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SPOTLIGHT

Observer

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4

Royal Decree: Income tax from 2028

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No (56/2025) promulgating the Personal Income Tax Law, after the same was presented before the Council of Oman.

Article (1) states that the “Personal Income Tax Law”, attached to this decree, shall be enforced.

Article (2) stipulates that the Chairman of the Tax Authority shall issue the Executive Regulation of the law attached to this decree within one year of the date of publication of the same in the Official Gazette. The Chairman of the Tax Authority shall also issue the decisions necessary for the implementation of the Law’s provisions.

Article (3) cancels the clause (1) of the article (18-bis) of the Income Tax Law issued by Royal Decree No (28/2009). It also cancels all that contradicts the attached law or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from January 1, 2028. — ONA

IF A PERSON EARNS RO 3,501, ONLY RO 1 IS TAXED, RESULTING IN A DEDUCTION OF JUST 50 BAISAS.

99 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION IN OMAN WILL NOT BE SUBJECT TO THIS TAX, DUE TO HIGH THRESHOLD

GOVT TARGETS NON-OIL REVENUE TO CONTRIBUTE 15 PER CENT OF GDP BY 2030, AND 18 PER CENT BY 2040

OMAN BECOMES FIRST GCC STATE TO IMPLEMENT PERSONAL TAX IN GCC REGION

REVENUES FROM THIS TAX WILL BE DIRECTED IN PART TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

5% on an annual income of over RO 42,000

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

OMAN HAS issued a comprehensive new Personal Income Tax Law that will impose a 5 per cent tax on individuals whose annual income exceeds RO 42,000. The law, announced by the Tax Authority, marks a significant shift in the country’s fiscal policy and forms part of broader efforts to diversify state revenue streams. It will come into effect at the beginning of 2028.

The Personal Income Tax Law is

intended to complement the existing tax system in a manner that aligns with Oman’s economic and social context and the responsibilities assigned to the Tax Authority. The law is also a key component in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, especially the aim to diversify income sources and reduce reliance on oil revenues. The government targets non-oil revenue to contribute 15 per cent of GDP by 2030, and 18 per cent by 2040.

In addition, the law seeks to redistribute wealth among different segments of society, thereby promoting social justice. Revenues from this tax will be directed in part to support the



The tax serves as a new revenue stream to diversify public income sources...It will help maintain social and service spending while preserving stability

DR SAID
AL SAQRI

national social protection system.

Under the newly implemented income tax law, individuals earning more than RO 3,500 per month will be subject to a-5 per cent tax, but only on the amount exceeding that threshold. This means that if a person earns RO 3,501, only RO 1 is taxed, resulting in a deduction of just 50 baisas. The progressive structure ensures that the tax burden is minimal for those just above the threshold, while higher earners contribute more. The policy is designed to be equitable, targeting upper-income brackets without placing undue pressure on middle-income earners. TURN TO P2

HM discusses Iran-US confrontation with leaders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday made a telephone call with His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

During the phone call, they exchanged views on the worrying developments taking place in the region, emphasising the need for concerted efforts and intensified regional and international coordination to de-escalate tensions between the Iran and Israel to spare the region the scourge of crises and disasters and protect its people, facilities and assets.

They also expressed their rejection of the attacks launched by the US on Iranian territory, as they represent an escalation that hampers de-escalation efforts and increases tensions and potentially threatens security and stability of the entire region.

His Majesty the Sultan also received a phone call from Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia.

They addressed the rapidly escalating tensions and dangerous developments between Iran and Israel, as well as recent US intervention targeting Iranian facilities.

The urgent need to intensify regional and international efforts to halt this destructive conflict and establish pathways for dialogue and understanding was emphasised during the phone call. The telephonic discussions also underscored the

OMAN CONDEMNS US STRIKES ON IRAN

People attend a protest against the US attack on nuclear sites in Tehran on Sunday.— Reuters

A spokesperson from the Foreign Ministry has expressed profound concern and condemnation over the escalation caused by the US direct air strikes on targets within Iran. Oman denounces this unlawful act of aggression and urges immediate and comprehensive de-escalation.

The spokesperson warned that the US action risks widening the conflict and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter, which expressly prohibits the use of force and the infringement of state sovereignty. International law guarantees nations the right to pursue peaceful nuclear programmes under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The statement also emphasised that targeting nuclear facilities — prohibited under the Geneva Conventions due to the severe risks of radioactive contamination — further exacerbates the breach of global norms. — ONA

importance of safeguarding lives, preserving resources, and ensuring security and stability for all parties concerned.

His Majesty the Sultan also conducted telephone calls with President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt, President Emmanuel Macron of France, and Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the UK.

They addressed the dangerous escalation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel,

including the increasing frequency of attacks and their devastating consequences on civilian infrastructure and populations. Concerns were raised about the potential repercussions threatening the security and stability of the entire region. The recent US military strikes on sites within the Islamic Republic of Iran were also discussed, with warnings that such actions risk further tension and escalation. — ONA

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GREETINGS

HM GREET'S DUKE OF LUXEMBOURG

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Duke Henri of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on his country’s National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to Duke Henri, wishing his country further progress and prosperity. His Majesty lauded the advanced relations between Oman and Luxembourg, expressing his hope that these ties would further grow and prosper to serve the joint interests.

5 PER CENT ON AN ANNUAL INCOME OF OVER RO 42,000

FROM PI
According to Karima bint Mubarak al Saadiyah, Director of the Personal Income Tax Project, all preparations and requirements for implementation have been completed. The executive regulations of the law will be issued within one year from the law’s publication in the Official Gazette.

The Tax Authority has developed a digital system to support voluntary compliance, which is integrated with relevant institutions to ensure accurate income calculation and verification of submitted tax returns. The Authority has also strengthened its workforce and provided training aligned with the law’s requirements. In addition, guidance manuals will be issued for both individuals and legal entities according to a scheduled rollout plan, she said.

The Tax Authority has started a 30-day awareness campaign to educate the public on the newly implemented income tax law, which applies a-5 per cent tax on annual earnings above RO 42,000. The campaign will highlight how this measure supports economic diversification efforts and contributes to strengthening the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by reducing reliance on oil revenues and creating a more sustainable fiscal framework. The new legislation comprises 76

The study concluded that approximately 99 per cent of the population in Oman will not be subject to this tax, due to a carefully considered exemption threshold. The threshold of RO 42,000 is considered high, and the 5 per cent tax rate is relatively low.

considered exemption threshold. The threshold of RO 42,000 is considered high, and the-5 per cent tax rate is relatively low.

The law also includes deductions and exemptions that reflect Oman’s social values, such as exemptions related to education, healthcare, inheritance, zakat, charitable donations and primary housing.

The new legislation repeals Article 1 of the earlier income tax law issued under Royal Decree 28/2009, ensuring that the current framework is aligned with evolving economic needs and does not conflict with previous statutes.

In a move to strengthen enforcement and ensure transparency, the law grants the Tax Authority broader access to financial data. This includes the right to obtain information from both public and private entities, including banking records, contracts and financial statements relevant to individuals under review.

This legislative reform reflects Oman’s continued efforts to strengthen public finance, improve compliance, and align with international standards in financial disclosure and tax governance.

articles across 16 chapters, and outlines the legal, procedural, and financial frameworks governing the taxation of individuals engaged in commercial, industrial or professional activities.

The implementation of the tax law follows an extensive economic and social impact study, which was based on income data from various government sources. The study concluded that approximately 99 per cent of the population in Oman will not be subject to this tax, due to a carefully

No abnormal radiation detected: EA

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) confirmed that the environmental situation in the Sultanate of Oman is stable, and no indications of elevated radiation levels or any abnormal environmental impact have been recorded so far. It noted that it is closely monitoring recent developments related to the targeting of nuclear sites in the region, in light of the ongoing escalation and the potential transboundary environmental repercussions.

EA also confirmed that it is working within an integrated national system, in coordination



with the relevant authorities, to monitor and analyse environmental and radiation data in real-time. This is achieved through the radiation monitoring and early warning system deployed across the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to continuous connectivity with relevant regional and international centres.

EA indicated that its efforts are continuing to monitor and conduct 24/7 monitoring, based on its role in protecting the environment and ensuring the safety of humans and natural resources in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Muscat Governorate wraps up ‘All Oman’ initiative

MUSCAT GOVERNORATE on Sunday hosted the final round of ‘All Oman’ initiative, which aims to enhance community partnership and embody the national trend of decentralisation. The event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

The final round of the three-day initiative, held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, aims to enhance direct communication between Omani governorates and the parties entrusted with implementing Oman Vision 2040. It seeks to enlighten and empower the local community through meetings, visits and workshops to unify efforts for devising an integrated approach.

The Governor of Muscat said that ‘All Oman’ initiative represents a real opportunity to convert the goals of Oman Vision 2040 into tangible reality through open dialogue and joint action aimed to accommodate local initiatives in all governorates of Oman, leveraging the competitive advantages of the governorates in terms of investment, economic potential, social and cultural factors that set them apart.

He added that the realisation of development goals and the implementation of strategic plans can only be achieved through meetings that reflect the common government-private sector approach and



The ‘All Oman’ Initiative was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat

thinking linked to the needs of the local community.

For his part, Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, underscored the efforts made to ensure the success of ‘All Oman’ initiative, which toured all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. He also lauded the advanced level of cooperation shown by the local community and official institutions.

Al Jabri pointed out that the initiative embodies the spirit of community partnership, focusing on empowering local communities and enhancing the role of governorates in development.

The initiative’s activities included specialised, knowledge-transfer-oriented workshops aimed to build the capacity of the

governorate’s employees and target audience from various sectors, like planning, project management and the Vision’s follow-up offices.

In Muscat Governorate, ‘All Oman’ initiative included a youth meeting that showcased inspiring experiences and success stories of how young people overcame challenges and how they made tangible impacts in their respective fields through innovation.

The youth meeting served as a platform for dialogue among young people and contributed to their role as active partners in implementing the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by introducing development initiatives and projects and by engaging various segments of society. — ONA

EA starts a new project on baby turtles

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Environment Authority (EA) has initiated a new project at the Ras Al Hadd Turtle Reserve to track baby sea turtles, also known as hatchlings. This project involves monitoring the number of hatchlings emerging from nests and studying the factors that influence their migration towards the sea.

The project’s main objectives are to assess environmental interventions, create protection strategies, enhance national capabilities in environmental monitoring, and improve the database to support scientific research and decision-making.



Dr Mona al Tarshi, the project manager and Environment Ecosystem Specialist at the Environment Authority, explained to the Observer that the project aims to tag sea turtles and their nests to analyse nesting success rates. This involves

collecting data on nesting frequency, hatching rates, and environmental factors impacting turtle reproduction at the Turtle Reserve in Ras Al Jinz and Ras Al Hadd. Currently, the team is tagging turtles and numbering nesting sites, with hatchlings expected to emerge in the next 60 days. A typical sea turtle nest can contain 80 to 120 eggs, with the green turtle being the most common nester in Oman’s Ras Al Jinz and Ras Al Hadd areas.

Dr Mona mentioned that green turtle nests usually contain 90 to 110 eggs, with an average hatch rate of 70 per cent to 80 per cent under natural conditions. This results in approximately 60 to 90 hatchlings per nest, although

this number can vary based on environmental factors and threats like predation or flooding.

When asked if the study is limited to Sur, the project manager clarified that the current focus is on the coastal regions of Ras Al Jinz and Ras Al Hadd. However, she noted that similar studies could expand to other nesting sites in the future based on available resources and collaboration opportunities. In Oman, significant nesting sites for sea turtles include Masirah Island, known for being one of the largest nesting sites for loggerhead turtles, as well as Al Daymaniyat Islands, Ras Al Jinz and Ras Al Hadd.

SHORT TAKES



MAJLIS ASH'SHURA TO HOST COMMERCE MINISTER ON WEDNESDAY

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura will host Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Wednesday and Thursday, to deliver his ministry's statement in a public session.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He said: 'The council will discuss the statement of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at its 13th and 14th regular sessions. The ministry's statement will address six main topics, the two sectors' contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), the ministry's vision for the future of the industrial sector, the ministry's projects for the 2020-2023 period, an evaluation of free trade agreements, Nazdahir programme and the foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows.'

The statement will elaborate on the efforts being made by the ministry to develop digital platforms and national initiatives such as Invest in Oman and evaluate the results of economic agreements signed with GCC countries and other countries, Al Nadabi said.

Meanwhile, the Youth and Human Resources Committee of the Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday hosted Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and a number of specialists from the ministry, to discuss the ministry's efforts to empower and develop the national workforce in the energy and minerals sectors. The meeting was chaired by Younis bin Ali al Mandhari, Chairman of the Youth and Human Resources Committee.

OJT PARTNERS, UTAS GRADUATES FETED



About 20 institutions were honoured for their support in providing students with practical, real-world training experiences

MUSSANAH: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences – Al Mussanah (UTAS-Al Mussanah), through its Training and Career Guidance Center, hosted the second graduates gathering and recognition ceremony on June 19. Held under the auspices of Dr Munia bint Mohammed al Farsiyah, Deputy Assistant Vice-Chancellor for E-Systems and Student Services, the event recognised key partner institutions involved in the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Programme for the 2024-2025 academic year.

A total of 20 public and private sector institutions were honoured for their support in providing students with practical, real-world training experiences. Notably, the Royal Navy of Oman received special recognition for training over 100 students across the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 academic years, establishing itself as one of the university's most active OJT partners.

The gathering also brought together UTAS graduates currently employed at the Al Mussanah campus. The event provided a vibrant and engaging atmosphere, filled with graduate-led activities and entertainment that encouraged networking and connection among attendees.

In her address, Dr Al Farsi lauded the contributions of the partner institutions and stressed the importance of strengthening ties with the labour market to enhance student preparedness and align with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The ceremony concluded with the presentation of commemorative plaques and certificates of appreciation, reaffirming the university's commitment to building impactful partnerships and advancing training initiatives in step with national development goals.

SOHAR ALUMINIUM, ATHAR SIGN MoU TO BOOST HEALTHCARE

SUHAR: Sohar Aluminium on Sunday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Athar Healthcare Endowment Foundation to enhance cooperation in supporting priority health initiatives and projects in the Sultanate of Oman. This partnership aligns with joint efforts to promote the sustainability of healthcare services and contribute to the development of the health sector.

The agreement was signed

by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kharousi, Director-General of Human Resources and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, and Ali bin Hassan al Lawati, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Athar Foundation.

The MoU aims to establish a structured mechanism for directing donations and contributions within the framework of corporate social responsibility, supporting the establishment of sustainable healthcare projects based on clear

national priorities. It ensures the effective utilisation of available resources to maximise impact.

Under the agreement, both parties will evaluate requests submitted by various healthcare institutions based on precise criteria to determine funding priorities. They will also monitor the implementation of approved projects and conduct studies to assess their social impact, measuring their effectiveness and contribution to Oman's healthcare system. — ONA

MoH issues heat stress norms to protect workers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

AS TEMPERATURES rise during the summer months in the Sultanate of Oman, the risk of heat stress emerges as one of the most significant challenges facing outdoor work environments, particularly at construction sites and open project areas.

In this context, the Ministry of Health (MoH), has launched an awareness initiative titled 'Safe Summer', aimed at raising awareness among employers and workers about the dangers of heat stress and ways to prevent it.

This initiative reflects the commitment of the concerned authorities to safeguard the health and safety of workers. As part of the campaign, the Ministry of Health issued a set of general recommendations that employers must adhere to in order to reduce the risk of heat stress.

These include implementing smart work schedules by assigning strenuous tasks during the early morning or late afternoon hours, and prohibiting outdoor work during peak heat periods specifically from 12.30 pm to 3.30 pm during the months of June, July and August.

Authorities also emphasised the importance of providing regular breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas. Rest periods should last between 45 to 60 minutes when working in a hot environment. Additionally, workers should have access to drinking water and hydration materials to help



maintain body hydration and replace lost fluids.

In terms of improving the working environment, the recommendations stress the use of air conditioning or fans in indoor workspaces, as well as portable fans and umbrellas in outdoor areas, to help reduce surrounding temperatures.

The campaign also underscores the importance of increasing awareness through training workers to recognise the signs of heat stress and respond appropriately. Educational materials including posters, brochures and short videos should be available at worksites. Furthermore, employers are advised to monitor daily temperature and humidity levels and to

identify high-risk groups such as individuals with diabetes, heart conditions, or those taking diuretics, giving them priority in protective measures.

HEAT STRESS

To better understand the health impacts of heat stress, the Observer spoke to Dr Muna Mohammed, an Emergency Medicine Specialist, who emphasised that heat stress is not limited to fatigue or exhaustion it can escalate into severe conditions such as heatstroke, which may lead to unconsciousness or organ failure if not treated immediately. She added that it is crucial for workers to recognise early warning signs such as excessive sweating, dizziness, muscle cramps and blurred vision. If any of these symptoms appear, the worker should be moved to a shaded, well-ventilated area and provided with water. If symptoms do not improve, emergency services should be contacted right away.

Dr Muna affirmed that the measures adopted by the authorities in Oman reflect advanced public health awareness. She stressed the importance of cooperation between employers and health agencies to mitigate the risks of heat stress and ensure the safety of the workforce.

Through this campaign, the Ministry of Health calls on all public and private institutions to comply with the recommendations and conduct ongoing awareness efforts, especially during the summer months when heat stress cases are more common.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2025 from July 15

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is preparing to launch 'Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival,' scheduled to run from July 15 to August 30.

A preparatory meeting, held in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar on Sunday, discussed the organisational and logistical plans for the festival. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Sultan bin Mansour al Ghufaili, Wali of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, along with representatives from government and private entities, civil society organisations and event operators.

The upcoming edition of the festival will feature a range of tourism, entertainment and cultural activities that highlight the unique natural and climatic features of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, reinforcing its status as a premier summer destination for visitors from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting also emphasised enhancing institutional coordination among stakeholders to ensure a well-organised festival that meets visitors' expectations. Discussions also covered improving the overall tourist experience, reviewing event site readiness, infrastructure plans, health monitoring, and visitor flow management, along



A preparatory meeting was held to discuss the logistical plans for the festival

with all supporting services.

A visual presentation was given summarising the outcomes of the 2024 Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Summer Festival, including visitor numbers, hotel occupancy rates and community engagement levels. This step aims to build on past successes and achieve greater economic and tourism impact this year.

Additionally, the meeting outlined various planned activities, including theatrical performances, entertainment

programmes, sports events and cultural showcases.

A special presentation introduced the 'Gulf Knights Forum,' a new addition to this year's festival, targeting equestrian enthusiasts from GCC countries. The forum will feature heritage and competitive programmes, enriching the festival's regional appeal and fostering cultural exchange.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2025 aligns with Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's efforts to boost

domestic tourism, stimulate economic activity and create temporary employment opportunities by supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and local producers, offering them participation and promotional opportunities.

The governorate is also promoting summer events through its 'Our Summer is Cool' campaign, which highlights the temperate climate and tourist attractions of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

— ONA

SPOTLIGHT



NO
MORE
CRANKY,
JUST
ENJOY

PLAN AND BOOK
SMART

PACK ESSENTIALS
THOUGHTFULLY

PREPARE KIDS
MENTALLY

STAY CALM AND
LEAD BY EXAMPLE

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AIR TRAVEL with children is often seen as a daunting experience, especially for parents navigating cramped cabins, ear-popping pressure and restless little ones. But with proper preparation and a dose of patience, flying with kids can become a smooth, even enjoyable journey. As more Omani families take to the skies — be it for tourism, family visits, or medical travel — the importance of knowing how to travel wisely with children has never been greater.

Success begins even before reaching the airport. Booking flights during the early morning hours, when children are typically well-rested, can lead to better moods and fewer meltdowns.

Selecting front-row seats or those closer to restrooms also makes the journey more manageable.

According to Ameena al Rawahi, a senior flight attendant with over a decade of experience, “Families who contact the airline in advance to request a bassinet or special child meals generally have a much easier time. We are here to help — but early coordination is key to a peaceful flight.”

Packing a smart carry-on is equally important. A well-equipped bag with essentials like favourite toys, colouring books, snacks, wet wipes and a change of clothes can make all the difference.

For infants, using a pacifier or bottle during take-off and landing helps relieve ear pressure. Paediatric consultant Dr Laila al Ghailani adds, “Simple items like chewy candy or gum for older kids can help balance ear pressure. Keeping children occupied is not just about entertainment — it’s about reducing anxiety and ensuring a calmer flight for everyone.”

Preparing children mentally for the journey helps ease anxiety. Introducing the idea of flying through child-friendly videos or storybooks can make the concept less intimidating.

Fatma Abdullah, a mother of three, shares, “Before each trip, I create a story around flying. We talk about

clouds, pilots and airplane sounds. By the time we board, my kids are more excited than scared — and that makes all the difference.”

Time management plays a crucial role. Arriving early allows time for check-in, security and boarding without rushing. Many airports, including Muscat International, offer children’s play areas where little ones can expend energy before boarding.

Once on board, spacing out toys and activities throughout the flight keeps children engaged and prevents boredom. For older kids, pre-loaded tablets with games or cartoons work well — just don’t depend on in-flight Wi-Fi.

Perhaps most importantly, the behaviour of parents often sets the tone. Calm, communicative parents tend to have calmer children. Yousuf al Balushi, a ground service agent at Muscat International Airport, observes, “When parents are cooperative and prepared, it’s easier for us to provide support. We offer early boarding and direct them to family services, but it all works better when the parents are composed.”

Of course, there are common challenges parents may face.

Crying infants are often responding to ear pressure or discomfort, so feeding during take-off and landing can help. Overactive toddlers should be allowed to move within limits, with gentle guidance. If fatigue or jet lag is an issue, creating a calm in-flight environment with blankets and quiet-time routines may help. After landing, avoid rushing off the plane. Take your time gathering belongings — especially those toys or electronics that made the flight easier. Let airport staff know if extra assistance is needed.

Flying with children doesn’t have to be a nerve-wracking experience. With thoughtful planning, a positive mindset and the right tools, air travel can become a meaningful and joyful family experience.

As one mother eloquently put it: “When you travel with children, you’re not just carrying their luggage — you’re carrying their world. Make it safe, fun and unforgettable.”



Keeping children occupied is not just about entertainment — it’s about reducing anxiety and ensuring a calmer flight for everyone.

DR LAILA AL GHAILANI
Paediatric consultant

SHORT TAKES



People take part in a solidarity march in support of the government’s actions in its recent border dispute with Thailand, in Phnom Penh. — AFP

CAMBODIA PM ORDERS HALT TO FUEL IMPORTS FROM THAILAND

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia’s prime minister said on Sunday the country would halt all fuel imports from neighbour Thailand, as tensions escalate over an ongoing border dispute. The nations have been at loggerheads since a Cambodian soldier was killed last month as troops exchanged fire in a disputed area known as the Emerald Triangle, where the borders of both countries and Laos meet.

“Starting from midnight tonight, all fuel and gas imports from Thailand will be halted,” Cambodian leader Hun Manet wrote on social media. He said energy companies would be able to “import sufficiently from other sources to meet domestic fuel and gas demands” in the country. Thailand has placed restrictions on several border checkpoints citing “national security”, and on Sunday Cambodia closed two crossings in retaliation.

In statements issued on Sunday, Cambodia’s foreign ministry urged citizens not to travel to Thailand unnecessarily, while Thailand’s consular affairs department warned Thais in Cambodia to avoid “protest areas”. The border spat has triggered political turmoil in Thailand after a phone call between leaders was leaked, prompting domestic criticism of Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra’s conduct. — AFP



WINDS FUEL CROATIA WILDFIRES

ZAGREB: Firefighters in southern Croatia were on high alert on Sunday in fear that expected strong winds could rekindle blazes in the Balkan nation. Crews, with the help of water bombers, managed to get control on Saturday over wildfires on the southern Adriatic coast, after a series of blazes started in recent days.

The fires, near Croatia’s second largest city Split, that started on Saturday morning close to the coastal village of Pisak was put under control but were still smoldering. They have burnt 300 hectares and dozen of houses, authorities said.

According to the Split-Dalmatia county firefighting commander, Ivan Kovacevic during the night several small fires were put down by the firefighters. — AFP

Israeli army recovers bodies in Gaza

GAZA: The Israeli military said on Sunday that it had recovered the bodies of three hostages in Gaza more than 20 months after they were abducted by Hamas fighters. “In a special operation... the bodies of the hostages Ofra Keidar, Yonatan Samerano and Staff Sergeant Shay Levinson were recovered from the Gaza Strip yesterday,” the military said in a statement.

Following the news, the forum repeated their frequent calls for the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza, writing on social media: “The hostages have no time. We must bring them ALL home, Now!”. The attack by Palestinian group Hamas on Israel in October 2023 resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people,

mostly civilians, according to a tally based on official figures. Of the 251 hostages seized during the assault, 49 are still held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel’s retaliatory military campaign against Hamas has killed at least 55,908 people, mostly civilians, according to the Gaza health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The UN considers these figures reliable. On Sunday, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog called for the “urgent release” of the remaining hostages after the United States carried out strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Meanwhile, Gaza is suffering from famine-like conditions according to UN agencies in the region following

KEY BANGLADESH PARTY FILES CASE ON ALLEGED ELECTION RIGGING

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s leading political party filed a case on Sunday against former election commissioners it accuses of rigging past polls to keep now-ousted autocrat Sheikh Hasina in power. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) said it had lodged a complaint against 19 people including Hasina, who fled in August following weeks of protest against her rule.

“We have brought allegations of violating the constitution, breaching the electoral code of

conduct, assisting a political party to win despite holding government positions, unleashing a reign of terror, and falsely declaring candidates as winners despite their failure to secure enough votes,” Salauddin Khan, a senior BNP leader, told reporters. The BNP claimed Hasina’s election wins in 2014, 2018 and 2024 were achieved through repressive actions against opposition parties.

Among those named in its case lodged at a Dhaka police station

are three former top election commissioners — Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, KM Nurul Huda and Kazi Habibul Awal. Other officials accused by the BNP include more election commissioners, commission secretaries, senior police and intelligence officials, and Hasina’s interior minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. The party alleged that despite repeated requests to the election commission, no steps were taken over the years to ensure a level playing field. — AFP

Ukraine army chief vows to expand strikes on Russia

UKRAINE’S top military commander vowed to increase the “scale and depth” of strikes on Russia in remarks made public on Sunday, saying Kyiv would not sit idly by while Moscow prolonged its three-year war. Diplomatic efforts to end the war have stalled in recent weeks. The last direct meeting between the two sides was almost three weeks ago and no follow-up talks have been scheduled.

Russian attacks on Ukraine have killed dozens of people during the interim, including in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, according to officials. “We will not just sit in defence. Because this brings nothing and eventually leads to the fact that we still retreat, lose people and territories,” Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky told reporters.

Syrsky said Ukraine would continue its strikes on Russian military targets, which he said had proved “effective”. “Of course, we will continue. We will increase the scale and depth,” he said. Ukraine has launched retaliatory strikes on Russia throughout the war, targeting energy and military infrastructure sometimes hundreds of kilometres from the front line. Kyiv says the

Ukraine has launched retaliatory strikes on Russia throughout the war, targeting energy and military infrastructure sometimes hundreds of kilometres from the front line. Kyiv says the strikes are a fair response to deadly Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and civilians



Rescuers stand in front of a damaged building following a Russian strike in Kramatorsk, Ukraine. — AFP

strikes are a fair response to deadly Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and civilians.

In wide-ranging remarks, Syrsky also conceded that Russia had some advantages in drone warfare, particularly in making fibre-optic drones that are tethered and difficult to jam. “Here, unfortunately, they have an

advantage in both the number and range of their use,” he said. He also claimed that Ukraine still held 90 square kilometres (35 square miles) of territory in Russia’s Kursk region, where Kyiv launched an audacious cross-border incursion last August. “These are our pre-emptive actions in response to a possible enemy offensive,” he said. — AFP



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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
(PRE-24-192)	Redressing Data Center (Re-Call-2)	01/07/2025	13/07/2025
(PRE-25-042)	Consultancy Services to provide Periodical Guideline to Evaluate Rental Prices for various types of units & uses in Muscat Governorate (Re-Call-1)	29/06/2025	07/07/2025
(PRE-25-064)	Development of residential area in Al Wadi Al Kabir (Re-Call-1)	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-079)	Construction and Maintenance of Roads side protections (Riprap, Gabions and Kerbs) (Unit Rate)	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-080)	Renewal Kaspersky Enterprise Antivirus Solution	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-081)	Supply & Installation of Lighting for the Green Walk Project	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-082)	Construction of the Public Park in Al Qurum	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-083)	Material Testing for Muscat Municipality Projects	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-084)	Renewal of Annual Maintenance Contract for IT Firewalls	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
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(PRE-25-086)	Legal Consultancy Services for Reviewing the Unified Municipal System Project Contract	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-087)	Consultancy Services for Supervision of "Beautification of MBD Area" Project	11/07/2025	03/08/2025
(PRE-25-088)	Maintenance of Road Safety Barriers and Impact Attenuators (Unit Rate)	11/07/2025	03/08/2025

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US hits Iran nuclear sites; Tehran pummels Israel

‘Dangerous escalation’: World reacts to US strikes

The United States struck three nuclear sites in Iran on Sunday, joining Israel’s bombing campaign after days of speculation over US involvement in the conflict. Here is a roundup of the key reactions:

◆ **EU: ‘Step back’**
The European Union’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas called for de-escalation and a return to negotiations. “I urge all sides to step back, return to the negotiating table and prevent further escalation,” Kallas wrote on X, adding that that EU foreign ministers would discuss the situation.

◆ **Russia: ‘Irresponsible’ strikes**
Russia “strongly condemned” the bombings, calling them “irresponsible” and a “gross violation of international law”. “A dangerous escalation has begun, fraught with further undermining of regional and global security,” the Russian foreign ministry added.

◆ **UN: ‘Dangerous escalation’**
UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the strikes a “dangerous escalation in a region already on the edge”. “There is no military solution. The only path forward is diplomacy. The only hope is peace,” Guterres said.

◆ **Britain: ‘Stability is priority’**
UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called on Iran to “return to the negotiating table and reach a diplomatic solution to end this crisis”. Starmer stressed that “stability in the region is a priority”.

◆ **France: ‘Exercise restraint’**
French President Emmanuel Macron

has called a meeting of the country’s defence council for Sunday. France is urging “all parties to exercise restraint to avoid any escalation that could lead to an extension of the conflict”, Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot posted on X.

◆ **China: ‘Cease fire’**
China’s foreign ministry said it “strongly condemns” the US strikes, warning that they “escalate tensions in the Middle East”. “China calls on all parties to the conflict, especially Israel, to cease fire as soon as possible,” the ministry said.

◆ **Pope Leo XIV: ‘Crying out for peace’**
Pope Leo XIV said after the strikes that “humanity is crying out for peace” and called for an end to all wars. “Each member of the international community has the moral responsibility to end the tragedy of war, before it becomes an irreparable chasm,” Leo said.

◆ **Saudi Arabia: ‘Exercise restraint’**
Saudi Arabia expressed “great concern” after the strikes on its neighbour, the “sisterly Islamic Republic of Iran”. “The Kingdom underscores the need to exert all possible efforts to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and avoid further escalation”.

◆ **Pakistan: ‘Violate international law’**
Pakistan said that the US attacks “violate all norms of international law”. “We are gravely concerned at the possible further escalation of tensions in the region,” Pakistan’s foreign ministry said. — AFP



Israeli security forces gather at the site of an Iranian strike that hit a residential neighbourhood. — AFP

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said US air strikes on Sunday “totally obliterated” Iran’s main nuclear sites, with Tehran later accusing Washington of “blowing up” talks aimed at a deal on its nuclear programme. Following the attack — the United States’ first large-scale strikes on Iran — Trump warned Washington would hit more targets if Tehran did not make peace. Hours later, Iran launched two waves of attacks against long-time foe Israel.

“Tonight, I can report to the world that the strikes were a spectacular military success,” Trump said, adding the key underground enrichment site at Fordo was hit, along with facilities in Isfahan and Natanz. “Iran’s key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated. Iran the bully of the Middle East must now make peace,” he said, warning future attacks would be “far greater” unless a diplomatic solution was reached. “Remember, there are many targets left.”

Trump’s intervention — despite his past pledges to avoid another “forever war” — threatens to dramatically widen the conflict, after Israel launched an unprecedented bombing campaign on Iran last week, with Tehran vowing to retaliate if Washington



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi speaks during a press conference at the Lutfi Kirdar Congress Center, in Istanbul. — AFP

joined in.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi accused the United States of sabotaging diplomacy after talks with European powers. “This week, we held talks with the E3/EU when the US decided to blow up that diplomacy,” he wrote on X.

Araghchi later told reporters in Istanbul the United States and Israel had “crossed a very big red line”, asserting Iran would continue to defend itself “by all means necessary”. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the US strikes, saying Trump’s decision to “target Iran’s nuclear facilities with the



US President Donald Trump addresses the nation, from the White House in Washington. — AFP

US strikes on Iran senseless and reckless, says ICAN

GENEVA: The United States’ military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities is “senseless and reckless”, the head of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons said on Sunday. “By joining Israel’s attack on Iran, the US is also breaking international law. Military action against Iran is not the way to resolve concerns over Tehran’s nuclear programme,” ICAN’s Executive Director Melissa Parke said in a statement. “Given that US intelligence agencies assess Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons, this is a senseless and reckless act that could undermine international efforts to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear

weapons.”

Geneva-based ICAN won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its key role in drafting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which took effect in 2021. Some 69 countries have ratified it to date, four more have directly acceded to the treaty and another 25 have signed it.

“The US should have continued to pursue the diplomatic process under way before Israel resorted to the illegal use of force. This does not make the region or the world safer. It makes it more dangerous,” Parke said. “Striking nuclear installations is explicitly banned under international law and risks causing radioactive

contamination harmful to human health and the environment. The US must stop all military action and return to the diplomatic path.”

In its flagship annual report on June 13 — the day Israel began its strikes on Iran — ICAN said nuclear armed states spent more than \$100 billion on their atomic arsenals last year.

ICAN said Britain, China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia and the United States together spent nearly \$10 billion more than in 2023. The United States spent \$56.8 billion in 2024, followed by China at \$12.5 billion, Britain at \$10.4 billion, Russia at \$8.1 billion and France at \$6.9 billion, said ICAN. — AFP



Protesters hold placards condemning the US attacks on Iran during a protest, in Seoul. — AFP



An Iranian woman lifts a national flag during a rally protesting the US attack, in Tehran. — AFP

OPINION

Income tax to diversify economy, shore up social protection



EDITORIAL

OMAN is on the cusp of a significant shift in its tax landscape with the introduction of a personal income tax (PIT). This move, a first for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, aims to diversify the country’s revenue streams and reduce its reliance on oil revenues.

The introduction of personal income tax in Oman is a strategic move to diversify revenue streams and address economic challenges. While it may present some challenges, it also reflects Oman’s commitment to aligning its tax regime with global standards and fostering economic growth.

The Personal Income Tax Law, as per Royal Decree No 56/2025, consisting of 76 articles distributed across 16 chapters, stipulates a 5 per cent tax on the taxable income of natural persons whose gross annual income exceeds RO 42,000, derived from specific income types as defined by the law.

The law also includes deductions and exemptions accounting for social considerations in the Sultanate of Oman, such as education, healthcare, inheritance, zakat, donations, primary housing and other factors.

The Tax Authority said that the Personal Income Tax Law complements the tax system in line with Oman’s economic and social conditions and aligns with the role assigned to the Tax Authority. It also contributes to the objectives of ‘Oman Vision 2040’ by diversifying income sources and reducing reliance on oil revenues, with targets of 15 per cent of GDP by 2030 and 18 per cent by 2040. Additionally, the tax aims to promote wealth redistribution among societal segments, enhancing social justice, while supporting the state budget and specifically financing part of the social protection system.

The implementation follows an in-depth study assessing its economic and social impact, with approximately 99 per cent of Oman’s population expected to be exempt. The executive regulations of the law will be issued within a year of its publication in the Official Gazette. An electronic system has been developed to promote voluntary compliance, linked with relevant departments for accurate income calculation and verification.

The initial plans for an income tax were announced in 2020. The draft proposals

Following a comprehensive impact study, about 99 per cent of Oman’s population will be exempt from the new tax

suggested a tax rate ranging from 5 per cent to 9 per cent for Omani citizens and expatriates. However, the implementation date has been repeatedly postponed.

With all necessary preparations and requirements for implementing the tax completed, the executive regulations of the law will be issued within one year of its publication in the Official Gazette. An electronic system has been developed by the Tax Authority to promote voluntary compliance and has been linked with the departments concerned to ensure accurate income calculation and verification of tax declarations. The Tax Authority has also strengthened its workforce through specialised training programmes in line with the tax implementation requirements. Additionally, guidance manuals for natural and legal persons will be published according to a predetermined schedule.

Oman’s move to introduce a personal income tax sets it apart from other GCC countries, which currently do not have a personal income tax.

While Oman is introducing a personal income tax, it already has a corporate tax framework in place.

More microplastics in glass bottles than plastic: study

REBECCA FRASQUET

Drinks including water and soda sold in glass bottles contain more microplastics than those in plastic bottles, according to a surprising study released by France’s food safety agency on Friday.

Researchers have detected tiny, mostly invisible pieces of plastic throughout the world, from in the air we breathe to the food we eat, as well as riddled throughout human bodies.

There is still no direct evidence that this preponderance of plastic is harmful to human health, but a burgeoning field of research is aiming to measure its spread.

Guillaume Duflos, research director at French food safety agency ANSES, said the team sought to “investigate the quantity of microplastics in different types of drinks sold in France and examine the impact different containers can have”.

The researchers found an average of around 100 microplastic particles per litre in glass bottles of soft drinks, lemonade and iced tea. That was five to 50 times higher than the rate detected in plastic bottles or metal cans.

“We expected the opposite result,” PhD student Iseline Chaïb, who conducted the research, said.

“We then noticed that in the glass, the particles emerging from the samples were the same shape, colour and polymer composition — so, therefore, the same plastic — as the paint on the outside of the caps that seal the glass bottles,” she said.

The paint on the caps also had “tiny scratches, invisible to the eye, probably due to friction between the caps when there were stored,” the agency said in a statement.

This could then “release particles onto the surface of the caps”, it added.

For water, both flat and sparkling, the amount of microplastic was relatively low in all cases, ranging from 4.5 particles per litre in glass bottles to 1.6 particles in plastic.

Duflos said the reason for this discrepancy “remains to be explained”.

Soft drinks however contained around 30 microplastics per litre, lemonade 40 and spirits around 60. Because there is no reference level for a potentially toxic amount of microplastics, it was not possible to say whether these figures represent a health risk, ANSES said.

But drink manufacturers could easily reduce the amount of microplastics shed by bottle caps, it added. The agency tested a cleaning method involving blowing the caps with air, then rinsing them with water and spirits, which reduced contamination by 60 per cent. The study released by ANSES was published online in the Journal of Food Composition and Analysis last month. — AFP

Skillful negotiation is the need of the hour

EVERY student who has ever attended a mock United Nations knows this – negotiations are never zero-sum games with all or nothing gains and losses. As the word suggests, negotiation itself means to talk and arrive at the best possible outcome for the parties involved.

In today’s uncertain time of international and regional conflicts, negotiations are the need of the hour.

The word ‘negotiate’ originates from the Latin word ‘negotiari’, meaning “to do business or trade”, although the act of negotiation goes further back than its Latin roots.

According to researcher John Graham, humans used “collective imaginations and their long-term relationships to survive and develop even better ways to live”.

An important early text on negotiation is the famous treatise ‘The Art of War’ by the Chinese Sun Tzu. In it, the skills of understanding the opposition, the art of listening, building rapport, and reaching a compromise are seen to be essential when interacting at a negotiating table.

Later works of the Indian strategist Chanakya and the Italian Machiavelli similarly emphasised prioritising one’s state above all, and maintaining open information corridors throughout any confrontation.

In the 20th century, businesses have focused on conducting negotiations to get a better economic or trade deal. The impactful book ‘Never Split the Difference’ by Chris Voss outlines the various stages of negotiations and comments on important points of ‘identifying the black swan’ and ‘creating the illusion of control’ as central to this powerful conversation.

In the geostrategic world, negotiation is key to sustaining



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

relationships between nation-states.

There are many historical examples where the right people have signed off on the right deal and saved the suffering of a mass of humanity. These include the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which re-created the map of Europe, and the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which recognised the United States. The Korean Armistice of 1953 effectively ended the Korean War, and the Taif Agreement of 1989 united competing Lebanese factions.

All of these agreements followed intense negotiations between warring parties but eventually introduced a peaceful era, however marred by sporadic violence.

According to those in the business of political negotiations, there are crucial factors to consider before finalising a political treaty.

Dr Kastner, a professor of international law, suggests

that four factors are central to successful negotiation: having clear stakeholders, a trusted mediator, and identifying the right time when all parties concerned are ready.

The fourth criterion is the most important. It clarifies that negotiators need to understand the concept of the peace to which they are aiming. Peace could be seen in different ways by all parties. While most of us understand it as the end of conflict, this is rarely the case. Most often, negotiations point to potential peace in the long run, but they set the stage for it.

With Oman as a central negotiator in the current regional conflict, the complexities of negotiations need to be understood by even the layperson, so that the aspiration for peace is mutually understood by all stakeholders, which includes everybody who is impacted by regional political strife.

Honouring the pillar of strength and love



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The write is author, translator and a communications professional

A long time ago, a child was born into a world of questions. And once upon a day, there was a man who carried the sky. He did not wear armour or have a sword. He didn't chase applause or seek the spotlight. Instead, he woke up every morning, laced up his worn-out shoes, and silently lifted the weight of the world for the people he loved. This is just one story of a man called Father.

In truth, every father writes a different kind of story, but each one is built on the same foundation: love, sacrifice and a deep desire to see their children thrive. It is often said that there is a certain poetry to fatherhood, not always spoken in words, but written in actions.

A father's love doesn't always come wrapped in hugs or expressed through flowery speech. Sometimes, it arrives in the form of a packed lunchbox, a well-timed lecture you didn't know you needed, or a hand on your back when the world feels too heavy. He teaches not by preaching, but by doing. Not by shouting, but by showing. He is the compass in a storm, the lighthouse that stands firm even when the waves crash hardest.

Fathers are the architects of the unseen.

They build safety out of silence, and strength out of softness. You might not always notice it, but he is always there, holding up the roof when the storms hit.

Often, a father is the midnight mechanic, the on-call comedian and the human GPS. He gives advice during car rides and imparts life lessons over lunch breaks. Fathers don't live forever, but their influence does. It is reflected in the way we speak, love, build and dream. It shows in how we stand tall during moments of doubt, and in the kindness we offer to those who need it. The legacy of a good father becomes part of who we are.

To every child, a father is the first giant you ever meet. He throws you into the air not to scare you, but to teach you trust. He stands behind your first steps, your first stumbles, your first heartbreaks, close enough to catch you, far enough to let you grow. Though the giant may seem to shrink as we grow taller, his love never does.

Fatherhood takes many forms: biological dads, stepfathers, adoptive dads, grandfathers, uncles, mentors, even older brothers who step up and take on a parental role. So when we commemorate Father's Day on June 21, we honour all those who provide guidance, protection and love.

Father's Day is a heartfelt celebration to recognise and appreciate the vital role fathers and father figures play in our lives. More than just a time for cards and gifts, it is a moment to reflect on the sacrifices, wisdom and love they have given us throughout our lives.

Father's Day dates back over a century. It was first observed in the United States thanks to Sonora Smart Dodd, who wanted to honour her father, a single parent who raised six children. Inspired by Mother's Day, she advocated for a similar celebration of fathers. The first official Father's Day was celebrated in Washington State in 1910 and was declared a national holiday in the US in 1972.

Father's Day is a heartfelt celebration to recognise and appreciate the vital role fathers and father figures play in our lives. More than just a time for cards and gifts, it is a moment to reflect on the sacrifices, wisdom and love they have given us throughout our lives.

Whether your father is still with you or lives on in your memories, Father's Day is a time to honour his impact. It's a day to say thank you for the protection offered, the lessons taught and the unconditional love given.

To the stepdads, granddads, foster dads, big brothers and uncles. To the men who stood in the shadows so we could walk in the light, and to those who never asked to be heroes but became one anyway. We see you. We remember. We carry you with us. You are all remembered in the stories we tell, the lives we lead and the love that echoes forever.

Bombing Iran, Trump gambles on force over diplomacy

SHAUN TANDON

For nearly a half-century the United States has squabbled with Iran's Islamic Republic but the conflict has largely been left in the shadows, with US policymakers believing, often reluctantly, that diplomacy was preferable.

With President Donald Trump's order of strikes on Iran's nuclear sites, the United States -- like Israel, which encouraged him -- has brought the conflict into the open, and the consequences may not be clear for some time to come.

"We will only know if it succeeded if we can get through the next three to five years without the Iranian regime acquiring nuclear weapons, which they now have compelling reasons to want," said Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst and supporter of the 2003 Iraq war who is now vice president for policy at the Middle East Institute.

US intelligence had not concluded that Iran was building a nuclear bomb, with Tehran's sensitive atomic work largely seen as a means of leverage, and Iran can be presumed to have taken precautions in anticipation of strikes.

Trita Parsi, an outspoken critic of military action, said Trump "has now made it more likely that Iran will be a nuclear weapons state in the next five to 10 years." "We should be careful not to confuse tactical success with strategic success," said Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

"The Iraq war was also successful in the first few weeks but President Bush's declaration of 'Mission Accomplished' did not age well," he said.

Yet Trump's attack -- a week after Israel began a major military campaign -- came as the cleric-run state is at one of its weakest points since the 1979 Islamic revolution toppled the pro-Western shah.

Since the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Hamas, which enjoys Iran's support, Israel -- besides obliterating much of Gaza -- has decimated Lebanon's Hezbollah, a militant group that would once reliably strike Israel as Tehran's proxy.

Iran's main ally among Arab leaders, Syria's Bashar al-Assad, was also toppled in December.

Supporters of Trump's strike argued that diplomacy was not working, with Iran standing firm on its right to enrich uranium.

"Contrary to what some will say in the days to come, the US administration did not rush to war. In fact, it gave diplomacy a real chance," said Ted Deutch, a former Democratic congressman.

Top Senate Republican John Thune pointed to Tehran's threats to Israel and language against the United States and said that the state had "rejected all diplomatic pathways to peace." Trump's attack comes almost exactly a decade after former president Barack Obama sealed a deal in which Iran drastically scaled back its nuclear work -- which Trump pulled out of in 2018 after coming into office for his first term.

Most of Trump's Republican Party and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, who has long seen Iran as an existential threat, attacked Obama's deal because it allowed Tehran to enrich uranium at levels well beneath weapons grade and the key clauses had an end date. — AFP

We have no idea where this war will go

AFTER days of publicly mulling whether to join Israel in its military campaign against Iran, President Trump directed the US military on Saturday to execute a complex attack on three of the nation's nuclear sites with several American warplanes and submarines.

Hours later, Trump declared the mission a "spectacular military success," saying during a national address from the White House that US forces had "completely and totally obliterated," Iran's nuclear programme. "There's no military in the world that could have done what we did tonight, not even close," he said, standing in front of Vice-President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth.

It may appear like a tactical victory less than four hours after the bombs began to fall, but projecting any sense of finality about this ordeal is wildly premature.

The nuclear sites in Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan may be lying in rubble. But whether Tehran will be unable to rehabilitate its nuclear programme remains an open question. And what will Iran do in return? If the more than 40,000 American troops and personnel in the Middle East are attacked, will the Trump administration try to topple the political establishment in Tehran? Any one of these questions could have complicated answers with disastrous consequences for the US and its allies throughout the Middle East. Trump doesn't see it that way. "There will be either peace, or there will be tragedy for Iran far greater than we have witnessed over the last eight days," he said, referring to Israeli air strikes. "Remember, there are many targets left."

Trump's decision holds the potential to transform not only his presidency but US standing overseas as well. He was elected to the White House on a platform of turning away from foreign conflicts with nebulous goals. A little more than seven months later, he's brought the US military directly into conflict with Iran in an act of war that was meticulously planned and detailed but entirely



A protester with a US dollar note taped over her mouth participates in a demonstration in support of Iran and Palestinians, and against the actions of Israel and the US, in Sydney on Sunday. — AFP

unauthorised by Congress. The president chose to launch these attacks against Iran by choice, not necessity. Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's director of national intelligence, testified in March that Iran had a stock of enriched material but had not decided to make a nuclear weapon. (She has since said her comments were taken out of context and estimated Iran was "weeks to months" away from producing nuclear weapons.) In his speech, delivered after he told Americans via social media that he had entered the war, Trump applauded the bombing operation, which took place using B-2 Stealth bombers along with missiles launched from submarines. "I want to congratulate the great American patriots who flew those magnificent machines tonight and all of the United States military on an operation the likes of which the world is not seen in many, many decades," he said.

It's true that the US Air Force had never used Stealth bombers

in such a highly orchestrated, overwhelming strike operation. At about \$2.1 billion apiece, the B-2 is the world's most expensive aircraft because of its onboard technology. It was engineered to slip behind Soviet air defences and obliterate hardened targets and has seen limited use during the wars in the Middle East.

The world's eyes now shift to the American troops inside Iran's range of fire via missiles, drones or other kind of attack. A response may not come for days. When Trump issued the drone strike in January 2020 that killed Qassim Suleimani, it was five days before Iran launched salvos of missile strikes on US forces stationed at bases in neighbouring Iraq.

Trump said he hopes that "we will no longer need" the American military's services. This is wishful thinking. It's almost certain we haven't seen the end of US military action in this war. It might very well have just begun.

— The New York Times



WJ HENNIGAN

writes about national security issues for Opinion from Washington

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The competition included elite riders from nine different countries

SAYYID ALI QUALIFIES FOR WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

MUSCAT: Oman's endurance rider His Highness Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said secured a slot in the 2026 FEI Endurance World Championship finals which will take place in AlUla city in Saudi Arabia next year following his successful completion of the prestigious Buchen 160 km international endurance race in Germany recently.

The race, conducted under the supervision of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), was a crucial qualification milestone and a challenging test for elite riders.

This marks the second time that HH Sayyid Ali officially qualified for the World Endurance Championship finals and it is showcasing his remarkable presence on the global endurance stage.

HH Sayyid Ali completed the six-phase 160 km course which was divided into several segments including 35 km, 25 km, 35 km, 25 km, 20 km and 20 km in aboard through horse Attila with a timing of 10 hours, 23 minutes and 20 seconds. The race, which began at 5:30 am and concluded by 7:20 pm, featured particularly tough weather conditions with temperatures reaching 31°C and it was demanding strategic endurance, heat management and expert horsemanship.

The competition included elite riders from nine different countries and this leded for further underscoring the international competitive intensity of the event.

This achievement followed an intensive training camp that spanned several weeks, focusing on both physical and technical preparation for the rider and the horse. The high-level conditioning enabled HH Sayyid Ali to excel in one of the most demanding endurance races of the season.

HH Sayyid Ali dedicated this qualification to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and to His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, in recognition of their unwavering support and patronage for equestrian sports and Omani riders.

25 players participate in Woodball Championship

THE second activation tournament for Woodball, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) represented by the Amateur Sports Division within the Sports Activities Department concluded with the participation of 25 players representing five teams from six different governorates across the Sultanate of Oman. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Younis al Battashi, Director of the Human Resources Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The tournament spanned three days and took place across 12 courts at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, prepared according to the standards of the International Woodball Federation. The championship included four main events: the individual stroke play, team stroke play, doubles knockout and individual knockout competitions.

The event witnessed a high level of competition and notable performances. In the team stroke play event, the team of Mohammed al Nyadi, Yaqoub al Abrawi, Yousef al Hasani and Said al Roushdi clinched first place with impressive teamwork. The team of Abdullah al Saadi, Juma al Hinai, Salim al Hamadani and Naham al Yahyai secured second place.

In the individual stroke play event, Abdullah al Saadi claimed first place with a total of 195 strokes, narrowly surpassing Mohammed al Nyadi, who placed second with 196 strokes. Yousef al Hasani finished third, followed by Hamad al Shaqsi in fourth and Adel al yadi in fifth place.

In the doubles knockout event, the duo of Salim al Hamadani and Juma al Hinai won the title with a strong and cohesive performance, while Fawzi al Sinani and Samir al Saadi secured second place. In the individual knockout category, Salim al Hamadani shone once again, securing first place, while Abdullah al Yahyai finished second.

Following the tournament's conclusion, Mohammed al Niyadi, Head of the Amateur Sports Division at the MoCSY, stated that organising such championships aligns with the Ministry's efforts to promote the presence of Woodball in Oman and create an encouraging competitive environment for players from various categories. He noted that the sport has been practiced in Oman since 2007, but it still requires more support and wider recognition.

Al Niyadi emphasised that this year's edition showed a noticeable improvement in players' technical performance, as well as increased awareness of the game's rules and playing methods an encouraging sign of the Ministry's successful promotional



The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Younis al Battashi, Director of the Human Resources Department at MoCSY



The event witnessed a high level of competition and notable performances

efforts. He added that since the first edition, the MoCSY has been working to enhance the championship's technical and organisational aspects, including player classification, competition quality and participant diversity. With the growing interest in the game especially in Asia and Europe there is potential to establish an official committee dedicated to Woodball in Oman to ensure its sustainable development.

Meanwhile, Yaqoub al Abrawi expressed his delight at winning first place in the

team event, noting that the team had previously competed internationally in Taiwan in 2019, where they ranked fourth globally. He highlighted the challenges facing the sport in Oman, such as limited institutional support, lack of regular training opportunities, and insufficient infrastructure, stressing the importance of holding regular local tournaments to nurture talent and motivate players.

Salim al Hamadani, the individual knockout champion, spoke about the intense competition during the tournament, praising the players' performance and the event's organisation. He remarked that hosting such events contributes to increasing the sport's visibility in the Sultanate of Oman and noted that Woodball is easy to play in open environments like beaches, making it ideal for wider outreach. He called on relevant authorities to support and regularly organise such tournaments to enhance the sport's success.

Said al Roushdi, a member of the winning team in the team stroke play event, said the competition was fierce and exciting, especially since most participants were experienced and well-versed in the game's rules and strategies. He emphasised that the real challenge lies not only in competition but also in the limited number of such tournaments. He stressed the need for these events to be held more frequently throughout the year due to the increasing interest in Woodball from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman. He concluded by affirming that regular tournaments will improve player performance and expand the sport's fan base.

Oman U-17 finish 8th in Beach Handball World Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

The Oman U-17 beach handball team concluded their historic debut at the 2025 IHF Youth Beach Handball World Championship in Tunisia with an eighth-place finish following to a 2-0 loss against Argentina in the seventh and eighth playoff on Sunday. It was a remarkable achievement for Oman boys in their first-ever appearance at the global event which was hosted successfully in Hammamet, Tunisia, with participation from 32 teams across the men's and women's categories.

Oman's journey towards the semifinals came to an end with a quarterfinal defeat against Brazil 2-0 despite a spirited performance by the national

team players. Brazil concluded the first set at 27-22 as they managed to capitalise on the missed opportunities by Oman's side. The second set was tighter as coach Jaber al Balush's boys were narrowing the gap to just two points in the final minutes 24-26 before they missed chances in key moments which made the difference and Brazil sealed a crucial victory.

In another match, Oman boys missed the chance to end in the fifth position as they suffered to another narrow 2-0 defeat against Thailand in the classification match for 5th-8th place. The match was well within reach but the team's players did not capitalise the opportunities for a victory. The first set saw a tight contest as Oman were taking a late lead through Imad al Ghailani



Oman's journey towards the semifinals came to an end with a quarterfinal defeat against Brazil 2-0

to go up 18-17. However, three missed scoring chances in the final minute allowed Thailand to

counter and seal the set 19-18. In the following half, Oman struggled to regain momentum

as a string of attacking errors and defensive lapses allowed Thailand to take control, closing out the match with a 18-10 win and denying Oman the opportunity to compete for fifth place.

ARGENTINA BLANK OMAN

Oman faced Argentina in the playoff for seventh place in their final match of the tournament. Argentina took advantage of Oman's slow start and lack of execution as they claimed a 2-0 victory. The first half ended at 22-12 while the second set finished at 24-14. Despite a few bright moments, Oman struggled to contain Argentina's fast-paced offense and the loss ruled them out of a spot in the 2026 Youth Olympic Games in Senegal, where the top seven teams qualified only from this event.

SHORTTAKES



Tommy Fleetwood plays his shot from the first tee. — Reuters

FLEETWOOD GRABS
PGA TRAVELERS LEAD
AFTER 3RD ROUND

NEW YORK: England’s Tommy Fleetwood, seeking his first PGA Tour title, fired a seven-under par 63 to seize a three-stroke lead after Saturday’s third round of the Travelers Championship.

The 34-year-old Merseysider eagled the par-five 13th for the second consecutive day on the way to standing on 16-under 194 after 54 holes at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut.

American Russell Henley, who won his fifth career PGA title in March at Bay Hill, matched his career-low PGA round with a bogey-free 61 to share second on 197 with US Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley, who shot 63.

“It’ll come down to a bunch of things really,” Fleetwood said. “Being in the last group, I’m really happy with that.

“I’m happy with the work I’ve done. It’s just an amazing opportunity to go out here tomorrow and hopefully it’s my time.”

World number one Scottie Scheffler, second-ranked Rory McIlroy and world number five Justin Thomas stumbled to fall well back, Scheffler and Thomas having shared the 36-hole lead with Fleetwood.

Paris Olympic runner-up Fleetwood, ranked 17th, has seven DP World Tour wins but none on the PGA despite 41 top-10 finishes.

Fleetwood sank a birdie putt from just inside 13 feet at the third hole and rolled in a 66-foot birdie putt, his season long, at the par-three fifth.

At the par-five sixth, Fleetwood dropped his approach inches from the hole and tapped in for birdie.

Fleetwood made a 19-foot birdie putt at the 10th then eagled 13, sinking a 30-foot putt from just off the green — “13 has been very kind to me so far. I’d like to keep up with that.”

Fleetwood, who had two eagles on the season when the week began, has made three in the past two days and only one bogey this week.

After driving the green at the par-four 15th to set up a a tap-in birdie, Fleetwood closed with three pars.

Henley made five birdies on the front nine to move within two of the lead and stayed on Fleetwood’s heels most of the day, adding a 14-foot birdie putt at the 12th, a seven-footer for birdie at 13, a four-footer to birdie 14 and a closing birdie from just outside five feet. — AFP



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy. — Reuters

Alcaraz beats Lehecka
to clinch Queen’s title

CARLOS ALCARAZ clinched his second Queen’s Club title as the world number two warmed up for Wimbledon with a 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 win against Jiri Lehecka in Sunday’s final. Alcaraz blasted 33 winners and 18 aces to subdue the gritty Czech world number 30 in two hours and 10 minutes in west London.

Having won titles on clay at the French Open, Rome and Monte Carlo, as well as the hard courts of Rotterdam, Alcaraz has now collected five trophies in 2025.

The 22-year-old has not lost since the Barcelona final against Holger Rune on April 20 and is enjoying the longest winning streak of his career with 18 successive victories.

Top seeded Alcaraz is just the second Spanish man to win Queen’s twice after Feliciano Lopez, who lifted the trophy in 2017 and 2019.

For a player raised on the clay courts of Spain, Alcaraz has developed into a formidable force on grass. The former world number one signalled his emergence on the surface

by winning Queen’s in 2023. He clinched the Wimbledon title for the first time just weeks later and defended his All England Club crown last year. Alcaraz, who has an 11-1 career record at Queen’s, will start his bid for a third successive Wimbledon title on June 30.

After his semi-final win over Roberto Bautista Agut on Saturday, Alcaraz fired an ominous message to his Wimbledon rivals, warning that his “grass-court mode” had been activated. And on the evidence of his relentless display against the obdurate Lehecka, he is in no mood to surrender his All England Club crown. Playing his first tournament since his epic French Open victory against Jannik Sinner two weeks ago, Alcaraz’s march to the Queen’s showpiece made it five consecutive finals for the Spaniard.

In contrast, Lehecka was playing in his first grass-court final after a shock win against British star Jack Draper in the last four. The 23-year-old was the first Czech in the Queen’s final since Ivan Lendl in 1990. Lehecka had come from a set down to stun Alcaraz in the Qatar Open quarter-finals in February.

But there would be no repeat of that upset on the lawns of Barons Court. In his second Queen’s final, Alcaraz had an early chance to break in the fifth game of the first set.

Lehecka thundered down an ace to get out of trouble of that occasion. But the five-time Grand Slam champion matched Lehecka’s serve blow for blow, dropping just one point in his first four service games.

Alcaraz’s piercing ground-strokes increased the pressure and Lehecka finally cracked in the the 11th game when an badly-timed double-fault gifted the first break to the Spaniard. Alcaraz served out the set in typically ruthless fashion, but Lehecka refused to surrender without a fight. A tight second set stayed on serve all the way through to the tie-break and, for once, Alcaraz stumbled with a key double-fault, allowing Lehecka to level the match. Alcaraz was unfazed, breaking for a 3-1 lead in the deciding set when Lehecka netted an off-balance forehand.

Alcaraz had the finish line in sight and he wrapped up his latest title triumph with a flurry of searing winners. — AFP

Bumrah shines but Brook brings England almost level with India

LEEDS: Harry Brook fell for 99 on his home ground and the brilliant Jasprit Bumrah took five wickets on Sunday to leave the first Test between England and India at Headingley finely poised.

England were bowled out for 465 on the third day, in reply to India’s first-innings 471; a deficit of just six runs.

When Brook was dismissed just one run shy of three figures, England were still 73 behind at 398-7.

But Chris Woakes, selected to lead the bowling attack in place of the injured Gus Atkinson, got England almost on level terms with a handy 38.

The 36-year old all-rounder, who has a Test century to his credit, struck consecutive sixes off paceman Prasidh Krishna before he was bowled by Bumrah.

Bumrah then wrapped up the innings by bowling Josh Tongue to finish with excellent figures of 5-83 in 24.4 overs.

The 31-year-old has now taken 14 five-wicket hauls in just 46 Tests.

Brook’s aggression, in an innings in which he had three reprieves, eventually proved his downfall.

One run shy of what would have been a first Test century at Headingley -- and ninth in 26 matches -- he mishooked a Krishna bouncer to Shardul Thakur at fine leg.

Brook threw his head back in agony following the end of a typically dashing 112-ball innings featuring 11 fours and two sixes.

He had been caught off a Bumrah no-ball while still on nought in Saturday’s last over and on Sunday he was dropped on 46 and 82 -- with both those chances ones India should have taken.

STOKES STORMS OFF

England resumed on 209-3, 262 runs behind, with Ollie Pope exactly 100 not out after coming in with the hosts in trouble at 4-1.

Pope, having added just six more



Bumrah wrapped up the innings by bowling Josh Tongue to finish with excellent figures of 5-83 in 24.4 overs.

runs off as many balls, made a careless exit when, trying to cut a wide ball from Krishna, he edged to wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant.

Brook treated Bumrah, widely regarded as the world’s leading bowler, with disdain when he advanced down the pitch and drove the paceman through the covers for four.

He then dished out similar treatment to Mohammed Siraj.

But from around the wicket, fast bowler Siraj had England captain Ben Stokes caught behind for 20 with a fine delivery that cut away from the left-hander as he pushed outside off stump.

Stokes, without a Test century for two years, threw his bat in the air in frustration before he walked off.

Brook should have been out on 46 when he pushed forward to left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja only for Pant to drop the thin nick.

England were 327-5 at lunch, still 144 runs behind, with Brook 57 not out and Jamie Smith unbeaten on 29.

One over before the new ball became available, Smith pulled a Krishna bouncer for six, even though there were fielders back on the boundary.

Two balls later, on 40, he tried to repeat the stroke but holed out to deep square-leg where Jadeja, realising he was going over the rope, relayed the catch to Sai Sudharsan.

India took the new ball as soon as possible, with England 350-6 off 80 overs.

Brook was missed again on 82 when fourth slip Yashasvi Jaiswal dropped a two-handed catch off a deliberate steer off Bumrah.

At that stage, England were still more than a hundred runs behind and when Brook went into the 90s with a superb lofted drive for six off Siraj it looked as if he would make India pay dearly for shoddy fielding.

But the tourists limited the damage thanks to Bumrah’s blistering spell to mop up the tail and leave the match on a knife edge. — AFP

SPORTS



Fluminense’s Juan Freytes celebrates scoring their third goal. — Reuters

INTER MILAN came from behind to beat Urawa Red Diamonds and knock the Japanese side out of the Club World Cup (CWC) on Saturday, while Borussia Dortmund held off Mamelodi Sundowns to win a seven-goal thriller. Fluminense rallied in the second half to beat Ulsan 4-2 and knock out the South Korean side while Monterrey and River Plate ended goalless.

At Lumen Field in Seattle, Ryoma Watanabe got an early opening goal for Urawa Reds, who were backed by a noisy contingent of their supporters.

But captain Lautaro Martinez — who got Inter’s equaliser in their 1-1 draw with Monterrey of Mexico in their opening game — repeated the trick to level matters with a clever overhead kick 12 minutes from time.

Valentin Carboni was then the unlikely hero as he grabbed the winner two minutes into injury time.

The 20-year-old Argentine had not played a competitive game since early October after suffering a serious knee injury while on loan at Marseille.

Carboni had not made an appearance for Inter in over two years, but he was on to hand to sidefoot home when the ball fell to him in the area.

“Our opponents play with their hearts and to counter that as a team we need to play with more pride, be humble and know how to suffer,” Martinez told broadcaster DAZN.

The result left some Urawa fans in tears and Inter level on four points with River Plate with the two teams meeting next.

River Plate were let down by their finishing in a scrappy, foul-ridden encounter with Mexico’s Monterrey, who sit on two points.

Esteban Andrada, Monterrey’s Argentine keeper, made a series of saves while River’s forwards were unable to put away the few chances that came their way.

Monterrey could still make it into the last 16 if they beat Urawa and River or Inter win their game.

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- Monterrey could still make it into the last 16 if they beat Urawa and River or Inter win their game
- Sundowns will still go into their final game in Group F with a chance of qualifying for the last 16
- South Korea’s Ulsan gave Fluminense a real scare in their Group F clash at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey

INTER MILAN, DORTMUND CLAIM FIRST WINS AT CWC



Urawa Red Diamonds’ Yusuke Matsuo in action with Inter Milan’s Matteo Darmian. — Reuters

BELLINGHAM STRIKES Earlier Jude Bellingham got his first goal for Dortmund as his new club overcame stifling heat in Cincinnati to beat Sundowns 4-3 and move to four points from two matches in Group F.

The South African champions had

taken a surprise early lead through a fine solo goal from Lucas Ribeiro.

However, Sundowns goalkeeper Ronwen Williams handed Dortmund their equaliser on a plate, passing the ball straight to Felix Nmecha, who stroked home.

Serhou Guirassy gave Dortmund

the lead with his 35th goal since the beginning of the season.

English midfielder Bellingham, who this month followed older brother Jude’s footsteps in joining the German side from Sunderland, started for the first time for Dortmund and made it 3-1 just before the break.

Khuliso Mudau’s own goal made it 4-1 before the hour mark, but Sundowns salvaged some pride by reducing the deficit through Igraam Rayners and Lebo Mothiba.

“I’m sweating like I’ve just come out of a sauna,” said Dortmund coach Niko Kovac when asked about the conditions in a game which started at midday local time.

“It was tough going for both teams, but the opposition are used to it. We certainly didn’t give our best performance, but that wasn’t possible today.”

Sundowns will still go into their final game in Group F with a chance of qualifying for the last 16.

“The boys made a wonderful performance... it was a hell of a match. I’m not happy but very proud,” said their Portuguese coach, Miguel Cardoso.

South Korea’s Ulsan gave Fluminense a real scare in their Group F clash at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, leading 2-1 until the 66th minute before the Brazilians ran out 4-2 winners, eliminating the K-League champions in the process.

Colombian striker Jhon Arias put Fluminense ahead with a 27th minute free-kick but goals from Lee Jin-hyun and Um Won-sang gave Ulsan the advantage at the break.

Nonata levelled for the Brazilians in the 66th minute before Juan Freytes put Fluminense ahead in the 83rd minute, slotting home after a scramble in the box.

Keno added a fourth in stoppage time to leave Fluminense on top of the group, level on 4 points with Borussia Dortmund ahead of their final game against South Africa’s Mamelodi Sundowns in Miami on Wednesday.

A win or draw for the Rio club in their final group game will ensure their passage into the last 16. — AFP



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Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufti, Minister of Energy and Minerals, with Shaikh Ali bin Salim al Junaibi, Chairman of Integrated Global Engineering Company, at the agreement signing on Sunday.

Mining concession awarded for RO 200 million sea salt production project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

THE MINISTRY of Energy and Minerals signed on Sunday, June 22, 2025, a mining concession agreement with Integrated Global Engineering Company to develop natural salt production in Concession Area I-51, located in Al Wusta Governorate. The concession covers a total area of 15 square kilometres.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufti, Minister of Energy and Minerals, while Shaikh Ali bin Salim al Junaibi, Chairman of Integrated Global Engineering Company, signed on behalf of the company.

The agreement aims to expand the production capacity of the existing salt plant and establish additional facilities to increase the annual output of natural salt to 1.2 million tonnes.

The salt will be extracted through the construction of seawater storage ponds, followed by natural evaporation using wind and solar heat. The salt will then be dried, refined and packaged. The estimated investment value of the project is RO 200 million.

Al Aufti emphasised that the project represents a strategic step forward in advancing economic diversification in Oman. He noted that the project is expected to create significant employment opportunities for Omani citizens. The primary objective is to boost the production of natural salt and develop its industrial derivatives for use in various projects aligned with sustainable development goals.

PIT to ensure sustainable financing for development

THE Ministry of Economy affirmed that the implementation of the Personal Income Tax (PIT), set to take effect at the beginning of 2028, represents a crucial step towards enhancing financial stability and completing the fiscal sustainability framework. This measure aims to ensure sustainable financing for development across various sectors.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, stated: “The tax serves as a new revenue stream to diversify public income sources and mitigate risks associated with reliance on oil as the primary revenue source. It will help maintain current levels of social and service spending while preserving Oman’s achievements in financial and economic stability under Oman Vision 2040 and its first executive phase, the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).”

He explained that the (PIT) is a fiscal tool adopted by most countries worldwide as a key revenue source to fund state-provided services. Over 190 countries impose this tax, and in many, income taxes constitute the largest component of total tax revenues at federal and local levels, financing public goods and services. He noted that implementing the tax in Oman will yield significant economic benefits, supporting income diversification strategies and long-term fiscal stability as a pillar of economic growth. It, he added, will also sustain government revenues, strengthen the state’s financial position, maintain credit ratings and boost spending power for beneficiaries — directly



‘As the Tenth Plan nears completion, Oman has advanced significantly in economic diversification and fiscal sustainability. The (PIT) will further prioritise financial stability by diversifying revenue sources’

DR SAID BIN MOHAMMED AL SAQRI
Minister of Economy

stimulating aggregate demand and economic growth.

He highlighted that oil and gas revenues account for 68 per cent to 85 per cent of Oman’s total public income, depending on global energy prices. While oil prices have stabilised at favourable levels in recent years, they remain volatile. Oman has effectively managed additional oil revenues by reducing public debt to safe GDP ratios, increasing investment and social spending, and subsidising essential goods and services, he further noted.

He affirmed that government policies and initiatives have successfully shifted Oman’s fiscal and economic trajectory towards sustainability and stability. Public debt has sharply declined, credit ratings have consistently improved to investment-grade levels, and Oman’s standing in global competitiveness indices has risen. The Tenth Five-Year Plan sustained GDP growth near target rates, while economic diversification policies attracted quality investments and drove non-oil sector growth beyond expectations, the minister said.

He added: “As the Tenth

Plan nears completion, Oman has advanced significantly in economic diversification and fiscal sustainability. The (PIT) will further prioritise financial stability by diversifying revenue sources — a strategic necessity to ensure equitable wealth distribution, enhance public services, strengthen social protection systems, and mitigate risks from global energy market fluctuations and other economic variables.”

He emphasised that accelerating Oman Vision 2040 and its economic diversification strategy — transitioning to a knowledge- and technology-driven economy — requires sustainable funding for long-term planning. The vision targets strategic investments in education, human capital, advanced infrastructure, innovation and diversified sectors, alongside essential services and social protection.

He pointed out that the 2025 budget allocates over RO 5 billion (39 per cent to education, 24 per cent to health, 28 per cent to social protection) to these sectors, with the Social Protection Fund benefiting over 2 million people monthly as a key mechanism for household financial stability.

As for the potential economic impacts, the minister noted that the tax study assessed effects on GDP and 18 economic sectors, concluding minimal impact (under 1 per cent) due to high exemption and low tax rates.

Foreign investment is expected to remain unaffected, as the tax applies to individuals — not corporate entities — and Oman’s rates remain competitive globally, the minister concluded. — ONA

OIA records RO 1.585 billion asset growth in 2024

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) reported a RO 1.585 billion increase in total assets in 2024, raising its portfolio to RO 20.425 billion, it was announced at the Authority’s annual media briefing on Sunday, June 22, 2025.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of OIA’s Board of Directors, said, “In 2024, OIA increased its asset size by RO 1.185 billion, reaching RO 20.425 billion compared to RO 19.240 billion in 2023.

“OIA continued to play its role in advancing the national agenda, contributing RO 800 million to the state’s general budget, bringing OIA’s total contributions since 2016 to over RO 7 billion.”

According to the minister, RO 400 million from that contribution was allocated towards the launch of the operational phase of recently developed Future Fund Oman (FFO), which focuses on supporting

strategic local projects.

Commenting on the Fund, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), shared the following, “This year, Future Fund Oman (FFO) marked the first year since its launch at the beginning of 2024. FFO was established to support local projects and strategic investments, with a focus on empowering the private sector and attracting foreign investments.

“It successfully achieved its intended objectives, witnessing strong interest from both local and international investors as it received 294 proposals from various economic diversification sectors.

“Following OIA’s rigorous procedures, 44 partnership proposals were approved, amounting the FFO contribution to RO 333.1 million.”

Al Murshidi also highlighted the growth of the National Development Fund, which manages domestic assets and local



OIA continued to play its role in advancing the national agenda, contributing RO 800 million to the state’s general budget.

companies.

“One of our key achievements is the growth in the asset size of OIA’s investment portfolios. In 2024, the National Development Fund’s assets increased to RO 12.075 billion, following local investment spending of RO 1.9 billion, which exceeded its 2024 target of RO 1.7 billion.”

According to Al Murshidi, the portfolio succeeded in doubling foreign direct investments within

local sectors — primarily in the energy sector, followed by tourism and mining — compared to the previous year, reaching RO 2.8 billion by the end of 2024.

As for OIA’s international investment portfolio, he added that the Future Generations Fund recorded an increase of 6.65%, reaching RO 7.535 billion by the end of 2024, in comparison to RO 7.065 billion in 2023.

Emphasising OIA’s ongoing

efforts in establishing strategic partnerships, Al Murshidi added: “Furthermore, our ongoing efforts to strengthen strategic partnerships and localise global industries and technologies continued with the Future Generations Fund invested in the American artificial intelligence company xAI.”

Also during 2024, OIA invested in 13 new investment funds across different sectors, and entered into many strategic partnerships, most notably with Türkiye’s OYAK Fund to establish a joint fund worth \$500 million focused on food, healthcare, energy, mining and industrial sectors within Oman.

In other notable developments, the Authority repaid RO 1.846 billion in debt during 2024, including RO 545 million by OQ Group, which was settled ahead of its maturity date.

In parallel, the Authority successfully reduced total government guarantees from RO 3.4 billion at the end of 2022 to RO 1.8 billion by December 2024.

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The award celebrates the bank's continuous strive to invest in innovative financial services and solutions.

NBO NAMED BEST RETAIL BANK IN OMAN 2025

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been named as the Best Retail Bank in Oman 2025 at the MEED’s Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Banking Excellence Awards.

The prestigious recognition celebrates the bank’s continuous strive to invest in innovative financial services and solutions that deliver a seamless and enhanced customer experience.

Focused on convenience and trust, NBO offers a comprehensive range of retail products and services tailored to meet the diverse needs of its customers — from children and youth to high-net-worth individuals.

These include Private Banking, Sadara Priority Banking, Privilege Banking, alongside Current, Savings and Deposit Accounts. In addition, the bank also provides exclusive lending solutions and a broad selection of Credit, Debit and Badeel Prepaid Cards.

To enhance customer experience, NBO’s award-winning app empowers customers to manage their accounts, payments and transactions digitally.

It features account opening services, loan top-ups, as well as bill payments. Through the app, customers can also apply for a credit card digitally through Oman’s first fully digital credit card application facility.

With the integration of Electronic Know Your Customer (E-KYC) technology, customers can update personal details while enjoying a fully digital onboarding journey, eliminating the need for physical paperwork or in-person verification.

For added convenience, customers can also link their NBO debit and credit cards to Apple Pay, Samsung Wallet and Garmin Pay, enabling seamless payments across a wide range of mobile devices.

To enhance customer satisfaction, NBO’s Rewards Programme allows customers to earn, redeem and convert points on everyday spending using their NBO cards for a variety of options.

NBO’s focus on customer ease extends beyond digital channels to its physical presence across the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank has introduced several innovations in Oman, including the Eid note dispensing machines, the self-service kiosks and the exclusive ATM and CDM machines that support a wide range of essential banking transactions. Supported by a dedicated team of relationship managers and a robust digital infrastructure, NBO continues to redefine the retail banking experience in Oman.

A’ SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY ENTERS THE IMPACT RANKINGS FOR FIRST TIME

MUSCAT: A’ Sharqiyah University has achieved a significant milestone by being ranked for the first time in the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings 2025, one of the most prestigious global rankings that assess universities’ progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The results of the THE Impact Rankings 2025 were officially announced on June 18, 2025, in Istanbul, Türkiye. The University was placed in the 1001–1500 band globally, out of 2,526 universities representing over 130 countries and

ranked second nationally among higher education institutions in Oman.

This global recognition reflects the University’s growing international presence and underscores its sustained commitment to social impact, academic excellence and active engagement with sustainability goals. It also highlights the University’s alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the country’s strategic priorities in education, research, innovation and sustainable development.

Professor Yahya bin Mansour

al Wahaibi, Vice Chancellor of A’ Sharqiyah University, remarked: “This achievement is the result of the collaborative efforts of our academic and administrative staff, students and community partners. It marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards embedding sustainability into our academic, research and community engagement practices.

Being featured in this global ranking reinforces our international presence and motivates us to continue on this ambitious path to improve the quality of our outcomes and better serve our society.”

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BYD’s dynamic line up of PHEVs includes the Song Plus, Qin Plus PHEV and Seal 7 DM-i.

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With features like ambient lighting, a 360° camera, panoramic sunroof, 10 Infinity Speakers with Android Auto and Apple Car Play, a 15.6” rotating multimedia screen and multi-colour ambient lighting, the Song Plus PHEV is carefully engineered to elevate your lifestyle.

The dreamy Qin Plus PHEV is perfect for customers looking for sustainable products to save fuel and enjoy an impressive fuel economy of 3.8L/100km, seamlessly combining gasoline and electric power.

The 1.5L engine, paired with an EHS electric motor, delivers swift acceleration and smooth power delivery. Expect faster acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.3 seconds with 194 hp and a combined driving range of

990 kilometres. Aesthetically, the Qin Plus PHEV speaks the Dragon Face design language, blending strength, power and elegance.

It features 17-inch alloy wheels and LED taillights accenting its dynamic waistline. Inside, the driver-focused cockpit, the car is equipped with an 8.8-inch LCD driver dashboard and an advanced infotainment system on a 10.1-inch rotatable screen, with Apple and Android connectivity among other impressive features.

The recently launched Seal 7 DM-i is an imagination of what our lifestyles could look like. The marine-life-inspired Seal 7 DM-i sedan features a powerful 1.5L turbo engine. Along with an advanced EHS system, it delivers ultra-low fuel consumption at 1.5 litres for 75 km in pure electric mode (WLTC) or 6 litres of fuel using the efficient PHEV system.

Moreover, the 50W wireless charging offers faster charging, contributing to better heat dissipation and peace of mind. Become a part of a revolution and embrace the change with BYD Oman.

The offer lasts July 16, 2025, so don’t miss out.

Private Banking from BankDhofar: A bespoke financial experience

MUSCAT: One year since its launch in June 2024, BankDhofar’s Private Banking segment has continued to set new standards in an increasingly automated financial landscape — offering a high level of personalised, discreet and refined services that extend well beyond conventional banking.

Understanding the ever-increasing levels of sophistication and cross-border requirements of clients, this premium offering from one of Oman’s foremost financial institutions sets a new benchmark for bespoke financial and wealth management in the region.

At the heart of BankDhofar’s Private Banking service is the principle of helping secure legacies through generational partnerships. Recognising that every client’s financial journey is unique, the



The service is built around a deeply collaborative and client-centric model.

service is built around a deeply collaborative and client-centric model.

Whether it is managing the shift of generational wealth, accessing global investment opportunities, or curating personalised lifestyle experiences, clients benefit from a holistic concierge banking approach tailored to their ambitions.

BankDhofar recognises that its clients place a high value on trust, discretion and a deeply personalised approach. Its Private Banking service is crafted not only to preserve and grow wealth, but also to simplify financial complexity — offering clients the reassurance and freedom to concentrate on other important aspects of their lives.

Genetco & Gree launch scratch & win promotion in Oman

MUSCAT: Genetco LLC, the exclusive distributor of Gree air conditioners in Oman, announced a limited time “Scratch & Win” consumer promotion running from June 20 to July 31, 2025.

The campaign aims to spread consumer joy while celebrating Gree’s achievement of the No 1 market share in the Sultanate of Oman’s residential AC segment and rewards customers with guaranteed savings — and the chance to win a 100 % instant refund on their new Gree purchase.

“Gree’s unwavering commitment to quality has earned the trust of Omani consumers,” said Dr Muthanna al Durrah, CEO & Board Advisor of Genetco. “This



The campaign aims to spread consumer joy while celebrating Gree’s achievement of the No 1 market share in Oman’s residential AC segment.

promotion is our way of thanking every household that has made Gree the country’s favourite air conditioning brand.”

Every buyer of a qualifying Gree

air conditioner receives an on-the-spot Scratch & Win card. Instant prizes include: 100 % cash-back refund, 25% discount, 15% discount and assured minimum Discount

on all other eligible models. Two heavily discounted models are excluded from the scratch card offer but already carry special cash savings.

Offer valid nationwide through authorised dealers and participating retail partners. Promotion period is 40 days only, from June 20 to July 31, 2025.

“For the first time, Genetco and Gree are bringing Omani consumers a guaranteed win promotion,” added Dr Ambuj Khare, Chief Operating Officer, Genetco. “Whether you’re upgrading before the summer heat or outfitting a new home, every customer walks away with a reward.”

Gree Electric Appliances Inc

of Zhuhai is the world’s largest specialised air conditioning manufacturer, recognised for its innovation, energy efficiency and rigorous quality standards.

In Oman, the brand has achieved the No 1 position in residential AC sales thanks to its durable performance under desert conditions and Genetco’s robust after sales support.

Established in 1971, Genetco LLC is a leading Omani business group representing global brands across consumer electronics, HVAC, office automation, MEP and facility management services. The company operates an extensive retail, distribution and service network throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

BUSINESS



The office was inaugurated by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and attended by Ibrahim bin Saad Bishan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman.

New tech office boosts Oman’s digital transformation drive

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

ELM, a digital solutions leader owned by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), has officially launched its new office in Muscat, underscoring its long-term ambition to participate in Oman’s digital transformation and expand its regional footprint.

The move marks Elm’s first physical presence in Oman, a market it views as strategically aligned with its growth objectives and expertise in e-government platforms, cybersecurity, digital identity and artificial intelligence-driven services.

With a client base that spans government, corporate and individual sectors in Saudi Arabia, Elm’s entry into Oman reflects growing regional collaboration in the technology space.

The office was inaugurated during a ceremony under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and attended by Ibrahim bin Saad Bishan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman, as well as key officials from both countries.

Elm’s expansion aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises the digital economy and government modernisation. The company says it aims to introduce custom solutions to help Omani institutions accelerate digital transformation across sectors such as logistics, public services and national security.

The Muscat office is part of Elm’s broader strategy to export its homegrown capabilities developed in Saudi Arabia. In recent years, Elm has gained prominence for building and managing platforms such as Absher (a government service portal) and Tawakkalna (a Covid-19 health platform), which have become integral to the Saudi government’s digital infrastructure.

Elm’s Executive Vice President of Marketing and Official Spokesperson, Majid bin Saad al Arifi, said the decision to establish a base in Oman reflects the company’s confidence in the local ecosystem.

“The opening of Elm’s office in the Sultanate of Oman represents a strategic step that reflects our strong belief in the capabilities and digital potential of this market,” said Al Arifi.

“Through our presence, we aim to build high-value partnerships and provide tailored technological solutions that enhance government performance and promote a sustainable digital economy — delivering meaningful impact to citizens, investors and our institutional partners alike,” he added.

Elm’s entry comes at a time when Oman is actively seeking private sector collaboration to fast-track its digital agenda, offering streamlined regulatory frameworks and incentives for foreign investment in the ICT sector.

Elm’s presence is also expected to generate skilled employment opportunities and knowledge transfer, as the company often works closely with local partners and public entities to localise its services.

MARKET REACTION

Investors brace for oil price spike



A US attack on Iranian nuclear sites could push oil prices even higher and trigger a knee-jerk rush to safety, investors said, as they assessed how the latest escalation of tensions would ripple through the global economy.

The reaction in Middle East stock markets, which trade on Sunday, suggested investors were assuming a benign scenario, as Iran intensified its missile attacks on Israel. — Reuters

PACT TO EXPLORE SUSTAINABLE METHANE PILOT PROJECT IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Oman LNG has signed an agreement with Japan-based Kanadevia Corporation (formerly Hitachi Zosen Corp) to carry out a detailed feasibility study for establishing a pilot plant to produce sustainable methane. The initiative marks a significant step towards expanding clean energy technologies in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement includes two major components: a technical and commercial evaluation of a

future commercial plant and a preliminary engineering study for a smaller-scale pilot facility.

The commercial facility is expected to produce up to 18,000 standard cubic metres of sustainable methane per hour, while the pilot plant will initially generate around 1,200 standard cubic metres per hour.

The proposed pilot project will feature three core elements: a seawater desalination unit, an electrolyser system to produce

hydrogen from water and a methanation system that combines green hydrogen with captured carbon dioxide to synthesise methane. Technologies such as carbon capture, reuse (CCR) and advanced catalysis will be central to the process.

The initial phase will involve the preparation of detailed design specifications, cost estimates and planning for engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) activities. — ONA

‘Ghost plume’ detected deep beneath Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

A team of international scientists has discovered what they believe is the first confirmed “ghost plume” — a hidden column of superheated rock rising from deep within the Earth’s interior — beneath the eastern region of Oman.

Unlike most mantle plumes, which are typically associated with volcanic activity at the surface, this newly identified plume shows no visible signs above ground, making it exceptionally difficult to detect.

The research, recently published in the prestigious journal Earth and Planetary Science Letters, offers evidence of the plume, which the scientists have named the ‘Dani Plume’.

According to the scientists, the discovery could reshape how geologists understand the inner workings of our planet, particularly beneath continents where such features have long been suspected but rarely confirmed.

Mantle plumes are hot, buoyant upwellings of rock that originate from the boundary



The research, recently published in the prestigious journal Earth and Planetary Science Letters, offers evidence of the plume, which the scientists have named the ‘Dani Plume’. Picture for illustration only.

between Earth’s core and mantle — roughly 2,890 kilometres beneath the surface.

As these plumes rise, they often create volcanoes and dramatic surface changes due to melting rock pushing through the crust. However, in continental regions, the thick and rigid lithosphere can prevent this molten material from reaching the surface, effectively hiding the plume from view.

According to the journal, the Dani plume is an exception because, while it leaves no volcanic signature on the surface, its presence is revealed through detailed seismic analysis. When earthquake-generated waves passed through the region, scientists noticed they slowed down, indicating the presence of hotter and softer rock beneath Oman. Additional data from field measurements

and computer models confirmed thermal and structural anomalies deep within the Earth.

The plume is estimated to be between 200 and 300 kilometres in diameter and up to 300 °C hotter than the surrounding mantle. Although small in size, it appears to have been active for tens of millions of years.

In fact, the researchers suggest it may have influenced the movement of the Indian tectonic plate around 40 million years ago and could still be affecting surface elevations in Oman today.

“This study presents interdisciplinary evidence for the existence of a ‘ghost’ plume beneath eastern Oman,” the researchers wrote, emphasising that while no single piece of data was conclusive on its own, together the findings formed a robust picture.

Importantly, the study also suggests that more heat may be escaping from Earth’s core than previously thought. This could require scientists to revise their models of how the Earth’s interior cools and evolves over time — and reassess how heat-producing elements are distributed within the planet.

OIA accelerates Oman Vision 2040 development hiring

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 22

In line with Oman Vision 2040 human capital growth goals, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) created 1,393 new jobs for Omani nationals during 2024, driving the Omanisation rate among its related entities to a high 77.7 per cent. The significant contribution to national employment generation was one of the highlights of OIA’s operational performance during 2024, showcased at a press conference held on Sunday, June 22, 2025.

Al Mutasim al Sariri, Director General In-Country Value, OIA, said, “Omanisation continues to be a key objective within many industries in the Sultanate of Oman and the Oman Investment Authority’s unrelenting commitment is a testament to its active drive towards advancing the human capital development goals included within Oman Vision 2040.”

The move showcases OIA’s leadership role in building a sustainable knowledge economy



OIA achieved 77.7% Omanisation across its subsidiaries in 2024.

for the future by investing in local talent and strengthening employment bridges for citizens. Oman Vision 2040, the nation’s long-term development plan, revolves around human capital and aims to build a competitive workforce capable of addressing the evolving needs of an advanced economy.

Aside from its strategy to create jobs, OIA has also launched various training and upskilling schemes including Nomou, Eidaad and

Mu’tamad. These initiatives seek to prepare young Omanis with the competencies needed for the labour market through formal education, mentorship and exposure to industries.

Its nucleus is Jadarah, an online site with the purpose of connecting graduates with job and training opportunities. By bridging the gap between education and employment, Jadarah promotes Oman Vision 2040’s immediate call to undertake greater integration between school output and the needs of the labour market.

Parallel to this, OIA has increased its support for scholarships, summer internships and joint programmes with higher education institutions.

The initiatives give Omani youth practical experience and technical skills to enhance their career preparedness and long-term employability.

OIA’s strategy shows the capability of public investment organisations to drive socio-economic transformation by connecting operational goals to national goals. Its consistent focus on localisation, people development and innovation is positioning it at the core driver of the Oman Vision 2040’s ambitions.

CHANGE PLAN

UK to issue 10-year industrial strategy



Britain is poised to publish a 10-year, multibillion-pound industrial strategy next week aimed at backing priority sectors, creating jobs and driving long-term economic growth.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s government has been working on a blueprint for the next decade as part of its wider “Plan for Change”, under which it seeks to overhaul the country’s skills system. — Reuters

SPACE RESTRICTION

Airlines avoid Middle East airspace



Airlines continued to avoid large parts of the Middle East on Sunday after US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites, according to flight tracking website FlightRadar24.

“Following US attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, commercial traffic in the region is operating as it has since new airspace restrictions were put into place last week,” FlightRadar24 said on social media platform X. — Reuters

OPINION

Arctic ownership and sustainability issues



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

THE Arctic is the northernmost region of the Earth, centred at the North Pole. It is a vast polar region at the top of the world. Unlike many individual geographical regions, it is not a country or a continent but an extensive area of the Arctic Ocean and the northernmost part of several continents, such as North America, Europe and Asia (specifically Russia). The Arctic is divided among countries like Canada, Denmark through Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA through Alaska. All these countries have coastlines in the Arctic Ocean. They can claim an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extending up to 200 nautical miles from their shores according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos). The ongoing conflict goes beyond these 200 nautical miles and is entangled in aspects of the seabed and resources beneath the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic consists of the Arctic Ocean, which is surrounded by land and is approximately 14.5 million square kilometres. The region has a vast tundra, permafrost, glaciers, sea ice and a unique ecosystem. The Arctic region holds both reserves of promise and peril. It is estimated that 13% of undiscovered oil, 30% of the earth's undiscovered gas and minerals like zinc and nickel offer an opportunity for resource

exploitation despite the Paris Agreement of the 1.5 °C goal. The ownership struggle for the Arctic is multi-layered and complicated, with national security issues, resource rights and geopolitical influence. Russia has invested heavily in Arctic militarisation. Meanwhile, Norway has approved the development of 19 new oil and gas fields, investing over \$18.5 billion to extend fossil fuel production despite its public climate commitments. The Arctic region is shared and contested, with no single owner, but a deep tapestry of national jurisdiction and unresolved international claims. This escalating claim and dispute among nations for the ownership of the Arctic is critical because unprecedented climate change, geopolitical competition and unregulated commercialisation pose an alarming threat to global ecosystem stability and cast a shadow of uncertainty on the existence of indigenous communities. The Arctic is warming up two to four times faster than the worldwide average. This is causing an unprecedented ice melt. The Arctic region acts as the Earth's refrigerator. It helps by cooling the planet and reflecting sunlight with ice and snow. Rapid warming of the Arctic region could disrupt the polar vortex, the key atmospheric system, creating extreme weather changes worldwide.

The Arctic region holds both reserves of promise and peril. It is estimated that 13% of undiscovered oil, 30% of the earth's undiscovered gas and minerals like zinc and nickel offer an opportunity for resource exploitation despite the Paris Agreement of the 1.5 °C goal.

Permafrost thawing can release more carbon, damage infrastructure and destabilise the landscape. Most of these environmental changes are irreversible within the human time scale, making it urgent. Increasing shipping, oil and gas extraction; and mining could exacerbate the situation. Suppose the commercialisation of the Arctic is not stopped. It could result in environmental degradation, which will lead to an ecological debacle with catastrophic ramifications, such as the risk of irreversible oil spills, noise pollution, release of toxins, an increase in sea level, extreme weather and destabilisation of global weather patterns. This could disrupt the livelihood of local indigenous communities. It could also lead to food insecurity and fear of encroachment in their habitat. The Arctic region remains fluid and fragile, with unresolved political and legal issues further exacerbated by climate change. More awareness must be created about protecting the Arctic, as it plays a key role in global climate stability – the Arctic's fragile ecosystem demands urgent collective action to prevent its commercialisation and militarisation. We should not allow short-term profits to take precedence over immediate health and ecological safety as a society. It is our responsibility to preserve this region for the sustainability of future generations.

CHINA MAY WIN MORE THAN EU FROM AUTO TARIFF TRUCE

BY NEIL UNMACK AND KATRINA HAMLIN

A DÉTENTE in the electric vehicle tariff war may suit China more than Europe. Brussels and Beijing are haggling over a way for Chinese manufacturers to sell battery rides tariff-free, but at a minimum price. Embracing such a system would be a risky move. Europe's electric-vehicle tariffs are barely a year old. Brussels added extra levies of up to 35 per cent to offset the competitive advantages that made-in-China vehicles get from government subsidies or cheap labour. Now, the People's Republic is pushing an alternative: rather than duties levied on imports, carmakers would commit to not sell below a certain price, a model used before with solar panels. Such a system could have benefits. Chinese manufacturers would not have to absorb the burden of levies through discounted prices. Europe, meanwhile, would be able to mollify Beijing and so avoid tit-for-tat tariffs on cognac and other exports, but still stop it dumping cars on the cheap. The latter is a potential mortal threat to Renault or Volkswagen. Last year, the Middle Kingdom exported some 1.25 million electric vehicles, more than half of the total production in Europe, as per International Energy Agency data. Look beneath the hood, however, and there are issues. Europe would probably want to find a level that reflects the extent of subsidies enjoyed by each carmaker, as it did with tariffs. A single tariff, likely China's preferred option, would be less precise. Either way, establishing a minimum floor for a complex vehicle with many moving parts would be challenging. It could also quickly become obsolete. Renault and Volkswagen are launching cheaper EV models to compete with China and changes in battery technology will lower costs. A floor could reduce the incentive to innovate. Enforcement looks a bigger headache. Tariffs have the virtue of simplicity. Yet car prices are fluid: dealers offer discounts and incentives such as cheap loans. And China's carmakers are already masters at bundling products to make their wares more attractive at home. BYD includes its "God's Eye" assisted driving software for all vehicles priced above 100,000 yuan (less than \$10,000). Carmakers at April's Shanghai auto show touted perks such as multiple screens and built-in kitchenettes. Nio owners have access to the brand's clubhouses. As such, European carmakers may still be undercut by Chinese rivals, incentivising production in China. True, Europe could impose minimum import quotas, as it did with Japan in the 1980s. Or it could set the price floor high but still impose tariffs below that level. — Reuters

FCA to revitalise London's sluggish markets

NEW PISCES markets could begin trading before the end of this year, in what the UK government hopes will be a boost for fast-growing companies in search of a stepping stone before reaching IPO (Initial Public Offering). The framework known as the Private Intermittent Securities and Capital Exchange System (Pisces), will allow the creation of a new type of private stock market, regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), with a much leaner regulatory burden compared to firms on public stock exchanges. In the FCA's own words, "Pisces will give the investors more opportunities to buy stakes in growing companies. And private companies can tap into a broader range of investors and asset managers, leading to greater support for future fundraising." LSEG (London Stock Exchange Group) boss David Schwimmer has expressed excitement about the new framework adding that investor interest "is not just from the UK — it's global." A statutory instrument setting out the regulations was put before Parliament last month for it to set out the final rules on the scheme. Industry sources suggested the regulator has some work to do to ensure the scheme's framework fits with market expectations. A key point of contention is a requirement that Pisces shares be traded intermittently, which the rules define as "occasional, not frequent and of limited duration." That would put it at odds with public stock markets, which allow for continuous daily trading between fixed hours. Mike McCudden, CEO of liquidity venue JP Jenkins, which hopes to operate its own Pisces exchange later this year, said he was "surprised" that intermittent trading was the starting point for Pisces. Dozens of private companies have had their shares admitted for trading to the firm's platform, worth a combined £2 bn. The precise



A man walks past London Stock Exchange building in central London. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

form that trading could take could also determine which investors get involved. The FCA says the use of a central securities depository or CSD (known as Crest in the UK) will be optional for Pisces market operators. Those who elect not to use the system, which facilitates the electronic settlement of share trades, could exclude certain types of funds from participating who require CSD functionality. That would mean some Pisces markets end up with quite different sets of investors and levels of liquidity, than others. Another area of concern is on share buybacks. While the manoeuvre is common on the London Stock Exchange, it is thought that the Treasury regards it as a waste of capital resources, so has banned its use on Pisces markets, which are designed to encourage investment into innovation. But there are concerns that the ban could be another dampener on liquidity, which could stunt the market's growth. "Whilst there are legitimate concerns here in terms of constraining growth potential — something that we believe sits at the heart of Pisces — (the use of buybacks) also affords a flexible capital reorganising mechanism that may be vital especially if a company is looking towards a full IPO," McCudden said. There are hopes that these issues and others could be cleared up under a five-year regulatory sandbox (it provides a controlled environment for firms to test new innovations), which will allow the FCA to test the design before finalising permanent regime in 2030. The sandbox environment is designed to enable the FCA to check everything is working as well as it could be and allow the regulator to make refinements more quickly. The regulatory sandbox system is one that has attracted international praise for its flexibility in the past. But there is no guarantee that regulators will agree with everyone in the industry. McCudden said he was desperate for the sandbox to be used constructively to ensure the outcome addresses real challenges within the London market.

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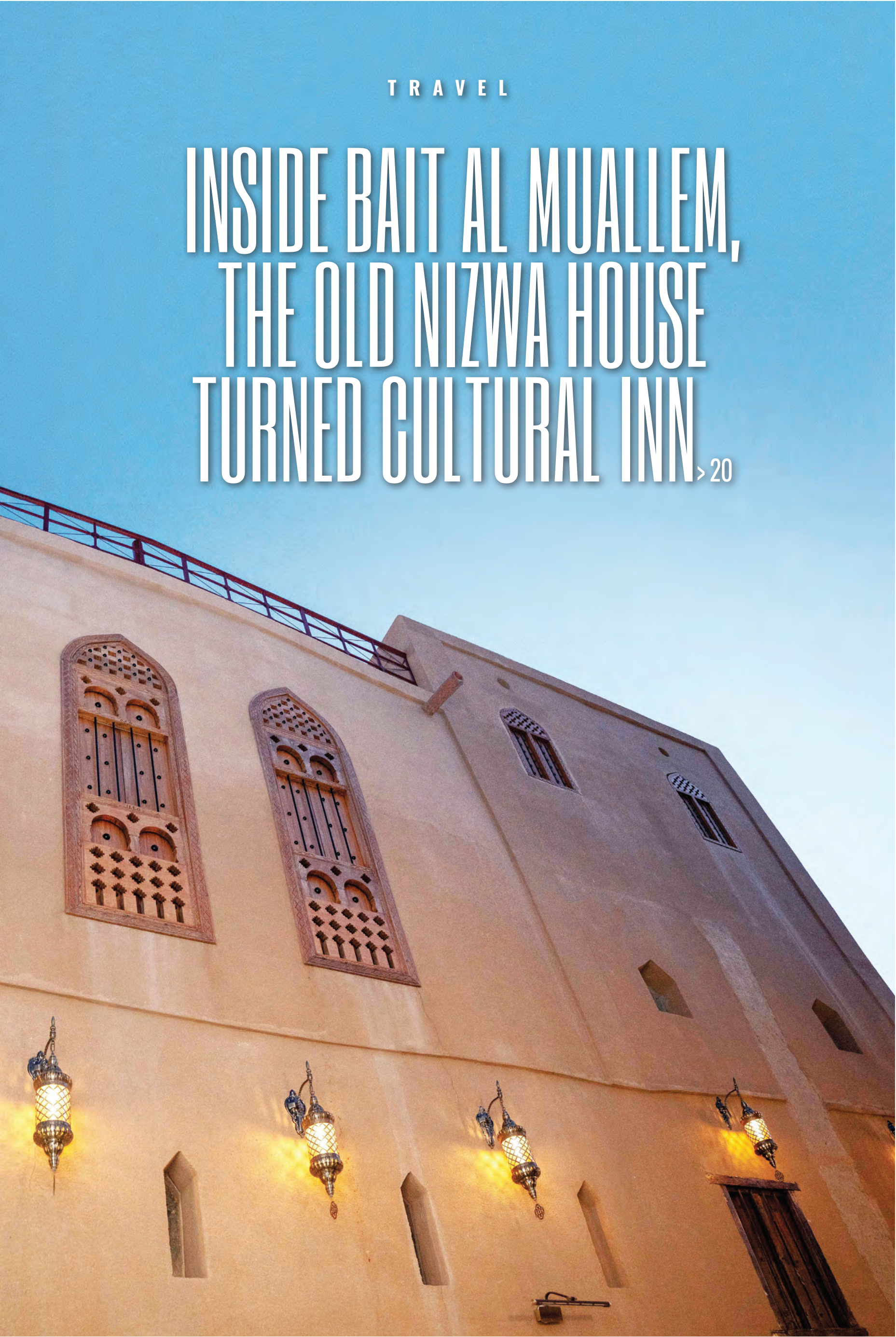
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ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

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LIFESTYLE

World’s largest Legoland set to open in Shanghai



ONE OF THE star attractions at Legoland Shanghai, which officially opens on July 5, is likely to be a mini replica of the Shanghai waterfront and skyscrapers of the Lujiazui financial district, all built in the colourful plastic bricks.

The Shanghai resort, which will be the world’s biggest Legoland so far and the first in China, features eight themed sections that will feel familiar to fans of Lego. They include Ninjago, Lego Friends and Monkie Kid lands, in which classic Lego pieces are brought to life and supersized — though not big enough to meet everyone’s expectations.

“I thought it would be huge, but it turned out to be half of the scale I dreamed... But the attractions are beyond my expectation,” said Lyu Xiaole, a very grown-up seven-year-old whose family were among those able to get limited tickets for a pre-opening visit on Friday.

China’s economy has been hit by weak consumer spending in recent years amidst a prolonged property slump and high youth unemployment, but Legoland Shanghai will be counting on resilient domestic travel and “experience” spending which have remained strong.

Legoland Shanghai is operated by a joint venture between Merlin Entertainments, which runs Legoland parks around the world and the Shanghai Jinshan District local government.

The replica of downtown Shanghai and the city’s waterfront is housed in the “Miniland” building at the site, where skyscrapers face the colonial era splendour of buildings along Shanghai’s famed Bund promenade.

The Miniland creations took 168,000 hours to complete, using more than 20 million bricks. “I think it’s best to play Lego in Legoland because I have much less Lego at my place,” said seven-year-old Shen Jieqi.

Lego, the Danish family-owned toymaker that produces the bricks, is a familiar name in China where it has more than 400 stores.

In Shanghai, Legoland will offer another leisure space in the city for those who can afford it. Tickets will start from 319 yuan (\$44.46) in low season and up to 599 yuan on peak days.

“We came very early in the morning. The atmosphere in the park is very joyful. The staff are full of passion,” said Huang Xuanhua, 44, who lives close by the resort in Shanghai’s Jinshan district and visited on Friday. “It has been a joyful day.” — Reuters

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



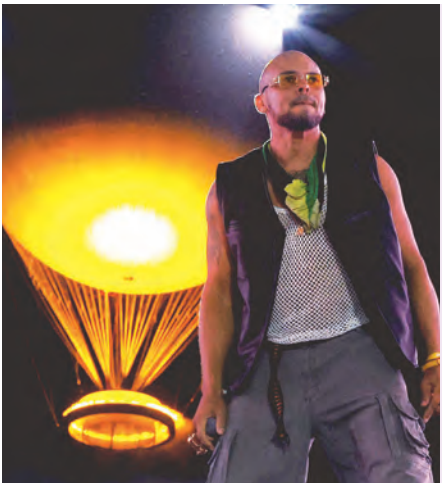
HERITAGE

The Head of the king Oba of Benin, a returned artefact from the “Benin Bronzes” collection, is displayed at the signing ceremony and handover of the 119 Benin bronzes returned from the Netherlands to Nigeria. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actors Aamir Khan, Genelia D’Souza and Riteish Deshmukh pose for photographs as they attend the screening of the Indian Hindi-language film ‘Sitaare Zameen Par’ in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

US band Major Lazer’s Walshy Fire performs during a concert as the Paris 2024 Olympic cauldron tethered to a balloon flies above the stage set in the Tuileries garden during France’s annual street music festival. — AFP

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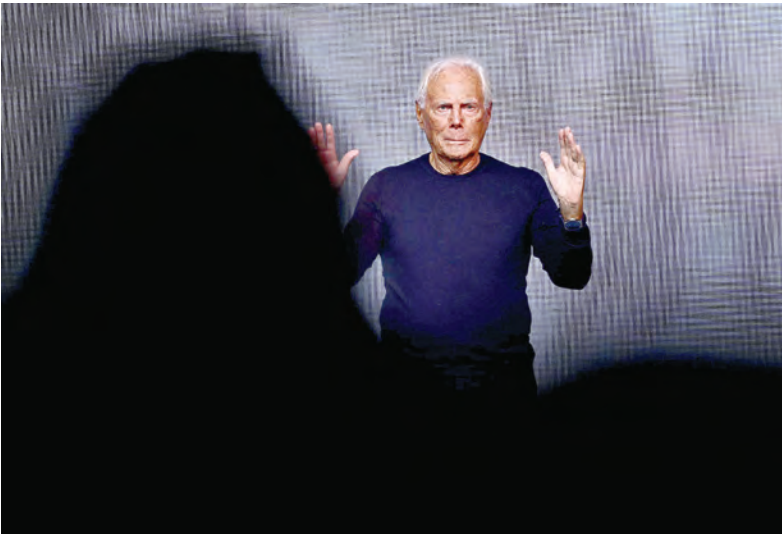


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Giorgio Armani to miss Milan Fashion Week shows



ITALIAN FASHION designer Giorgio Armani, who is “currently recovering at home”, will miss two of his shows at the Milan Fashion Week, his company said on Friday.

The 90-year-old designer will not attend Saturday’s and Monday’s shows, set to present Armani’s menswear collections for Spring-Summer 2026, a statement said.

“Armani has worked with his usual dedication on the collections that will be presented,” the fashion house said and “although he cannot be there in person, he will closely follow every phase of the shows”.

Armani, also known as “Re Giorgio” (“King Giorgio”), has built an empire in the luxury industry.

Widely regarded as a visionary creator, he is celebrated for his haute couture, ready-to-wear, accessories, perfumes, jewellery and interior design, as well as luxury hospitality in cities such as Milan, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Seoul and Shanghai.

Milan Fashion Week, one of the most influential events in global fashion, has a rich history rooted in Italy’s cultural and economic revival after World War II. In the 1950s, the city’s fashion scene began to grow, driven by talented designers and the rise of prêt-à-porter. By the 1970s, Milan’s fashion industry organised its own calendar, turning individual shows into a major industry event.

As a symbol of Italy’s enduring influence on fashion, Milan Fashion Week remains a vital event — balancing heritage with innovation and inspiring the industry worldwide.

In the 21st century, Milan Fashion Week embraced digital transformation, sustainability and diversity. Many brands launched eco-friendly initiatives, reflecting a shift towards responsible fashion. Today, Milan continues to attract global attention, serving as a launchpad for new talent and cutting-edge trends. — AFP



Utopia and fragile democracy at Art Basel fair

THIS YEAR 'S Art Basel, the world's top contemporary art fair, paints a portrait of a troubled planet, with works embodying the relentless pursuit of happiness and the fragility of democracies.

The four-day event in the northern Swiss border city of Basel, which closed yesterday, features more than 280 galleries presenting works by around 4,000 artists.

The monumental works section features an 85-metre-long installation entitled “The Voyage — A March To Utopia”.

Created by the studio of Dutch artist Joep van Lieshout, it features 80 large sculptures forming a procession of absurd objects, where “everybody walks in the same direction... on their way to a happy place”, the artist said.

The journey begins with a team of oxen, followed by all means of getting to that better world, including a walking stick, a cart, a toilet on wheels, a wheelchair and a mobile surgical theatre for those struggling to keep up.

Next come objects representing everything the convoy is carrying, followed by sculptures of ghosts symbolising those who didn’t make it to the end.

It ends with machines set to destroy the road behind them, so that “there’s no going back”, the artist explained.

- FLAG OF LOGS -

A stone’s throw away, Spanish artist Jaume Plensa presents a work composed of 21 aluminium doors engraved with the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

Entitled “Forgotten Dreams”, it invites viewers to contemplate collective aspirations and not forget the horrors of the past.

Vietnam-born Danish artist Danh Vo has installed a huge US flag made from hundreds of logs and 13 steel stars, referencing the first version of



the flag from 1777.

Reconstructed at Art Basel, “In God We Trust” was first created in 2020, during the presidential election campaign between Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

The logs were removed one by one and burned in fireplaces, gradually causing the flag to disappear.

The work serves as an allegory of the fragility of US democracy.

- A CELEBRATION OF LIFE -

Art Basel is above all a commercial event, where artists and galleries come to meet wealthy collectors.

But the fair is also very popular with art lovers who come for the simple pleasure of browsing the works on show.

Its “Unlimited” section brings together monumental pieces intended for museums and major collections.

It includes recent as well as older works.

The “Unlimited” hall features 67 works, including three angels by German sculptor Thomas Schutte, which foster “a certain ambivalence”, said Carmine.

With “their wings resembling razors”, are they “protective angels or angels of the apocalypse?”, he asked.

Japanese artist Izumi Kato brings a touch of poetry with his stone structures, painted with enigmatic faces, drawing on the Japanese tradition that each stone contains a spirit.

US artist Arlene Shechet plays on contrasts, with a heavy orange abstract sculpture designed to give an impression of lightness despite its weight.

“The current political situation is dark and so bringing light and colour and joy and spirit and art is very meaningful,” she said. — AFP

FEATURES



INSIDE BAIT AL MUALLEM, THE OLD NIZWA HOUSE TURNED CULTURAL INN

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

TUCKED AWAY in the old streets of Al Aqur, one of Nizwa’s oldest neighbourhoods, there’s a tall, weathered house made of sunbaked mud bricks. It looks pretty quiet and plain from the outside, but inside, it’s alive with stories. This house, over 400 years old, has watched so many things happen — empires rising and falling, dynasties changing hands — every brick having witnessed moments in Oman’s long history. It used to belong to Saif bin Mohammed al Nabhani, a well-respected scholar known for his calm, kind nature and deep wisdom. His house was more than just a home; it was a place for learning, a space where values were shared and passed on, not just with words but through the way of life itself.

Today, that old house has been given a new purpose. It’s been transformed into Bait Al Muallem, a lively guesthouse that feels like stepping into Oman’s history but in a way that’s welcoming and real. This isn’t just about having a roof over your head; it’s about experiencing something genuine — getting a real taste of Oman’s culture and stories. It’s about connecting with the place and its people.

The idea for this came from Asaad al Akhzami (inset). He’s someone with a lot of experience in the hotel world, having been a general manager at a big hotel in Salalah. But even with all his success, he felt a pull back to his roots. He wanted to create a place where visitors could truly feel Oman — not just see it from a tour bus or stay in a fancy hotel, but really connect with the heart of the country. His plan was to offer an authentic experience that touches the soul, not just the senses.

Putting that plan into action wasn’t easy. Coming into Nizwa as an outsider and trying to take over a historic house wasn’t straightforward. Local pride runs deep here and many in the community had reservations. But Asaad was determined. He worked hard to earn trust and respect; and soon, the local community saw that his aim was genuine. Building that trust was key; it was the foundation for everything else.

Every detail of the house was carefully preserved. The original mud walls stayed, the carved wooden ceilings kept their stories and the arches watched silently as they always had. But comfort had to be part of it too. So, modern touches like air conditioning, soft lighting and modern bathrooms were added — but with care not to disturb the house’s old-world charm. Asaad calls this “smart authenticity” — keeping what’s genuine while making sure guests are comfortable.

Guests often leave with stories of their own. One fellow told Asaad, “This house breathes, it has a soul,” while another admired the wall markings, thinking they were just decorations, only to discover they’re traditional symbols loaded with meaning. It’s these little details that make the place special.

But Bait Al Muallem isn’t just about sleeping and waking up in a historic house. It’s about bringing the local community into the experience. Women from

nearby homes prepare traditional Omani meals, full of flavour and warmth. Elders gather in the courtyard, sharing tales around the fire, passing down a sense of history and culture.

Guides dressed in colourful traditional clothes lead tours that show guests what daily life here is really like — beyond what’s written in the guidebooks. Local artisans also take part, sharing their crafts with visitors who want to learn more than just the surface level of Oman’s culture.

When it first opened, most guests were history buffs or those really interested in culture. Now, though, the audience has grown.

Young travellers, families, artists, bloggers — people looking for something real and meaningful — are all drawn here. They’re not just looking for a nice place to stay; they want an experience that stays with them, something authentic that helps them understand the country’s true spirit. At Bait Al Muallem, everyone feels like part of the family — welcomed and valued.

For Asaad, this isn’t just about expanding a business. It’s part of a bigger picture — how travel itself is changing. More and more, people want to seek out experiences that are meaningful, that connect them with other people and cultures, rather than just ticking off sights on a list. They want to feel something, learn something and leave with a story of their own.

Thanks to the success of Bait Al Muallem, Asaad has gone on to open similar inns in Tiwi and Nizwa, called Nomad Inn. More projects are on the way — places in Salalah and Wadi Al Shab, each aiming to give visitors a taste of Oman’s diverse beauty and traditions. Even plans are underway for a special retreat up on Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, where guests can get even deeper into nature and culture.