMR7.13 billion by the end of last June, compared to OMR5.72 billion last December. Bank Muscat leads the seven banks in market capitalisation, which amounted to OMR3.40 billion, representing 42.6 percent of the total market capitalisation of banks. Bank Sohar International comes in second place with market cap of about OMR1.3 billion, and the National Bank of Oman came in in third place market cap of of OMR811.3 million. The market capitalisation of the seven banks constitutes 35.2 percent of the total market capitalisation of public shareholding companies, which amounted to OMR20.25 billion by the end of last June. -ONA

CONFIDENCE ON THE ROAD



Full-size SUVs and pickups powered 44% of General Motors Middle East's sales over 25 years

MUSCAT: For decades, full-size SUVs and pickups have been at the heart of how customers across the Middle East define confidence on the road, accounting for almost half of General Motors (GM) Middle East's sales, exactly 44% between 2000 and 2025, reflecting a deep, enduring preference for capability, space, presence and safety. As GM marks 100 years in the region, that connection also speaks to a legacy built over generations, shaped by iconic vehicles, and how strength, safety and confidence have evolved. For many Middle Eastern car enthusiasts, GM's classic vehicles had the kind of visual character that felt timeless and, during their era they were at the forefront of the industry, representing strength and safety — built from thick metal, heavy materials and a visibly sturdier form. Yet, vehicle safety is more nuanced, shaped by physics, efficiency and a far deeper understanding of how to protect people in the moments that matter most. As automotive engineering advanced, so did the vehicles by managing crash forces more intelligently and protecting the people inside more effectively. This shift matters at a time when road crashes continue to claim approximately 1.19 million lives globally each year and impose significant economic costs. Against that backdrop, modern vehicle engineering is increasingly focused on avoiding collisions, managing impact energy and protecting occupants when incidents occur. In fact, GM Africa & Middle East's 2024 YouGov survey across the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt found that safety features were the most important factors in vehicle purchase decisions for 89% of respondents, ahead of affordability and overall aesthetics.

This is a clear regional signal that safety is prioritized at the point of purchase. Speaking about this transformation, Jorge Plata — President & Managing Director of GM Africa and Middle East said, "Decades ago, just as today, drivers wanted vehicles that inspired confidence on every journey. What has changed is how we deliver that confidence. Today, strength isn't just about heavy metal; it's engineered through advanced safety systems, smarter structures, and technology that helps reduce the risk of crashes before they happen. That is the fundamental evolution of the modern vehicle." From the earliest Chevrolet and GMC trucks and Cadillac sedans to today's SUVs and pickups, GM's legendary vehicles have continued to shape what confidence on the road looks like. Across GM's portfolio — including the Chevrolet Tahoe and Suburban, Chevrolet Silverado, GMC Yukon and Sierra, and Cadillac Escalade — this evolution is especially visible. Over the last 25 years, GM Middle East has sold around 1 million full-size SUVs and pickups alone, underlining the region's enduring affinity for these flagship nameplates. These vehicles continue to deliver the presence, space and capability customers expect, while integrating sophisticated safety, driver-assistance and connected solutions that support driver awareness and rapid response. Jorge Plata continued, "Modern vehicle design now prioritizes aerodynamics to improve stability and efficiency, lighter yet stronger materials to enhance responsiveness, and carefully engineered deformation zones that absorb crash forces before they reach occupants. What may appear less rigid externally often reflects a far more complex and effective approach to safety."

MAIN INDEX

Muscat Stock Exchange index falls by 163 points in weekly trading

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange declined by 163 points during the week and closed at 7,480 points, affected by the pressures that stocks faced with the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the region. The sectoral indices recorded a collective decline, led by the industrial sector index, which lost 178 points, the financial sector index, which fell by about 145 points, the services sector index, which fell by 84 points, and the Sharia index, which fell by 15 points. During the week, publicly listed companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange announced their preliminary financial results for the first half of this year, showing profit growth and a general improvement in performance. However, this was not reflected much in share prices, as investors await further incentives and a more stable situation. The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed a decline in trading value, transactions executed, and market capitalisation during the week. Trading value decreased from OMR247.8 million to OMR137.53 million, transactions executed recorded a 28 percent drop from 58,000 transactions to 41,758 transactions, and market capitalisation declined to OMR38.48 billion, recording weekly losses estimated at OMR244.3 million. OQ Basic Industries shares attracted investors, witnessing trades worth OMR22.7 million, representing 16.5 percent of the total trading value. OQ Exploration and Production came in second place with trades worth OMR21.7 million, Bank Muscat came in third with trades worth OMR18.8 million, and Bank Sohar International came in fourth place with trades worth OMR17.9 million. OQ Gas Networks shares witnessed trades worth OMR16 million, representing 11.6 percent of the total trading value.



The weekly price bulletin issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange showed a decline in the prices of 55 securities, compared to 20 securities whose prices rose and 21 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels. Oman Chromite shares topped the list of gainers, rising by 19.1 percent and closing at OMR3.50. Oman Oil Marketing Company shares rose by 9.9 percent and closed at OMR1.20. Al Madina Investment shares climbed to 36 baisa, recording an increase of 9 percent. Oman Finance Free Bonds 2022 recorded an increase of 6.2 percent and closed at 85 baisa, and Oman Finance Services Bonds 2026 rose by 5.6 percent and closed at 75 baisa.

Al Batinah Development and Investment shares led the decliners, falling by 21.4 percent to close at 55 baisa. Sohar Power shares fell to 245 baisa, registering a drop of 18.3 percent. Oman and Emirates Investment Holding shares declined by 10.6 percent to close at 143 baisa. Oman United Insurance shares fell by 10 percent to close at 324 baisa, and Salalah Port Services shares dropped to 480 baisa, registering a decline of 9.9 percent. In company news, Bank Nizwa announced that it has submitted a non-binding letter of intent to the board of directors of Oman Arab Bank, including a proposal for a merger by acquiring Alizz Islamic Bank into Bank Nizwa. The proposal includes Bank Nizwa acquiring all of

Alizz Bank's issued share capital at an indicative valuation of 1.2 times book value, followed by the merger of Alizz Bank into Bank Nizwa. The merger is planned to be financed through a combination of equity and capital instruments, including the issuance of Tier 1 perpetual sukuk and a strategic investment by Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), whereby the company will own a strategic stake of up to 20 percent of Bank Nizwa's issued share capital through subscription to the new shares. Ominvest stated that its board of directors has approved the company's participation as a strategic investor within the proposed financing structure. -ONA

DATA

Assets of Oman's Islamic banking sector reaches OMR9.8bn by end of May 2026



MUSCAT: Total assets of the Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman rose to approximately OMR9.8 billion by the end of May 2026 registering an increase of 9.2 percent compared to the same period last year. This represents 19 percent of the total assets of the Omani banking sector. Data issued by the Central

Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that the total outstanding financing provided by Islamic banking sector units increased by 10.5 percent to reach approximately OMR7.9 billion. Deposits at Islamic banks and windows also recorded an increase of 11 percent, reaching approximately OMR7.8 billion by the end of May 2026. -ONA

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BRIEFS

Spain vs Argentina In Numbers

The statistics behind Spain and Argentina's respective paths to the FIFA World Cup 202 final



648 Rodri has completed 648 passes in North America – the most ever registered by a player at a World Cup. The 30-year-old broke his own record: 638 at Qatar 2022. The next best was also set by a Spain midfielder, with Xavi making 599 successful passes in 2010. Rodri's closest challengers for completed passes at this tournament are team-mates Pau Cubarsi (547) and Aymeric Laporte (533).

37 Spain are unbeaten in 37 matches – a joint-record in men's international football. Since a 1-0 loss to Colombia in March 2024, La Roja have won 27 and drawn 10 games. Italy went 37 outings without defeat from 2018 to '21, before Argentina repeated the feat between 2019 and '22.

30 Spain winger Lamine Yamal has completed the most dribbles at this tournament: 30. He is followed by France's Kylian Mbappe (24), Brazil's Vinicius Junior (23), Argentina's Lionel Messi (22) and Belgium's Jeremy Doku (21). Diego Maradona holds the record for the most successful take-ons in one edition: 53 at Mexico 1986. Messi has the most this century: 46 at Brazil 2014.

19 Argentina have scored 19 goals – 2.71 per game on average – at these global finals. It is the most by one team at a World Cup since Brazil struck the same total in 1970, and has been bettered by only four teams: Brazil with 22 goals in 1950, France with 23 goals in 1958, West Germany with 25 goals in 1954, and Hungary with 27 at the same edition. Spain have scored 13 times. It is two more than their personal best at a World Cup, inspired by Emilio Butragueno in 1986, and five more than they managed in their title-winning campaign in 2010.

13 Argentina have scored at least two goals in 13 successive games – a World Cup record. The last time they didn't score twice in a game was in a 2-1 loss to Saudi Arabia in their Qatar 2022 opener. The Albiceleste have also been on target in 16 consecutive outings – a sequence surpassed by only Hungary (17 from 1934 to '32), Germany (18 from 1986 to '98), Germany (18 from 1934 to '58) and Brazil (18 from 1930 to '58).

8 Lionel Messi has scored eight goals at this tournament. The only men with more in one World Cup are Eusebio with nine for Portugal in 1966, Ademir de Menezes with nine for Brazil in 1950, Gerd Muller with 10 for West Germany in 1970, Sandor Kocsis with 11 for Hungary in 1954, and Just Fontaine with 13 for France in 1958. Messi leads Kylian Mbappe marginally in the race for the adidas Golden Boot by virtue of having managed four assists to the Frenchman's three. Messi's 12 goal contributions are the most by a player in a World Cup since Muller registered 13 56 years ago.

7 Argentina have emerged triumphant in all seven outings to equal the record, set by Brazil in 2002, for the most victories in one World Cup. Lionel Scaloni's side could become only the fifth to lift the trophy with a 100-per-cent record after Uruguay in 1930, Italy in 1938, and Brazil in 1970 and 2002.

6 Unai Simon has kept six clean sheets in seven matches – the most ever registered in a single World Cup. Seven goalkeepers had managed five: the Netherlands' Jan Jongbloed in 1974, Italy's Walter Zenga in 1990, Brazil's Taffarel in 1994, France's Fabien Barthez in 1998, Germany's Oliver Kahn in 2002, Italy's Gianluigi Buffon in 2006 and Spain's Iker Casillas in 2010. Simon, who recorded a shutout in his last appearance at Qatar 2022, set a new record for not conceding in the World Cup: 650 minutes until he was finally beaten by Belgium's Charles De Ketelaere in the quarter-finals. Italy's Walter Zenga had held it at 517 minutes. Simon also boasts the best save percentage of every goalkeeper at this tournament: 93. Spain, who have only let in one goal, are out to set a new record for the fewest goals conceded by a triumphant team. France, Italy and Spain let in two apiece en route to glory in 1998, 2006 and 2010, respectively. Argentina have conceded seven goals. The last team to let in more than six and reach a World Cup final were Brazil in 1998.

5 Argentina have scored five goals from outside the penalty area – the joint-most by one team in a World Cup. Lionel Messi got two of them, with Giovanni Lo Celso, Julian Alvarez and Enzo Fernandez grabbing one apiece. Messi's goals saw him outrank Brazil legend Rivellino and become the player to bag most World Cup goals from outside the box.

5 Mikel Oyarzabal has scored five times at this tournament, equalling the Spanish record for a World Cup. Emilio Butragueno got five goals at Mexico 1986 and David Villa followed suit at South Africa 2010. Oyarzabal and Villa share the Roja record for goal contributions at one edition at six.

4 Lionel Messi has registered four assists at this tournament. He is one shy of France's Michael Olise in the race to finish as its top provider: Messi's first extended his record for assisting in the most editions to six. Marc Cucurella and Dani Olmo are Spain's leading assistants on two apiece. - *Agencies*

All set for a blockbuster final

Spain vs Argentina. Lamine Yamal vs Lionel Messi. The ultimate team vs the comeback kids. Will Spain win their second World Cup title, and their first since 2010? Or will Argentina become the first team to win back-to-back World Cups since Brazil in 1962?

NEW JERSEY. It seems fitting that the biggest World Cup in history has produced a blockbuster final. Defending world champions Argentina will face European champions Spain in a mouthwatering showdown at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Sunday. The match kicks off at 11pm, Oman time.

Argentina are chasing a fourth World Cup title and a place in history as the first team to win back-to-back tournaments since Brazil in 1958 and 1962. Spain are bidding for their second crown after lifting the trophy in 2010.

It will also be the first World Cup match featuring the top two teams in the FIFA rankings since the rankings were introduced in 1992, with No.1 Argentina facing No.2 Spain.

The final is also the first to feature the reigning European champions and the reigning world and South American champions, and the first to feature two Spanish-speaking nations since 1930.

Despite the quality of both sides, the matchup pits the tournament's most potent attack against its tightest defence. Argentina have scored the most goals with 19, while Spain have conceded just once.

The spotlight, however, will fall squarely on Lionel Messi, widely regarded as the greatest footballer of

all time. The Argentine captain, who dismantled England in the semi-final with two assists, is seeking a second World Cup title to further cement his legacy.

A victory would give him something fellow Argentine great Diego Maradona never achieved: two world titles. Maradona lifted the trophy in 1986 before finishing runner-up in 1990. At 39, Messi continues to defy expectations. He enters the final tied with Kylian Mbappe for the tournament lead with eight goals and ranks second in assists with four, one behind France's Michael Olise. The 5-foot-7 superstar also holds the all-time World Cup scoring record with 21 goals, one ahead of Mbappe.

He will also join Brazilian full-back Cafu as the only player to have appeared in three World Cup finals. (Three-time winner Polé missed the 1962 final due to injury).

Messi also shares an unlikely connection with Spain's teenage sensation Lamine Yamal: the pair were photographed together for a 2007 UNICEF charity calendar when Messi was an emerging Barcelona star and Yamal was a baby.

Spain's demolition of tournament favourites France in Tuesday's semi-final was arguably the standout performance of the World Cup

Scaloni hails 'legend' Messi

NEW JERSEY: Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni urged fans to make the most of seeing Lionel Messi lead his team out in another World Cup final at the age of 39 as the holders aim to regain the trophy when they take on Spain on Sunday.

"He has made history. He is a legend," Scaloni said of the former Barcelona player, who has already helped Argentina win a World Cup and back-to-back Copa America titles in the last five years.

Messi's international career has enjoyed a remarkable late renaissance – a decade ago he briefly retired from the Argentina team at the age of 29 after a Copa America final loss to Chile, his fourth defeat in a final for his country. Messi and Scaloni hugged on the pitch at full-time after Wednesday's 2-1 semi-final win over England, with the Argentine captain calling that victory "pure history".

"It fills me with pride because



he is the best player in the history of football," Scaloni said of Messi, who has scored eight goals at this World Cup, which is his sixth, and is the tournament's all-time top scorer with 21.

"To have been able to get to a final in the way that he has in this moment, at the age of 39, I think it is incredible.

"That is why I said we should enjoy having him, because look at what happened with Diego (Maradona) and how we ended up missing him.

"We still have Leo and we should appreciate that. He is the historic figure and the legend, as are all these players who have given us these marvellous years."

Argentina had gone 28 years without winning a major international title before lifting the Copa America in 2021 to spark this current golden era.

"They have done things that a few years ago were unthinkable. It was not easy to get here and to compete at this level over so many years," he said ahead of Sunday's final at the MetLife Stadium just outside New York City. "We might win and I hope we do but in any case the journey to get this far has been incredible."

Scaloni said he could not answer whether the game would definitely be Messi's last at a World Cup, but it seems highly unlikely he will continue until the next one in 2030.

Argentina will have to beat the reigning European champions if they are to become the first nation in 64 years to win back-to-back World Cups.

"They are a great team. Everything worries me about them," Scaloni said. - *Agencies*

'It is a privilege to be in a final': De la Fuente

NEW YORK: Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said there was no sense of anxiety about facing the defending champions, nor any obsession with history or the occasion.

"It is a privilege to be in a final," De la Fuente said. "Having the chance to fight to win it is a privilege and we will try to use all our weapons to win it against a country that has been at its best over the past few years."

For Spain, this final is the culmination of a journey that has transformed a talented generation into one capable of dominating international football.

"We have gradually grown as a team and matured over the past few years," said captain Rodri. "I have always believed this generation would be very successful. We have won the Nations League, then the Euros, and now we have a great challenge ahead. The greatest achievement would be to win the World Cup."

That evolution has been built as much on togetherness



as talent. Rodri pointed to the two months Spain spent living together during the tournament as an invisible advantage.

"The time we spent together in base camp was important," he said. "You need good energy and a good vibe. You help each other, you have fun together and you grow as a group. Sometimes that goes unseen."

De la Fuente traced that unity back even further, to a meeting before Spain travelled to North America. "We spoke about the long travel, the humidity and

the heat," he said. "We ended by saying, 'It is what it is.' Nobody has complained. Things like hydration breaks or a 30-minute halftime may seem strange now, but perhaps in 30 years they will be normal. We have to adapt."

"There is no defined style for our team," Rodri said. "Matches have different stages and we have not played the same way every game. This will be the most physical match. We know when to attack, defend or counter. That's why we are here."

Spain's versatility has been matched by remarkable consistency. It has conceded just one goal all tournament, comfortably the best defensive record in this World Cup. "We are a complete team and very difficult to beat," Rodri said. "We have managed well in our own box, in the opponent's box and in midfield. It is not easy to score against us. We have conceded just once in this World Cup."

The captain expects midfield to determine much of Sunday's contest.

"Midfield is everything in football," he said. "They have a very good midfield and so do we. It will be an important battle."

The Spain coach rejected any suggestion that Argentina's competitiveness crosses a line. "I would never dare to say Argentina is a dirty team," he said. "I have the utmost admiration for them. They are South American champions, Finalissima winners and led by a close friend of mine. I only have admiration."

Even discussions about Lionel Messi were framed through that same lens of respect rather than fear. "It goes beyond words what Messi means as a player," Rodri said. "For me, he is the greatest of all time. He led his country to the World Cup in Qatar."

But Spain refuses to reduce the challenge to one footballer. "Argentina is more than Messi," Rodri added. "They are a complete team with top players. We are the two best teams, and we have to be mindful of Leo and the others." - *Agencies*

SLOVENIAN REFEREE

Vincic to take charge of World Cup final

NEW JERSEY: Slovenia's Slavko Vincic on Sunday will referee the biggest game of his career, the FIFA World Cup final. After 102 matches involving 48 teams across 16 different venues, there are two sides left standing in pursuit of the trophy, Spain and Argentina. FIFA on Thursday announced the appointment of the Slovenian Vincic.

Referenced 512 matches The 46-year-old from Maribor has refereed 512 matches in his career including five on the world stage, starting with two at Qatar 2022 – the Argentina-Saudi Arabia and Wales-England group fixtures.

Here in North America he has refereed three more, beginning with the Brazil-Morocco and Jordan-Algeria group games and

continuing with the Mexico-Ecuador encounter in the Round of 16.

While Vincic's only previous experience of refereeing Argentina was La Albiceleste's aforementioned 2-1 defeat against Saudi Arabia, he has overseen five Spain matches starting with a friendly against Colombia (2-2) in 2017. He then officiated their UEFA Euro 2020 group fixture against Sweden (0-0), the UEFA Nations League semi-final against Italy (2-1) in 2023, and Euro 2024 matches against Italy (1-0) and France (2-1) – in the group stage and semi-finals respectively.

His CV also shows that he refereed the 2024 UEFA Champions League final between Spain's Real Madrid and Borussia Dortmund of Germany. - *Agencies*



CLICKED IN 2007

Messi and Brady in disbelief over 'prophetic' Yamal photo

NEW YORK: Argentina captain Lionel Messi says it is "crazy" to be facing Spain's Lamine Yamal in Sunday's World Cup final after being photographed with him as a baby.

In 2007 Lamine Yamal's parents won a charity photoshoot at Barcelona in which 20-year-old Messi held their five-month-old baby. Speaking to Messi during a news conference in New York, NFL legend Tom Brady called the photos "very prophetic".

Messi said: "That photo is incredible. The fact that we're both playing in the World Cup now is crazy."

Lamine Yamal made his Barcelona debut at 15 and has inherited the number 10 shirt from Messi.

He helped Spain win Euro 2024 and, now aged 19, could become the youngest player to win the European Championships and the World Cup.

"He's one of the best in the world right now," said 39-year-old Messi. "I wish him luck because his suc-



cess will be Barcelona's success.

"We'll try to keep him from playing at his best. Spain has a great team, not just him.

"He's a tremendous player - a global star. He's 19 years old and has his whole career ahead of him. I wish him the best, but we'll give it

our all to ensure he doesn't become champion this time." Messi attended a fans' event on Friday with Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez and Spain captain Rodri.

After the news conference, Argentina head coach Lionel Scaloni hugged Spain counterpart Luis de la



Fuente, who was one of the instructors when Scaloni gained his UEFA Pro coaching licence in Spain.

Former England defender Rio Ferdinand and actor Kevin Hart hosted the event, while tennis legend Novak Djokovic and NBA star Kevin Durant joined Brady in asking

questions. Brady continued his ongoing feud with Logan Paul as they argued on stage before the record seventh-time Super Bowl winner slapped the YouTuber turned WWE star, with New York Knicks player Karl-Anthony Towns splitting them up. - *Agencies*

Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian online warehouses

Seven night-shift workers were killed and 25 people were injured when drones struck a warehouse operated by Russia's largest online retailer, Wildberries, in Kotovsk in the Tambov region



KYIV: Ukrainian drone attacks have killed seven people and wounded 51 others across Russia, while strikes also hit logistics sites and sparked a fire at an oil depot near Moscow.

Kyiv has intensified its long-range drone campaign against Russian energy, military and logistics infrastructure in an effort to weaken Moscow's ability to sustain its invasion.

Seven night-shift workers were killed and 25 people were injured when drones struck a warehouse operated by Russia's largest online retailer, Wildberries, in Kotovsk in the Tambov region, Governor Yevgeny Pervyshov said on Saturday.

"Seven people working the night shift died at the scene," Pervyshov wrote on Telegram. The town is some 360 kilometres (roughly 220 miles) from the border with Ukraine.

He said Russian air defences had also shot down 28 drones approaching the region and claimed the number of casualties could have been substantially higher.

A second Wildberries warehouse was hit in Elektrostal,



around 50 kilometers east of Moscow, injuring 24 people, according to Moscow regional Governor Andrei Vorobyov.

Wildberries co-founder and CEO Tatyana Kim described it as a "terrible night" for Russia and the company, often described as the Russian equivalent of Amazon. She offered her condolences to the victims' families.

In nearby Noginsk, falling drone debris ignited a fire at an oil depot and injured two people, Vorobyov said.

Authorities evacuated a nearby maternity hospital and a residential building as a precaution. Offi-

cials did not immediately provide details of the damage to the oil facility.

A drone also struck a residential building in Vladimir, around 180 kilometers east of Moscow, briefly setting it on fire. Regional Governor Alexander Avdeyev said no one was injured.

Why did Ukraine strike the warehouses?

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said long-range strikes had hit two "significant logistical facilities."

Zelenskyy said long-range strikes had been "in response to

Russian strikes on our civilian infrastructure and on our cities and communities."

"These facilities were used by the aggressor to supply sanctioned components for the production of drones and navigation equipment," he wrote on Telegram.

The Ukrainian president also said that Ukrainian forces had carried out operations against targets in the Sea of Azov and Russian-occupied territory.

Russia's Defence Ministry said air defence systems intercepted 379 Ukrainian drones overnight across 19 regions, as well as over annexed Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

A Russian attack has struck port infrastructure in Ukraine's southern Odesa region, killing one person and damaging a foreign-flagged vessel.

The ship, which was sailing under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, was hit during Saturday's attack, regional Governor Oleh Kiper said on Telegram. Three other people were injured.

The strike also damaged port buildings, storage tanks and warehouses, Kiper said.

Russia says shot down 774 Ukrainian drones in past 24 hours

Meanwhile Russian air defence systems have shot down 774 Ukrainian fixed-wing drones and 13 guided aerial bombs over the past 24 hours, the Russian Ministry of Defence said in a statement on Saturday.

The ministry said Russian forces had carried out another overnight round of strikes using air-launched precision-guided weapons and attack drones against Ukrainian military-related targets.

It said the strikes hit port infrastructure at the Port of Odesa used for unloading fuel and lubricants, as well as fuel storage facilities intended to support the Ukrainian armed forces.

The ministry added that a container ship unloading ammunition at the Port of Odesa was also struck. Russian forces also targeted a dry cargo vessel near Snake Island in the Black Sea that was transporting supplies for the Ukrainian military.

—DW



Uganda school bus crash kills 20 children and one adult

KAMPALA: A school bus crash overnight in Uganda has killed 20 pupils and one adult, injuring several others, police said on Friday.

Uganda's government said it would be halting all school trips until further notice in response to the accident.

Parents and other relatives rushed to the elementary schoolyard in Kampala on Friday morning seeking information about their loved ones.

Uganda Police Force community liaison officer Michael Kananura said in a statement on social media that the crash took place late on Thursday in Chekwatit Village in the Kapchorwa district of eastern Uganda.

The Suzuki bus belonging to the King David Junior School in the capital Kampala from an excursion to the Sipi Falls waterfalls in the region.

Kananura said that 20 pupils and one adult male had been confirmed dead after the crash.

"Several survivors, whose identities are yet to be established" were rushed to local hospitals for treatment, he said, later saying that three adult males and "several juveniles" sustained injuries in the crash.

"Preliminary investigations indicate that the school bus had taken pupils on an educational tour to Sipi Falls in Kapchorwa District," Kananura said. "While returning from the tour, the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle, which veered off the road, struck a large stone along the roadside, and overturned." —DW

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

'Closely following' developments on US bill seeking 100% tariff over Russian oil purchase: India

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday said New Delhi is "closely following" developments related to a proposed US legislation targeting five countries, including India, for their purchase of Russian oil, seeking 100 per cent tariffs on these countries.

Addressing a weekly media briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the government is aware of the proposed legislation and is monitoring the situation.

He reiterated that India's crude oil imports are guided by its energy security requirements and broader sourcing strategy, noting that New Delhi has multiple suppliers across the world.

"We are closely following these developments, and we are aware of the proposed legislation," Jaiswal said.

"As far as buying oil, we buy oil from various countries in the world. It is based on our approach towards energy sourcing," he added.

Referring to maritime traffic in the region, he said there is regular movement of Indian vessels between India and the Arabian Gulf.

"On the number of Indian vessels which are there in the Persian Gulf, as of today, we have, there is regular traffic between India and the Persian Gulf region; we have seven Indian ships which are there in the Persian Gulf, Indian flagships which are there in the Persian Gulf," the MEA Spokesperson added.

MEA's response comes after a bipartisan group of more than 60 US Senators introduced revised legislation to impose sweeping sanctions on Russia, replacing



the earlier proposal for blanket tariffs with targeted measures aimed at the world's largest buyers of Russian energy.

The revised bill, "Senator Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia Act of 2026", introduced after the death of Senator Lindsey Graham, holds major purchasers of Russian oil and gas accountable for supporting Russia's war in Ukraine.

According to an official release, the revised bill "refines tariff authority from a blanket 500 per cent tariff to tariffs on the top five purchasers of Russian crude oil and natural gas of up to 100 per cent," while creating an exception for countries importing less than 15 per cent of Russia's natural gas exports that are taking significant steps to reduce those imports.

The overview of the key changes said that the revised legislation also "adds new authority to impose tariffs of up to 100 per cent on the top five countries facilitating Russian oil sanctions evasion." —ANI

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Why American hospitals are looking to India for trained healthcare professionals

NEW YORK: Angel Verghese, 25, has a clear plan. The nursing graduate from Welcare College of Nursing in Kochi in southern India's Kerala state has already passed the NCLEX, the US licensing exam for registered nurses.

She is now gaining the work experience she needs before taking the IELTS English-language test and, she hopes, moving to New York, where her brother has already settled.

"I've always wanted to work in the US," Verghese told DW. "It offers better opportunities to learn, grow professionally and build a future. I know the process takes time, but I'm willing to wait."

Waiting for America

Nearly 100 kilometres (62 miles) away in Kottayam, 26-year-old Susan Kurian is further along the same journey.

Having completed the clinical experience that US employers require, she is working with a recruitment agency to complete credential verification and secure a job offer from an American hospital.

"The paperwork is long and complicated, but my goal hasn't changed," Kurian told DW. "The US is where I want to build my career. I hope everything falls into place."

For thousands of young nurses across Kerala, the US remains the ultimate destination. The journey is rarely quick, often involving years of exams, paperwork and waiting, but the promise of better pay, career growth and international experience continues to draw them.

That demand is being fuelled by an American healthcare system struggling to find enough staff.

The US Bureau of Labour Statistics projects 189,100 registered nurse openings every year between 2024 and 2034, driven by an aging population and a wave of retirements.

Hospitals continue to recruit internationally, and India has become an increasingly impor-



tant source of trained healthcare professionals.

Beginning the immigration process early

Because Indian applicants face one of the longest employment-based immigration backlogs, nurses beginning the process today may have to wait more than a decade before receiving a US immigrant visa.

Despite that, recruiters across Kerala continue to sign up candidates.

"Yes, we continue processing applications," Louie Terence, operations manager at Tiju's Academy, which prepares healthcare professionals for overseas licensing and language exams, told DW.

"Kerala nurses are well trained, speak good English and are known for their dedication. Many still see the US as the dream destination because of the salaries, working conditions and long-term career opportunities," said Terence.

Rather than waiting idle, many nurses begin the immigration process early. Recruitment agencies help them pass the NCLEX examination, complete credential verification and secure job offers from sponsoring US hospitals.

Once an immigrant petition is filed, they receive a priority date,

effectively reserving their place in the visa queue.

"We're still filing US petitions despite the backlog, and we hope it will be streamlined soon," a senior official from Affniks International, a leading overseas nurses recruitment agency, told DW.

Gaining work experience elsewhere

Few nurses remain in India while they wait.

Instead, many build careers in countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the UK and Germany, earning higher salaries and gaining international experience until their US priority date becomes current.

Rajkrishna S. Iyer, a US immigration attorney, says America remains the long-term goal for many Indian nurses despite the lengthy delays.

"Many nurses still aspire to work in the US," Iyer told DW. "But because the backlog is so long, they often spend years working elsewhere before their opportunity comes."

"By then, family circumstances may have changed, forcing them to rethink their plans. Others are left at the mercy of recruitment agents who don't always provide complete information," Iyer added.

Ancy Philip understands that

journey well.

The Kerala-born nurse moved to California in 2006, when hospitals were recruiting overseas nurses far more aggressively. Nearly two decades later, she is a US citizen and still works in an American hospital.

"When I came, the process was much simpler," Philip told DW.

"Today there's still a huge shortage because of the aging population, but immigration backlogs have made the process much more difficult. Nurses are still coming, but it's a trickle compared with before," she said.

Even so, she says Kerala nurses continue to enjoy an exceptional reputation.

"They are committed, highly skilled, take ownership of their work and are extremely professional. Hospitals know the quality they're getting," said Philip.

Building a global reputation

Kerala's reputation as a nursing powerhouse has been built over generations through missionary-run colleges, English-language education and a long tradition of overseas migration.

Today, its graduates work in hospitals from Dubai and London to New York.

—DW



LIFESTYLE

STUDY UNVEILS HOW COLON

Scientists have identified a molecular switch that could help explain why colorectal cancer becomes more deadly. Researchers found that when levels of a gene-regulating factor known as GATA6 decline, cancer cells lose their normal identity and transform into highly adaptable, fetal-like cells that can spread through the bloodstream and form new tumours in the liver.

The study suggests this transition is driven primarily by changes in how genes are activated or suppressed, rather than by new genetic mutations.

Researchers at Weill Cornell Medicine and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have identified a key factor that may help colorectal cancer spread to the liver. Their findings suggest that losing GATA6, a transcription factor that helps control which genes are turned on or off, can push cancer cells into a more primitive and adaptable state that makes metastasis possible.

Understanding how this transformation occurs could lead to new strategies for preventing one of the deadliest aspects of colorectal cancer.

GATA6 normally serves as a molecular “identity keeper” in the cells that line the intestine, helping them maintain their specialised functions. However, the study, published June 22 in Cell Stem Cell, found that GATA6 levels are much lower in liver metastases from both mice and people with colorectal cancer.

The researchers also found that reduced GATA6 expression is associated with poorer patient outcomes. Once colorectal cancer spreads beyond its original site, treatment becomes far more challenging, and metastasis remains the leading cause of death from the disease.

For years, scientists have searched for genetic mutations that might trigger liver metastasis, but no clear driver mutations have emerged. Instead, the new study points to a different mechanism.

“We discovered that GATA6 loss acts as a critical switch that can change cancer cells in the primary tumor from non-metastatic to pro-metastatic,” said Dr. Norihiro Goto, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Gastroenterology & Hepatology at Weill Cornell, who co-led the research.

“Our findings suggest that epigenetic changes may be more important for promoting liver metastasis,” added Goto.

CANCER CELLS CHANGE

Unlike genetic mutations, which alter the DNA sequence itself, epigenetic changes influence which genes are active or inactive and therefore which proteins cells produce. Dr. Saori Goto, an instructor in medicine at Weill Cornell, served as first author of the study. Dr. Omer H. Yilmaz, associate professor of biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also co-led the work.

Organoid models reveal how cancer cells become metastatic

According to Dr. Norihiro Goto, studying tissue samples taken from established liver metastases provides only a limited view of the metastatic process.

“When researchers analyse patient samples from liver metastases, we fail to capture the important signals occurring in the early stages of the metastatic process,” said Dr. Norihiro Goto.

To better understand those early events, the research team developed a laboratory model using organoids derived from liver metastases. These miniature, three-dimensional clusters of cancer cells reproduce many characteristics of real tumors. The scientists implanted the organoids into the colons of mice, where they formed increasingly aggressive tumors that later spread to the liver. Repeating this process several times allowed the team to observe how cancer cells gradually acquire metastatic abilities.

Their experiments revealed that the loss of GATA6 promotes lineage plasticity, which is the ability of cells to alter their identity and behavior. When GATA6 was absent, colorectal cancer cells activated alternative genetic programs and adopted a flexible fetal-like state. These transformed cells were better equipped to travel through the bloodstream and establish tumours in distant organs.

This type of cellular reshaping is normally used by the body during wound repair and adaptation to stress. In cancer, however, the same process may help drive metastasis.

GATA6 loss creates cells primed for liver metastasis

One sign of this plasticity was the appearance of cells lacking LGR5, a marker commonly found in intestinal stem cells. Earlier research has shown that LGR5-negative cells can initiate liver metastases.

IDENTITY TO SPREAD

The new study demonstrated that shutting down GATA6 causes cancer cells to shift from an LGR5-positive state to an LGR5-negative state. These cells display fetal-like characteristics and possess the ability to spread to other organs. In contrast, restoring GATA6 activity, or activating related pathways, reduced the metastatic potential of colorectal cancer cells.

“When we genetically delete GATA6, the frequency and burden of liver metastases in mouse models significantly increase, while having little effect on primary tumor growth,” said Dr. Norihiro Goto, who is also a member of Jill Roberts Institute for Research in Inflammatory Bowel Disease and Sandra and Edward Meyer Cancer Centre, both at Weill Cornell.

Based on these findings, the researchers suggest that metastasis may depend more on specific transitions between cellular states than on how quickly a primary tumor grows or how large it becomes.

Potential biomarker and future treatment target

The findings raise the possibility that GATA6 could serve as a biomarker for metastatic risk. Tumors with low GATA6 levels may be more likely to contain cells capable of switching into a metastasis-promoting state. Such information could help doctors identify patients who may benefit from closer monitoring or more aggressive treatment.

The study also points toward a potential therapeutic strategy focused on maintaining cellular identity or preventing cancer cells from entering highly flexible, pro-metastatic states. However, Dr. Norihiro Goto noted that researchers will need to find ways to target these processes without interfering with normal tissue repair, which relies on similar biological programmes.

Future research will focus on identifying vulnerabilities unique to GATA6-deficient cancer cells that could be exploited by new therapies. The team also plans to investigate how the tumor micro-environment, including immune cells and liver-specific signals, influences these cellular transitions in preclinical models. -ANI

The study suggests this transition is driven primarily by changes in how genes are activated or suppressed, rather than by new genetic mutations

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat and Nama Electricity Supply Company announce activation of e-Mandate solution

The initiative will strengthen the digital payments ecosystem, streamline bill collection, and enhance the experience of Nama Electricity Supply Company's customers through Bank Muscat's innovative and secure digital banking solutions

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, and Nama Electricity Supply Company have announced the activation of an e-Mandate solution through Bank Muscat's API Banking on the company's app, Nama Services.

The initiative will strengthen the digital payments ecosystem, streamline bill collection, and enhance the experience of Nama Electricity Supply Company's customers through Bank Muscat's innovative and secure digital banking solutions.

The activation of the e-Mandate solution was officially announced during the partnership agreement signed at Bank Muscat's Head Office in Airport Heights by Salim Said Al Kumyani, Chief Executive Officer, Nama Electricity Supply Company, and Ahmed Faqir Al Balushi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer - Banking, Bank Muscat.

Bank Muscat's e-Mandate solution is based on a one-time direct debit authorization, enabling customers of Nama Electricity Supply Company to issue an electronic mandate through Nama Services App, authorizing the direct debit of recurring bill payments from their bank accounts. The service is also integrated with Nama's internal billing system, enabling automated reconciliation and settlement processes, improving collection efficiency, reducing manual in-



tervention, and enhancing operational performance and service reliability. The solution is designed to simplify the execution of direct debit transactions and facilitate the payment of recurring obligations for government entities and corporate customers, providing a secure and innovative digital alternative to post-dated cheques. The initiative also supports the Central Bank of Oman's efforts to develop the country's electronic payments infrastructure, reduce reliance on traditional payment methods, promote financial inclusion, and advance the digital transformation objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Commenting on the launch, Ahmed Faqir Al Balushi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer - Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "The launch of the e-Mandate solution in collaboration with Nama Electricity Supply Company marks another milestone in Bank Muscat's journey to deliver advanced digital banking solutions that support digital transformation across various sectors. Through our API Banking platform, we continue to empower our partners with secure, scalable solutions that enhance operational efficiency, simplify collection processes, and improve the end-user

experience. This partnership reflects our commitment to supporting Oman's transition towards a fully integrated digital economy while fostering innovation in financial services in line with Oman Vision 2040."

Salim Said Al Kumyani, Chief Executive Officer, Nama Electricity Supply company, said: "We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to activate the e-Mandate solution through Nama Services App. This collaboration forms part of our ongoing efforts to enhance our customers' experience by providing more convenient and efficient digital services. Through this service, customers of Nama Electricity Supply Company can now pay their recurring bills securely and seamlessly while benefiting from automated processes that save their time, effort, and ensure accurate collection and settlement of bills. This initiative represents an important milestone in our digital transformation journey and reflects our commitment to leveraging the latest technologies to deliver services that meet customer expectations and improve our operational efficiency."

Bank Muscat continues to reinforce its leadership in innovation and digital transformation through

sustained investment in the development of its digital banking platforms and the delivery of advanced solutions that meet the evolving needs of both institutional and individual customers. The Bank's API Banking platform is a key pillar of its strategy to enable organizations to integrate directly with its banking services, helping improve operational efficiency, accelerate transaction processing, and support business growth. Bank Muscat's leadership in innovation and digital transformation is driven by a forward-looking strategy that aligns with the future of the banking industry through the continuous enhancement of its digital platforms and the delivery of innovative solutions that provide customers with convenience, reliability, and a seamless banking experience. The Bank also continues to strengthen its digital transformation efforts by introducing technology-driven initiatives that simplify banking for individuals and empower businesses, thereby supporting financial inclusion across the Sultanate. Strategic partnerships with technology providers and fintech companies remain central to Bank Muscat's efforts to develop next-generation banking services that respond to evolving market needs.

EDUCATION LEADER

Indian School Al Seeb welcomes new principal Rana Sangram Singh

MUSCAT: Rana Snagram Singh Bhadauria has been appointed as the new Principal of Indian School Al Seeb marking a significant addition to the leadership of one of Oman's leading Indian Schools.

He is an IIM Indore alumnus, NABET Certified Accreditor and holds his academic credentials from University of Kanpur, University of Lucknow, and Jamia Millia Islamia University. Currently he is pursuing his doctoral studies at Jananayak Chandrashekhar University, Uttar Pradesh.

Rana Sangram Singh is an experienced education leader with over 23 years of progressive experience in CBSE school education, including more than 14 years as Principal of various renowned schools in India. He has been associated with CBSE as City Coordinator, Master Trainer, Mentor, Observer and Centre Superintendent. He has

He does not limit himself to only academics and training, he is also a known storyteller, orator and social worker

contributed to the success of reputed brand institutions like Seth M. R. Jaipuria Schools and MIT World Peace Schools.

He does not limit himself to only academics and training, he is also a known storyteller, orator and social worker.

The appointment of Rana Sangram Singh marks the beginning of a new chapter in the institution's journey of academic excellence and holistic development.



LIMITED-TIME CAMPAIGN

Best Cars announces Oman's lowest pre-owned vehicle EMIs starting from OMR 48



MUSCAT: Unlocking unprecedented affordability for car buyers across the Sultanate of Oman, an exclusive limited-time campaign has officially launched to deliver Oman's lowest EMIs for pre-owned vehicles.

Available only at Best Cars - Oman's trusted destination for quality pre-owned vehicles, this massive value drive allows motorists to step into a dependable, high-quality vehicle with introductory monthly installments starting from an incredible OMR 48*. Running until July 30, 2026, this exclusive promotion is structured to make premium automotive ownership highly accessible.

This special summer campaign is built around a comprehensive suite of financial advantages designed to maximize affordability for value-conscious car buyers. Key among the benefits are highly competitive finance interest rates starting from 3.5% per annum, making vehicle ownership smoother than ever. To add further value, Best Cars is offering top-market trade-in prices on existing vehicles, backed by an efficient, on-the-spot quick evaluation process that enables customers to transition into their next vehicle seam-

lessly and transparently. (Terms & Conditions Apply)

The attractive OMR 48 monthly installment is an indicative rate available on selected pre-owned vehicles financed through Oman Arab Bank, subject to standard credit approvals, eligibility criteria, and banking terms. Under the campaign guidelines, the maximum financing tenure is dependent on the vehicle's age, ensuring that the total age of the automobile does not exceed 9 years from its initial date of registration. Because the offer is tied directly to current stock, customers are encouraged to visit early to secure their preferred models from the massive lineup of trusted vehicles.

Established in 2001, Best Cars operates from its prominent main showroom in Wattayah—the largest facility of its kind in the heart of Oman's automobile market. The showroom stocks a wide range of prominent vehicles, including Toyota, Lexus, Kia, Ford, BMW, GMC etc catering to every taste and budget. While this exclusive campaign is currently centered at the flagship Wattayah facility, plans are underway to expand such specialized value programs to additional locations in the future.



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