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H M THE SULTAN RETURNS FROM UK VISIT



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned to Oman on Sunday following a private visit to the United Kingdom.

'May God grant His Majesty continued success in advancing the nation's progress and achievements and may He protect and guide him,' ONA stated reporting

the return.

During his visit, His Majesty the Sultan met UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer at 10 Downing Street on July 30, where the two leaders discussed ways to deepen the strategic partnership between Oman and the United Kingdom. ONA

Speed, negligence remain top killers on Oman roads

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 1,854 road accidents and 586 fatalities were recorded in Oman in 2024. According to figures released by National Centre for Statistics and Information, speeding and driver negligence were the leading causes of deadly crashes.

While the total number of accidents dropped from 2,040 in 2023 to 1,854 in 2024 - down by over 9% - the number of deaths remained high with only a marginal decrease from 595 fatalities in 2023. Injuries reduced from 2,129 to 1,936 in the same period.

Muscat governorate registered the highest number of accidents at 445, resulting in 420 injuries and 107 deaths. South Sharqiyah followed with 266 accidents and 311 injuries and 72 fatalities, though North Sharqiyah recorded the second highest number of deaths at 106. Other governorates with significant fatalities included Musandam (89 deaths) and Dakhliyah (67 deaths).

Speeding was attributed for the largest share of accidents - 768 - resulting in 808 injuries and 248 deaths. Negligence was



Three killed in truck collision

Ibri - Three people died and another was critically injured in a collision between two trucks in the Al Rahba area of Ibri, Dhahirah on Sunday, according to Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

CDAA teams responded to the accident and provided emergency medical care to the injured individual at the site. The injured person was later transferred to a hospital for further treatment.

CDAA urged all road users to exercise caution, particularly on highways, and to comply with traffic safety regulations to prevent such tragedies.

2024 FIGURES

ACCIDENTS	- 1,854
DEATHS	- 586
INJURIES	- 1,936

ACCIDENTS

DUE TO SPEEDING

TOTAL	768
INJURIES	808
DEATHS	248

DUE TO NEGLIGENCE

TOTAL	324
INJURIES	214
DEATHS	136

the second most frequent cause, responsible for 324 accidents, 214 injuries and 136 fatalities. Other contributing factors included bad driving behaviour (99 deaths), overtaking (39 deaths) and tailgating (25 deaths).

Drunk driving resulted in 43 injuries and 13 deaths, while fatigue caused seven injuries and four deaths. Accidents due to vehicle defects led to 68 injuries and 15 deaths, while road infrastructure flaws caused nine injuries but no fatalities.

Authorities continue to urge motorists to exercise caution, follow speed limit and prioritise safety. "Persistently high number of deaths despite fewer accidents signals the need for greater public awareness and strict enforcement," a traffic

safety official said.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Royal Oman Police have launched several campaigns in recent years to address risky driving behaviour.

OIA chief, Hong Kong CE discuss investment cooperation

Hong Kong - Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), met John Lee Ka-chiu, Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, on Sunday to discuss ways to strengthen economic, trade and investment cooperation between Oman and Hong Kong.

The meeting reviewed opportunities to enhance bilateral



partnership, with both sides expressing interest in deepening engagement across priority sectors.

Murshidi praised the strong ties between Oman and Hong Kong, while stressing the importance of continued exchange of visits and expanded cooperation to serve mutual interests.

Lee highlighted Oman's strategic direction under Vision

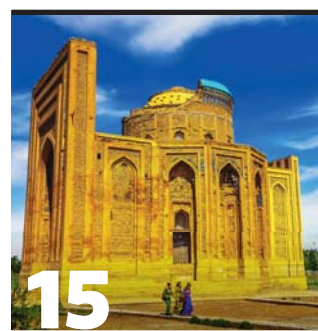
2040, noting its alignment with China's Belt and Road Initiative. He added that Hong Kong, as a leading global financial and trade hub, offers an attractive environment for investment in areas such as renewable energy and advanced technologies.

The meeting was attended by H E Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hina'i, Ambassador at Foreign Ministry.



09

Israeli minister leads illegal incursion into Al Aqsa Mosque



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Turkmenistan, one of the world's most isolated countries, lures tourists

12-day Work Forum opens in Salalah to tackle labour market challenges

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Ministry of Labour's 12-day Work Forum 2025 opened in Salalah on Sunday to address key challenges in the labour market and explore opportunities aligned with national development goals.

Inaugurated by H E Mahad Baawain, Minister of Labour, the forum has brought together over 1,000 participants including international experts, senior officials, business leaders and investors.

The event will feature 33 working papers focused on aligning labour policies with emerging trends, fostering public-private partnerships and promoting sustainable employment models in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Nasser Salim al Hadhrami, Di-

We are moving towards comprehensive strategies in education, training and employment to support emerging work patterns

NASSER SALIM AL HADHRAMI

rector General of Labour in Dhofar, said the forum highlights Oman's commitment to keeping pace with global labour developments. "Introduction of the new Labour Law and Social Protection Law reflects our efforts to align with international standards," he said. "We are moving towards comprehensive strategies in education, training and employment to support emerging work

patterns."

Mohammed Hassan al Obaidli, Director General of Executive Bureau of GCC Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs, warned that rapid economic and technological transformations are reshaping the labour landscape. "We must build fair and flexible models for skills development, employment and social protection," he said.

Azar Bayramov, Director General of OIC Labour Centre, said the forum plays a critical role in fostering cooperation. "Our mission is to be a bridge between governments, workers and employers to ensure decent work for all," he said, announcing a post-forum training programme on leadership in occupational safety and health for Omani stakeholders.

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The use of smart agriculture technologies is being expanded in Oman to enhance food security and resource sustainability in line with Vision 2040 objectives, according to officials at Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

Modern techniques - hydroponics, smart irrigation systems and drones - are increasingly being adopted across the country, although officials say these are still in early stages of implementation in the sector and largely focused on research initiatives and private sector investments.

Badriya Saif al Hosni, Head of Smart Agriculture Department in Directorate General of Agriculture and Livestock Research, said the strategy aims to integrate



technology into traditional agricultural systems. "One prominent feature of the ministry's strategy is digital transformation of services and adoption of modern technologies to increase crop productivity and reduce costs. We are also working to empower farmers with smart agriculture tools."

Badriya informed that projects underway include aquaponics systems, precision agriculture

based on climate data, drone-assisted pest control and pollination, and solar-powered greenhouses. Smart irrigation systems, which use soil moisture sensors, are also being deployed to improve efficiency.

Training is a core part of the government's approach. "The ministry offers specialised training courses for farmers on drone operations, soilless farming and

the use of mobile apps in farm management," she said.

Pilot projects have been introduced across governorates to support the transfer of knowledge to small-scale farmers.

Badriya, however, acknowledged that challenges remain. "One of the most prominent challenges is the disparity in digital infrastructure across governorates, along with the need to raise technical awareness among some farmers." High operating and maintenance costs also limit adoption in certain areas.

To support adoption, the government is allocating annual budgets and encouraging partnerships with the private sector. Development Bank offers soft loans to small farmers to purchase equipment, while agricultural associations help facilitate access to shared smart farming technologies.

REFUSE SINGLE-USE, CHOOSE TO REUSE

Enforcement of Phase 3 of the single-use plastic shopping bags ban scheduled from July 1 has been inconsistent. Some commercial establishments included in the phase continue to hand out plastic bags. How can the ban be more effectively implemented? Here is what Muscat Daily readers said -

Salim al Balushi
Private sector employee

The ban is a great move, but enforcement is weak. Authorities need to inspect shops regularly and fine violators. More awareness campaigns can also help people shift to reusable bags.

Mona al Riyami
Homemaker

I still receive plastic bags at small stores. There should be one rule for all, big or small. Give shops a deadline and supply affordable eco-friendly alternatives.

Rashid al Harthi
Student

We need stronger public engagement. Involve schools and colleges to spread awareness. Also, reward stores that follow the ban - positive reinforcement works better than just penalties.

Arun Menon
Supermarket manager

Many stores continue using plastic due to lack of alternatives and cost issues. The government could subsidise paper or cloth bags for a while to help the transition.



Paramesh Dhanapal
Student

Plastic causes pollution and it cannot be decomposed. It pollutes all the five essential elements of our universe. Stopping or significantly reducing the use of plastic is essential for our environment. The ban should

be effectively implemented to save our planet. The first step towards this would be discontinuation of production of plastics. Next, is punishment for those who are not ready to take this seriously. Severe punishment like



large amounts of money in fine or imprisonment has to be implemented to make the ban more effective.

Muna Basheer al Zadjali
Private sector employee

Banning plastic bags is a necessary step towards a cleaner environment, but it is only the beginning. To ensure the ban is effective, there must be affordable and practical alternatives and public awareness. With these measures in place, the fight against plastic pollution can become much more successful.

Jovita Sarkar
Retail sales manager

I think it would be a good idea if we are given more access to resources to make cloth, paper or jute bags. After all, it's difficult to maintain these in the same way as single-use plastic bags for customers and workers alike.

Dalal al Amri
Human resources manager

The biggest issue I and many other customers face with the implementation of this ban is the lack of accessible alternatives. If I don't have a high-quality cloth bag, then I'm forced to use the ones provided by shops which are very expensive to buy and only last for a couple of purchases before they get ruined.

Siddharth Pandey
Software engineer

This ban can be more effectively implemented if authorities inspect local businesses more frequently. If they regularly monitor plastic consumption rates of commercial centres, they can make more informed decisions when they introduce new phases of the ban. Providing monetary incentives for reduced plastic consumption may encourage such businesses to take more responsibility for our environment.



Is overtourism a growing concern in Dhofar during khareef? What can be done to curb the traffic and overcrowding?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram or muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

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Celebrating the Future of Finance Leadership in Oman

ICAI Oman Chapter and OCCI Host Graduation Ceremony for Omani CFO Program – Sur

Sur, 26 July 2025 - In a significant stride toward advancing financial leadership and empowerment in Oman, the ICAI Oman Chapter, in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), hosted the Certificate Distribution Ceremony for the 5th Batch of the Omani CFO Program – Sur. The event was held at the Grand Hotel, Sur, celebrating the achievements of 72 aspiring Omani finance professionals.

This milestone event marked the culmination of an intensive eight-week mentoring journey, part of a transformative national initiative aligned with Oman Vision 2040. With successful batches already conducted in Salalah, Muscat, Sohar, Barka, and now Sur, the program has positively impacted more than 230 participants, guided by a network of over 100 dedicated mentors from ICAI.

The evening was graced by several distinguished dignitaries, including:

- H.E. Sheikh Suba' bin Hamdan Al Saadi, Secretary General of the General Secretariat for National Celebrations
- Shaikh Rashid Amer Al-Muslehi, First Vice-Chairman, OCCI Board of Directors
- Engg. Hammoud Salem Al-Saadi, Second Vice-Chairman, OCCI Board of Directors
- Dr. Abdullah Masoud Al Harthy, OCCI Board Member and Chairman of the CFO Mentoring Program Committee
- Mr. Anwar Hamad Al Sanani, Board Member, OCCI
- CA Unmesh Avinash Bhome, Chairperson, ICAI Oman Chapter

A key moment during the event was the distribution of certificates to the CFO program participants and selected mentors, which was graciously carried out by H.E. Sheikh Suba' bin Hamdan Al Saadi, adding prestige and encouragement to the celebration of their accomplishments. Delivering the keynote address, Dr. Abdullah Al Harthy highlighted the program's deeper purpose beyond technical training: "This initiative is more than a training program - it's a platform to



shape confident, capable leaders for Oman's future." He commended both the participants and mentors for their dedication and effort.

Congratulating the graduates, CA Unmesh Bhome remarked, "We are not just developing CFOs - we are nurturing future leaders who will drive this beautiful Sultanate of Oman's economic transformation." He also an-



nounced that the 6th batch of the program will be launched soon in Barka, extending the initiative's reach and impact.

A notable highlight of the evening was a dynamic panel discussion, moderated by CA Ajil James Kurian, featuring standout participants from the Sur batch:

- Ahmed Ali Al Moosawi, Assistant

Treasury Manager, Special Oilfield Services Co. LLC

- Nutaila Talib Hilal Al Thanawi, Assistant Finance Manager, SMN Power Holding SAOG
- Nassr Nasser Abdallah Al Naabi, Finance Analyst, Ministry of Finance
- Shaghila Khamis Al Malkhi, Assistant Manager, Rawaq Rehabilitation Center

During the discussion, Ms. Nutaila Talib Hilal Al Thanawi shared a personal milestone, announcing that she had been promoted to Deputy Finance Manager at SMN Power Holding SAOG, attributing the growth in her leadership and technical skills to her participation in the CFO program.

The panelists shared powerful insights on how the program enhanced

their leadership and strategic finance capabilities, while broadening their perspective on the evolving role of CFOs in a dynamic business environment. The Sur batch uniquely featured interactive group discussions, case-based multiple-choice assessments, and focused one-on-one mentoring - all designed to simulate real-world financial decision-making and deepen learning outcomes.

Top three achievers from the Sur Batch were specially honored:

- Mohammed Nasser Rashid Al Fannah Al Aرامي, Arabian Industries SAOC
- Majid Abdullah Khamis Al Jabri, Oman India Fertilizer Company (OMIFCO)
- Nutaila Talib Hilal Al Thanawi, SMN Power Holding SAOG

Launched in 2023, the Omani CFO Mentoring Program stands as a flagship initiative of the ICAI Oman Chapter, committed to nurturing future finance leaders through practical learning, structured mentoring, and strategic collaboration. The ICAI Oman Chapter also acknowledged the continued support of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) in advancing its mission.

The resounding success of the Sur edition reaffirms the power of vision, mentorship, and institutional collaboration in shaping the next generation of financial leadership in Oman.

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Dhofar gets sesame cultivation project to boost food security

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Oman has launched a sesame cultivation project in Dhofar governorate as part of its efforts to enhance food security and reduce reliance on imports.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between Specialized Integrated Food Company (Sifco) and the Omani Agricultural Association's Dhofar branch at Salalah Free Zone on Sunday. The agreement covers the cultivation of sesame in the Najd region and supports the national drive to link agriculture with food manufacturing.

The initiative is backed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and the Salalah Free Zone.

In its first phase, the project will cover 600 acres and benefit 35 farmers. Production is estimated at 300 tonnes, with Sifco



committed to purchasing the full harvest. Future expansion is under consideration.

The sesame crop will supply Omani food manufacturers, particularly producers of tahini and halva. It is also used in cosmetics and traditional medicine.

Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabuk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, said the project reflects the zone's strategy to encourage partnerships that connect investors with local producers. "This initiative falls within efforts to support economic development by stimulating qualitative partnerships between investors and the local community," he said.

He added that the project supports sustainable develop-

ment by building value chains based on local resources. "The Salalah Free Zone seeks to empower industries based on local production and support integrated value chains," he said.

Officials said the project aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and national efforts to improve self-sufficiency in essential commodities. Sesame is considered well-suited to the desert environment of Najd and has high nutritional and commercial value.

The agreement represents a joint effort between government agencies, the private sector, and local farmers. It also aims to support small and medium enterprises in the food industry by ensuring stable supply sources.

Al Ain village offers glimpse into Oman's living heritage

Our Correspondent
Jabal Akhdar

Nestled among the terraced slopes of Jabal Akhdar in Dakhliyah, Al Ain village remains one of Oman's most captivating destinations for visitors seeking cultural depth, natural beauty, and historical continuity. Surrounded by orchards and stone-carved paths, the village has long served as a vital agricultural and spiritual hub - and continues to draw visitors year-round.

Known for its cool summers and very cold winters, Al Ain's climate supports a range of seasonal crops, including roses, pomegranates, grapes, peaches, walnuts, garlic, and onions. Its landscape, shaped by centuries of farming across stone terraces, presents a distinctive Omani agricultural model still practised today.

Yahya bin Nasser al Riyami, a long-time resident, describes Al Ain as "one of the ancient villages in Jabal Akhdar, dating back hundreds of years". Its importance, he explains, lies not only in its central location but also in its geological foundation. "The village sits on a mass of travertine rock, known for its abundant water sources," he said, noting its panoramic view of neighbouring villages Al Aqar, Al Shirajjah, and



Al Qasha.

Al Ain owes its name to the natural springs that feed its network of aflaj. "Three aflaj originate here: Falaj al Awar, Falaj al Qanti, and Falaj Abu Kabir," said Riyami. These traditional irrigation systems support farms across multiple villages and remain in use today. Springs such as Ain al Uyaynah continue to flow, sustaining both agriculture and tradition.

The village is also known for its religious and educational legacy. "Sites like Al Qalaa, believed to be one of the earliest Persian-inhabited homes, and the engineering of the falaj systems reflect the depth of the village's history," said Riyami.

He pointed to the presence of four old mosques and a Quranic school as evidence of the community's early emphasis on learning and faith. A section of

village farmland is even set aside to fund religious and scientific book endowments.

Al Ain's stone houses and natural paths form a unique network that once connected it to nearby governorates. Riyami noted how, before the construction of the Jabal Akhdar road, these footpaths were the only link to Nizwa, Izki, Samail, and even Al Awabi in South Batinah. "These routes were vital. They were maintained regularly and now attract hikers and heritage enthusiasts," he said.

With adventure tourism on the rise, many of these historic paths are being preserved. "The relevant authorities are making efforts to keep them passable, as they've become part of the region's tourism appeal," Riyami added.

Beyond its scenic charm, Al Ain remains economically active. "The village is surrounded by orchards on all sides, like a bracelet on the wrist," he said, describing the crop diversity.

Students' digital platform boosts home care services

Muscat - A team of students from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Shinas has developed a digital healthcare platform aimed at improving access to home medical services across Oman.

Designed to streamline appointment booking and provide users with detailed information on doctors and clinics, Me'ad features an interface suited for both elderly users and younger, tech-savvy individuals. It incorporates artificial intelligence to personalise service recommendations and maintain transparent pricing.

According to developers, over one million users - including patients, doctors, and consultants - have accessed the platform's services, which now span a wide network of medical centres and clinics in various governorates.

Maaz bin Murad al Maamari, CEO of Nahj Foundation, which

oversees the platform, said the development process faced initial hurdles. "The platform team faced several challenges, given that the idea is new. Continuous communication with relevant authorities and the presentation of a comprehensive vision for the platform highlighted its importance in this vital sector," he said.

Maamari confirmed that the team is working on new features, including medication delivery, e-visits, and improved integration with government health systems. Plans are also underway to expand services into new specialisations and extend the platform's reach to all of Oman's governorates by next year.

The team is also exploring future entry into the Gulf healthcare market.

Me'ad has received several awards, including first place in the Best Student Idea Competition and the Best Idea Award at the UTAS in Shinas in 2025.



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Board of Directors' Report for the Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2025

Dear Valued Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the interim report of Oman Fisheries Company S.A.O.G. for the six-month period ended 30 June 2025. This report outlines the Company's key developments, strategic initiatives, operational performance, financial results, and future outlook.

1. Key Business Developments

Organizational Restructuring

During the first half of 2025, the Company implemented a revised organizational structure approved by the Board. This restructuring involved the removal of C-level positions, resulting in enhanced operational efficiency, expedited decision-making, and notable cost savings.

Appointment of General Manager

In February 2025, Mr. Dawood Al Wahabi was appointed as General Manager following his prior role as Transformation Officer (September 2024 – January 2025). With over 35 years of experience in the fisheries sector, Mr. Al Wahabi brings a track record of leadership in operational transformation and sustainable growth.

Adoption of a Revised Operational Model

Following a comprehensive analysis of operational, market, and historical performance data, the Company has adopted a data-driven operational model aimed at maximizing asset efficiency and enhancing procurement sustainability. This model is designed to optimize profitability through evidence-based decisions and predictive performance indicators. Key initiatives under this strategic shift include:

- Recalibrating the product portfolio by increasing the share of higher-margin demersal species, based on market demand analytics and yield optimization models.
- Prioritizing the procurement and in-house processing of fresh fish to increase value-added output, while restricting frozen fish trading to periods of seasonal supply gaps.
- Enhancing the utilization of key assets—most notably the Al Khair vessel—through data-informed scheduling, cost-efficiency analysis, and output maximization frameworks.

Third-Party Processing Services

In H1 2025, the Company capitalized on idle capacity in its processing units by offering services to third parties, processing 117 metric tons (MT) of fish.

Operational Agreement – Al Khair Vessel

A partnership agreement was executed to operate the Al Khair vessel under OFC's fishing license. The arrangement includes a no-cost quota and additional revenue from processing catch exceeding the quota. The vessel is operationally ready and scheduled to commence activity by mid-August 2025.

New Fishing License

The Company was recently awarded a new fishing license with an annual quota of 10,000 MT. This development underscores the Government's confidence in OFC's operational capacity and strategic direction. Management is currently negotiating terms with vessel operators to commence utilization under this license.

Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Product Line

OFC has established a new RTE production line at its Ghala facility. Initial setup, including equipment installation, lab testing, and onboarding of a food technologist, has been completed to drive the strategic growth of this segment.

Long-Term Commercial Agreements

The Company entered into strategic long-term agreements, including:

- An export contract with a Chinese partner for 160 containers of demersal fish annually (RO 4–5 million in value).
- A supply agreement with J. Marr for 360 containers of small pelagic fish per annum.

Operational Efficiency Enhancements

Process streamlining and cross-functional coordination initiatives are yielding measurable operational improvements across the Company.

2. Operational and Financial Highlights

Inventory Optimization

Inventory levels declined from 772 MT in December 2024 to 270 MT in June 2025—a 65% reduction. Compared to June 2024 (1,084 MT), this represents a 75% decrease, reflecting tighter inventory control and optimized stock turnover.

Storage Cost Savings

The reduction in inventory led to a cost savings of RO 182,000 in storage expenses year-on-year.

G&A Cost Reductions

General and Administrative expenses declined by 24% due to targeted cost control measures.

Receivables Recovery

Trade and other receivables were reduced from RO 2.871 million to RO 1.003 million—a 65% decrease. Notably, the Company recovered RO 365,000 from a long-outstanding Egyptian customer.

New Working Capital Facility

OFC secured a RO 500,000 working capital facility from Oman Development Bank to enhance procurement capacity and revenue generation. Additional financing negotiations are in progress with other banking partners.

3. Key Financial Results

FS Items	H1-2025	H1-2024	Difference	Diff. %
Total Assets	7,579,667	9,597,777	(2,018,110)	-21%
Total Liabilities	5,255,109	7,569,203	(2,314,094)	-31%
Net Equity	2,324,558	2,028,574	295,984	15%
Revenue	1,001,263	3,868,446	(2,867,183)	-74%
Cost of Sales	(1,389,448)	(3,494,796)	2,105,348	-60%
Operating Expenses	(643,561)	(1,367,017)	723,456	-53%
Net Finance Cost	(114,933)	(120,205)	5,272	-4%
Net Loss	(1,146,679)	(1,113,572)	(33,107)	3%
EBITDA	(716,912)	(778,237)	61,325	-8%

The decline in revenue was mainly driven by liquidity constraints. Additionally, efforts to liquidate aged inventory affected overall value. Despite a marginal increase in net loss (3%), the Company achieved an 8% improvement in EBITDA, attributable to enhanced cost discipline. The net loss also reflects a one-time fair value depreciation adjustment of RO 159,000.

4. Key Challenges

- Liquidity and Working Capital: Ongoing liquidity constraints are affecting procurement activities and operational scalability. Engagements with financial institutions continue to secure additional credit lines.
- Customer Portfolio Development: Strategic efforts are underway to diversify and strengthen the customer base, focusing on high-margin segments.

5. Outlook and Future Strategy

OFC is actively implementing a structured transformation agenda under the oversight of the Transformation Committee. The Company's revised strategy emphasizes sustainability, asset efficiency, and long-term value creation for its shareholders.

6. Corporate Governance

The Board of Directors remains fully committed to maintaining the highest standards of corporate governance, ensuring transparency, accountability, and robust oversight in accordance with regulatory requirements and stakeholder expectations.

7. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The Company continues to support local communities—particularly the fishing community—through education initiatives, safety awareness programs, and partnerships that promote long-term community development.

8. Risk Management and Internal Controls

OFC maintains a comprehensive internal control framework aligned with best practices in corporate risk management and compliance. The Internal Audit function reports independently to the Board through the Internal Audit Committee, ensuring continuous governance and control enhancements.

9. Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend our sincere appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said—may Allah protect him—and to the Government of Oman for their unwavering support of the private sector and national economic development.

We are equally grateful to our esteemed shareholders for their confidence, continued support, and commitment to the long-term success of Oman Fisheries Company.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors
Oman Fisheries Company S.A.O.G.
Dr. Shahid Mahmood Haider Al Bulushi
Chairman – Board of Directors

Condensed interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2025 (Expressed in Omani Rials)

	30 June 2025 (unaudited)	31 December 2024 (audited)
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	5,452,816	5,740,564
Right-of-use assets	376,409	868,183
Total non-current assets	5,829,225	6,608,747
Current assets		
Inventories	445,419	787,203
Trade and other receivables	1,003,079	1,673,618
Other financial assets at amortised cost	-	1,600,000
Cash and bank balances	301,944	120,115
Total current assets	1,750,442	4,180,936
Total assets	7,579,667	10,789,683
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	16,307,700	16,307,700
Legal reserve	3,314,319	3,314,319
Capital reserve	29,269	29,269
Revaluation reserve	3,359,298	3,518,232
Accumulated losses	(20,686,028)	(19,698,283)
Total capital and reserves	2,324,558	3,471,237
Non-current liabilities		
Employees' benefit liabilities	16,725	29,793
Term loans	439,727	411,580
Lease liabilities	113,454	419,077
Deferred tax liability	186,970	186,970
Total non-current liabilities	756,876	1,047,420
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,894,910	2,212,956
Term loans	38,239	151,185
Bank borrowings	2,534,749	3,611,685
Lease liabilities	30,335	295,200
Total current liabilities	4,498,233	6,271,026
Total liabilities	5,255,109	7,318,446
Total equity and liabilities	7,579,667	10,789,683
Net assets per share	0.013	0.019

Condensed interim statement of profit or loss or other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30 June 2025 (Expressed in Omani Rials)

	Six-month period ended 30 June 2025 (unaudited)	Three-month period from 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025 (unaudited)	Six-month period ended 30 June 2024 (unaudited)	Three-month period from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024 (unaudited)
Revenue	1,001,263	405,717	3,868,446	1,337,459
Direct costs	(1,389,448)	(582,719)	(3,494,796)	(1,265,056)
Gross (loss)/profit	(388,185)	(177,002)	373,650	72,403
Other income	58,578	9,040	106,546	3,316
Selling and distribution expenses	(132,918)	(32,335)	(720,163)	(275,612)
General and administrative expenses	(569,221)	(267,608)	(753,400)	(388,363)
	(643,561)	(290,903)	(1,367,017)	(660,659)
Operating loss for the period	(1,031,746)	(467,905)	(993,367)	(588,256)
Finance costs	(138,418)	(54,211)	(177,459)	(99,514)
Finance income	23,485	4,609	57,254	28,672
Net loss before tax for the period	(1,146,679)	(517,507)	(1,113,572)	(659,098)
Income tax	-	-	-	-
Net loss after tax and total comprehensive loss for the period	(1,146,679)	(517,507)	1,113,572)	(659,098)
Loss per share - basic and diluted	(0.0063)	(0.0028)	(0.0061)	(0.0036)



تكاful عمان للتأمين ش.م.ع.م.ع.

TAKAFUL OMAN INSURANCE SAOG

The directors' report to the shareholders on unaudited condensed consolidated interim financial statements for the six months ended 30 June, 2025.

Dear Shareholders,

It is my privilege to present to you the financial performance of Takaful Oman Insurance Company SAOG for the six months ended 30 June, 2025, on behalf of the Board of Directors.

I am pleased to announce that we have successfully completed the transition to the new financial reporting standards, specifically FAS 43 - Accounting for Takaful, FAS 42 - Presentation and Disclosures in the Financial Statements of Takaful Institutions, and FAS 30 - Impairment Credit Losses and Onerous Commitments. These standards came into effect on January 1, 2025. This significant milestone reflects our ongoing commitment to maintaining compliance with the latest regulatory requirements and ensuring the highest level of accuracy and transparency in our financial reporting practices.

The company has astutely leveraged the achievements of the previous year to drive continued progress. Allow me to present an overview of the key highlights:

- * The company has kept pace to its growth trajectory and reported 27% growth in Gross Written Contributions (GWC) totaling to RO 25.73 million in H1 2025 as compared to last year.
- * Recognized Takaful Contributions has increased to RO 17.81 million in H1 2025 in comparison to RO 17.51 million in H1 2024.
- * Takaful Gross Margin has improved from 0.79 million in H1 2024 to 0.97 million in H1 2025.
- * The combined (Shareholders Fund and Participants Fund) results, as per new accounting standard, recorded a net profit after tax and OCI of RO 1.20 million in H1 2025 (H1 2024 (restated): Loss after tax RO 0.10 million).
- * The Company generated combined (Shareholders Fund and Participants Fund) net investment income of RO 0.66 million in H1 2025, (H1 2024: 0.63 million).

Our accomplishments demonstrate our dedication to creating value for our stakeholders and positioning our company as a prominent player in the takaful industry. We have full confidence that we will maintain our growth trajectory and successfully achieve our strategic goals in 2025 and beyond.

Financial Performance in Brief

I am delighted to announce the key financial indicators of the company:

Participants Funds

Recognized Takaful Contributions has decreased to RO 17.81 million in H1 2025 in comparison to RO 17.51 million in H1 2024.

Takaful Gross Margin expanded by 22%, advancing from RO 0.79 million in H1 2024 to RO 0.97 million in the corresponding period of 2025.

The combined participants' fund results (General Takaful and Family Takaful), as per new accounting standard, have reported a surplus of RO 1.33 million in H1 2025 as compared to a surplus of RO 1.14 million in H1 2024 (restated) as per new accounting standard).

Furthermore, the Company has experienced a commendable 27% year-on-year growth in its top-line performance, with Gross Written Contributions totalling RO 25.73 million in H1 2025, a notable increase from the RO 20.26 million in H1 2024. Notably, the Family Takaful segment constitutes 58% of the total top-line. Additionally, the Health Takaful Line of Business constitutes 16%, while the Motor and Non-Motor Takaful Line of Businesses constitutes 14% and 12% respectively.

Shareholders' Fund

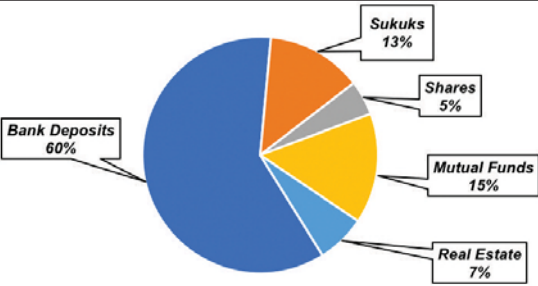
The Shareholders' Fund revenue is primarily derived from the Wakala fees followed by the investment and mudarib fees income. For the six months ended June 30, 2025, the shareholders' fund earned Wakala fees of RO 5.06 million (H1 2024: RO 1.65 million).

The Shareholders' fund has reported a profit before finance cost and tax of RO 0.14 million in H1 2025, as compared to the loss before finance cost and tax of RO 1.19 million in H1 2024 as restated in accordance with the new accounting standards.

Investment Position & Performance:

The Company maintains a resilient and stable investment portfolio valued at RO 26.85 million, primarily composed of bank deposits held with Islamic banks, representing 60% of the total combined investment portfolio. Notably, the Company generated combined (Shareholders Fund and Participants Fund) investment income of RO 0.66 million in H1 2025 in comparison of RO 0.63 million in H1 2024.

The Company is diversifying its investment portfolio by increasing its allocation to more profitable Sukuks and Equity, demonstrating its commitment to enhancing overall investment income.



Investment Category	Percentage
Bank Deposits	60%
Sukuks	13%
Shares	5%
Mutual Funds	15%
Real Estate	7%

Shariah Compliance is the topmost priority

Takaful Oman Insurance has demonstrated a commitment to being transparent and accountable in optimizing its portfolio while abiding by the Shariah law. The Shariah Supervisory Committee exerts its supervisory role to ensure that the company operation is in compliance with Islamic Shariah rules and principle. The Financial statements for the six months ended June 30, 2025, are reviewed and approved by Shariah Supervisory Committee.

High Performing Leadership Team with Excellent Omanisation Ratio

Employees are the cornerstone of any organization. To achieve sustainable & profitable growth, an experienced and motivated team is essential. Transparency, high ethical and moral standards, diversity, and equal opportunity are the fundamental pillars of HR policy. The company provides a healthy working environment, to harness the best potential of the employees. In line with government policy, the company provides youth training and learning opportunities in the insurance sector. Takaful Oman is proud to achieve an overall Omanisation ratio of 82% as against the required ratio of 75%. The company staff is the primary source of achievement. To keep the company ahead in the industry, it continues to invest in the training and development of its human resources.

Dhamani Platform

The Financial Services Authority launched the Dhamani Platform on January 1, 2025, to streamline the processing and payment of medical claims. Takaful Oman has successfully implemented this change, integrating the claims processing through Dhamani with the bank to ensure timely payments. This integration also facilitates accurate reporting to the regulator, enhancing transparency and efficiency in the claims process.

Training and Development

Takaful Oman has implemented a range of targeted training and development initiatives aimed at fostering comprehensive skill enhancement among employees and channel partners. Recognizing the critical role of continuous learning in driving productivity and sustaining a competitive advantage, these programs encompass both technical competencies and essential soft skills, including communication, leadership, and collaboration. During the first six months, 107 employees attended training sessions over 46 days, covering key topics such as Islamic Bank Contracts, Takaful insurance, the future of insurance, risk management, AML, information security, and the Insurance Elevate Program. These sessions aimed to strengthen industry knowledge, regulatory compliance, and professional development across the organization.

In alignment with national priorities and regulatory expectations, we have also actively supported the Omani workforce development agenda by participating in training programs under the Tankeen initiative, sponsored by the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

This integrated approach underscores our commitment to the professional advancement of our team and partners, contributing meaningfully to the organization's sustained growth and success.

Information Technology:

Takaful Express:

Transforming Takaful Express into accessible, self-service points, similar to ATMs, can substantially enhance outreach and convenience for users. These will be placed in high footfall areas like malls, airports, transport hubs, and banks, improving accessibility, especially in remote locations without direct access to agents or branches. Users can easily complete enrollment, make payments, and receive digital policies via SMS, email, or WhatsApp, with integration for mobile wallets, debit cards, and QR payments.

The platform allows motor claims submissions, document uploads, excess payments, and claim tracking, while self-service options enable policy endorsements. Video and chat support offer live assistance. Takaful Express will act as a brand ambassador with engaging visuals, interactive banners, and loyalty-based promotions. Usage data will be analyzed to improve UI/UX, identify high-demand areas, and optimize product offerings.

Affinity Portal:

Affinity Portal is a B2B2C digital platform designed to empower partners to offer a range of insurance products directly to their end customers. The portal will be white-labeled to reflect the branding and identity of each partner, ensuring a seamless and personalized experience.

Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG)

Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG is dedicated to pursuing the business in a socially responsible and sustainable manner. Our ESG charter demonstrates our commitment to ethical and responsible business practices, community development, environmental protection, employee engagement, stakeholder engagement, and ESG integration. The Company recognizes that our CSR activities and ESG considerations will enhance society and the environment and foster long-term success as a responsible business. In alignment with the ESG reporting guidelines issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) for listed companies, Takaful Oman is pleased to announce the publication of its 2024 Sustainability Report along with 30 ESG Metrics. This marks a significant milestone in our commitment to transparency, accountability, and sustainable business practices.

Macro Economics Outlook

The macroeconomic outlook for Oman is promising, as evidenced by the significant improvement in the country's credit rating. The recently issued revised outlook in September 2024 by S&P Global to 'positive' from 'stable', along with the affirmation of its 'BBB-' long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings, reflects growing confidence among investors and lenders in Oman's economy and banking sector. This positive shift is a testament to the government's effective measures to enhance public financial management and diversify economic revenue streams beyond oil. The ongoing improvement can be attributed to several factors, including the stability of oil prices, the government's fiscal policies, and growth in foreign exchange reserves. The elevation in Oman's credit outlook from stable to positive confirms the effectiveness of the nation's economic and financial strategies, which align with national priorities and the objectives of the 10th Five-Year Plan, underscoring the strategic directions of the 2040 vision.

Acknowledgement:

The Board gratefully acknowledges His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al Said for his outstanding leadership and vision.

The Board would like to convey their profound gratitude to the shareholders who have shown unwavering confidence in the Company and its management team. They would also like to thank the Financial Services Authority (FSA), Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), the Re-Takaful operators, and all the Participants for their continuous guidance and support.

In addition, The Board wishes to express their heartfelt appreciation and recognition for the commitment, dedication, and innovative thinking displayed by every member of our Takaful Oman family, with complete confidence that they will continue to do so.

On behalf of the Board of Directors

Mr. Sulaiman Hamed Hamood Al Harthi
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be delivered or sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within seven days of receipt of the request. Requests to be sent to the following address:

Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG,
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 207, Postal Code 134, Buraik Al Shati, Sultanate of Oman
Head Office: Insurance Complex, Building No. 9/59, Street No. 1, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Al Chaher Street, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman Phone: 22701600, Fax: 24609511, Email:info@takafuloman.om

Condensed consolidated interim statement of shareholders' comprehensive income For the six months ended 30 June 2025		
	Unaudited 2025 RO	Unaudited 2024 (Restated) RO
Wakala fee earned	5,056,808	1,646,911
Investment Income	252,223	262,270
Mudarib Fees Income	205,390	185,420
	5,514,421	2,094,601
General and administrative expenses	(1,567,677)	(1,324,690)
Ijarah Financing Cost	(3,859)	(34,983)
Profit paid on Wakala arrangements	(107,653)	(40,279)
Acquisition cost	(3,808,354)	(1,958,004)
Profit before tax	26,878	(1,263,356)
Taxation	(202,960)	18,591
Profit for the period	(176,083)	(1,244,765)
Other comprehensive income / (Loss)		
<i>Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
Changes in fair value of financial asset at fair value through equity	21,172	-
Total other comprehensive income	21,172	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	(154,911)	(1,244,765)

Condensed consolidated interim statement of participants' revenues and expenses For the period ended 30 June 2025		
	(Unaudited) 2025 RO	(Unaudited) 2024 (Restated) RO
Recognised Takaful Contributions	17,814,431	17,509,016
Recognised Takaful Costs	(15,067,077)	(16,051,352)
Takaful service result before retakaful arrangements held	2,747,354	1,457,665
Allocation of the contribution	(6,345,510)	(7,718,902)
Amounts recovered from the re-Takaful	4,572,813	7,058,784
Re-Takaful Net Results	(1,772,697)	(660,119)
Takaful Gross Margin	974,657	797,546
Income from Investments	410,777	370,840
Amortisation of Deferred Cost	(745,672)	(304,427)
Amortisation of Deferred Profit	512,644	268,825
Net Amortisation of Deferred Cost	(233,028)	(35,602)
Net Takaful Results	1,152,406	1,132,784
Other Income	379,175	192,054
Mudarib Fees	(205,390)	(185,420)
	173,785	6,634
	1,326,191	1,139,418

Condensed consolidated interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2025			
	(Unaudited) June 2025 RO	(Unaudited) December 2024 (Restated) RO	(Unaudited) December 2023 (Restated) RO
Policy holders' assets			
Cash and Bank Balances	3,393,381	1,869,707	1,917,606
Investments at fair value through equity	4,295,537	1,764,574	440,368
Investments at fair value through income statement	1,527,900	500,000	4,651,750
Prepayment and other assets	698,219	651,350	589,855
Wakalah bank deposits	11,000,000	13,000,000	9,000,000
Takaful arrangements Assets - CAA	20,128	-	-
Re-takaful arrangements Assets - CAA	8,380,754	8,090,317	6,907,007
Re-takaful arrangements Assets - GAM	9,301,333	8,641,862	6,411,024
Total policyholders' assets	38,617,252	34,517,810	29,917,610
Shareholders' assets			
Cash and Bank Balances	776,420	1,240,209	477,487
Investments at fair value through equity	1,021,172	-	-
Investments at fair value through income Statement	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
Investment Properties	1,800,000	1,800,000	-
Receivable from participants' fund	3,583,359	3,402,991	4,793,247
Deferred policy acquisition costs	419,636	1,225,070	886,342
Wakalah bank deposits	5,204,000	5,204,000	6,904,000
Prepayment and other assets	897,902	895,359	1,052,483
Property and equipment	437,999	398,649	453,374
Intangible assets	459,766	485,185	463,508
Deferred tax asset	835,500	1,038,461	1,169,343
Right of use assets	95,417	126,172	1,487,277
Total shareholders' assets	17,531,171	17,816,096	19,687,061
Total Policyholders' and shareholders' assets	56,148,423	52,333,906	49,604,671
Policyholders' Liabilities			
Payable to shareholders' fund	3,583,359	3,402,991	4,793,247
Accounts and other payables	1,846,980	1,215,913	1,583,700
Provision for Takaful Arrangements - CAA	19,110,755	21,879,115	23,839,710
Provision for Takaful Arrangements - GAM	19,376,254	14,445,328	7,771,215
Re-takaful arrangements Liabilities - CAA	-	231,713	201,281
	43,917,348	41,175,060	38,189,153
Policyholders' Equity			
Investment Fair value Reserve	(95,954)	(126,916)	37,417
Deficit in participants' fund	(5,204,142)	(6,530,334)	(8,308,960)
	(5,300,096)	(6,657,250)	(8,271,543)
Total Policyholders' equity and liabilities	38,617,252	34,517,810	29,917,610
Shareholders' liabilities			
Wakala financing	2,043,114	1,504,345	1,470,296
Ijarah Liabilities	81,301	151,501	877,835
Deferred income from wakala Fee	744,824	1,202,824	610,575
Employees' end of service benefits	147,198	118,210	109,546
Accounts and other payables	372,424	286,996	537,145
	3,388,861	3,263,876	3,605,397
Shareholders' Equity			
Share Capital	16,000,000	16,000,000	16,000,000
Perpetual Sukuk as additional capital	6,000,000	6,000,000	6,000,000
Legal Reserve	1,436,739	1,436,739	1,436,739
Investment Fair value Reserve	478,111	456,939	-
Retained earnings	(9,772,540)	(9,341,458)	(7,355,075)
	14,142,310	14,552,220	16,081,664
Total shareholders' equity and liabilities	17,531,171	17,816,096	19,687,061
Total Policyholders' and shareholders' equity and liabilities	56,148,423	52,333,906	49,604,671

S&P assigns OQ investment-grade credit rating

Our Correspondent

Muscat

S&P Global Ratings has assigned OQ, Oman's international integrated energy group, an investment-grade rating of 'BBB-' on the global scale issuer credit rating, and a 'gcAA-' rating on the GCC regional scale, both with a stable outlook.

In its rating action statement, S&P stated that OQ benefits from vertical integration across the hydrocarbon value chain, upstream access to new blocks in Oman, leading positions in domestic refining and gas transmission, and strong backing from its sole shareholder, the Government of Oman.

S&P noted that the stable outlook reflects its expectation that OQ's integrated business model and prudent balance sheet management through 2025-2026 will enable the company to withstand any potential impact on its credit metrics, even in a weaker market environment.

'OQ's business risk profile is balanced by the concentration of its assets in Oman, its medium-sized scale of operations, and its exposure to the volatility of the

hydrocarbon industry,' the agency said.

S&P acknowledged that over the past three years, OQ has significantly reduced its debt by utilising operating cash flow and proceeds from the divestment of non-core assets and stakes in subsidiaries. The agency added, 'We expect OQ's credit metrics to remain strong over the next two years, despite unfavourable oil prices and refining margins, with funds from operations (FFO) to debt of 50%-53% in 2025 and 54%-57% in 2026.'

In a social media post, OQ Group stated that the investment-grade rating from S&P reflects confidence in the group's integrated business model, prudent financial management, and strategic importance to Oman's energy sector.

'S&P's assessment highlights OQ's strong liquidity position, disciplined capital structure, and key role in supporting Oman's economic diversification and energy transition under Vision 2040. This first-time public rating from S&P affirms OQ's position as a national energy leader committed to long-term resilience and value creation,' OQ said.

Ahlibank's rights issue oversubscribed on strong shareholder demand

Muscat - Ahlibank has successfully concluded its rights issue, which was oversubscribed. The offering comprised approximately 357mn shares at a price of 142bz per share (including a 2bz issue expense per share), attracting strong participation from shareholders and significant interest across the investment community. This outcome reflects the strength of Ahlibank's market positioning and underscores its readiness to capitalise on emerging opportunities with greater agility and scale.

This landmark achievement marks a critical milestone for the bank, reinforcing its capital position and affirming shareholders' confidence in the bank's long-term growth strategy. It serves as a clear endorsement of Ahlibank's disciplined approach to transformation, operational agility, and strengthening its standing within an increasingly competitive banking landscape.

More than a financial transaction, the rights issue deepens alignment between shareholders and the bank's strategic vision, ensuring Ahlibank remains well-positioned to deliver sustainable value, drive performance-led

growth, and navigate future opportunities with resilience and precision.

The capital raise forms part of a broader capital optimisation initiative aimed at enhancing the bank's financial flexibility and supporting its next phase of development. The funds will be directed towards executing core strategic initiatives and expanding the bank's lending capacity to stimulate business activity. These efforts will contribute to improving capital adequacy ratios, strengthening market resilience, and supporting the bank's objective of delivering superior value to its stakeholders.

This successful issuance not only reinforces confidence in Ahlibank's governance and institutional strength but also highlights the bank's forward-looking strategy. As the operating environment continues to evolve, Ahlibank remains committed to sustainable growth, disciplined execution, and market leadership.

With an enhanced capital structure and a future-oriented outlook, the bank is well-positioned to accelerate its growth trajectory and seize value-accrative opportunities across Oman.

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

GLOBAL TRADE WAR

Trump tariffs: Where do we stand after White House unveils new tariffs

Uwe Hessler

In his election campaign, Donald Trump once said that "tariff is the most beautiful word in the dictionary." Now, after six months in office, the US president is eager to turn his very specific vision of global trade into reality.

With a move that shocked both politics and business across the world, Trump announced on April 2 that he would impose a "baseline tariff" of 10% on all goods imported to the United States. In addition, goods from about 60 other trade partners would face so-called reciprocal tariffs that were even higher and meant as payback for the unfair trade policies of what Trump called "the worst offenders."

However, on July 31 Trump signed an executive order again imposing new, and even higher tariffs on scores of countries, citing emergency powers he said he is using to shrink the country's trade deficits with many of its trade partners.

The executive order lays out rates to be applied against nearly 70 countries, ranging from 10% to 41% for goods transhipped through other jurisdictions to avoid US duties.

In a minor reprieve that opens the door to further negotiations, the White House said the measures will take effect this week for most countries. The order came after a flurry of tariff-related activity in previous weeks that saw some countries strike more favourable terms for trade with the US.

Trade deals done

On July 27, the US and the European Union agreed that European goods imported to the US would face a 15% baseline tariff. This includes the EU's crucial automobile sector, which had been subject to a 25% levy since Trump took office earlier in January.

By contrast, the EU will charge US firms no duties at all, and has pledged to buy US energy worth \$750bn, as well as make investments in the US of around



President Donald Trump's executive order signed on July 31 lays out tariff rates to be applied against nearly 70 countries, ranging from 10% to 41% for goods transhipped through other jurisdictions to avoid US duties

Just hours before an August 1 deadline expired, US President Donald Trump imposed sweeping new tariffs on imports from global trading partners, escalating an aggressive trade policy aimed at reducing the US trade deficit



\$600bn, according to the White House.

The agreement, which still needs to be signed off by all 27 EU members, has already come under strong criticism. French Prime Minister François Bayrou said this week the EU had capitulated, describing previous Sunday as a "dark day."

The United Kingdom was the first country to strike a trade deal with Washington in May.

British products will be subject

to a 10% base rate, with exceptions for some industries. The UK is still negotiating exemptions for its steel and aluminium products from the 25% rate in force. In return, the UK had to open its market further to US ethanol and beef.

Under a deal struck in July, Japan's exports to the US will be taxed at 15%, including automobiles, an industry accounting for 30% of Japanese exports to the US in 2024. Tariffs of 50% on

Japanese steel and aluminium will continue to apply and the White House said that under the deal, Japan would make an unspecified \$550bn investment in the US.

With regard to South Korea, recent negotiations have resulted in a 15% baseline tariff on all imports from that country - down from a threatened 25% for one of the US's top-10 trading partners and key Asian ally.

Trump said Wednesday that

South Korea had also agreed to invest \$350bn in US projects and to purchase \$100bn of liquefied natural gas and other energy products. Furthermore, South Korea will accept American products, including automobiles and agricultural goods into its markets and impose no import duties on them, he added.

Washington has also concluded trade deals with the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Pakistan, which was facing a potential 29% tariff under Trump's April 2 announcement, said Thursday it had struck a deal that would result in lower tariffs, as well as an agreement in which Washington would help develop the country's oil reserves.

China - the world's second-largest economy - is a special case. Washington and Beijing had raised tariffs on each other's goods to more than 100% before temporarily lowering rates for a 90-day period. That pause is set to end on August 12.

China has taken an aggressive stance in response to Trump's brief threat of imposing a 145% levy on imports, retaliating with tariffs of its own on US goods and blocking the sale of vital rare earth minerals and components used by American defence and high-tech manufacturers.

Holdouts face trade war escalation

Countries without bilateral trade agreements will soon face reciprocal tariffs ranging from 25% to 50%, with a baseline of 15% to 20% for any not making a deal.

Among the tariff levels adjusted in Trump's latest order, Switzerland now faces a higher 39% duty. The Swiss government said Friday it would negotiate to avoid the higher levy, which will potentially hammer its key pharmaceutical industry. The new rate is up from the 31% previously threatened.

Brazil is one of the few major economies to run a trade deficit with the United States, meaning Brazil imports more from the US than it exports to the country.

Nevertheless, the US president has threatened to impose a 50% tariff on Brazil's products because of political differences. Trump called a current trial against former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro a "witch hunt," and has demanded the release of the ultraconservative politician.

Brazil's current president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, has in turn called Trump an "emperor" and said he didn't fear publicly criti-

cising Trump.

India, meanwhile, has drawn Trump's ire for its huge trade surplus with the US and its trade ties with Russia. As a result, Trump announced on Wednesday that he would impose a 25% tariff on Indian goods, plus an additional "penalty" because of India's purchase of Russian oil that helps Moscow finance its war in Ukraine.

On his Truth Social platform, Trump also wrote that India "is our friend," but added its tariffs on US products "are far too high."

Canada and Mexico - two of the US's biggest trading partners - haven't been spared Trump's tariff threats either, even though trade between the three neighbours is governed by the US-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade agreement, negotiated during Trump's first term in office.

Earlier this month, Trump threatened to raise current tariffs on Mexico from 25% to 30% starting on August 1, saying President Claudia Sheinbaum's government hadn't done enough to help secure their shared border.

Many goods certified under the USMCA free-trade pact, however, have remained exempt. On Thursday, the US president extended Mexico's current rates for 90 days to allow more time for trade negotiations.

On Thursday, the US president singled out Canada for a separate tariff hike, raising levies for goods from the country from 25% to 35% starting on 1 August.

Trump also warned of more trade consequences for Canada after Prime Minister Mark Carney announced plans to recognise a Palestinian state. Trump's order also cited Canada's failure to "cooperate in curbing the ongoing flood of fentanyl and other illicit drugs" as well as its "retaliation" against his measures.

In March, Washington already imposed a 25% tariff on Canadian cars and auto parts, adding a 50% levy on steel and aluminium imports in June. DW

Microsoft surpasses \$4tn valuation

Una Hajdari

Microsoft surpassed \$4tn in market capitalisation on last week after it published stellar fourth quarter earnings. The firm announced that annual revenue for its flagship Azure cloud computing platform surpassed \$75bn, a staggering 34% jump from last year.

The Azure cloud business is a centrepiece of Microsoft's efforts to shift its focus to artificial intelligence, but until Wednesday, the firm had not lifted the veil on how much money it makes.

The revelation beat Wall Street expectations and pleased investors wary about Microsoft's ongoing construction of costly new data centres needed to meet cloud computing and AI demand.

Microsoft's fiscal fourth-quarter profit was \$34.3bn, or \$3.65 per share, beating analyst expectations for \$3.37 per share. The software giant's end-of-year earnings report also showed a 24% spike in the company's quarterly profit.

"We continue to scale our own data center capacity faster than any other competitor," CEO Satya Nadella said on an investor



Microsoft's fiscal fourth-quarter profit was \$34.3bn, or \$3.65 per share, beating analyst expectations for \$3.37 per share

call, boasting that the company now has more than 400 of the sprawling facilities across six continents.

As a cloud computing platform - which means providing computing power, storage, and tools over the internet instead of on local servers - Microsoft Azure offers businesses and institutions a way to run websites and apps, store and back up data, and analyse massive datasets.

It can also be used for AI projects, giving organisations the infrastructure to build, train, and deploy AI models at scale. In short, Azure lets companies innovate and grow without the

cost and complexity of maintaining their own hardware.

Microsoft launched Azure more than a decade ago, but the service has increasingly become intertwined with its AI ambitions, as the company looks to sell its AI chatbot and other tools to big business customers that are also reliant on its core online services.

It still trails behind its lead competitor, Amazon Web Services, which reported \$107.6bn or in revenue for its fiscal year that ended in December.

Cost-cutting layoffs

Building the infrastructure to power cloud and AI technology

is expensive, and Microsoft has looked for savings elsewhere. It announced layoffs of about 15,000 workers this year even as its profits have soared.

Nadella told employees last week the layoffs were "weighing heavily" on him but also positioned them as an opportunity to reimagine the company's mission for an AI era.

Still, the overall workforce numbers haven't changed. The company said it employed 228,000 full-time employees as of June 30, the exact same amount it reported a year ago, though slightly more of them are now US-based and fewer of them are in product support roles or consulting services.

Promises of a leaner approach have been welcomed on Wall Street, especially as Microsoft and other tech giants are trying to justify huge amounts of capital spending to pay for the data centres, chips and other components required to power AI technology.

Microsoft didn't disclose Wednesday to what extent sweeping US tariffs are affecting its revenue, but its annual report lists tariffs among a number of risks the company faces.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Japan seeks swift cut to US auto tariff following trade deal

Tokyo, Japan - Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Friday that Japan will continue urging the United States to swiftly implement their bilateral trade agreement, including cutting tariffs on automobiles and auto parts.

Ishiba said the government will take "all necessary measures" to mitigate the impact of higher US tariffs on Japanese exports, adding that the details of an executive order signed by US President Donald Trump to implement a 15% "reciprocal" tariff are being examined.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said at an earlier press conference that the executive order will help reduce uncertainty over US trade policy and "downside risks" to the Japanese economy.

The reciprocal tariff of 15% targeting Japan will take effect on August 7, instead of Friday as initially expected. Based on the bilateral deal reached last month, the United States will reduce its tariff on imported Japanese cars to 15% from the current 27.5%.

"We will continue to call on



We will continue to call on the United States to take measures to implement the bilateral trade agreement swiftly, including reductions in tariffs on cars and auto parts. We have 4,318 items that are exported to the United States

JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER SHIGERU ISHIBA

the United States to take measures to implement the bilateral agreement swiftly, including reductions in tariffs on cars and auto parts," Ishiba told reporters.

"We have 4,318 items that are exported to the United States. Based on the progress seen today, we will take all necessary steps to minimize the tariff impact on each," he said.

Japan is among nations that have seen their tariff rates lowered from levels earlier unveiled by the Trump administration.

Japan initially sought the removal of the higher tariffs, but the United States apparently did not budge. Japan's negotiation team, led by economic revitalization minister Ryosei Akazawa, settled for lower rates.

Akazawa said Thursday that it may take time for the 15% auto tariff to be implemented, citing a tariff deal on autos between Britain and the United States as a precedent.

With the auto sector a major driver of Japan's export-reliant economy, higher US duties on Japanese cars deal a blow to carmakers such as Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co., given the importance of the US market to their bottom lines.

Kyodo News

Oman Sail ropes in QNB Oman for Asian, Oceanian championship

Oman Sail announced that it is partnering with QNB Oman to deliver the upcoming Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship 2025, to be held at the Oman Sail Sailing School in Mussanah from October 25 to November 1, 2025.

The agreement was signed by Dr Khamis bin Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, and Khalid bin Mohammed al Barwani, CEO of QNB Oman, at a ceremony held recently at the Oman Sail Headquarters.

Through this agreement, QNB Oman joins Oman Sail as a Gold Partner to achieve excellence in the sport of sailing by enhancing Oman's presence at the global stage and enabling Omani sailors to compete at the highest levels. These efforts are part of establishing Oman as one of the leading countries in this sport.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "We are pleased to partner with QNB Oman to support the upcoming championship. Like Oman Sail, our partners are committed to supporting and empowering the Omani Youth as part of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, and the event will be an important development opportunity for the next generation of Omani sailors as we prepare to welcome athletes, coaches, families and media from across Asia and Oceania to the Oman Sail Sailing School in Mussanah."

Khalid bin Mohammed al Barwani, commented, "QNB Oman is proud to partner with Oman Sail in supporting the IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Cham-



pionship 2025. As the region's premier event for young sailors, this championship offers a unique platform for emerging tal-

ent to thrive and grow." Through this partnership, QNB Oman reaffirms its commitment to empowering the next



generation and providing them with the opportunities they need to reach their full potential on a global stage.

The 2025 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship, to be organised in collaboration with the Oman Marine Sports Committee and International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA), will see over 100 sailors from more than 15 countries take part in a week of high-level competition. This will be the second time Mussanah has hosted the event following the successful staging of the event in 2019 with 141 participants from 21 nations taking part.

Operating under Oman Tourism Development Company, Oman Sail is tasked with rekindling the country's maritime

eminence, promote the Sultanate around the world through sailing, contribute to the sustainable prosperity of the nation and provide long-term learning opportunities for the youth.

Since 2008, Oman Sail has built a solid foundation around Sailing, Tourism, Commerce, Health and Environment, all underpinned with competency-based development for its

QNB Oman is proud to partner with Oman Sail for the region's premier event for young sailors, which offers a unique platform for emerging talent to thrive and grow

KHALID AL BARWANI

workforce. Committed to offering both men and women equal opportunities to learn, Oman Sail's programmes focus on nurturing young talent to develop the sailing champions of tomorrow, increasing revenue in the tourism, activity and experiential learning markets and gaining prominent international exposure for the country.

The company has a strong track record in delivering a portfolio of events across the sultanate to showcase Oman's natural beauty, tourism potential, the people's hospitality, and the infrastructure readiness for business opportunities.



Amouage adds Opus XVI - Timber to its Library Collection

Amouage's Library Collection occupies a unique role as the platform from which the esteemed Omani perfume house unveils some of its most audacious creations, showcasing uncompromising innovation and arresting aesthetics.

Key to the collection is the idea of knowledge, with each of the perfumes in the range being in some way related to the concept, whether it be the question of the form that knowledge assumes in a virtual world (as seen in Opus V - Woods Symphony), its ability to empower those who have been deprived of it (Opus XIV - Royal Tobacco) or the manner in which it can be allied to surrealism in order to challenge our expectations of what we see around us (Opus XV - King Blue).

As it contains some of the most adventurous compositions in Amouage's universe, the Library Collection is always curated with great care. "Sometimes, we go through periods when we don't add anything new to the Library Collection, simply because we don't feel we have found the right scent. But then a moment arrives when an idea aligns so perfectly with everything the Collection stands for, it becomes absolutely obvious that it has to be introduced to the range," explains Chief Creative Officer, Renaud Salmon.

He wanted to create a perfume that would form a tribute to a sense of permanence, profundity and erudition. What better way to express such notions, he thought, than by exploring the creative possibilities offered by the giant sequoias of California and the frankincense trees of Oman.

And what better way to capture the spirit of these ancient organisms than by composing a perfume constructed almost entirely with woods.

LuLu Exchange opens centre at Zakher Mall

LuLu Exchange, a leading global financial services company and the regional fintech partner of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), has opened its new Customer Engagement Centre at Zakher Mall, Al Khuwair, in Muscat.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by the esteemed presence of LuLu Exchange Oman Director, Sheikh Mohammed Hamed Ali al Ghazali, and Aadeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings, along with senior management of LuLu Financial Holdings.

The event marked a pivotal milestone in LuLu Exchange's ongoing commitment to advancing the standard of financial services within the community. The



newly inaugurated Customer Engagement Center has been strategically established to enhance the overall customer experience while streamlining financial transactions for resi-

dents of Muscat.

Sheikh Mohammed Hamed Ali Al Ghazali shared his thoughts on the occasion. "The opening of this Customer Engagement Center represents

more than just an expansion. It reflects our dedication to serving the people of Oman with excellence and trust. We are proud to bring world-class financial services closer to our customers,

ensuring convenience and reliability at every step," he said.

Lathish Vichitrn, General Manager of LuLu Exchange Oman, said, "With the launch of this center, we are reinforcing our promise of customer-first service. Our goal is to create a seamless experience where every transaction is efficient and reassuring for the people we serve."

As a proud regional fintech partner of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), LuLu Exchange is extending its global partnerships to enhance brand trust and community engagement. This affiliation with the world champions reflects the company's global credibility and deep-rooted values of teamwork,

trust, and excellence - values mirrored in every service offered at the new centre.

LuLu Exchange looks forward to serving the Omani community better through its Zakher Mall Customer Engagement Center, providing a wide range of financial services tailored to meet the evolving needs of customers in the region.

LuLu Exchange is one of Oman's leading financial services companies, providing remittances, foreign currency exchange and other allied services through a network of over 46 branches and digital solutions, including the LuLu Money App, to a cross-section of society, powered by a robust network.

Liva Insurance joins forces for Traffic Safety Awareness Exhibition in Salalah

Highlighting its continuous commitment to fostering a culture of safety and responsible driving, Liva Insurance proudly participated as a Gold Sponsor of the Traffic Safety Awareness Exhibition, organised by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) at the Salalah Gardens Mall.

The event was inaugurated under the esteemed patronage of Najeeb Ali al Rawas, Governor of Dhahirah Governorate.

Held during the peak of Salalah's renowned Khareef season, the exhibition perfectly aligns with Liva Insurance's strategic focus this year, reinforcing the importance of road safety among residents and visitors alike. Khareef annually attracts several visitors from across Oman and beyond, significantly increasing traffic on the roads and presenting distinct driving challenges.

At Liva Insurance, safeguarding the well-being of our community is central to everything we do. Supporting initiatives such as the Traffic Safety Awareness Exhibition is an integral part of our strategy

BADER AL MARZOUQI

Throughout the exhibition, the Royal Oman Police provided visitors with essential safety guidelines and practical advice to effectively manage the unique driving conditions encountered during the Khareef season.

Commenting on this initiative,



Bader al Marzouqi, Head of Distribution Personal Lines, stated: "At Liva Insurance, safeguarding the well-being of our community is central to everything we do. Supporting initiatives such as the Traffic Safety Awareness Exhibi-

tion is an integral part of our strategy to enhance road safety awareness, especially during the Khareef season when Salalah experiences a significant influx of visitors.

"Through our continuous sup-

port of events like this, we aim to proactively educate drivers and the wider community about responsible driving practices, ultimately contributing to safer roads for everyone in Oman."

During the Khareef season,

heavy fog often reduces visibility dramatically, requiring motorists to exercise heightened vigilance, use fog lights responsibly, and maintain safe distances between vehicles. Rainfall further complicates conditions, causing roads to become slippery, so drivers are advised to handle their vehicles gently, especially when navigating curves or steep turns.

Additionally, roads near mountainous areas may pose risks from rocks unexpectedly descending onto roadways, demanding cautious driving at all times. Recognising these seasonal challenges, Liva Insurance actively collaborates with the Royal Oman Police by advocating and promoting these essential driving guidelines.

Through its dedicated support for crucial public safety initiatives like the Traffic Safety Awareness Exhibition, Liva Insurance contin-

ues to demonstrate leadership - not only as a provider of innovative insurance solutions - but also as an active partner in national efforts aimed at reducing road accidents and fostering a culture of responsibility and caution among all road users across the Sultanate of Oman.

Established in 2023 through the integration of Al Ahlia Insurance and National Life & General Insurance Company (NLGIC), Liva Insurance is the region's leading multi-line insurance company that provides Motor, Home, Travel, Health, Life and various business insurances serving the GCC region for over 80 years.

Liva Insurance is redefining insurance for today's realities, combining local knowledge, passion and presence with global expertise to go beyond premiums, products and policies.

LOT - The Value Shop opens fifth branch at Lulu Hypermarket in Bidayah

LOT - The Value Shop has further broadened its scope in Oman with the launch of its fifth outlet at LuLu Hypermarket in Bidayah.

The launch of the fifth branch follows the success of the other four branches of LOT in Mall of Muscat, Wadi al Lawami, Nujum Mall at Amerat and Buraimi. The expansion plan aligns with LOT's commitment to continuously enhance accessibility of retail offerings to customers even in the remote areas of the country.

With the recent launch, the group aims to uphold its dedication to excellence while providing an unparalleled retail experience through quality products and services for the local community.

The value shop aims to serve the day-to-day needs of customers by offering a diverse range of products at affordable prices. Shoppers can explore an impressive assortment of household essentials, kitchenware, toilet essentials, travel accessories, stationery and a vast collection of toys. There is also a separate area dedicated to household products prized at less than ROO.350. Shoppers can find an exceptional collection of the latest seasonal fashion trend for men, women, and kids, footwear, elegant jewellery, and ladies' bags.



LOT offers an enjoyable experience for those on the hunt for great deals and value in everyday essentials, without compromis-

ing on the quality. Speaking at the launch, a senior spokesperson stated, "We are happy to have launched the

fifth branch of our value store in Oman. All LOT outlets have well-planned layouts and ample parking spaces, offering shoppers a

hassle-free experience. The strategic location of LOT stores ensures convenience and accessibility, making it a preferred des-

ination for customers." LOT value shops offer convenience, value, and a unique assortment of merchandise for the

whole family, making it the first choice among budget-conscious shoppers seeking quality products.

Omantel continues 'Break the Barrier' campaign

Omantel continues to strengthen its prominent presence at Dhofar Khareef, one of the region's most iconic tourism seasons, through a renewed technology partnership with Dhofar Municipality.

This collaboration underscores Omantel's commitment to enhancing its brand presence and supporting national efforts to ensure the success of the tourism season, which attracts a growing number of visitors from within and outside the sultanate.

This year's participation comes under the theme 'Break the Barrier', a campaign designed to inspire visitors to embrace



new experiences, move beyond routine, and enjoy the unique autumn atmosphere of Dhofar. The

campaign also encourages guests to capture their moments and share them across digital

platforms powered by Omantel's advanced network. To ensure a smooth experi-

ence for visitors, Omantel has made early preparations by expanding network capacity across key tourist sites and high-traffic areas, while upgrading and redistributing several stations to deliver stronger coverage and ensure exceptional voice and data services even during peak demand.

To provide added convenience for visitors, public WiFi is now available at key locations across Dhofar, including Eteen Square, Awaqad Park, and Awdhat al Madhi, ensuring reliable connectivity throughout their visit.



SalamAir adds Airbus A321neo to expand more

SalamAir, Oman's low-cost carrier, has announced the arrival of its newest aircraft, the Airbus A321neo named 'Muttrah', which was chosen through an Instagram vote by its passengers and followers.

This new addition brings SalamAir's fleet to 14 aircraft and further strengthens the airline's commitment to efficient operations, enhanced passenger comfort, and environmental responsibility.

Powered by advanced CFM LEAP-1A engines, the A321neo offers significant sustainability and performance benefits, including up to 20% reduction in fuel burn per seat and lower CO emissions. The aircraft also meets the highest environmental standards, with NOx emissions

cut by 50% and noise levels reduced by over 15 decibels compared to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regulations.

With a seating capacity of 212, the aircraft features a modern cabin design with USB charging ports at every seat, offering a more comfortable and connected travel experience. Its extended range of up to 4,000 nautical miles enhances SalamAir's operational flexibility and opens new opportunities for medium- and long-haul routes.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, Chief Executive Officer of SalamAir, commented: "The addition of this new A321neo to our fleet marks a key milestone in boosting our operational capability ahead of the peak travel season.

BEYOND installs sculptural icon on Palm Jumeirah

BEYOND Developments, the forward-thinking real estate brand shaping lifestyle destinations by the sea, has unveiled PASSO, a sculptural waterfront development located on the prestigious West Crescent of Palm Jumeirah.

As BEYOND's first flagship beyond its masterplan in Dubai Maritime City, PASSO marks a defining milestone in the company's strategic growth to one of the world's most iconic and desirable destinations.

The project launched with a



spectacular Palm Jumeirah event featuring Dubai's first-ever "screens in the sky" show, a 13-minute performance with over 4,000 drones blending immersive visuals and live stage action.

Comprising two sculptural towers, Avita and Bella, PASSO offers 625 residences in a refined mix of layouts. From one-bedroom retreats and two-to-four-bedroom-plus lifestyle homes to expansive five-bedroom penthouses and six ultra-exclusive beachfront mansions, each

home is designed to evoke comfort, connection, and effortless elegance. Scheduled for completion in Q3 2029, PASSO reflects BEYOND's commitment to human-centric spaces that promote wellbeing and enrich daily life and presents an exceptional investment opportunity.

"PASSO is not just a new address; it is a strategic leap in our journey to craft places that resonate on a deeper human level," said Adil Taqi, CEO of BEYOND Developments.

Qatar Foundation, University of Granada name winners of Radwa Ashour Award

Qatar Foundation and the University of Granada have announced the winners of the first edition of the Radwa Ashour Award for Arabic Literature, an award created to support and celebrate outstanding literary talent in the Arabic language.

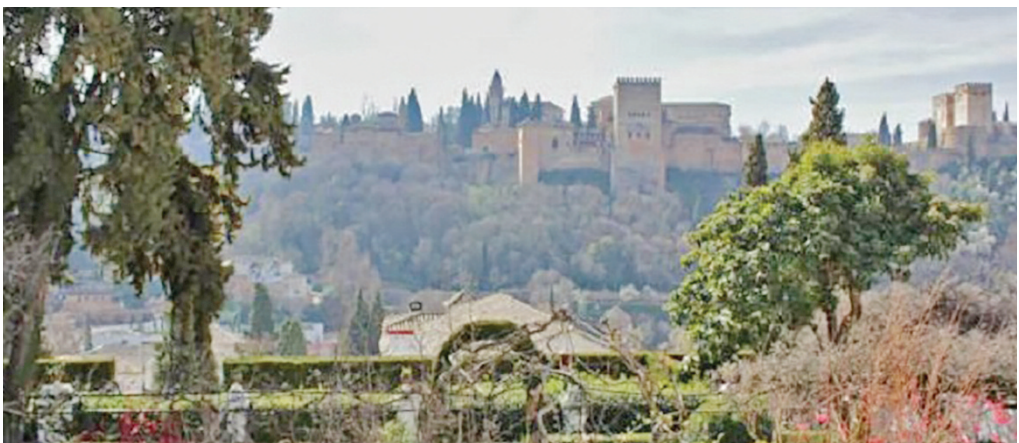
For the inaugural edition, two individuals have been honored: one in the '40 and Under' category and the other in the 'Over 40' category. Nora Nagi from Egypt received the award in the former, while Mohammad Tarazi from Lebanon was recognized in the latter.

For Nagi, being associated

with the name of the great writer and her literary role model - Radwa Ashour with her profound human and literary legacy - is both an honor and a responsibility that she deeply appreciates.

"I look forward to this inspiring literary journey, hoping it will be a fruitful opportunity for creativity and dialogue," she said.

"Winning the Radwa Ashour Award embodies a commitment to human dignity and upholds the values to which she devoted her pen. It reminds me of the sincerity of words, and reaffirms my belief in literature as a form of resistance," Tarazi said.



"The news of winning this Award filled me with gratitude and awe. Radwa Ashour's name

evokes a legacy of cultural struggle, and gives us all the moral courage to write against vio-

lence, carnage, and oblivion." The University of Granada will host both writers in the Andalu-

Celebrating exceptional Arabic literary talent across generations with awards in '40 and Under' and 'Over 40' categories

sian city of Granada for an extended residency where they will have the opportunity to develop their literary projects while engaging with local cultural and academic communities.

The Radwa Ashour Award for

Arabic Literature was officially launched in November 2024 in Granada in honour of the renowned Egyptian writer and professor Radwa Ashour. Open exclusively to writers who create in Arabic, the award reflects Qatar Foundation's (QF) commitment to promoting the Arabic language and preserving Arab-Islamic cultural heritage.

This annual award takes the form of a writing residency retreat in Granada, granted to two exceptional Arabic-language writers. Recipients are selected based on the literary merit of their existing work.

Russia: Krasheninnikov volcano erupts for the first time in 600 years

Kamchatka, Russia - The Krasheninnikov volcano in Russia's Kamchatka has begun erupting for the first time in nearly 600 years, according to the Kamchatka Volcanic Eruption Response Team (KVERT).

On the Telegram channel of the Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, KVERT said that the last eruption took place in 1463, and none has been known to have occurred since.

It comes after the Ministry of Emergency Services in the Kamchatka region reported that a magnitude 6.8 earthquake struck off the coast of Kamchatka. The ministry issued a tsunami warning for the Kamchatka peninsula, which has since been lifted.

An ash plume was recorded rising up to a height of 5-6km above sea level. The volcano itself stands at 1,856 metres.

The lava flow continued pouring down the south-western slope of the volcano, reaching a length of 2.7km, the researchers reported.

Connection to earlier earthquake

The volcano belongs to Russia's Eastern Volcanic Belt, one of the most active volcanic regions on Earth. It has about 300 volcanoes, with 29 of them still active, according to NASA's Earth Observatory. Quakes and tsunamis regularly strike the peninsula that lies close to an ocean trench where two tectonic plates meet.

Sunday's earthquake and subsequent volcanic eruption could be connected to Wednesday's massive 8.8 magnitude earthquake that triggered tsunami warnings across the Pacific, according to KVERT.

Earlier this week, Kamchatka's tallest volcano, Klyuchevskaya Sopka, also experienced eruptions, with observers seeing streams of lava on its western slopes, according to the Kamchatka branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences' geophysical service.

The Kamchatka Territory EMERCOM of Russia said the Krasheninnikov volcano has been assigned an 'orange' aviation danger code. The Russian Emergencies Ministry issued a recommendation not to visit the vicinity of the volcano or attempt to climb it.

"The vicinity of the volcano is volcanic wasteland, cinder and lava fields without dense vegetation. At the moment there is no threat of natural fire," an official statement said.

Euronews



An ash plume was recorded rising up 5-6km following the volcano's eruption

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Euronews

Poland extends border controls with Germany and Lithuania

Warsaw, Poland - Poland is extending its temporary border controls with Germany and Lithuania until October 4. This was announced by Interior Minister Marcin Kierwinski on Sunday. The reason given was continued concerns regarding irregular migration.

Increased security measures have made the route via Belarus and Russia largely impassable, which is why the migration movement is increasingly shifting to other EU states - especially Lithuania and Latvia.

"The 98% tightness of our barrier means that Belarusian and Russian services and illegal migration are moving to other sections," says Kierwinski.

"Today, the main task not only for us but also for our partners in the European Union is to close the route to Lithuania and Latvia, if I may use that word," he added.

In response to illegal migration, Germany introduced controls at its borders with Poland and the Czech Republic. Last year, these controls were extended to all borders.

"In September, we will decide on the next steps in this regard based on data from the border guards, the military and the police," Kierwinski said. In Lithuania, controls are being carried out at 13 locations, including three border crossings. The remaining 10 border crossing sites will be 'ad hoc control sites', which can be used by local residents.

In Germany, border controls are carried out at 52 locations. The decision to maintain control



Border controls with Germany and Lithuania, which were introduced by Poland on July 7, have been extended until October 4

Increased security measures have made the route via Belarus and Russia largely impassable, which is why the migration movement is increasingly shifting to other EU states - especially Lithuania

controls at internal Schengen borders continues to undermine the EU principle of free movement of people. However, Schengen countries are allowed to introduce border controls in what they consider to be 'emergency' situations, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, or as a 'last resort' for security threats.

48.6% Poles support resignation of PM

"In your opinion, should Donald

Tusk resign and cease to serve as Prime Minister of the government?" asked a United Surveys poll for Polish news site Wirtualna Polska.

48.6% of respondents answered that Tusk should resign, while 43.8% said that he should remain in office. 7.6% were undecided or refused to take a position. The respondents were also strongly divided by party lines.

Supporters of the ruling coalition, which includes Civic Platform, the Left, the Polish People's Party and Poland 2050, support Tusk. 85% of them are against the Prime Minister's resignation.

However, 80% of voters supporting conservative opposition parties, including Law and Justice and the far-right Confederation, favour his departure.

The poll was conducted between 25 and 27 July among a representative sample of 1,000 adults.

Donald Tusk has come under increasing political pressure since the results of the presidential election were announced in June, after Karol Nawrocki, backed by Law and Justice, defeated the perceived favourite Rafal Trzaskowski, who is part of Tusk's Civic Platform.

On 11 July, Tusk held a vote of confidence, telling the Sejm that it could not 'turn a blind eye' to the fact that his government was facing 'greater challenges' as a result of Nawrocki's election.

At the end of July, Tusk carried out a government reshuffle, replacing several key ministers in his cabinet.

Euronews



AI robot pet with unique quirks popular in Japan

Tokyo, Japan - A fluffy artificial intelligence (AI) powered robot pet is popular in Japan, developing unique personalities and quirks based on how it is 'raised', Kyodo News reported on Sunday.

Moflin, created by Casio Computer, can exhibit more than four million distinct personality traits, and identifies the person who interacts with it most as its owner. It gradually learns the owner's preferences through petting and cuddling.

The project took off when an engineer brought a prototype designed to capture the cuteness of small animals.

Casio launched Moflin in November and surpassed its sales goal, selling more than 7,000 units by March. The robots are especially popular with women in their late 30s and 40s. Ichikawa noted that some users even take their Moflins on outings.

"People can feel that their

Moflins are different from other Moflins, as the robots, like animals, display individual personalities and emotions, on top of growing and having varying sleep cycles," said Erina Ichikawa, 42, who led the development team.

Each robot costs 59,400 yen (US\$400), and Casio offers add-on services, including a salon that cleans and grooms the robots' fur.

Anadolu Agency

Moflin, created by Casio Computer, can exhibit more than four million distinct personality traits, and identifies the person who interacts with it most as its owner

CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL IN TORONTO



A dressed-up girl poses for photos with her float during the Grand Parade of the 2025 Toronto Caribbean Carnival in Toronto, Canada, on Saturday (Xinhua)

South Africa detains 1,000 illegal miners

Johannesburg, SA - Nearly 1,000 undocumented migrants working illegally at a gold mine in north-eastern South Africa have been arrested, police said on Friday.

Public broadcaster SABC reported that police had launched an operation titled Operation Vala Umgodi at the Sheba Gold Mine in Barberton, Mpumalanga province.

What do we know about arrests?

SABC cited a police spokesperson as saying those arrested were working underground at the mine, close to the borders of Eswatini and Mozambique.

The spokesperson said they would be charged with breaking immigration laws and possibly for illegal mining.

A police statement posted to Facebook said some of those arrested were likely 'underage'.

The operation to round up the miners took nearly a week, AFP news agency reported, citing an unnamed police spokesperson.



Most of the miners came from neighbouring countries, including Eswatini and Mozambique

The police said more arrests could follow.

Mine owner Barberton Mines welcomed the arrests, saying 'illegal mining will not be tolerated'.

What is the Sheba gold mine?

Sheba was founded in the 1880s and is one of South Africa's oldest and richest gold mines.

It played a key role in the country's early gold rush, attracting prospectors and shaping the

region's mining legacy. Today, the mine remains operational, but faces high costs and a massive issue with gold theft, prompting the owner to restructure operations to stay viable.

South Africa has around 6,000 abandoned mines, many of which have become hotspots for illegal activity.

Illegal miners in South Africa are known as 'zama-zamas' ('take a chance' in the Zulu language), who work in abandoned

or operational mines using basic tools and methods. Many come from neighbouring countries; the rest are made up of unemployed South Africans who turned to illegal mining after the decline of the formal mining sector.

A police operation to root out illegal miners took place in 2024 when police surrounded the abandoned gold mine near Stilfontein, which lies southwest of Johannesburg.

DW

Israeli fire kills 14 Palestinians in Gaza, including 9 waiting for humanitarian aid

Gaza City/Ankara - At least 14 Palestinians were killed on Sunday in Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip, including nine who were shot dead while waiting for humanitarian aid in the southern city of Rafah, according to medical sources.

The nine victims were targeted near aid distribution centres in northern Rafah, the sources told Anadolu.

Two other Palestinians were killed and several others injured in an Israeli airstrike on a school sheltering displaced civilians in the Al-Amal neighbourhood of Khan Younis, while three more were killed in artillery shelling that hit a civilian gathering in Shejaiya neighbourhood, Gaza City.

The Israeli army also continued heavy shelling in central Khan Younis throughout the day, according to local sources.

Red Crescent Society staff killed
An Israeli airstrike targeted the headquarters of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in Khan Younis, Gaza early on Sunday, killing a staff member and injuring



three others, the organisation said in a statement.
The strike hit the first floor of the building, setting it on fire and causing significant damage, according to the statement.
The attack comes after US envoy Steve Witkoff visited Gaza

to inspect efforts to get food into the devastated Palestinian territory, where deaths by hunger and starvation have climbed in recent days.
“Gaza is now on the brink of a full-scale famine. People are starving not because food is

unavailable, but because access is blocked, local agrifood systems have collapsed, and families can no longer sustain even the most basic livelihoods,” according to Qu Dongyu, head of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization.

Six more die of malnutrition
At least six more Palestinians died of malnutrition in the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry in the blockaded enclave said on Sunday.
In a statement, the ministry

confirmed that the total number of people who have died from starvation had now risen to 175, including 93 children.
Access to food, water, and medical supplies remains severely limited in the enclave due to an ongoing Israeli block-

lives since the start of 2025.
Each case of suicide was investigated, including analysis of farewell notes and interviews with those close to the soldiers.
Findings indicated that most suicides stemmed from prolonged exposure to combat, trauma,

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ade, and poor distribution of aid by the controversial Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

matic battlefield experiences, and the psychological toll of losing comrades.

Spike in suicides among Israeli soldiers
Meanwhile, an Israeli military investigation has found that the majority of recent suicides among its soldiers are directly linked to the trauma and extreme conditions experienced during the war in the Gaza Strip.
According to Israel’s public broadcaster KAN on Sunday, 16 soldiers have taken their own

“Most of these suicides are the result of the complex realities created by the war in Gaza. War has consequences,” a senior Israeli military official told KAN.
According to KAN, 17 Israeli soldiers committed suicide in 2023, and 21 in 2024. Since the war began, nearly 3,770 soldiers have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the broadcaster said.
Anadolu Agency



Talks to secure Global Plastics Treaty to resume in Geneva

Geneva, Switzerland - Talks to secure a Global Plastics Treaty are restarting in Geneva on Tuesday (August 5), with negotiators striving to break a deadlock that prevented a deal last year.

Over the next fortnight, national delegations need to reach a unilateral consensus on many critical issues in order to create a legally binding international agreement on plastic pollution.
The second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2) follows the collapse of talks in Bhusan, South Korea in December last year. As awareness about the plastics crisis - and its devastating environmental and health dimensions - grows, momentum is building for a treaty to match the enormity of the challenge.

At the UN Ocean Conference last month, ministers and representatives from more than 95 countries signed a declaration dubbed the ‘Nice Wake-Up Call’, spelling out what’s needed for a meaningful outcome. Crucially, they said, a full lifecycle approach is required, with mandatory limits around plastic production and phasing out toxic chemicals.

And earlier this week, a group of more than 60 leading scientists from around the world urged governments to agree on ambitious, enforceable action in Geneva.
“This is not just a call for action, this is the scientific community bearing witness,” said

Professor Steve Fletcher, director of the Revolution Plastics Institute, and editor-in-chief of the *Cambridge Prisms: Plastics* journal in which the letters were published.
“We’ve watched the evidence pile up for decades. This treaty is a test of whether the world is prepared to govern

Over the next fortnight, national delegations need to reach a unilateral consensus on many critical issues in order to create a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution

plastics in a way that reflects the scale and urgency of the crisis.” A separate report from Greenpeace, also published this week, makes clear that leaders are up against some antagonistic forces in the form of industry lobbying and countries lacking ambition.

What do scientists say?
The scientists argue that the stakes at INC-5.2 are sky high. This is the world’s best opportunity to secure a binding agreement that tackles plastic pollution across its entire lifecycle.
Some major petrostates instead want to focus on plastic

waste, arguing there is no need to limit production if the end product is tackled.
But the open letters lay out an evidence-based roadmap for treaty negotiators that covers the whole supply chain, with targets to cap and reduce plastic production.
They want to see global health safeguards created to protect human health, since nano- and microplastics have been found to infiltrate all parts of the body, from our brains to breastmilk.
“There is clear and growing evidence that plastic poses serious risks to human health. Yet the approach to health protection in the treaty still hangs in the balance,” says Dr Cressida Bowyer, deputy director of the Revolution Plastics Institute at the University of Portsmouth.
The treaty must directly address human health impacts in its core obligations, she argues.
Some experts also make a strong case for including trade in the agreement. Nearly 99 per cent of plastics are derived from fossil fuels, according to the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), and plastic takes shape as it is shipped around the world.
“To be effective, the global plastics treaty must address the real-world architecture of the plastics economy, where trade is the connective tissue,” says Professor Maria Ivanova, of Northeastern University in the US.
Euronews

Israeli minister leads illegal incursion into Al-Aqsa Mosque

Ankara, Turkey - Israel’s far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir led a large group of illegal settlers in a provocative march and mass incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem early on Sunday, coinciding with the Jewish commemoration of Tisha B’Av.

According to the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, at least 1,251 illegal Israeli settlers stormed the mosque compound in the morning hours performing Talmudic rituals, singing, and dancing under heavy police protection.
Among the participants was Likud lawmaker Amit Halevi, who joined Ben-Gvir in what Palestinian officials called an ‘unprecedented escalation in political and religious incitement’, according to Wafa news agency.
The Jerusalem Governorate warned of the seriousness of this large-scale, organised incursion, calling it a ‘systematic violation’ of the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the rights of Palestinian worshippers.
The incursion included assaults on Muslim worshippers,



journalists, and Al-Aqsa guards.
In a statement from within the compound, Ben-Gvir said ‘the Temple Mount is for the Jews, and we will remain here forever’, sparking widespread condemnation.
The incursion came hours after Ben-Gvir led another illegal settler march through the Old City of Jerusalem after midnight.
The events were organised by extremist ‘Temple Mount’ groups, which had called for mass entry into the Al-Aqsa

Mosque on Sunday to mark Tisha B’Av, which they refer to as the ‘anniversary of the Temple’s destruction’. The Jerusalem Governorate described this year’s Tisha B’Av as one of the most dangerous days for Al-Aqsa, citing plans by groups to designate August 3 as ‘largest day of incursions’.
The statement added that the Israeli government’s full alignment with illegal settler groups was emboldening efforts to alter the religious and legal status of

the mosque.
Al-Aqsa Mosque is the world’s third-holiest site for Muslims. Jews call the area Temple Mount, claiming it was the site of two Jewish temples in ancient times. Israel occupied East Jerusalem, where Al-Aqsa is located, during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. It annexed the entire city in 1980 in a move never recognised by the international community.
Anadolu Agency

Pro-Palestine protesters march across Sydney Harbour Bridge

Sydney, Australia - Thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Australia marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday as part of a rally calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and humanitarian aid to be allowed into the enclave.
While weekly marches have taken place every Sunday since October 2023, this is the first time the Palestine Action Group has held its protest on Sydney’s iconic bridge.
The Palestine Action Group Sydney organised the March for Humanity, calling on ‘everyone, every individual and every organisation, who cannot bear to do nothing in the face of this atrocity, to join with us’.
It said the event ‘will send a



powerful message to the world, to Gaza, to Israel, and to our own Government, that we are determined to stand up for humanity’, calling on the authorities to facilitate the event.
“The deliberate starvation of two million Gazans is a part of a broader plan, repeatedly an-

nounced by Israeli leaders, to either kill or expel the entire Palestinian population from Gaza. This is a genocide,” the group said.
The NSW Police said on X that due to public safety issues, they will be working with protesters to get everyone off the bridge safely, but in a staged manner.

WHO delivers 24 truckloads of aid to Gaza

Istanbul, Turkey - The World Health Organization (WHO) has delivered 24 trucks carrying vital medical supplies to Gaza since Friday, the agency’s Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced on Sunday.
The shipments include essential medicines, trauma and surgical equipment, treatments for non-communicable diseases, and laboratory and water testing supplies, according to Tedros.
“These items will be transported to health facilities and health partners in the coming days,” he said in a statement on X. The WHO chief expressed gratitude to the United Arab Emirates for its contribution to the latest aid delivery.

Promotion of communism a crime in Czech Republic from January 1, 2026

Prague, Czech Republic - For staunch opponents of communism in the Czech Republic, it's the happy end to a very long story. After the country's so-called Velvet Revolution, which started in 1989 and led to end of the communist regime there, opponents of the ideology demanded that communists be treated the same as German Nazis had been. More than 30 years later, their demands have finally been met.

In late July, Czech President Petr Pavel signed an amendment to his country's criminal code that criminalises the promotion of communist ideology, placing it on the same footing as Nazi propaganda. The amendment will enter into force on January 1, 2026.

The movement to amend the law was first initiated by Martin Mejstrik, formerly a leader of the student protests during the Velvet Revolution and later a Czech senator. Historians from the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, or the USTR, also joined the initiative and this spring, the amendment passed through the Czech political system, supported by Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala's pro-European coalition government. President Pavel's signature in July finalised the process.

The amendment of section 403 of the Czech criminal code now allots a jail sentence of one to five years for anyone who 'establishes, supports or promotes Nazi, communist, or other movements which demonstrably aim to suppress human rights and freedoms or incite racial, ethnic,



This file photo shows pro-communism activists supporting the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia staging a rally in Wenceslas Sq., Prague, Czech Republic in 2022

The Czech criminal code now bans the promotion of communist ideology, making it equivalent to Nazi propaganda. At the same time, the Czech communist party is one of the most successful in Europe

national, religious or class-based hatred'.

'Criminal totalitarian ideologies'

"The aim of this draft was to eliminate an obviously unfair distinction between two criminal-totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century," Kamil Nedvedicky, a deputy director at the USTR, had explained before the amendment

was passed.

Both of those ideologies suppressed fundamental rights and freedoms, he said. "It is logical and just that Czech criminal law clearly reflects this. It's not about ideology, it's about protecting the democratic constitutional state," he said.

Somewhat ironically, the Czech Republic is also one of the few countries in the European

Union that has a comparatively successful communist party. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, or KSCM, was formed in 1990 and until the last Czech parliamentary election four years ago, had members of parliament and even provided several Czech vice presidents.

The KSCM was the offspring of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, a dictatorial regime with a Marxist-Leninist ideology that ruled the country until 1989. The KSCM has tens of thousands of members and entered the European Parliament after the 2024 EU elections as part of the left-wing Stacilo! (in English, 'Enough!') coalition. Polling indicates the Stacilo! elec-

toral alliance will likely get over the 5% hurdle in the Czech Republic's October parliamentary elections too. Its lead candidate is KSCM leader and member of the European Parliament, Katerina Konecna.

Possible ruling role for communists

And that may not be all. The current favourite in domestic elections is Andrej Babis, a former Czech prime minister, oligarch and the leader of the right-wing populist party, ANO (in English, 'YES'). Babis has not ruled out working with Stacilo! to form a new coalition.

The new amendment to Czech law could potentially even

lead to a ban on the KSCM. That happened to the Workers' Party, a Czech far-right, extremist and neo-Nazi party, in 2010.

KSCM leader Konecna told DW that the amendment is a political attack on her party by the current government.

"It's about the systematic attempt by the antisocial, corrupt government of Petr Fiala to silence its loudest critics," she argued. "That definitely has no place in a democratic society."

Konecna also said it was 'amusing' that the amendment was signed into law by Pavel, who was previously a prominent member of the original Czech Communist Party.

Pavel, a former career soldier,

was a member of the Communist Party until 1989. "In retrospect and with the knowledge I have today, it was a decision I am definitely not proud of," the Czech president has previously said.

"I think the last 30 years that I have dedicated to building a safer Czech Republic are a symbolic apology to society," he also previously said in an interview with Czech tabloid, Blesk. Pavel served as chief of staff of the Czech military between 2012 and 2015 and as chairman of the NATO military committee for more than three years, from 2015.

'We won't be intimidated'

KSCM leader Konecna argues that the Czech government should be addressing issues ordinary citizens have to deal with, like high energy prices and unaffordable housing. Instead, she claims, they've spent their time passing a law to silence political critics.

"But we won't be intimidated," she said combatively. "Even if they threaten us a hundred times and imprison us."

Russian politicians have also spoken out about the new Czech rules. "When the state and system of that time are compared to fascist ideology and the fascist regime, it is quite obvious that this is being done to question, accuse, and condemn our country," Vyacheslav Volodin, the chairman of the Russian Federation's parliament, the Duma, said on July 25, according to Russia's state news agency Tass. DW

Pakistan: Monsoon death toll rises to 299

Islamabad, Pakistan - The death toll from rain-related incidents in Pakistan has risen to 299, up from an earlier figure of 234, Dawn reported, citing data from the country's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

According to Dawn, citing the NDMA data as reported by state-run PTV News, the monsoon season, which started in late June, continues to cause severe destruction across the country.

These seasonal rains, typically lasting from June through September, are vital for replenishing water supplies and bringing relief from the intense summer heat in the country, which is already hit with a severe water crisis.

However, they also frequently lead to deadly floods, landslides, and large-scale displacement, particularly in areas with poor drainage or dense populations, as per Dawn's report.

The NDMA's updated data now shows that 299 people have died due to flash floods and heavy rains. Among the dead are 140 children, 102 men, and 57 women, the Dawn reported.

Additionally, 715 people have been injured, including 239 children, 204 women, and 272 men, since the rains began on June 26.

ANI

India: Kerala's noted 'two-rupee doctor' passes away at 80

Kannur, India - Kerala's popular doctor, Dr A K Rairu Gopal, known to provide health care services at a modest fee to people, died on Sunday. He was 80.

The doctor earned the sobriquet 'Two Rupee Doctor' as he often took just that much as his consulting fee from patients. The doctor, who left his mark on the field of healthcare services, was honoured with the IMA award for the best family doctor in the state. During his career, the doctor provided his noble service to more than 18 lakh patients.

Earlier today, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan described doctor Rairu Gopal 'as the people's doctor', noting that his readiness to serve for such a nominal fee was a source of immense relief for poor patients.



Dr A K Rairu Gopal

"For half a century, he charged only two rupees for consultations, making healthcare accessible to all. His willingness to serve was a great comfort to countless patients," the Chief Minister said, according to the Public Relations Officer (PRO). ANI

Philippines' Marcos Jr to arrive in India today for a five-day visit

New Delhi, India - Philippines President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr is set to visit India from August 4 to 8, and hold talks with President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other officials.

Marcos, after arrival in New Delhi on August 4, will meet with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. On August 5, he will lay a wreath at Rajghat. Marcos will then hold talks with PM Modi in Hyderabad House.

Exchange of memoranda of understanding and press statements will take place thereafter.

Marcos will then meet J P Nadda, Minister of Health and Family Welfare and thereafter President Droupadi Murmu.

The Philippines' President will then travel to Bengaluru and meet Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot.



Philippines President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr

This would be the first visit of Marcos to India since the assumption of office of the President of the Philippines.

Diplomatic relations between India and the Philippines were established in November 1949. Both countries have since developed a strong partnership across

a broad spectrum of areas, including trade and investment, defence and security, maritime cooperation, agriculture, healthcare, pharmaceuticals and digital technologies. The two countries also engage closely at the regional level, including through India's Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership with ASEAN.

An official statement said that India's relations with the Philippines are 'an integral pillar of our 'Act East' Policy, Vision MAHASAGAR and our vision of the Indo-Pacific'. The visit of President Marcos coincides with the 75th anniversary of India-Philippines diplomatic relations. The visit is an opportunity for both leaders to set the path for future bilateral cooperation and to engage on regional and international issues of mutual interest, the statement added.

India and the Philippines share warm and multifaceted bilateral relations rooted in historical ties and shared democratic values. Cooperation spans various sectors, including defence, trade, investment, and cultural exchange, the statement said.

ANI

Measles kills 357 Afghan children in first half of 2025: UNICEF

Kabul, Afghanistan - Measles has killed at least 357 children in Afghanistan in the first half of 2025 amid a worsening humanitarian crisis, with over 12mn children in urgent need of assistance, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned, according to Khaama Press.

Between January and June, over 74,800 suspected measles cases were reported, with nearly 80 per cent affecting children under the age of five. Other preventable illnesses such as severe diarrhoea and pneumonia are also rampant, adding to the health burden on children and families, Khaama Press reported.

UNICEF also highlighted one of the world's worst child malnutrition crises unfolding in the country. The agency said: "3.5mn children in Afghanistan are acutely malnourished, and 1.4mn are at immediate risk of death."

The situation is being further exacerbated by mass deportations from Iran. From January to June, over 714,000 Afghans returned to the country, of whom 99 per cent were undocumented and 70 per cent were forcibly expelled. These returns have overwhelmed border communities and put additional pressure on already fragile services, according to Khaama Press.



UNICEF projects that by October, 9.5mn people - approximately one-fifth of Afghanistan's population - will be facing 'crisis' or 'emergency' levels of hunger. In response, the agency has

appealed for US\$1.2bn in funding for its 2025 operations but warned that only 51 per cent of the required funds have been secured so far. Khaama Press reported that this shortfall

threatens to disrupt critical, life-saving programmes for children and families.

UNICEF has issued an urgent call for sustained international support, warning: "Without immediate action, Afghanistan will face countless preventable deaths and worsening suffering among its most vulnerable, particularly children and women."

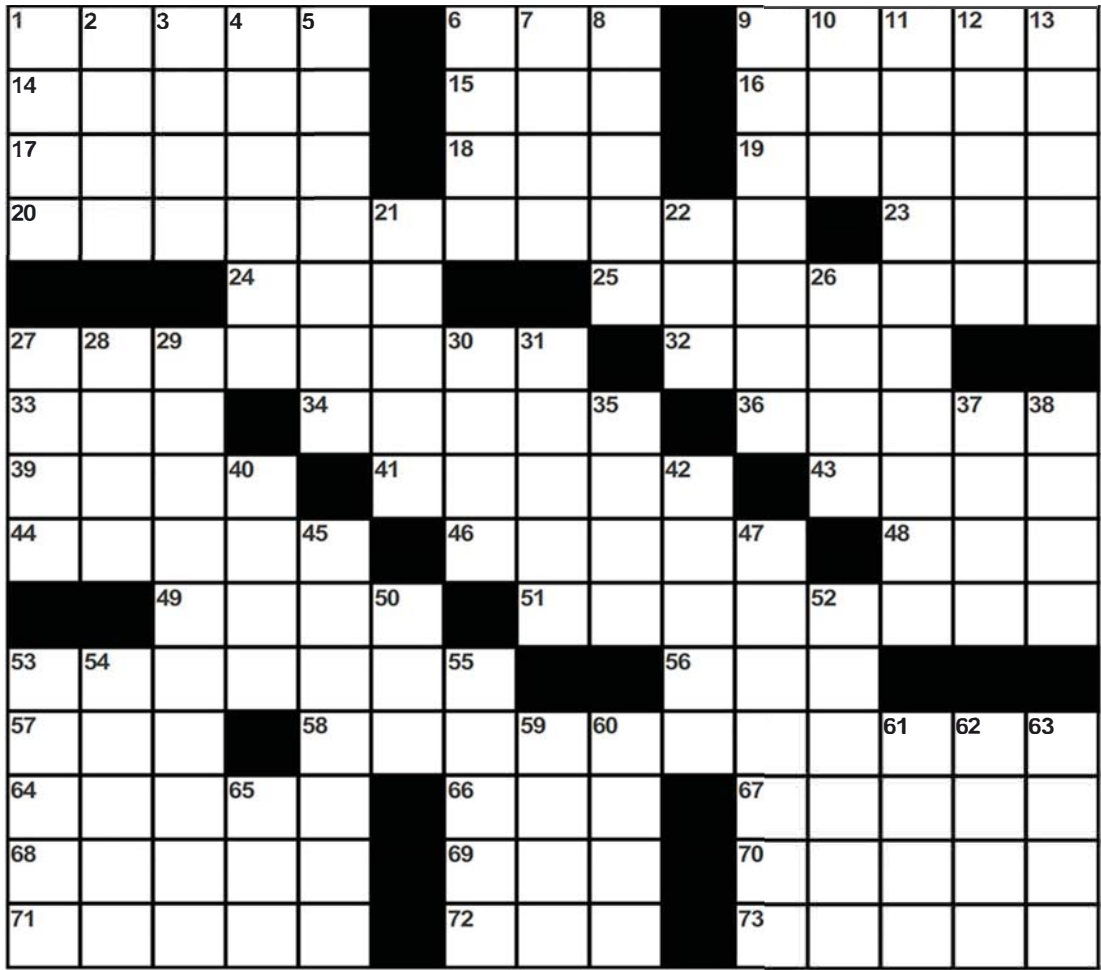
The worsening humanitarian crisis is unfolding alongside growing security concerns, compounding the challenges faced by the population. Despite the 2020 Doha Agreement, Afghanistan remains a safe haven for major terrorist organisations including

Al-Qaeda, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and ISIS-K, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has said in its latest quarterly report, warning of rising militant threats and worsening regional instability, Khaama Press reported.

Nearly four years after the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan continues to spiral into insecurity, diplomatic isolation, and humanitarian collapse. The SIGAR report noted that the Taliban's harsh policies have undermined its push for international recognition.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Eyeglasses, informally
 - 6) Impressive degree
 - 9) Turkish generals
 - 14) Artistic stand
 - 15) Word from a finger-pointing chooser
 - 16) Constructed
 - 17) Jungle vine
 - 18) Affirmative action?
 - 19) "Tomorrow" musical
 - 20) Aggravation at a lack of progress
 - 23) Type of modem testing
 - 24) Airplane passenger's concern
 - 25) Addressed a waiter
 - 27) Pronged weapons
 - 32)_fide
 - 33) It may be right above a knee
 - 34) Down's partner
 - 36) The time being
 - 39) Knocks on a door
 - 41) Begets
 - 43) Gulf War missile
 - 44) Stand on its head
 - 46) Jack's nemesis
 - 48) .0000001 joule
 - 49) Went out, as a fire
 - 51) Jewish sect member of old
 - 53) Small scrap

- 56) It can help with a housewarming
 - 57) "Overhead" engine part
 - 58) A dam is one, essentially
 - 64) States with conviction
 - 66) "... we having fun yet?"
 - 67) First thing read, typically
 - 68) Camelot weapon
 - 69) One way to move quickly
 - 70) Alpha's opposite
 - 71) Church part
 - 72) Tennis match segment
 - 73) Chart anew
- DOWN**
- 1) "To thine own _ be true"
 - 2) Au_
 - 3) Jacob's twin
 - 4) Used a thurible
 - 5) Like proper venetian blinds
 - 6) Bird that repeats (var.)
 - 7) Cowboy's pride
 - 8) Part of a TV feed
 - 9) Leave high and dry
 - 10) Big bang creator
 - 11) Things that get in the way
 - 12) Type of skirt that flares outward
 - 13) "Farm" or "home" at-

- tachment
- 21) Some members of Indian royalty
- 22) Kingly sphere
- 26) "The Dukes of Hazard" spin-off
- 27) By way of, briefly
- 28) Acquire in the field
- 29) Roadblock
- 30) H.S. math subject
- 31) Bacon bit
- 35) "Awright!"
- 37) Be a good doctor
- 38) Competitive advantage
- 40) Quick haircut
- 42) Big mess
- 45) Coup participant
- 47) John Deere product
- 50) Belle of the ball, briefly
- 52) One of these days
- 53) La_ (Milan opera house)
- 54) Type of base
- 55) Autocrats no more
- 59) Common test answer
- 60) Lease
- 61) Agenda unit
- 62) Legendary gymnast
- Korbut
- 63) Tide type
- 65) Former electronics giant

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Wear something really awesome today, because you're definitely all about the huge crowds, fun distractions, and loud merrymaking. If there's a carnival somewhere nearby, get moving right away, because you're definitely going to have fun. If not, see if you can mimic that kind of atmosphere at your own place of work or residence. Check in with the powers that be first, and then go for it.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Energy is what it's all about for you right now. You're hotter than the sun and you've got a magnetic energy that draws others close. Everything goes your way, no matter what you're doing. If you need a table at the hottest restaurant in town, it's a snap. If you're angling for that corner office with the killer view, you've got it. The good times just keep on coming for you!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You usually strive to keep it positive, and today is no exception. It's sometimes crazy just how well it works out for you. Sometimes difficult situations can work out simply because you just know deep down that that's how it has to be, particularly when it comes to taking on new projects. Your energy pushes you to take risks today, so go for it. Your positive attitude means that everything should go well.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You may feel like your nose has been to the grindstone so long that it's been shaved down quite a bit. Keep up those efforts, though, and you should soon see it all come to fruition. Some tasks require massive amounts of effort, but you're definitely capable of getting it done. Big successes usually demand a big investment. You know you're up for it, and your belief makes it so.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Creativity and good feelings about your fellows are just erupting out of you today. That's an incredibly powerful combination you've got going for you, so be sure to focus all that energy in the right place. These potent influences make you feel great, but they also send you in a new, sweeter direction you could never have seen coming. That feeling of fulfillment is the perfect ending to a great day.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Try to avoid taking much of anything at face value right now. Instead, try looking beneath the surface and get at someone else's motives. This is particularly smart if a deal seems too good to be true or the person on the other end seems just a bit too anxious for you to agree then and there with no time for questions. Just smile and tell them you need time to think, and then decide later.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Fireworks go off when you start to engage in a one-on-one conversation on some deeply stimulating topic. If you're enjoying the debate for its own sake, be sure to let the other person know, or they might confuse your brainy enthusiasm for a much different kind of heat. You can make intellectual connections of all kinds now, but you should try to keep things on the lighter side.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your people are playing follow-the-leader, but at least for now you're the one leading the way. Everyone is happy to mosey along with you, especially when you decide to indulge in fun and games. Skip the movies today, and go for something more educational and interactive. You could get out there and dance, take in a new play or maybe hear live music. Any cultural event can work for you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Only stubborn fools refuse to compromise. Remember that during today's negotiations, no matter the venue. To keep things moving along, you need to keep a broader perspective in mind. What brings the most people the most benefit? Should you delay some desires if it means getting some sizable long-term advantage? Get those points across to other parties if they're the ones who are saying no.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're ready to make such a big splash that the people around you should carry umbrellas. Only the best is good enough for now, and that's definitely a welcome change of pace from your usual low-key self. You're great at playing house and saving bucks, but now and then you need to indulge in some lavish little something that shows you just how awesome life can be.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It might be a great day for you on the job, but only if you make a serious effort to focus your energy and keep yourself from distractions brought by higher-ups. Some of them may actually be looking for trouble, so make sure you don't make yourself a target for their negative attitudes. Keep your head down, work as hard as you can and solidify all your plans before the end of the day.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's quite tempting to tell others what they need to hear, especially when you're sure you could really help them. You need to avoid interference now, though. Hold your tongue and keep it held. It's totally essential that people make their own mistakes today. If you keep after them, they won't learn anything except that you're always there to save the day.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. From 1925 to the start of World War II in 1939, Ahmed Muhtar bey Zogolli ruled what country?

A. Egypt
B. Turkey
C. Albania
D. Libya

2. The GANEFO tournaments were initiated, and first held, where?

A. Japan
B. Russian
C. Indonesia
D. Cambodia

3. By late 2021, how many people approximately were in the world population?

A. 9.2 bn
B. 7.9 bn
C. 6.9 bn
D. 8.4bn

Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	L	L	S
A	I	U	I
I	M	G	M
A	T	Y	M

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION

20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

	9	5				6		
		7			8			1
1		8				3	7	9
	3		6	5	2			
			8		1			
			7	4	3		2	
9	7	6				2		3
5			3			1		
		3				7	6	

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

4	9	7	6	2	5	3	1	8
8	6	1	9	7	3	4	2	5
3	5	2	4	8	1	9	7	6
5	2	6	3	4	7	1	8	9
9	3	4	1	6	8	2	5	7
7	1	8	2	5	9	6	3	4
6	7	3	5	9	2	8	1	4
1	4	5	8	3	6	7	2	9
2	8	9	7	1	4	5	6	3

ON CLOUD NINE

Brazil beat Colombia in shootout to win Women’s Copa America title

Quito, Ecuador - Brazil successfully defended their Women's Copa America crown by defeating Colombia 5-4 in a shootout on Saturday to claim their ninth continental title after a roller-coaster final in Quito ended 4-4.

The decider at the Estadio Rodrigo Paz Delgado saw Colombia take the lead three times, only for Brazil to respond on each occasion.

Brazil great Marta forced extra time with a late equaliser and the veteran struck again in the 105th minute to seemingly seal victory. But a resilient Colombia found yet another equaliser to send the encounter to penalties, where Brazil's experience ultimately prevailed.

"I think women's soccer has been growing a lot. I think the trend is for it to be more competitive. Everyone here deserved a match like this. Congratulations to Colombia too," Brazil's Amanda Gutierrez said.

Both teams created early chances but the breakthrough came in the 25th minute when Colombia's Linda Caicedo capped off a tidy passing move with a composed low finish from close range.

Brazil got the equaliser in the dying moments of the first half when Angelina stepped up to calmly convert a penalty after VAR confirmed a foul by Jorelyn Carabali on Gio Garbelini.

Colombia regained the lead in the 69th minute via a Brazil own goal, defender Tarciane attempting a routine back pass to goalkeeper Lorena but unaware that she had already charged off her line to collect the ball.

Gutierrez equalised for Brazil again 10 minutes from time with her sixth goal in the tournament, a fierce strike off Garbelini's pass, but striker Mayra Ramirez restored Colombia's lead by netting after a quick counter-attack eight minutes later.

'Las Cafeteras' were within touching distance of their first continental title until Marta, introduced as a late substitute, delivered a moment of magic with a stunning equaliser six minutes into stoppage time, forcing the game into extra time.



Brazil players celebrate with the trophy after beating Colombia in the Women’s Copa America final on Saturday

Messi suffers hamstring injury as Miami edge Necaxa in shootout

Fort Lauderdale, US - Lionel Messi left injured in the 11th minute with hamstring discomfort, but Inter Miami earned a 5-4 penalty shootout win against visiting Necaxa following a 2-2 draw in Matchday 2 of Leagues Cup Phase One play on Saturday night.

Miami (1-0-1, 5 points) converted all of their penalties, with Luis Suarez clinching the extra point with a finish off the underside of the crossbar after a wild game that saw both teams finish with 10 men. Herons goalkeeper Rocco Rios Novo made one save, thwarting Tomas Badaloni's attempt from the spot.

Earlier, Badaloni scored his third of the tournament in the 33rd minute for Necaxa (1-0-1, 4 points), who played 11-on-10 for 43 minutes after Inter Miami's Maximiliano Falcon was ejected for denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity with a 17th-minute foul.

Cristian Calderon's second yellow card in the 60th minute evened numbers before Necaxa's Ricardo Montreal and Miami's



Lionel Messi was subbed off after suffering a hamstring injury in the 11th minute of their match against Necaxa

Jordi Alba traded goals after the 80th minute. Miami's Telasco Segovia opened the scoring a minute after Messi's departure.

The 38-year-old Messi limped off the field under his own power. Miami manager Javier Mascherano confirmed postgame that Messi felt hamstring soreness, and expressed optimism it was

relatively minor.

All eight penalty takers converted to lift 10-man Club America to an important two points with an 8-7 penalty shootout victory against Minnesota United.

Sebastian Caceres' 90th-minute header pulled America (0-0-2, 3 points) level from behind for a third time in the match and fifth time in the tournament. Goalkeeper Luis Malagon then followed a sensational denial of Carlos Harvey in second-half stoppage time with a penalty save of Nicolas Romero on Minnesota's eighth PK to help seal the shootout win.

The Mexico City outfit previously tied it at 1-1 through Michael Boxall's own goal in the 27th minute and 2-2 on Jose Zuniga's 53rd-minute contribution.

Tani Oluwaseyi and Bongsi Hlongwane each scored their second goals of the tournament for Minnesota (1-0-1, 4 points). Harvey then put the Loons up 3-2 in the 65th minute, three minutes after America's Igor Lichnovsky received his second yellow card.



Aleksandar Pavlovic

Bayern midfielder Pavlovic suffers eye socket fracture

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich midfielder Aleksandar Pavlovic faces a spell on the sidelines after suffering an eye socket fracture in training, the German club said.

The 21-year-old Germany international had undergone successful surgery, the club said in a statement on Saturday without providing a timeline for his return.

Bayern are already without playmaker Jamal Musiala, who sustained a fibula fracture with a broken and dislocated ankle at the Club World Cup last month, while left back Alphonso Davies is out due to an ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) tear.

Bayern play VfB Stuttgart in the German Super Cup final on August 16 before beginning their Bundesliga title defence against RB Leipzig at home six days later.

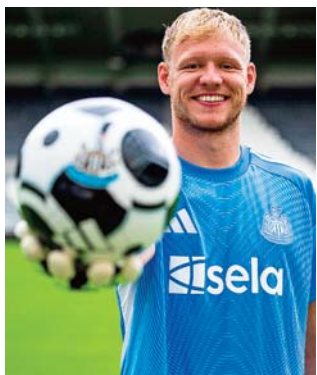
The 21-year-old Germany international had undergone successful surgery, the club said in a statement on Saturday

Newcastle sign former Arsenal goalkeeper Ramsdale on loan from Southampton

London, England - Newcastle United have signed former Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale from Southampton on a season-long loan, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

The 27-year-old England goalkeeper, who made the second-most saves in the league last season at 125, has worked with Newcastle manager Eddie Howe during his spell at Bournemouth.

"Aaron is an exceptional goal-



Aaron Ramsdale

keeper... Having worked with him before, I know what he can bring to us on and off the pitch, so we look forward to welcoming him into the group," Howe said.

Newcastle, who finished fifth last season to secure a Champions League berth, begin their Premier League campaign with a visit to Aston Villa on August 16.

Ramsdale joined Southampton from Arsenal last year on a deal valid until June 2028.

He joined Arsenal in 2021 and helped them to a 2022-23 runners-up finish in the Premier League, before losing his starting place to David Raya the following year.

After securing promotion, Southampton went straight back down last season and Ramsdale suffered his third top flight relegation after previous drops with Bournemouth in 2019-20 and Sheffield United in 2020-21.

West Ham sign former Newcastle striker Wilson

London, England - West Ham United have recruited ex-Newcastle United and Bournemouth striker Callum Wilson as a free agent on a one-year contract, the east London club announced on Saturday.

The 33-year-old Wilson has had 111 direct goal involvements in 239 Premier League appearances, including 49 in 130 games for Newcastle, where he failed to agree a new contract.

He has played nine times for England, scoring twice.

"I'm excited to be joining a massive football club like West Ham. A club that shares a similar passion to mine, hard work, dedication and also I strive for success



Callum Wilson

so I'm glad to be a part of it," Wilson said.

Wilson moved to Newcastle in September 2022 and had his best Premier League tally of 18 goals in 2022-23, a season that also saw him feature for England at the World Cup in Qatar.

He played in just 18 league games last term due to injuries.

"He is a proven, experienced Premier League striker, with a great work ethic and a fantastic goalscoring record," West Ham coach Graham Potter said.

"He also has excellent character and personality, which is such an important factor, and something that we place a big emphasis on with our player recruitment."



Ayoub Jabbari

Moroccan Jabbari joins FC Cincinnati on loan

Cincinnati, US - FC Cincinnati acquired Moroccan forward Ayoub Jabbari on loan from French Ligue 2 side Grenoble.

The deal announced Saturday runs through the end of the 2025 season and includes a purchase option.

Jabbari, 25, will occupy an international roster slot.

"We're excited to welcome Ayoub to the club," FCC general manager Chris Albright said. "His physicality, work rate and hold-up play will be a valuable addition to our team. We expect him to be an immediate character fit within our group, and we look forward to him joining us in Cincinnati."

Jabbari has recorded 14 goals and four assists in 99 career appearances, playing for Racing Santander (2022-23) and Paris FC (2023-24) before joining Grenoble last year.



Kalle Rovanpera in action at Rally Finland

Rovanpera on road to victory in Finland as Toyota dominate

Double world rally champion Kalle Rovanpera was heading for a first home victory in Finland on Sunday with his rampant Toyota team ending the penultimate leg with their cars in the top five places.

Rovanpera stretched his lead from 4.9 seconds overnight to 36.1 over teammate Takamoto Katsuta with eight-times world champion Sebastien Ogier third, Elfyn Evans fourth and Sami Pajari fifth.

Briton Evans looks set to take over at the top of the championship after Hyundai's Ott Tanak, who leads by one point, was handed a five-minute penalty and dropped to 14th.

Hyundai had a miserable day with reigning champion Thierry

Neuville, second overnight, and Adrien Fourmaux suffering punctures that sent them plunging down the order to sixth and seventh respectively.

"I just tried to keep a good pace," said Rovanpera. "Obviously there was no need to take any crazy risks but I still wanted to go fast so that I've the feeling for tomorrow morning."

"I have the feeling we need to go quite fast tomorrow. It's going to be a big day."

Neuville said it was now just a question of getting as many points as possible.

"Obviously any good result and any hope for the championship is basically gone," said the Belgian. "We needed a good result here, and we won't get any."

Dubai, Abu Dhabi to host Asia Cup T20 matches

Dubai, UAE - Dubai and Abu Dhabi will be the host cities for the men's Twenty20 Asia Cup, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) said, with arch-rivals India and Pakistan to meet in Dubai on September 14.

The tournament in the United Arab Emirates, scheduled to run from September 9 to 28, will feature eight teams — two more than the last edition — with 11 matches in Dubai and eight in Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi will host the opener between Afghanistan and Hong Kong, while the final will be held in Dubai.

"Hosting it in the UAE allows us to bring the excitement to one of the most vibrant cricketing hubs in the world," ACC President Mohsin Naqvi said in a media release on Saturday.

"Dubai and Abu Dhabi are well equipped to deliver a seamless and world class experience for players, fans, and broadcasters alike."

Group A includes defending champions India, Pakistan, UAE and Oman, while Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Hong Kong are in Group B.

STAGE ALL SET FOR A THRILLING FINALE

India bounce back in scintillating final session but England just need 35 runs to win

London, England - England had moved to within 35 runs of securing a famous victory over India when bad light and torrential rain ended an extraordinary fourth day of the final test at The Oval on Sunday.

Harry Brook and Joe Root shared a superb fourth-wicket partnership of 195 to put England on the brink of completing a record run chase that would have given them a 3-1 series win.

With India on the ropes, however, and England needing only another 73 runs, Brook played a wild stroke and skied a catch to depart for 111.

That gave India a chink of hope and they certainly made the most of it.

Jacob Bethell also fell to a rash shot for five and Root, having completed a masterful 39th test century, nicked a catch to wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel off Prasidh Krishna to spark wild Indian celebrations.

In mounting tension, Jamie Smith and Jamie Overton struggled to get bat on ball, surviving several frenzied appeals before the umpires decided it was too dark to continue.

The players left the field and shortly afterwards a heavy rain shower made conditions unplayable, depriving the crowd of a tense finale to a day of unrelenting drama.

England will resume on 339-6 on Monday, with Chris Woakes unlikely to bat due to a broken shoulder, and India still in with a chance of a victory that would earn them a share of a gripping five-match series.

India had the better of the morning session after England resumed on 50-1, dismissing Ben Duckett for 54 and Ollie Pope for 27 to leave the hosts wobbling on 106-3. Brook, on 19, was lucky to survive when Mohammed Siraj caught him in the deep before stepping back on to the boundary cushion.

The prolific right-hander made him pay a heavy price for



India's Prasidh Krishna celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Joe Root on Sunday

Brook enjoyed a huge slice of luck on 19 when Mohammed Siraj caught him in the deep before stepping back on to the boundary cushion

the error, striking two sixes and 12 fours all round the ground to reach his 10th test century off 91

balls. Root provided the perfect foil, continuing his consistent form throughout the series, as the Indian bowlers struggled to get much movement under grey skies.

Once past three figures, Brook launched an all-out attack, hitting Akash Deep for two fours in an over before attempting a third and Siraj completed the catch on this occasion.

Brook's bat flew out of his hands as he played the stroke and he had to retrieve it before returning to the pavilion to a standing ovation from the crowd.

He probably believed he had

done enough to ensure victory for his team but India had other ideas.

The highest successful run chase at The Oval was England's 263-9 against Australia in 1902.

Earlier, India ended a gripping third day that ebbed and flowed leading England by 323 runs on Saturday.

India had dominated the morning session as Jaiswal and nightwatchman Akash Deep shared a stubborn century partnership to frustrate a toothless England attack.

Jaiswal moved calmly to his sixth test century and second of

the series while Ravindra Jadeja, who England had failed to dismiss in the second innings of any of the first four tests in the series, passed 50 once again before edging the second new ball to Harry Brook at second slip off Tongue.

Washington Sundar then delivered a remarkable late cameo.

Washington Sundar then delivered a remarkable late cameo.

Sundar put on a six-hitting fest as he scored a quick-fire half century to help India extend their second innings lead. Sundar shifted his gears after India were nine wickets down and slammed a 39-ball half-century.

CLASSIFIEDS

NAME CHANGE

I, **MUKKERA SRINIVAS** (holder of Indian Passport No. **Y3483789** son Of **MUKKERA UPPALAIAH** having permanent residence in **v: PARIVEDA M: KOHEDA ,SIDDIPET 505473 TELANGANA. INDIA** (complete postal address in India), and presently residing in **FLAT 11 HULLAD SAD Hamriya, RUWI OPP; Al Nahdha Hospital 491, 131 SULTANATE OF OMAN**, (complete postal address in Oman) intend to change my name from **MUKKERA SRINIVAS** (old name) to (new name) **MUKKERA SRIKANTH** for all practical. Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, PO Box No: 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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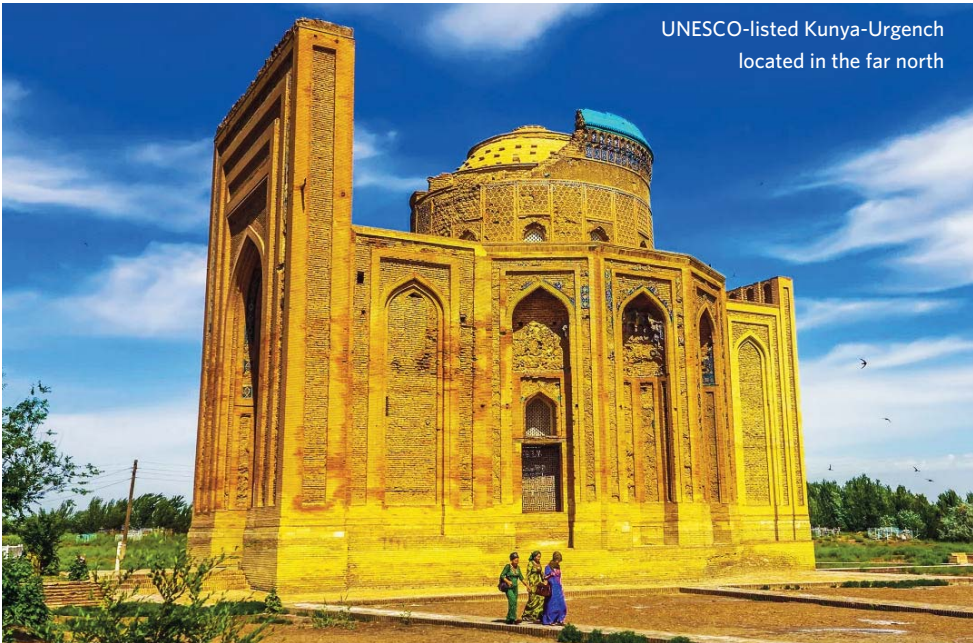
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TURKMENISTAN



Turkmenistan's Darvaza Crater has been burning for more than 50 years

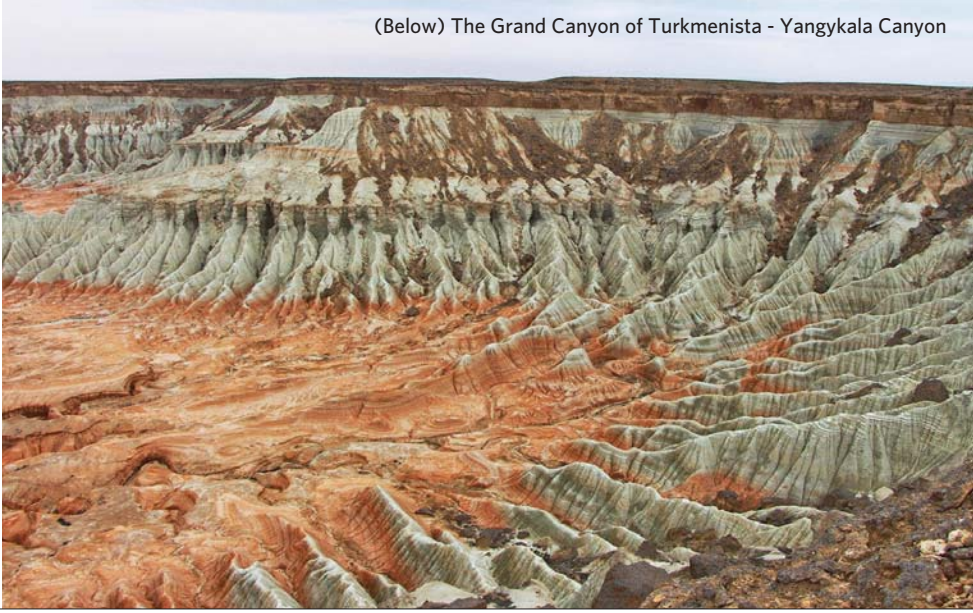
The Great Kyz Kala is the most completed historic site out of the 5 ancient Merv sites



UNESCO-listed Kunya-Urgench located in the far north



A Ghost City: The White Buildings of Ashgabat



(Below) The Grand Canyon of Turkmenista - Yangykala Canyon

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST ISOLATED COUNTRIES, THIS FORMER SOVIET STATE IS NOW SHOWING SIGNS IT'S READY FOR MORE TOURISTS

When the Turkmenistan government announced new streamlined visa regulations in April, people familiar with travelling to the Central Asian nation were unsure what to make of it.

Not that there are many such experts — along with North Korea and Eritrea, Turkmenistan has long been considered one of the globe's most isolated countries, a legacy that dates to the 1990s when the nation broke away from the disintegrating Soviet Union and turned inward, settling into a sealed-off, independent authoritarianism.

For certain travellers, though, especially those who gravitate toward conflict zones and geopolitical oddities, Turkmenistan's impenetrability has given it an alluring mystique. There's just one problem: getting in.

Scoring a tourist visa is a long and involved process that requires obtaining a Letter of Introduction (LoI) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after booking your visit with a government-approved tour operator. The vetting — the government decides if you should be allowed to enter — can sometimes take months.

Word that the regime intended to make things more user-friendly for travellers, then, was startling, says Dylan Lupine, whose UK-based Lupine Travel offers small-group Turkmenistan tours.

"We are still in the dark about it, as are our local partners in Turkmenistan, as there have been no updates since," Lupine says. "The new visa regulations haven't yet come into place and

there's no news of when this will be happening."

If and when the new process kicks off, visitors would be able to apply online, with officials pledging that it will be much faster and result in fewer rejections. The LOI requirement will reportedly vanish, but visitors will still need a 'sponsor' in Turkmenistan, which in most cases means signing up for a guided tour.

"Once it does come into place, I do think it will strongly boost visitor numbers," Lupine adds.

Main attraction – Gates of Hell

For decades — even before independence from the USSR — Turkmenistan's main attraction has been the Darvaza Gas Crater. Located in the Karakum Desert about a four-hour drive from capital city Ashgabat, the huge fiery pit is a manmade phenomenon, created during the Soviet era when a natural gas exploration rig collapsed into a sinkhole.

After travelling across the desert in 4x4 caravans, visitors check into yurt camps and make their way to the edge of the rim around the 'Gates of Hell' after dark to feel the heat and listen to the sizzle of the flames licking up from the bottom.

Darvaza, however, is literally running out of gas. In recent years, the flames have noticeably receded, and there are predictions the crater may flame out completely in coming years.

A British photographer was confronted with an amazing inferno as he visited a gas crater which locals call 'The Gates of Hell' — because it has been burning for 46 years. Alec Connah travelled to the Kara Kum

Desert in Turkmenistan, 186 miles from capital city Ashgabat, to witness the extraordinary phenomenon, caused when drillers ignited natural gas in 1971.

A drilling rig had crashed into the crater and workers chose to ignite the gas after they were concerned that poisonous fumes might be released into the nearby village of Darvaza. They expected the gas to burn out within a few days, but the inferno has continued to rage ever since, with temperatures reaching as much as 1000° C. The crater, which is 226 feet wide and almost 100 feet deep, has since become one of Turkmenistan's most common tourist destinations, despite its intimidating moniker of 'The Gates of Hell'.

Untraced terrain

But that doesn't mean there aren't other reasons to visit. Ancient Silk Road cities with their historic mosques and minarets offer dramatic contrast to Ashgabat with its over-the-top modern architecture and grandiose monuments featuring everything from post-communist leaders and medieval poets to golden horses, the national dog, and a gigantic bull balancing the world on its head.

Given the fact they encounter very few foreign visitors, the Turkmen people are warm and welcoming. If arid landscapes are your thing, around 80% of Turkmenistan is desert. And there's the novelty of exploring a place that few others have visited in modern times.

"Turkmenistan is unlike any country I have visited," says the Norwegian writer and anthropologist Erika Fatland, author of 'Sovietistan' and other books

about Central Asia and the former Soviet Union.

"The shining white marble capital of Ashgabat, with its empty lanes, is one of the weirdest capitals I have ever visited."

Spangled with golden statues and white marble, Ashgabat is both an architectural wonder and Instagram icon. Many of the structures are shaped like their government functions — like a Ministry of Oil and Gas building that resembles a giant lighter. Others were created to capture Guinness World Records — including the world's largest indoor Ferris wheel and a colossal horse head that hovers above the national stadium.

Fortresses and friendly folk

At the city's indoor Russian Bazaar, vendors offer samples of caviar harvested from Turkmenistan's slice of the Caspian Sea, as this writer discovered during a recent visit. A blend of Persian and Central Asian influences, the culinary scene is surprisingly good. Nightlife is rather limited, but you can grab a chilled beverage at Clever's Irish Pub or the Florida British Pub.

Once in a strategic position along the Silk Road trading route between Asia and Europe, the country has multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the Parthian Fortresses of Nisa near Ashgabat and the sprawling ruins of Merv in eastern Turkmenistan. Even more impressive are the richly decorated grand mosque, tombs and towering minaret at Kunya-Urgench in the far north.

"My most beautiful experiences in Turkmenistan were in the countryside, in the desert, where I encountered the friendliest, most hospitable people I have ever met," says Fatland. "The only drawback was the fermented camel milk, chal, the de facto national drink, that they kept serving me in generous quantities. Let's just say that it's an acquired taste."

Sudden shift

Ironically, Turkmenistan was easier to visit during the Soviet days, when Intourist expedited travel in the USSR. Created in 1929 by autocratic leader Joseph Stalin, the state travel agency was tasked with earning foreign exchange via tourism and making sure visitors (nearly all of them on closely supervised guided tours) only saw the best side of the Soviet Union.

With offices in London, New York and other foreign cities, Intourist lured travellers with striking posters and newspaper ads. Among the tours they offered in the 1930s was a 16-day Immemorial Cities of Turkestan journey that included a stop in 'flourishing Ashkhabad'.

Tourism grew slowly at first. But with the Cold War thawing in the 1980s, the USSR was attracting around four million tourists per year. The unraveling of the Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall offered a chance to increase visitation even more. Yet Turkmenistan didn't leap on the bandwagon. (Courtesy: cnn.com)

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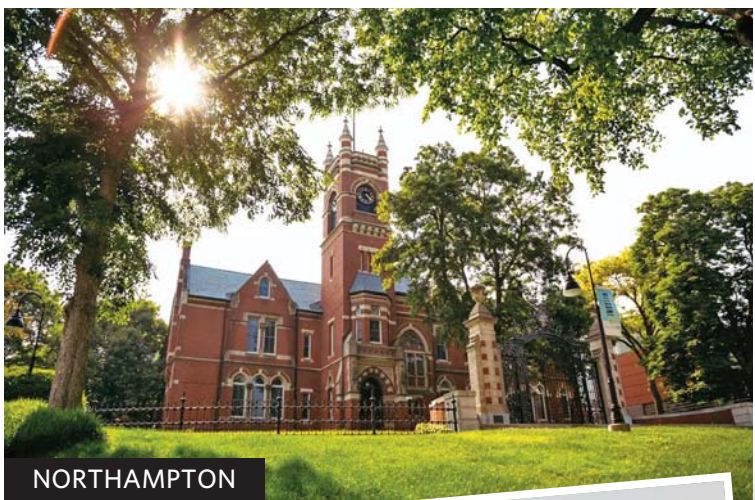
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For its annual list of 'America's Best Towns to Visit', CNN Travel editors considered hundreds of suggestions and winnowed the list to 10 by evaluating the finalists' attractions, food and beverage offerings, cultural and nightlife scenes, diversity, sense of identity, proximity to other interesting spots, and the 'wow factor', besides lodging options and ease of getting there.

Ranging in size, from about 15,000 residents to about 115,000, these destinations are spread across the country and capture the incredible variety that defines the United States — from history and natural beauty to culture and food. And they serve as reminders of what Americans do best - build towns and communities that add up to more than the sum of their parts.

Rapid City, South Dakota

Rapid City offers fly fishing and boundless opportunities to enjoy the natural world.

Taking a page from Mount Rushmore nearby, Rapid City leans into its 'City of Presidents' nickname with sculptures of nearly every US head of state on display downtown. This Black Hills hub is close to myriad natural wonders — from the Bad-

AMERICA'S MOST INTERESTING TOWNS BRING TOGETHER THE BEST OF A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. SURROUNDED BY STUNNING LANDSCAPES, PACKED WITH ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT AND EVOLVING WITH THE TASTES OF THE PEOPLE WHO SETTLE AND EXPLORE THEM, THESE DESTINATIONS SHOW OFF WHAT MAKES THE UNITED STATES SO DISTINCTIVE AND A BIG DRAW IN 2025

lands to the bison herd in Custer State Park – and it's a place to sample locally sourced walleye or bison and view Native American art. In this friendly Midwestern town, you can gather at Main Street Square for year-round events and then fan out onto its greenway and into the hills to see more of South Dakota's wonders.

Clarksdale, Mississippi

It's no surprise that this Mississippi Delta town — considered the cradle of the blues — is a year-round festival destination.

Clarksdale's musical identity has solidified in recent years, and now this small Deep South city entertains locals and visitors with more than a dozen music festivals, in addition to its core lineup of juke joints hosting live performances every day of the week. Locals embrace the city's 'gritty' character and its unvarnished charm. But new lodging and dining options are keeping things fresh, and local eats go beyond typical Southern soul-food fare to fold in Cajun and Creole flavours as well.

Northampton, Massachusetts

A coffee-drinking, bike-riding oasis, Northampton combines the charm of a village with big-city culture.

Long a welcoming haven for gays and lesbians, this western Massachusetts town is a regional destination for dining, shopping and concerts. It's also home to Smith College, a cornerstone of this town's reputation for new ideas and strong women. Regional rail trails make it a hub for biking, too. Founded by Puritans in 1654, Northampton is today a place to enjoy sinfully good pastries and bread.

Petaluma, California

Known for top-notch farm-to-table dining and historic architecture, Petaluma still shines from its Gold Rush boom.

This quirky Northern California town is perfectly situated for day trips to the coast, wine country and San Francisco. In town, you can run or walk along a trail by the Petaluma River past outdoor artwork or get out on the water for kayaking and paddleboarding. Once known as 'The World's Egg Basket', owing to the region's poultry farms, Petaluma offers boundless variety for foodies and beverages to complement any craving.

Annapolis, Maryland

Annapolis has long lured day-trippers from nearby Baltimore and DC for an outing on the Chesapeake Bay and a hearty meal of seafood.

But this picturesque waterfront city also offers a charming downtown whose narrow streets, brick sidewalks and Georgian buildings reflect its rich history as a colonial capital frequented by George Washington and other founding fathers. Throw in sailing cruises, a historic state house, the handsome US Naval Academy campus and bustling restaurants serving Maryland's trademark blue crabs, and you have all the ingredients for a memorable visit.



MISSOULA

Bend, Oregon

A remote getaway at the edge of the Cascade Mountains, Bend was named after that feature in the river that flows through town.

You can keep busy fishing and boating along the Deschutes and on dozens of lakes in the area, in addition to kayaking, biking, rock climbing and more. This big outdoor playground — with its "go-play-all-day energy" — tops things off with food trucks and fancier fare, live music and plenty of expertly crafted local beer.

Las Cruces, New Mexico

A sunny, moderate climate and stunning landscapes in every direction make Las Cruces ideal for outdoor activities nearly all year long.

If you're looking to hike, opportunities abound to the east in the Organ Mountains and northwest of town in the Robledo Mountains, where Prehistoric Trackways National Monument preserves tracks left by reptiles 280 million years ago. The second-largest city in New Mexico, Las Cruces still has the laid-back pace of a much smaller town, with a rich blend of Mexican, Native American and Western culture.

Asheville, North Carolina

For well over a century, Asheville has been drawing visitors looking for a restorative escape in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

America's largest home, the Biltmore House, was constructed here at the end of the 19th century as a

country retreat. Then last year, Hurricane Helene's destruction knocked Asheville off its stride. But the storm has unified this resilient community more than ever. And Asheville's mountain views, scenic trails, vibrant neighbourhoods, lively arts scene and delicious food and drinks are all still here for you to enjoy.

Missoula, Montana

Missoula sits at the confluence of four top rivers, and you may have caught a glimpse of this area in 'A River Runs Through It.'

More than ever, fly fishing is ingrained into the local way of life, and the water and surrounding wilderness offer boundless opportunities for adventure. This university town has become a hub for live music and world-class ceramics. A place to experience the American West, Missoula galleries also showcase a distinctive medium of Indigenous art.

Ithaca, New York

You don't have to go far to find a spectacular waterfall in this upstate New York college town.

The area around Ithaca is jam-packed with gorges and cascading falls, slicing through fertile land dotted with wineries and cider houses in the state's Finger Lakes region. In town, there's a lively farmers market and more cultural offerings than Ithaca's size would suggest. That's thanks in part to a large student population that adds layers of diversity to the town's homegrown offerings. Fans of geology, birding, music and more will find plenty to do here.

(Courtesy: cnn.com)

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