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Tourism GDP to hit **RO3.5bn** in 2025

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman’s travel and tourism sector is on course to generate RO3.5bn for the national economy in 2025, continuing a steady growth trend that has already pushed the industry beyond pre-pandemic levels, according to the latest data from World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

In 2024, the sector contributed around RO3.3bn to GDP - about 7.7% of the economy - and supported 212,700 jobs. Tourism’s GDP share of 7.8% recorded in 2019 (pre-pandemic) is expected to rise to about 8.1% in 2025.

Looking ahead, WTTC forecasts the sector’s contribution will grow exponentially reaching RO5.2bn by 2035. Employment is also set to grow with total tourism jobs projected to reach 277,700 by 2035, creating around 53,000 new jobs over the next decade.

Tourism-related taxes generated about US\$669.4mn in 2023, accounting for roughly 1.2% of Oman’s government revenue.

Spending patterns show a balanced mix of domestic and interna-

tional demand. Domestic travellers made up about 52% of total tourism spending in 2024, with international visitors contributing the remaining 48%. International tourists spent about RO1.5bn in 2024 which is forecast to reach RO1.6bn this year, slightly ahead of the amount forecast to be spent by domestic travellers (RO1.5bn).

Of the total spent in 2024, 65.6% was on leisure trips and 34.4% on business travel. The UAE remains the top source market for inbound visitors (17%), followed by India (12%), the UK (8%), Germany (5%) and Bahrain (4%).

The outlook remains strong with WTTC projecting tourism GDP to grow to RO5.2bn by 2035 at an average of 4.1% per year. International visitor spending is expected to rise by 5.2% per year to RO2.7bn by 2035, while domestic spending is projected to increase 1.9% annually, reaching RO1.8bn.

WTTC analysts expect the sector’s upward trend to continue driven by ongoing investments, promotional efforts and infrastructure improvements aimed at attracting more domestic and international tourists.



Passenger traffic set to rise 37% at Salalah Airport

Our Correspondent
Salalah

With the 2025 khareef season beginning in Dhofar on Saturday, Salalah Airport stated that it is fully prepared to handle a sharp rise in passenger traffic, supported by 12 local and international airlines now operating flights to the destination.

Zakaria bin Yaqub al Harrasi, Vice-President of Salalah Airport, said the airport expects passenger numbers and flight movements to increase significantly compared to last year owing to continued efforts to improve operations and streamline services.

Passenger traffic this season is forecast to exceed 900,000 - a 37% increase over the 692,626 travellers recorded in 2024. Harrasi said the surge reflects both the growing popularity of the



khareef season in Dhofar and the expanded flight network serving the region.

Domestic travellers will make up the largest share with 62.5% of total arrivals, followed by GCC visitors at 35.7% and tourists from India at 1.8%.

Flight movements are also projected to climb 36% this season with more than 5,000 inbound and outbound flights expected, compared to 3,869 last year.

A highlight for 2025 is the ad-

dition of Saudia, which launched its first direct flight from Jeddah to Salalah on Wednesday. The airline will operate three weekly flights throughout the season, boosting air connectivity between Oman and Saudi Arabia and offering more options for travellers.

Harrasi added that Oman Airports continues to invest in digital services to enhance the passenger experience. Now in its second year, the Safar Aisr (Travel Easier) initiative has introduced self-service kiosks, pre-check-in services and dedicated information centres to reduce wait times and simplify travel procedures.

The facilities are part of a wider strategy to accommodate rising tourist demand during khareef and to promote Dhofar as a key summer destination in the region.

Over 1,300 Omanis repatriated from Iran in phased evacuation



Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 1,300 Omani citizens have been safely repatriated from the Islamic Republic of Iran under a phased evacuation plan overseen by Foreign Ministry in coordination with Oman’s embassies abroad and relevant national and regional authorities.

According to official figures, around 1,380 Omani citizens returned home and at least 281 nationals were provided safe passage through a combination of land and sea crossings and special flights, reflecting the sultanate’s commitment to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens and to uphold humanitarian cooperation.

In the first phase, 313 citizens were transferred through the port of Bandar Abbas, with additional groups passing through the Shalamcheh border into Iraq for onward travel to Oman.

The second phase saw the safe return of 245 citizens and several other nationals via Bandar Abbas. Ten buses were dispatched to transport citizens from northern Iran to the border with Türkiye, while three buses carried citizens to the Shalamcheh crossing with Iraq, ensuring smooth transit arrangements.

In the third phase, 193 Omanis and 158 other nationals were evacuated through Bandar Abbas Port to Khasab Port. Another 155 citizens and several other nationals were flown directly from Iraq to the sultanate, following coordination with the Omani Embassy in Baghdad.

The fourth phase brought back 294 citizens and a number of other nationals via Türkiye, with evacuees arriving at Muscat International Airport.

The Foreign Ministry expressed its appreciation for the support and cooperation extended by Turkish authorities and all national agencies that contributed to the smooth execution of the operation.

The fifth phase, concluded on Saturday, secured the return of a further 181 citizens and other nationals who had been evacuated from the city of Mashhad through Turkmenistan before being flown to Oman.



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Omani cookbook wins two global awards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has won two international awards for its publication *The Omani Cuisine* at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards held in Lisbon, Portugal.

The Gourmand awards are among the most prominent global events celebrating the best books in culinary arts and food culture. The ministry’s participation showcased Oman’s culinary heritage through its book, produced in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University.

At a ceremony attended by culinary experts and industry figures from around the world, Oman won the ‘Best Book in the World’



award in the Culinary Diplomacy category and ‘Best Cookbook in the World’ award in the Intangible Cultural Heritage category.

Officials said the achievement highlights efforts to document and promote Omani cuisine as an integral part of the nation’s cultural and heritage identity.

Asma bint Salem al Hajri, Tourism Promotion Expert at the ministry, said the participation reflects ongoing work to enhance the reputation of Omani cuisine regionally and internationally. She noted that traditional Omani food plays a key role in cultural tourism and showcases the depth of Omani civilisation.

The ministry’s activities at the event included a visual presentation and a tasting session, giving

attendees insight into Omani dishes, their ingredients and preparation.

The event was a platform to introduce the diversity and authenticity of Omani food to new audiences and make it a part of the sultanate’s tourism offering.

Fatima bint Ali al Lawati, Assistant Director for Institutional Planning and member of the Food Tourism and Culinary Arts Programme at the ministry, said the double win demonstrates international appreciation for Oman’s culinary arts and intangible heritage. She added that the recognition will encourage further efforts to promote Omani food culture through careful documentation and creative marketing.

Bigger role of AI sought in economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is taking steps to increase the contribution of the artificial intelligence (AI) sector to its national economy by expanding the number of specialised start-ups and boosting research and investment in the field.

Hassan bin Fida Hussain al Lawati, Head of National Programme for AI and Advanced Digital Technologies at Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), said the programme benefits economic, development and service sectors, directly impacting citizens' quality of life.

He said the programme aims to increase the number of technology companies specialising in AI by 20% each year. The number of such companies now exceeds 25, up from fewer than ten



Oman moved up five places in the Oxford Insight Government AI Readiness Index, ranking 45th globally out of 193 countries in 2024

HASSAN AL LAWATI



In September 2024, the Council of Ministers approved the National Programme for AI and Advanced Digital Technologies as part of a broader strategy built on three pillars, the first of which is promoting AI adoption in economic and development sectors. The second focuses on localising AI technologies and developing national expertise to position Oman as a technology producer.

The third pillar governs AI and digital applications with a human-centred approach to ensure ethical and effective use under flexible laws.

Lawati noted that Oman moved up five places in the Oxford Insight Government AI Readiness Index, ranking 45th globally out of 193 countries in 2024, compared to 50th in 2023. Oman aims to join the world's

top 30 countries in this field, he added.

He further informed that MTCIT, in partnership with University of Technology and Applied Sciences, launched an initiative called AI Makers to encourage work in the field and reward top researchers, scientific papers and projects in AI.

MTCIT also introduced a competition called 'Engineer it with AI' to support local development in generative AI, enhance national skills and encourage innovation. The contest aims to boost economic returns by helping new start-ups and raising national performance indicators.

In addition, an initiative called Humanising AI has been launched to maintain a balance between technical progress and the human aspect of service delivery, ensuring inclusivity for all groups in society.

National HIV Guidelines updated, aligned with global standards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Represented by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Ministry of Health (MoH) launched an updated edition of the National HIV Guidelines on Thursday marking a significant step forward in the sultanate's efforts to enhance the quality of care for people living with HIV.

The event was held under the patronage of H E Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Planning and Health Regulation at MoH, and attended by Dr Amal al Ma'niyah, Director General of Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, alongside several senior officials and healthcare professionals.

Revision of the national guidelines forms part of MoH's ongoing commitment to standardising the provision of care and treatment across healthcare institutions in line with evidence-based best practices. It also aims to enhance the capacity of healthcare providers, support the objectives of the National AIDS Strategy, and



help mitigate the health and social impacts of the virus.

The updated guidelines offer practical, clinical and scientific recommendations in key areas such as diagnosis, treatment and long-term follow-up. These also address the psychological, social and human rights factors affecting people living with HIV.

Developed in collaboration with national and international experts, the guidelines align with global standards established by World Health Organization and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

On the sidelines of the launch, a training workshop was held for 150 healthcare professionals representing health institutions across all governorates. Organised by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in partnership with The Royal Hospital, the workshop focused on key updates in the 2025 National HIV Guidelines, implications of these on clinical practice and ways to foster stronger inter-professional collaboration among HIV service providers.

The centre emphasised the fact that the updated guidelines represent a pivotal advancement in improving the quality of life for people living with HIV, reducing new infection rates, and combating the stigma and discrimination associated with the virus.

Over 250 model farms boost fruit production in Dhahirah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhahirah is witnessing steady progress in agricultural development through continued expansion of the Model Commercial Farms programme, an initiative launched by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) in 2020.

Data released by Directorate General of Agricultural and Water Resources in the governorate indicates that, as of mid-2025, more than 250 model farms have been established across wilayats in Dhahirah covering a total area exceeding 140 acres.

As part of the programme, approximately 9,000 tissue-culture date palm saplings and 6,000 seedlings of various fruit trees - including mango, Omani lemon, guava, fig and grape - have been distributed among farmers.

The programme is aimed at boosting the agricultural sector through development of organised, economically viable farms that adopt modern irrigation



techniques. These technologies are a prerequisite to participate in the programme, as these contribute to water conservation and improved production efficiency.

Programme officials stated that it plays an integral role in promoting sustainable agricultural practices, enhancing food security and improving farmers' livelihoods. In addition to provision of high-quality plant varieties, MAFWR continues to offer technical guidance and advisory support to ensure long-term productivity and economic returns.

The programme's success achieved in Dhahirah serves as a model for similar initiatives in other governorates, in line with

the ministry's strategic plan to achieve a qualitative leap in the sultanate's agricultural sector.

In a related development, the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhahirah issued a total of 1,462 water licences covering a wide range of water-related activities in its wilayats in 2024.

The licences include approvals for construction and maintenance of dams and aflaj, implementation of development projects, drilling of new and replacement wells, deepening and cleaning of existing wells, and projects related to water reuse. Additional licences were issued for inventory certificates, replacement of inventory plates, and extension of water pipelines from wells.

Officials emphasised the fact that the licensing process is essential for sustainable management of water resources in the governorate, while supporting the national strategy to preserve water security in alignment with the sultanate's broader sustainable development goals.

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Uzbekistan opens its doors to Omanis

ADKHAMJON JANOBIDDINOV

The writer is an independent researcher and journalist from Uzbekistan focusing on its foreign affairs and economy

In May 2025, Uzbekistan introduced 30-day visa free stay for citizens of Oman. As an ancient centre of Islamic civilisation, Uzbekistan holds a special place in the Muslim world. Cities like Bukhara and Sa-markand were once home to some of the greatest Islamic scholars in history, including Imam al Bukhari and Imam al Tirmidhi. The architectural beauty of centuries-old mosques and madrasas, and the spirit of traditional hospitality make Uzbekistan a deeply spiritual and culturally enriching destination for travellers from Oman.

The new visa-free regime makes it easier than ever for Omani travellers to explore Uzbekistan. The move is part of a broader effort to strengthen ties between Uzbekistan and Gulf countries and welcome more visitors from the Arab world.

While countries like Turkey, the UAE and Qatar have long been top destinations for Omani travellers, Uzbekistan offers an equally unique and authentic experience. Whether you seek cultural enrichment, a peaceful escape or spiritual rejuvenation, Uzbekistan has something to offer.

Uzbekistan is a muslim majority country. All foods are halal and mosques are present in every neighbourhood. Friday prayers are widely attended and the call to prayer is heard throughout the day. This atmosphere allows Omani visitors to feel spiritually at home.

Uzbekistan was ranked the safest country in the world in the 2024 Safety Perceptions Index. Tourist police are present at historical sites and are trained in multiple languages to assist visitors. Families, solo travellers and elderly tourists can feel at ease during their stay.

Uzbekistan is now more accessible than ever. According to the Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan, aviation authorities of Uzbekistan and Oman recently held negotiations to discuss the launch of direct air connections between the two countries, including planned flights by Oman Air to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, there are several connecting flights from Dubai and Doha to major cities in Uzbekistan.

When it comes to tour attractions, Uzbekistan is home to seven Unesco World Heritage Sites and thousands of historical and archaeological landmarks.

Tashkent, the capital city, is known for

its blend of modern and Soviet-era architecture, green parks and vibrant bazaars. Samarkand, once the capital of the Timurid empire, is known for its Islamic architecture and pilgrimage sites, including the Imam al Bukhari mausoleum. Bukhara is another city famous for its Islamic architecture. For many centuries, it has been a centre for Islamic learning and culture.

For nature lovers, Uzbekistan offers unexpected variety. From the mountains of Zaamin to the Amirsoy Resort, travellers can enjoy hiking, skiing or simply breathing in the fresh mountain air. For those seeking more unusual adventures, there's the Aral Sea. Once the fourth-largest lake in the world, the shrinking sea lost more than 90% of its water due to mismanagement of water resources during the soviet era.

Hospitality is a cornerstone of Uzbek culture. Just as the Silk Road brought travellers, traders and scholars through these lands centuries ago, today's Uzbeks continue the tradition of treating guests as family. This makes Uzbekistan a very unique travel destination.

With shared religious values and cultural appreciation, Uzbekistan offers unforgettable experiences to travellers from Oman. The growth of tourism can also foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding, further strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily

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Students develop AI tool to aid learning

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group of Omani university students has developed an artificial intelligence-powered learning platform to improve access to higher education for students with disabilities, highlighting the growing role of youth-led innovation in the sultanate's digital transformation.

Named Ilmify, the platform allows students to upload complex academic material, which is then simplified using AI into accessible formats such as text summaries and audio explanations. It is designed to assist learners with visual or hearing impairments, as well as students with cognitive difficulties who face challenges with standard course content.



The tool was developed by nine students from different academic fields and is part of a wider trend across the Gulf and South Asia, where student entrepreneurs are using technology to address gaps in education equity.

Ammar bin Rashid al Busaidi, Operations Manager, said the idea stemmed from a teammate's struggle to access course material due to a disability. "That experience motivated us to create something useful for others in similar situations," he said. The name combines the Arabic word 'ilm' (knowledge) with '-ify' linking knowledge and technology.

The platform uses an AI engine that analyses individual learning patterns to offer tailored assistance. It also includes an accessible interface, easy navigation and the option to switch between formats.

The students worked on Ilmify while pursuing regular studies. "Balancing classes and technical development wasn't easy, but efficient time management and a shared vision made it possible," Busaidi said.

Plans are underway to launch a mobile app and expand the platform's content to include school-level material, sign language videos and more language options for non-Arabic and non-English speakers.

The team is also seeking partnerships with education institutions and organisations that support individuals with disabilities in Oman and other countries where digital learning tools for students with special needs are still limited.

Although still in its early stages, Ilmify supports Oman's strategy to develop inclusive, technology-driven education under the national digital economy plan.

Busaidi noted that inclusive edtech is a growing sector in countries such as India, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where governments are investing in AI learning tools for diverse learner groups, including those with disabilities - a trend that Ilmify aims to support.

Centralised used car market in Muscat soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) held a workshop on Wednesday titled 'Regulating the Used Vehicle Sales Sector' as part of efforts to enhance collaboration with the private sector and create a more organised commercial environment.

The workshop was attended by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with Majlis A'Shura members and representatives from Muscat Municipality, Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Interior and the General Administration of Customs. Stakeholders and representatives from used car dealerships across the country also participated.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsi, Director General of Commerce at MoCIIP, said the sector makes a



Spread over 500,000sqm, the project is designed to provide a one-stop hub for consumers and modern infrastructure for dealers

SALIM BIN SULAIMAN AL THUHI significant contribution to the national economy and reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to regulating it and promoting a supportive business climate. She

described the workshop as a platform to address challenges and find practical solutions.

Participants highlighted several key issues including the absence of a centralised location for dealership operations, which leads to fragmented services and higher costs. Other concerns included the need to better regulate non-Omani participation to protect local businesses, high rental fees, limited financing, costly customs clearance and the presence of unlicensed vendors.

Khazaen Economic City presented a proposal to develop a centrally located market for used vehicles in Muscat governorate. The project, currently under review, aims to bring all dealerships together in one integrated hub with dedicated facilities and services.

Mansour bin Khalifa al Siyabi, Majlis A'Shura member from Basher, welcomed MoCIIP's dialogue with stakeholders on the matter and suggested offering financial incentives to help dealerships move to the new site. He proposed forming a closed joint-stock company owned by dealers to manage the market and ensure sustainable operations and fair rents.

Providing details of the planned central car market, Salim bin Sulaiman al Thuhi, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said it would cover 500,000sqm and include showrooms for new and used cars, inspection and maintenance centres, insurance and

registration services, auction facilities and various amenities such as banks, restaurants, fuel stations and parking.

Thuhi said the project is designed to provide a one-stop hub for consumers and modern infrastructure for dealers, while supporting urban planning, simplifying government monitoring and generating reliable data for policymaking.

Ali bin Hamad al Maamari, Director of Licensing Department at MoCIIP, said the workshop was part of a wider strategy to improve Oman's business environment and that its recommendations would be submitted to relevant authorities for follow-up.

The workshop concluded with calls to commence work on the proposed central market and implement agreed measures to regulate the sector and facilitate a competitive, investor-friendly climate.

South Batinah unveils 5 investment opportunities

Our Correspondent
Barka

As part of efforts to boost economic activity, increase national income, and enhance leisure offerings for citizens and residents, South Batinah Governor's Office has announced five investment opportunities across key wilayats in the governorate. An official at the Governor's Office informed that the opportunities are open to local and international investors and span a variety of sectors aimed at revitalising economic and community infrastructure.

The investment packages include development, management and operations of Barka Waterfront, Wadi al Maawil Souq and Al Awabi Souq. Additionally, investors are invited to bid for operations and management of a slaughterhouse in Musannah and development of Al



Misfah in the wilayat of Rustaq.

"These projects are designed to stimulate economic development, attract private investment and provide much-needed job opportunities for local residents," the official said. "These will also enhance public amenities and contribute to a higher quality of life in the governorate."

The deadline for submitting bids is August 7. The projects are part of efforts to achieve sustainable development and support Oman's economic diversification goals.

New ecotourism projects planned in four Dhofar nature reserves

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Environment Authority (EA) has launched a new investment initiative to develop and manage ecotourism activities in four nature reserves in Dhofar.

In line with Oman's vision for sustainable tourism and conservation of its natural heritage, the authority is inviting expressions of interest from qualified companies, institutions and investors to partner in eco-friendly tourism projects in the protected sites.

The reserves include Khor al Qurm al Kabir Nature Reserve near Salalah, which has a rich mangrove ecosystem supporting migratory birds and marine life; Khor Awqad Sanctuary, a coastal wetland known for its biodiversity; Khor Taqah Nature Reserve near the town of Taqah, an im-



portant nesting area for marine and coastal species with views of the Arabian Sea; and Khor Salalah Nature Reserve, which has freshwater channels and vegetation that attract wildlife and visitors.

EA said the investment packages are designed to balance environmental protection with responsible tourism, providing nature-based experiences while preserving the ecological integrity of these sensitive areas.

Interested parties must submit a letter of interest with a valid commercial registration for the planned activity. Proposals should include a detailed business plan covering the project scope, environmental measures, design plans with site maps and operational frameworks.

Applicants are also required to provide company details, organisational structure, experience in ecotourism activities, and capacity to manage projects in protected zones. The initiative is part of the sultanate's national strategy to diversify tourism offerings, boost local economies and protect its biodiversity.

EA stressed the fact that the reserves are not only environmental assets but also serve as educational and recreational areas that highlight Oman's natural beauty to local and international visitors.

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Oman showcases investment ambitions at SPIEF in Russia

MoCIIP concludes its participation at 28th St Petersburg International Economic Forum

St Petersburg, Russia - The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), concluded its participation in the 28th St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), reaffirming its commitment to global economic dialogue and cross-border investment engagements.

Oman spotlighted its integrated business ecosystem and priority sectors under Oman Vision 2040, which aims to foster a resilient and diversified economy.

SPIEF 2025 attracted approximately 20,000 participants from 140 countries, maintaining robust international engagement. The Forum featured more than 150 events, ranging from thematic panels and plenary sessions to business breakfasts and bilateral dialogues. High-profile attendees included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang, Bahraini royal Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad al Khalifa, and South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile - alongside senior officials from nearly 50 countries, including Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Central African Republic.

Their presence underscored SPIEF's role as a pivotal platform for fostering multipolar economic cooperation.



Oman spotlighted its integrated business ecosystem and priority sectors, reaffirmed its commitment to global economic dialogue and cross-border investment engagements

The Omani delegation was led by H E Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, who spearheaded a series of high-level meetings and sector-focused en-

gagements. The delegation's program included participation in key forum sessions, bilateral meetings with institutional investors, and exploratory visits to major corporate pavilions.

This year, Oman's focus centred on promoting investment in

four high-potential sectors: Luxury tourism, logistics, food security, and mining - each aligned with national efforts to position Oman as a competitive and future-ready investment destination.

As part of its engagement, Oman organised a dedicated roundtable with leading Russian companies active in these sectors. The session provided a platform to present the sultanate's competitive advantages, regulatory reforms, and infrastructure readiness, while facilitating direct

dialogue with potential investors and strategic partners.

"Oman is focused on high-value investment, enabling enterprise through streamlined digital platforms, and scaling public-private partnerships - an area where we bring over two decades of institutional experience. Our business climate continues to strengthen, supported by policy clarity, legal reform, and competitive market access."

She highlighted Oman's upgraded credit rating by Standard & Poor's in 2024 as a signal of

fiscal stability and investor confidence, adding that the Sultanate is actively translating these gains into tangible investment momentum across key sectors - from green hydrogen and advanced manufacturing to integrated tourism and logistics.

Trade and economic cooperation between Oman and Russia continues to deepen. As of February 2024, the bilateral trade volume reached RO30.9mn.

Notably, Oman exports to Russia surged from RO582,602 in 2022 to RO3.35mn in 2023 - a remarkable 475% increase. Imports from Russia totalled RO188.4mn, highlighting the scale and diversification of commercial ties between the two countries.

Oman's participation in SPIEF 2025 aligns with its broader strategy to enhance investor outreach in key international markets, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. By leveraging global platforms such as SPIEF, Oman is actively cultivating a network of institutional investors and strategic partners to catalyse sustainable development and high-impact investment.

As part of the official business programme, Oman participated in the SPIEF session titled 'Greater Eurasia: Drivers for the Formation of an Integrated Investment Market'.



ECB warns of sharp slowdown in global trade

Brussels, Belgium - The European Central Bank (ECB) has warned of a significant slowdown in global economic outlook over the next two years, attributing it primarily to US tariffs and rising uncertainty surrounding international trade policies.

According to the ECB's June 2025 macroeconomic projections, global import growth is now expected to reach 3.1% in 2025, down by 0.4 percentage points from previous estimates. The outlook for 2026 is more severe, with growth forecast to drop to 1.7%, a sharp downward revision of 1.4 percentage points.

The ECB attributes the slowdown to the impact of recent US tariff increases on various imports and broader policy uncertainty across international trade channels.

On the other hand, the ECB noted several positive factors that could support the eurozone economy and enhance its resilience. These include increased government spending on defence and infrastructure, rising real household income, a strong labour market, and improving financing conditions.

Investments in Mahas Industrial City surpass RO41mn

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' has completed the infrastructure and a road project in Mahas Industrial City, located in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam governorate.

Spanning a total area of 1.5mn sqm, the project comes along the lines of Madayn's continued efforts to advance development in Musandam and promote investment in line with Oman Vision 2040 objectives, particularly the priority of 'Development of Gov-

ernorates and Sustainable Cities'.

Mubarak bin Salim al Ghailani, Acting Director General of Mahas Industrial City, stated that eight new projects were localised in the city during 2024, attracting investments worth RO2,515,000 and covering an area exceeding 49,900sqm.

This brings the total investment volume in Mahas Industrial City to RO41,742,750 by the end of 2024, with a total leased area reaching 229,558sqm. The city currently provides employment



to 320 individuals.

"In 2024 alone, three building permits were issued, along with several approvals for project maps, six work permits, and eight plan drawings (kroki), all processed in line with Madayn's high standards of efficiency and regulatory compliance," Ghailani said.

Ghailani highlighted the full completion of the city's infrastructure and road project, which includes the construction of a 7km road network built to international standards, with side-

walks, side parking, and sustainable solar-powered lighting.

The project also features a 2,000-cubic metre main water tank with an advanced pumping system, a 500sqm sewage treatment unit, a main security gate at the city entrance, and fully integrated road, water, and wastewater networks. Additionally, the project includes a 70sqm main bridge and a 3km flood protection canal along the main wadi course in Mahas.

He added that work is cur-

rently underway on establishing the Madayn Entrepreneurial Complex, which aims to support entrepreneurs and the SMEs. The complex, being developed over an area of 10,000sqm, will include ten ready-built factories of 500sqm each (expandable), outdoor parking areas, and a fully equipped entrance gate to facilitate operations. Ghailani pointed out that Mahas Industrial City targets projects in food security, logistics, and light to medium-scale industries.

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- All inquiries or requests for clarification regarding the tender should be directed via email to aji@munanoor.com
- Sealed tenders should clearly mention only the Tender Name and Tender Number on the envelope.
- All sealed tenders must be submitted at MUNA NOOR Head office Reception counter on or before 01:00 PM on the submission date. Please ensure that your submission includes a copy of your Commercial Registration (CR) and VAT certificate, among any other required documents. Kindly note that the tender fee is non-refundable.

MunaNoor reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason.

Omantel, FiberHome open R&D centre

Muscat - As part of its broader research and development strategy, Omantel has partnered with FiberHome, a leading Chinese technology provider, to establish a joint research and development centre dedicated to advancing intelligent solutions in next-generation fibre networks and telecommunications technologies.

This strategic collaboration supports Omantel's vision to bridge industrial expertise with academic research, fostering a dynamic ecosystem for innovation and technology entrepreneurship in Oman. The initiative plays a vital role in driving the nation's digital transformation and enabling a knowledge-based economy.

Commenting on the partnership, Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, pointed out that Omantel has been continuously expanding its investments in R&D across the technology and digital sectors, recognising the importance of staying ahead in a fast-changing digital landscape. "We are committed to em-



bracing global innovation and developing future-ready solutions that fuel our sustainable growth and meet the evolving needs of our customers. This joint center is a testament to that commitment.

"It will serve as a high-tech platform to design and test forward-looking solutions for Oman and the wider region. Partnering with a global leader like FiberHome enhances our capabilities to build smarter, more efficient

networks and deliver commercially viable technologies. We are confident this initiative will strengthen our position both regionally and globally."

Joe Cai, Vice President of FiberHome, said, "We are proud to join forces with Omantel in launching this innovation center, which marks a new milestone in FiberHome's long-term engagement with Oman and the Middle East. The lab will leverage our global R&D strength to develop

advanced smart network solutions, including next-generation technologies like 50GPON and AI-powered network management. This partnership also promotes talent development and deeper collaboration between academia and industry, both essential pillars for sustainable digital growth."

The centre will serve as an integrated platform, bringing together academic insight and real-world expertise.

Germany, France united on US tariff retaliation

Berlin, Germany - The German aerospace industry has told Euronews it is aligning with its French counterpart in supporting EU retaliatory measures that target US finished aircraft rather than spare parts, citing the interdependence of transatlantic production lines.

The German Aerospace Industries Association (BDLI) wants only US completed products aircraft and helicopters to be targeted by the EU for retaliation

tariffs - leaving the market for the supply of parts unscathed - if trade negotiations between the EU and the US founder, the group has told Euronews. It's position aligns it with the French sector's stance.

'If the EU must respond, counter-tariffs should focus strictly on fully finished aerospace end products - such as complete aircraft and helicopters - and explicitly exclude spare parts or critical products,' BDLI



said in an email to Euronews. "This is essential to avoid unintended harm to European and global production networks."

US aircraft are included in the European Commission's draft list of €95bn worth of US products that could face duties if ongoing

negotiations fail. The list was open for industry consultation until 10 June and now awaits approval by EU member states.

BDLI's position mirrors that of Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury, who also chairs the French aerospace association GIFAS. Speaking to French media in May, Faury backed tariffs on finished aircraft but warned against measures affecting spare parts, to avoid disrupting the global supply chain.

A source familiar with the matter told Euronews that the French government supports the stance of its aerospace industry.

In response to the EU's inclusion of aircraft in its draft retaliation list, the US has launched an investigation that could pave the way for the Trump administration to impose additional tariffs on the EU aerospace sector.

Trade tensions between the EU and the US risk reigniting the long-standing rivalry between aerospace giants Boeing and Airbus, even though the two economies' production systems are tightly intertwined.



S&P 500 slips, oil falls as investors watch Iran war

New York, US - US stocks ended a choppy trading session mixed on Friday as oil prices retreated while investors watched diplomatic developments in the Middle East.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average inched up 0.1%, while the S&P 500 and Nasdaq Composite gave up early gains to close 0.2% and 0.5% lower, respectively. The Nasdaq and Dow each eked out small gains for the week - 0.2% and less than 0.1%, respectively - while the S&P dipped 0.2% to notch its second losing week in a row. Stocks were little changed on Wednesday after Federal Reserve officials kept interest rates steady, but raised their inflation forecast and lowered their economic growth outlook amid elevated economic uncertainty. US markets were closed in observance of the June-teenth holiday on Thursday.

President Trump on Thursday said he would take two weeks to decide whether to join Israel in military action against Iran. The deferral appeared to be a pivot

for the president, whose rhetoric in recent days suggested he was considering assisting Israel in its efforts to neutralise Iran's nuclear programme by force.

Though Friday's de-escalation efforts bore no fruit. European officials reportedly failed to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear program during talks in Geneva, and a top Israeli official warned the conflict could be protracted.

Markets have been contending with geopolitical risk and the possibility of an inflationary oil supply shock since Israel bombed Iranian nuclear and military targets last Friday. Oil prices spiked last week and were trading at their highest level since January in non-US markets on Thursday.

Brent crude, the global benchmark, slid about 2.5% to US\$77.20 a barrel amid optimism the US may push for Israel and Iran to negotiate.

The Magnificent Seven stocks were mostly lower, with Apple (AAPL) shares rising more than 2% to buck the trend. (Investopedia)

EU shuts out Chinese medical suppliers from Europe market

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union has confirmed a ban on Chinese companies from participating in EU government tenders for medical devices exceeding 5mn - another piece in an ongoing tit-for-tat trade tensions between Brussels and Beijing.

The European Commission has formally introduced restrictions previously reported by Euronews in response to what it describes as discriminatory barriers imposed by China against European medical device manufacturers.

Following a detailed investigation, the Commission found 'clear evidence' that China had been unfairly blocking EU-made medical devices from its public procurement market. This marks the first countermeasure taken under the International Procurement Instrument (IPI), which came into force in August 2022 to

promote fair access for EU firms to procurement opportunities outside the bloc.

"Our aim with these measures is to level the playing field for EU businesses. We remain committed to dialogue with China to resolve these issues," said Trade Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič.

Under the new rules, Chinese companies are barred from bidding on public contracts for medical devices in the EU single market that exceed 5mn. Additionally, successful bids must contain no more than 50% of inputs originating from China.

According to the Commission, the measures are proportionate to China's own restrictions and are designed to ensure the continued availability of critical medical equipment for EU healthcare systems. (Euronews)



الأنوار للاستثمارات ش.م.ع

Al Anwar Investments SAOG

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Directors' Report for the year ended 31st March 2025

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 31st Annual General Meeting of Al Anwar Investments SAOG (AAI). I take this opportunity to place before you the Annual Report on the activities and performance of your company for the financial year ended 31st March 2025.

Overview of the Group results

The Company reported a consolidated net profit of OMR 2,385,000 for year ended on 31st March 2025 as against a profit of OMR 532,000 for the year ended on 31st March 2024, an improvement of 348%, primarily due to higher Share of Profit (SoP) from associate companies, realized gains on the sale of investments and dividend from investments classified as Fair Value. The total comprehensive Income for the year ended on 31st March 2025 was OMR 1,657,000 as against last year's OMR 1,568,000, an improvement of 6%.

Following the successful completion of a rights issue amounting to OMR 5.0 million, shareholders' equity stood at OMR 37.4 million as of 31st March 2025. Debt/ Equity ratio is a 0.77 as compared to 0.49 in the previous year. Net assets per share as at 31st March 2025 is 130 baizas per share as against 155 baizas for the previous year, declined due to issue of right issue at 0.065, discount to the book value.

Dividends

The company's accumulated profits (retained earnings) as of 31st March 2025, are OMR 4.8 million. The Board of Directors recommends a cash Dividend of 4% (Last year: 5%) and Stock Dividend of 4% (last year: 3%) for the approval of shareholders.

Financial statements

The audited consolidated financial statements presented includes the following:

- The results of Subsidiary Companies for the year ended 31st December, 2024 of the following:
 - Al Anwar International Investment LLC, 100% subsidiary;
 - Al Anwar Taleem LLC, 100% subsidiary
 - Al Anwar Hospitality SAOC, 100% subsidiary; and
 - Al Anwar Industrial Investments SAOC, 100% subsidiary.
- The share of profit/ (loss) of Associate Companies for the year ended 31st December, 2024 (Al Ruwad International Education Services SAOC up to 31st January 2025) in which AAI owns between 20% and 50% of share capital or has significant influence.
- Dividends from investments classified at Fair Value.
- Realized and unrealized gains / losses from investment classified at Fair Value.

Performance of Investments

Associates

1. Al Maha Ceramics SAOG (AMC) (AAI Stake – 18.74%):

AMC reported revenue of OMR 4,928,826 for the year ended 31st December 2024, compared to OMR 5,707,121 in the previous year — a decrease of 13.6%. The net loss after tax for the year was OMR (1,464,824), compared to a net loss of OMR (1,120,593) in the corresponding period last year. AMC has written off its entire investment in Al Hael Ceramics. As per notification dated 24th April 2025, effective from 29th May 2025, Sultanate of Oman has imposed antidumping duty on all ceramic and Porcelain products coming from India and China with some exceptions. It is expected that it will help the company to increase its sales in Oman.

2. Voltamp Energy SAOG (VE) (AAI Stake – 24.68% to 15%):

VE reported revenues of OMR 41,552,772 for the year ended 31st December 2024, compared to OMR 30,512,671 in the previous year, an improvement of 36%. The company reported a net profit attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company of OMR 5,281,005, significantly higher than OMR 816,510 of previous year. This is mainly on account of strategic emphasis on expanding its portfolio with premium, value-driven products and boosting exports by entering new markets.

AAI divested a 9.68% stake in Voltamp during the year, realizing a profit of OMR 1,357,000 from the transaction. Despite the partial disposal, AAI continues to classify Voltamp as an associate due to its sustained significant influence over the company.

3. Arabia Falcon Insurance Company SAOG (AFIC) (AAI Stake – 22.62%):

AFIC recorded insurance revenue of OMR 21,761,637 for the year ended 31st December 2024, compared to OMR 20,973,982 in the previous year, an improvement of 3.8%. The net profit after tax rose to OMR 1,585,328, from OMR 741,594 of previous year, an improvement of 114%, primarily driven by improved technical results. The company's performance remains well-aligned with overall market trends, reinforcing its position as a stable and growing insurer in the sector.

4. Al Ruwad International for Education Services SAOC (AIS) (AAI Stake – 43.51%):

The Company has reported lower revenue and a loss for the twelve months period ended on 31st January 2025 as compared to loss of last year. This is primarily due to lower number of students enrolled in the school during academic year.

5. National Biscuits Industries Ltd. SAOG (NABIL) (AAI Stake – 29.22%):

NABIL reported revenue of OMR 19,459,000 for the twelve months period ended on 31st December 2024 as against OMR 16,453,000 of last year, an improvement of 18% from last year. The net profit for the period was OMR 993,000 as against OMR 601,000 for the same period of last year, an improvement of 65%. The growth in both revenue and profitability are attributed to the company's expanded geographical coverage and successful launch of new products in the premium segment.

6. National Detergent Co. SAOG (NDC) (AAI Stake – 25.24%):

NDC reported revenues of OMR 24,519,448 for the year ended 31st December 2024, compared to OMR 21,180,627 in the previous year, an improvement of 16%. The company reported a net profit of OMR 1,393,616 as compared to OMR 657,519 recorded in the previous year, an improvement of 112%. The overall growth is primarily because of higher domestic sales, product mixes and favorable raw material prices.

7. Oman Chlorine SAOG (OC) (AAI Stake – 22.11%)

Oman Chlorine Group has reported revenue of OMR 34,423,834 for the year ended 31st December 2024 as compared with OMR 32,174,460 in the previous year, a growth of 7%. The net profit (Attributable to Parent Company Shareholders) for the period is OMR 1,529,770 as compared to profit of OMR 1,968,036 in the previous period, a decline of 22%.

Other significant investments

1. National Bank of Oman SAOG (NBO)

In line with the Board approved strategy, Al Anwar has acquired an equity stake of 4.01% in NBO. The investment is classified at fair value. As of 31st December 2024, National Bank of Oman (NBO) reported a net profit of OMR 63.06 million, an 8.7% increase from the previous year. Gross loans and advances increased to OMR 4.09 billion, reflecting a growth of 11.7 per cent over last year. Customer deposits as of 31 December 2024 are at OMR 4.13 billion, recording a strong growth of 14.4 per cent over last year.

2. Dhofar International Development and Investment Co SAOG (DIDIC)

AAI has an equity stake of 6.84% in DIDIC at carrying value of OMR 6,763,787 as at 31st March 2025. The investment is classified at fair value. As of 31st December 2024, DIDIC reported a net profit of OMR 8.29 million, reflecting a 6.8% increase from the previous year's OMR 7.76 million. This growth was primarily driven by improved performance in key associate companies and a reduction in unrealized losses on financial assets.

3. Bank Dhofar SAOG

AAI has an equity stake of 1.51% in Bank Dhofar at carrying value of OMR 6,489,687 as at 31st March 2025. The investment is classified at fair value. Bank Dhofar reported a net profit of OMR 43.61 million for 2024, up 12.5% from the previous year. Key financial highlights include a 3.0% increase in net interest income, 8.6% growth in total assets to OMR 5.09 billion, and a 14.1% rise in customer deposits.

Organisation

AAI has always been fully committed of recruiting and training Omani employees and developing and promoting the local talent. AAI Organisation level at 31st March 2025 is 57%.

Outlook

In 2024, Standard & Poor's upgraded Oman's credit rating from "BBB-" to "BB+" with a stable outlook. This upgrade marks Oman's return to investment-grade status after nearly seven years, reflecting significant improvements in public finances, fiscal discipline, and economic reforms.

AAI has maintained a prudent and active approach towards managing its investment portfolio. Our objective this year is to:

- continue to support and pro-actively manage our investment companies and,
- take advantage of investment opportunities available in the market

We are confident that AAI and its Group companies will continue to play a pivotal role in Oman's economic growth, create job opportunities for Omani nationals, and attract foreign investments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to take this

opportunity to express our greetings and good wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pray to Allah to grant him and his government success to lead the country and the people to greater prosperity and progress.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, Financial Services Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, Bankers, Auditors for their continued support. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Directors of all our portfolio investment companies for direction given to the managements of the respective companies. I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the management team and all employees of our portfolio investment companies.

I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to the Shareholders of Al Anwar Investments SAOG for the confidence they have reposed in the company and its Board.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of

Al Anwar Investments SAOG
Brig. (Rtd.) Masoud Humaid Al Harthy
Chairman

Consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2025		
	2025 RO'000	2024 RO'000
ASSETS		
Investment in associates	29,392	30,915
Investments at fair value	32,352	13,241
Property and other assets	2,284	2,274
Receivables and prepayments	1,866	1,263
Cash and bank balances	485	85
TOTAL ASSETS	66,379	47,778
EQUITY		
Share capital	26,086	20,600
Legal reserve	4,930	4,674
Equity investment reserve	373	1,385
Associates' reserves	1,273	803
Retained earnings	4,756	4,412
Total equity	37,418	31,874
LIABILITIES		
Bank borrowings	28,790	15,725
Payables	171	179
Total liabilities	28,961	15,904
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	66,379	47,778
Net assets per share (in Baizas)	130	155

Consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 March 2025		
	2025 RO'000	2024 RO'000
Share of results of associates	1,888	559
Net investment income	2,750	1,585
Other income	31	28
Net income	4,669	2,172
Administrative expenses	(374)	(353)
Finance costs	(1,264)	(1,066)
Capital work-in-progress written-off	-	(36)
Reversal of contingency provision	40	260
Provision for impairment loss on investment in associates	(540)	(300)
Corporate Social Responsibility expenses	(10)	(10)
Directors' fees and remuneration	(136)	(135)
Total expenses	(2,284)	(1,640)
Profit before tax for the year	2,385	532
Income tax	-	-
Net profit for the year	2,385	532
Other comprehensive income:		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss		
Share of other comprehensive income of associates	284	479
Fair value (loss) / gain on investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(1,012)	557
Other comprehensive income for the year	(728)	1,036
Total comprehensive income and net profit for the year	1,657	1,568
Earnings per share (in Baizas) - Restated	11	2

Note:1) The complete accounts will be send by mail to any shareholders who requests them in arabic or english as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.
2) Financial statements are available on MSX website.

Toyota Prado offers raffle trips to Istanbul

Toyota Prado now offers buyers exclusive benefits, including chances to win one of 16 iPhone16 Pro Max and one of five international holiday packages to Istanbul for two adults (4 nights, 5 days) in a Grand Raffle draw.

The other benefits include free service from 3 years 30,000km up to 10 years/100,000km (whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance and Scratch & Win prizes which vary by model, variant, model year and manufacturing year, a press release said. The campaign, that began on June 1, will last until July 31.

For decades, the Prado has been the trusted companion of off-road adventurers and city drivers alike. Now, in its latest generation, it raises the bar even higher with enhanced capability, superior comfort, and a bold, retro-inspired presence that commands attention on every road.

Built on Toyota's advanced GA-F platform, the Prado delivers unmatched durability and stability across challenging terrains. Whether navigating rocky trails, cruising through the city, or taking on long road trips across Oman's diverse landscapes, the Prado ensures a confident and



controlled drive.

Retaining its robust body-on-frame construction, the Prado introduces Electric Power Steering (EPS), which offers smoother

handling, reduces kickback on uneven surfaces and provides effortless manoeuvrability at any speed. Drivers can choose between a 2.4ltr Turbo Petrol or a

2.8ltr Turbo Diesel engine, each paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission, delivering a perfect blend of power, precision and efficiency.

Inside, the Prado offers a thoughtfully designed seven-seat cabin that speaks to both strength and sophistication. The spacious interior is crafted for

families and adventurers who value comfort as much as capability, while Toyota Safety Sense ensures that every journey is safer, smarter and more relaxing.

With features designed to reduce driver fatigue and enhance awareness, long drives across Oman's open highways or through winding mountain passes become more enjoyable than ever.

With Oman's unique terrain ranging from rugged mountains, to sandy deserts and coastal highways, the Prado is perfectly tuned to meet the lifestyle demands of local drivers. It is a vehicle that has consistently proven itself in the toughest environments and now brings even more comfort, power and intelligent features for the next generation of explorers. Whether it is a family getaway, a weekend off-road adventure, or daily drives through bustling streets, the Prado is engineered to perform, protect and impress.

Built on Toyota's advanced GA-F platform, Prado delivers unmatched durability and stability across challenging terrains



OAB wraps up Nizwa roadshow

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has successfully concluded the third leg of its SME Development Training Roadshow, held in Nizwa from June 17-18.

Organised in collaboration with the SME Development Authority and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nizwa, under the bank's flagship 'Tumouhi' initiative, the event drew wide participation from aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners in Dakhliyah, continuing a nationwide mission to support and empower Oman's growing SME sector. The event was held under the auspices of Sheikh Dr Faisal bin Ali bin Rashid al Zidi, Wali of Manah, a press release said.

Following successful workshops in Muscat and Sohar earlier this year, the Nizwa event brought together a dynamic mix of sessions covering financial literacy, business strategy, marketing, and HR fundamentals. Designed to offer hands-on

learning and real-world insights, the two-day workshop also served as a vibrant networking hub for local entrepreneurs and industry experts.

Sheikh Zidi expressed his enthusiasm towards this initiative in supporting the SME sector, praising the government's steadfast approach and the great attention it pays to this vital sector, given its pivotal role in supporting the growth of the economy and enhancing its diversity. He emphasised that supporting entrepreneurs and emerging business owners contributes to creating new job opportunities and enhancing local innovation.

"This workshop is a true turning point for entrepreneurs. They would walk in with ideas, and leave with a plan, equipped with the confidence to take their businesses to the next level. The sessions were practical, relevant, and exactly what small business owners and entrepreneurs would need," he stated.

Sohar Aluminium, Siraj Foundation sign agreement

Sohar Aluminium and Siraj Education Endowment Foundation signed a cooperation agreement to fund the purchase of electronic donation devices for the Foundation.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the Academia-Industry Forum organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. This agreement reflects both parties' commitment to supporting sustainable educational initiatives and promoting a culture of charitable endowments that are directed towards supporting the higher education sector in the sultanate.

The agreement was signed in the presence of H E Prof Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The



agreement was signed by Jameel Mohammed Shakeel, Corporate Communications and Social Responsibility Manager at Sohar Aluminium and Eng Mahmood bin Khalfan Al Hadidi, CEO of Siraj Education Endowment Foundation.

Based on this agreement, Sohar Aluminium will fund the purchase of electronic donation devices that will facilitate fundraising efforts to support students in higher education institutions who are financially disadvantaged or come from

low-income families, enabling them to continue their academic studies.

The support will be administered through a structured mechanism that ensures transparency and optimal use of financial resources. Siraj, for its

part, will be responsible for the operation, management, and regular maintenance of the electronic donation devices.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kharusi, general manager of Human Resources and Corporate Affairs at Sohar Aluminium, stated that the agreement is part of the company's broader efforts to strengthen its partnerships and support the initiatives of various government institutions.

"Through this agreement, we aim to support the purchase of smart endowment donation devices that make it easier for individuals to contribute to the education sector, which in turn helps prevent financially disadvantaged students from missing the opportunity to complete their university education," he added.

ahlibank demonstrates its market leadership

Reinforcing its position as a leading player in the Sultanate of Oman's debt capital markets (DCM), Ahlibank has successfully acted as Issue Manager for the RO15mn senior bond issuance by United Finance Company (UFC), comprising a base issue of RO10mn and a fully exercised greenshoe option of RO5mn.

The transaction had a novel structure of being the first senior bond issuance by a Finance and Leasing Company (FLC) in recent years. This structure enabled the three-year issuance



to price competitively at a coupon of 7.00% pa, a press release said.

Hanaa al Kharusi, senior general manager, Wholesale Bank-

ing at Ahlibank, said, "We continue to remain the #1 issue manager for fixed income issuance for private issuers on the Muscat Stock Exchange. At

Ahlibank, we remain committed to empowering Omani corporates through bespoke capital-raising strategies that are both efficient and market-responsive. The successful execution of this bond issuance underscores our advisory strength, our distribution expertise, and our ability to navigate market dynamics with precision, positioning ahlibank as a trusted partner in accelerating corporate growth through capital market access."

The issuance garnered robust investor interest with total

demand of RO17.2mn, reflecting a 1.7x oversubscription underscoring Ahlibank's capability in structuring and delivering high-impact capital market transactions. The private placement received over 60 applications, representing the highest level of investor participation for any comparable corporate bond issuance in recent years.

The strong momentum surrounding the offering illustrates growing market confidence—not only in the issuer, but also in Ahlibank's execution expertise and market-readiness.

Tourism Committee discusses investment, localisation strategies

The Media, Tourism, and Culture Committee of the Shura Council held its seventh meeting of the second annual session (2024-2025), chaired by H E Abdullah Hamad al Harthy.

The session hosted H E Azzan Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, along with ministry officials, to discuss strategies for enhancing job localisation in the tourism sector and the establishment of integrated tourism cities and service stations for



mobile homes, a press release said.

H E Harthy welcomed the ministry representatives, highlighting the value of direct en-

gagement with government bodies to exchange ideas and advance the tourism sector—one of Oman's key pillars for economic diversification under

Vision 2040.

H E Busaidi gave a detailed presentation on the tourism sector's latest performance indicators, including its contribu-

tion to GDP, growth in local and foreign investments, and the expansion of hospitality infrastructure. He also outlined future development plans, ongoing

inter-agency coordination efforts, and challenges facing the sector. He emphasised the link between expanding tourism projects and creating new job

opportunities for Omanis.

The members raised questions regarding the ministry's job creation efforts, particularly in replacing expatriates in supervisory and managerial roles. They stressed the need for phased Omanisation targets in the hospitality sector that preserve service quality.

Discussions also touched on establishing integrated service stations for mobile homes to support adventure and desert tourism, ensuring high standards of safety and accessibility.



Turkish Airlines, Icelandair expand codesharing ties

Turkish Airlines and Icelandair announced the expansion of their existing codeshare partnership during the 81st IATA AGM in New Delhi, India.

This expansion marks a significant step in strengthening connectivity between two key regions at the crossroads of continents and oceans, a press release said.

Since the beginning of their partnership in June 2023, the two flag carriers have cooperated under a codeshare agreement to offer passengers more seamless travel options. Building on this foundation, Icelandair will introduce direct flights between Reykjavik and Istanbul, starting September 5, operating twice weekly during the winter season. These new flights will be incorporated into the scope of the agreement, allowing Turkish Airlines to put its marketing code on Icelandair's operations.

In return, Icelandair will place its marketing code on select Turkish Airlines flights beyond Istanbul, covering destinations across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This extended integration connects Icelandair's transatlantic network with Turkish Airlines' global reach across multiple continents, creating new opportunities for both business and leisure travel.

Turkish Airlines CEO, Bilal Ekici stated, "This cooperation goes beyond a commercial

partnership. It represents a strategic alignment between two trusted carriers. By launching direct flights between Reykjavik and Istanbul and integrating our networks, we are opening the door to new traffic flows and connectivity options between Iceland, Türkiye and beyond."

Bogi Nils Bogason, Icelandair CEO, added, "Building on the partnership with Turkish Airlines will offer travellers even greater connectivity and seamless travel options across our combined networks. The expansion of our codeshare partnership to multiple destinations in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, reflects our shared commitment to service excellence, building a stronger global network and unlocking new opportunities for growth."

This enhanced cooperation is expected to boost tourism and trade between Türkiye and Iceland while enhancing global connectivity via Europe

This enhanced cooperation is expected to boost tourism and trade between Türkiye and Iceland while enhancing global connectivity through a most comprehensive route.

Shura Bureau reviews government responses

The Shura Bureau held its 12th regular meeting of the second annual sitting of the Tenth Term (2023-2027), chaired by H E Tahir Mabkhoot al Junaibi, deputy chairman of the Council, in the presence of Council Bureau members and H E Ahmed Mohammed al Nadabi, secretary general of the council.

During the meeting, the bureau reviewed a number of government responses and official correspondences, along with several reports submitted by the council's permanent committees and working groups. The session also saw the approval of a set of follow-up tools submitted by members of the council, a press release said.

The reports discussed included that of the working team formed to review the benefits of the Social Protection System. Established in January 2025, the team was tasked with assessing the current benefits in light of emerging societal needs and concerns. The report outlined the team's methodology, including analysis of relevant literature, benchmarking against international best practices, and identifying legislative and regulatory gaps. It also presented the out-



comes of discussions with stakeholders and experts, and proposed a set of actionable recommendations.

The bureau also examined the report of the Digital Economy Working Team, which was formed to support Oman's strategic shift towards a robust digital economy in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. The report included key findings derived from consultations, meetings, and sectoral analyses, as well as recommendations to enhance the digital ecosystem in the sultanate.

The Bureau also reviewed the report of the working group assigned to assess and evaluate various proposals and reports submitted to the council.

The meeting further covered several reports from the council's standing committees. Among them was the Health and Social Committee's report on promoting investment in the private

healthcare sector. The report included an overview of the committee's efforts, data analysis, stakeholder engagements, and key recommendations. The Bureau resolved to include this report in the agenda of the next Council session.

Also reviewed was the report by the Services and Public Utilities Committee on enhancing the quality of telecommunications services in Oman. The report analysed the performance of

major companies, sectoral financial data, and provided recommendations aimed at improving service quality nationwide.

The Bureau also reviewed reports of the Youth and Human Resources Committee, including a proposal to establish a national centre for gifted Omanis, a report on the implementation of the Wage Protection System, and a report addressing the grievances of employees laid off by Al Bashayer Company.

Vodafone sponsors OABC networking event

The Oman American Business Council (OABC), in partnership with Vodafone Oman hosted its highly anticipated Speed Networking Evening last week, bringing together decision-makers from Oman's leading companies and dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for an evening of fast-paced, high-impact business networking.

Held at the Diplomatic Club, the event was designed to foster meaningful connections between established corporates and growing businesses in a structured format that maximises interaction. Each attendee



participated in a series of two-minute introductions - ensuring a room full of potential collaborations and new opportunities, a press release said.

Vodafone Oman played a pivotal role as the title sponsor, reinforcing its commitment to the development of Oman's entrepreneurial and SME ecosystem.

"OABC is here to connect people and open doors—and tonight's turnout proves what's possible when we work together," said Ali Daud, OABC chairman. "Through our partnership with Riyadh, and Vodafone's generous support, this has become one of OABC's biggest events yet. We're proud to stand

behind SMEs and help make doing business in Oman easier."

Mohammed al Alawi, head of Enterprise at Vodafone Oman, said, "At Vodafone Oman, we are proud to be part of initiatives that align with our commitment to empowering Oman's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Events like these foster meaningful connections."

Khalfan al Khatri, acting director of marketing and events, Riyadh (SMEs Development Authority), added, "It's vital for Oman's SMEs to have access to platforms where they can present their businesses directly to the corporate sector."



Chery Oman unveils summer campaign

New World Autos, the distributor for Chery vehicles in Oman, recently announced an exciting Chery Summer Campaign under the theme 'Enjoy Summer Drives with Cool Vibes'.

As families prepare for scenic road trips and memorable getaways, Chery brings more value, safety and innovation to every journey with attractive benefits for customers purchasing any Chery vehicle this summer, a press release said.

The benefits include Free AAA Roadside Assistance, Free Service up to 6 years/60,000km (whichever is earlier), an unparalleled 10 year/1,000,000km engine warranty (not applicable on Arrizo 5), free insurance, Walk-in and Win raffle with a chance to win a Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra 5G and Test Drive and

Win exciting prizes.

Also available is attractive EMI options across the full range. This exclusive campaign that began on May 18, will continue until July 17. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.)

Chery has established itself as one of the most forward-thinking automotive brands globally, backed by strong investments in research and development, including five R&D centres worldwide. Chery's vehicles reflect the brand's commitment to intelligent mobility, safety, energy efficiency and driving comfort. With numerous international awards and patents, Chery's range in Oman represents a fusion of cutting-edge engineering, refined

aesthetics, and exceptional value.

The range in Oman includes all-new Tiggo 9, Tiggo 8 Pro Max, Tiggo 7 Pro Max, Tiggo 4 Pro, Arrizo 8, Arrizo 6 Pro and Arrizo 5.

The flagship SUV in the Chery range, the Tiggo 9 is equipped with a 2.0-litre turbocharged engine, finely tuned to offer a harmonious blend of power and efficiency. Paired with an advanced 8-speed automatic transmission and all-wheel drive capability, it delivers a smooth, confident and exhilarating driving experience across Oman's diverse terrain.

Inside, the Tiggo 9 offers a sanctuary of calm and sophistication. Its seven-seat configuration caters to modern families and adventurers alike, while the

multi-layer noise reduction cabin, ventilated leather seats, front seat massage, driver headrest speakers and multi-zone climate control elevate passenger comfort to new levels.

The Tiggo 8 Pro Max is powered by a 2ltr turbocharged engine paired with a 7-speed Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT), delivering robust performance and efficiency. The cabin boasts premium leatherette seats, ambient lighting and a high-definition dual-screen infotainment setup.

Blending bold design and practical versatility, the Tiggo 7 Pro Max comes with a 1.6ltr turbocharged engine mated to a 7-speed DCT for smooth, responsive drives. Inside, the SUV features a sleek digital cockpit, intelligent voice command system and a panoramic sunroof.

Shell Oman, SQU teams strengthen local talent

Shell Oman, in partnership with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), successfully concluded the second edition of the Energising New Markets programme, an immersive learning experience designed to equip university students with practical skills and industry insights aligned with Oman's sustainable development ambitions.

Held on the SQU campus, the four-day programme brought together a group of promising students from the College of Economics and Political Science and the College of Engineering to take part in an intensive workshop. Centred around Shell's CAR framework, which focuses on Capacity, Achievement, and Relationships, the programme offered participants hands-on exposure to the business side of renewables and energy transition through real-world case studies.

Over the first three days, students worked in diverse teams to analyse a commercial expansion challenge linked to Shell's Powering Progress strategy. The sessions combined technical and soft skills training, while also addressing identified skillset gaps through mentorship and guided



exercises led by Shell and SQU professionals and experienced facilitators.

On the final day, student groups presented their commercial business plans before a panel of Shell and SQU leaders and judges. The presentations demonstrated not only their strategic thinking, but also their ability to apply classroom knowledge to industry-relevant scenarios.

"This programme gave us a platform to challenge ourselves, apply what we've learned, and grow in new ways outside the classroom," shared one of the participating students.

Professor Salim Al Harthi, deputy vice chancellor for Academic Affairs and Community Service at SQU said, "This collaboration stands as a pioneering model of synergy between academic institutions and the industry sector, offering a practical learning environment that enhances students' skills in strategic thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and other essential competencies required in today's dynamic job market."

This initiative, first introduced in 2024, is part of Shell's broader In-Country Value (ICV) efforts to support local talent and build a more sustainable, future-ready workforce. In 2025, the programme expanded further with two workshops and the number of participants doubling.

Pakistan recommends Donald Trump for Nobel Peace Prize

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan has announced that it recommended US President Donald Trump for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of what it described as his 'decisive' diplomatic intervention during the recent Pakistan-India crisis, according to an official statement issued on Saturday.

Islamabad stated that Trump's intervention helped defuse tensions and avert a broader conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, which could have had catastrophic consequences for millions across the region and beyond.

"At a moment of heightened regional turbulence, President Trump demonstrated great strategic foresight and stellar statesmanship through robust diplomatic engagement with both Islamabad and New Delhi



US President Donald Trump

which de-escalated a rapidly deteriorating situation," it said in the statement, adding: "This intervention stands as a testament to his role as a genuine peacemaker and his commitment to conflict resolution through dialogue."

At the height of hostilities between India and Pakistan last month, triggered by the April 22 attack in the Indian-administered Kashmir, Trump

announced on May 10 that the US mediated a ceasefire, saying he prevented a potential nuclear war by using trade and direct diplomacy between the two South Asian nuclear-armed nations.

The latest development came after Trump met with Pakistani military chief General Asim Munir at the White House on Wednesday.

Pakistan further said it 'ac-

knowledges and greatly admires President Trump's sincere offers to help resolve the longstanding dispute of Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan'.

"Durable peace in South Asia will remain elusive until the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions concerning Jammu and Kashmir", the statement stressed.

Anadolu Agency

Moscow backs Iran's peaceful nuke programme, opposes weaponisation

Moscow/Kyiv - Russian President Vladimir Putin has reaffirmed Moscow's opposition to the spread of weapons of mass destruction, including any potential acquisition by Iran, in an interview published Saturday.

Putin told Sky News Arabia that Russia supports Iran's right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, emphasising that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has 'found no evidence' suggesting Tehran seeks to build nuclear weapons.

He reaffirmed Russia's firm opposition to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, describing Iran's fatwa banning nuclear weapons as a serious and 'important' step that should be taken seriously.

"We believe Iran has the right to use nuclear energy peacefully, and we are ready to help," Putin said.

Hostilities broke out on June 13 when Israel launched airstrikes on several sites across Iran, including military and nuclear facilities, prompting Tehran to launch retaliatory strikes.

Moscow had informed Israeli leaders multiple times that 'Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons', urging dialogue to reduce regional fears and promote collective security.

The Russian president also said it is essential to 'declare



Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia supports Iran's right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes

Ukraine a neutral country, outside any military alliances, and without nuclear weapons', adding that such guarantees are vital for lasting regional stability.

He stressed that Russia insists on Kyiv recognising the results of referendums held in four Ukrainian regions, warning: "Ig-

noring them would mean the possibility of renewed armed conflict."

Putin claimed that Russia and Ukraine were close to an agreement during the 2022 Istanbul talks, and expressed hope that Ukraine's current leadership would prioritise national inter-

ests 'rather than the agendas of third parties'.

He accused 'external actors' of exploiting Ukraine for geopolitical goals, saying: "Ukraine deserves a better fate than to be a tool in the hands of those working against Russia."

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign

Minister Andrii Sybiha on Friday condemned Putin's 'cynical statements' that show contempt for international efforts to end the war in Ukraine.

Sybiha responded to Putin who said, 'Wherever a Russian soldier steps is ours', during the St Petersburg International Eco-

nomic Forum. Sybiha said Russian troops bring only 'death, destruction, and devastation' wherever they go.

He accused the Russian president of sacrificing his own people in the war.

"He already disposed one million Russian soldiers in a senseless bloodbath in Ukraine without achieving a single strategic goal. One million soldiers. Two million feet."

Poland said, "Member States should take all necessary measures to ensure that individuals who are or have been contracted by the Russian armed forces or other armed groups acting on behalf of the regime are not allowed to undermine our security or move freely within the Schengen Area," said a joint statement.

"In particular, it is important to avoid granting residence permits or visas to those who have

Moscow had informed Israeli leaders multiple times that 'Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons', urging dialogue to reduce regional fears and promote collective security

Why justice is crucial in DRC-Rwanda peace deal

Kinshasa, DRC- The Democratic Republic of the Congo government and Rwanda will be the chief signatories of the peace agreement, with little or no involvement from the rebel groups currently occupying the eastern parts of Goma under the Congo River Alliance. Technical teams from Rwanda and Congo initiated a draft on Wednesday in the US-mediated peace process.

Analysts, however, say the sticking point could be the implementation. "The reason why we have a challenge with all these peace deals is because, we keep including clauses for amnesty. It means it is justice delayed," said Kambale Musavili from the Centre for Research on Congo-Kinshasa.

"What it signals to armed groups committing crimes on the ground is that you can pick up guns and blackmail the Congolese government to negotiations. The Americans are making the same posture, unfortunately they are going to reinvigorate the same militia groups," Musavili added.

Concerns have also been raised about the details of the deal, which are yet to be made public to the Congolese.

"What we are experiencing here is not really new. But now, what are the operational com-



Eastern Congo region witnessed increased violence when M23 rebels advanced on main cities of Goma and Bukavu

The reason why we have a challenge with peace deals is because, we include clauses for amnesty. It means it is justice delayed

KAMBALE MUSAVILI

mitments that will be put in place?," said Professor Philippe-Doudou Kaganda, Scientific Director of the Centre for Research and Study on Conflict and Peace in the Great Lakes Region.

"It is precisely here that there is a risk that we will not have a realistic agreement on certain aspects and that could possibly

lead the belligerents to strengthen their demands and continue to wage war."

Cautious optimism

The Congolese civil society is optimistic but cautions that history may repeat itself if the deal is not carefully handled.

"Certainly, this is an agreement that we are longing for," Hyprocat Marume, President of the South Kivu civil society, said. "But it should have been signed since the capture of Bunagana, instead of letting our people die first and leaving us in a crisis situation." Marume stressed that the Congolese government must help its citizens to live in peace and tranquillity. "Taking up arms to demand positions, we must ensure that this experience

never happens again."

Previous ceasefires between Kinshasa and Kigali have often failed, but Washington hopes this one will stick and bring economic opportunities.

The draft peace deal aims to end fighting in eastern Congo, where Rwandan-backed M23 rebels made significant advances at the beginning of the year, capturing the strategic city of Goma and the town of Bukavu. "The agreement includes provisions on respect for territorial integrity and a prohibition of hostilities, disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration of non-state armed groups," said a statement posted to the US State Department's website.

DW

OBSERVING YOGA DAY



People take part in a mass yoga session at Independence Square in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Saturday, marking the International Day of Yoga (Xinhua)

BTS member Suga completes South Korea's military duty

Seoul, South Korea - Suga, the last member of the K-Pop group BTS to complete his mandatory military service with the South Korean army, was discharged on Saturday, opening the way for the band's reunion.

Suga started his service in 2023. Earlier this month, BTS members Jimin and Jung Kook

were also discharged from their duties.

"We confirm that Suga effectively completed his alternative service on June 18 by using his remaining leave. His official discharge date is June 21," BTS' label, Big Hit Music, said in a statement.

He completed his military duty as a social service agent. Unlike

other members, Suga's discharge was not celebrated with the public, amid fears of overcrowding.

After his release from the national service, Suga posted a message on fan community platform Weverse. "Above all else, I wanted to... sincerely thank our fans who waited for me all this time," SUGA told the group's fans - collectively known as ARMY.

DW

Iran’s leader Khamenei retreats to bunker, names successors: Report

Tehran, Iran - Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has taken ‘an extraordinary series of steps’ to safeguard both his life and the leadership structure of the Islamic Republic amid escalating Israeli attacks on Iranian territory, according to a report by *The New York Times* on Saturday.

Citing three Iranian officials familiar with emergency war plans, the report said Khamenei has suspended electronic communications and now speaks with commanders primarily through a ‘trusted aide’, in an effort to avoid detection.

The supreme leader, now ‘ensconced in a bunker’, has reportedly appointed a line of replacements down the military chain of command, and also named three senior clerics as potential successors in the event of his death, the report added.

The measures come amid Israeli threats to eliminate the Iranian leader.

The officials cited by *The New York Times* said that Khamenei believes either Israel or the US could attempt to assassinate him.

The report emphasised the seriousness of Iran’s current situation, noting that Khamenei’s son Mojtaba, once rumoured to be a frontrunner, is not among the named successors.

Security concerns have led the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence to enforce strict measures, including a ban on the use of



The supreme leader, now ‘ensconced in a bunker’, has appointed a line of replacements down the military chain of command, and also named three senior clerics as potential successors in the event of his death

phones or electronic devices by senior officials and military commanders, the report said.

There has been no comment from the Iranian side regarding the report so far.

17 Iranian scientists killed, claims Israel
Meanwhile, Israeli Channel 12 claimed on Saturday that 17 Ira-

nian nuclear scientists have been killed so far amid the ongoing military confrontation between Israel and Iran now entering its ninth day.

The channel reported that a senior nuclear scientist was killed on Friday night in an Israeli strike on an apartment in the Iranian capital Tehran, along with two other nuclear experts.

The total number of nuclear scientists that have been allegedly killed since the beginning of the hostilities now stands at 17, according to the Israeli media outlet.

The Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth identified one of the scientists killed in the Friday night attack as Ithar Tabatabai Kamsha, described as an expert in nuclear weapons, and noted that his wife was also killed in the strike.

Channel 12 claimed that the targeted apartment was specifically housing nuclear scientists, but provided no further details. The Israeli military has not issued an official statement on the reported assassinations.

Iranian authorities have not responded to the allegations.

Earlier reports by the Israeli Army Radio said that an Israeli drone had struck a residential unit in the central Geisha neighbourhood of Tehran late on Fri-

day, allegedly killing a nuclear scientist and two of his aides.

Israel has previously confirmed the assassination of 10 Iranian nuclear scientists in separate incidents during the ongoing conflict.

430 killed in Iran
Iran’s Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi announced on Saturday that the death toll from Israeli airstrikes rose to 430, with more than 3,500 civilians

wounded since the start of the attacks on June 13, according to a Health Ministry press release cited by local media.

The Israeli strikes have targeted a wide range of sites, including missile depots, nuclear facilities, and residential areas in Tehran, Isfahan, Qom, Khorramabad, and other cities.

Among the reported targets was the nuclear site in Isfahan, which Iranian authorities said did not suffer hazardous leaks.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Activists News Agency reported Thursday that up to 639 people have been killed and more than 1,300 injured in the Israeli assault.

Iran has retaliated with coordinated drone and missile attacks on Israeli territory.

On the Israeli side, at least 25 people have been killed and more than 2,500 injured in Iranian strikes, according to figures released by Israeli authorities.

Five members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards were also killed in Israeli attacks targeting the city of Khorramabad in western Iran, the Iranian Mehr news agency reported on Saturday.

Khorramabad, the capital of the Lorestan province, has not been previously reported as a primary target in the ongoing hostilities between Iran and Israel. Iranian media reported earlier on Saturday that two people were killed and four injured in an Israeli attack in Qom in central Iran.

Anadolu Agency



Cousin of ousted regime leader Assad arrested in Syria: Officials

Damascus, Syria - Syria’s Interior Ministry announced on Saturday that Wassim Badi al-Assad, cousin of ousted regime leader Bashar al-Assad and a top suspect in war crimes and large-scale drug trafficking, has been arrested during a security operation.

According to a statement by the ministry on Telegram, Wassim was captured through a joint operation carried out by the General Intelligence Directorate in coordination with Interior Ministry units.

“The General Intelligence Directorate, in collaboration with relevant Interior Ministry departments, successfully ambushed and apprehended the criminal Wassim Assad, known for committing numerous crimes during the former regime era and for being one of the most prominent drug traffickers,” the statement said.

Born in 1980, Wassim is married and resides in Syria’s coastal province Tartus. For years, he has been recognised as a central figure in Syria’s drug trade.

As a cousin of Bashar al-

Assad, Wassim has been included in the sanctions lists of both the US and the EU.

He was particularly known for his role in the production and smuggling of narcotic pills, serving as a crucial figure in the financial and logistical operations of the network.

Born in 1980, Wassim resides in Syria’s coastal province Tartus. For years, he has been recognised as a central figure in Syria’s drug trade

Assad, Syria’s leader for nearly 25 years, fled to Russia in December, ending the Baath Party’s regime, which had been in power since 1963.

Ahmad Al-Sharaa, who led anti-regime forces to oust Assad, was declared president for a transitional period in January.

Anadolu Agency

Israel kills 11 aid seekers in Gaza, including 3 children

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 11 Palestinians, including three children, were killed on Saturday morning in Israeli attacks involving shelling and gunfire targeting civilian gatherings waiting for humanitarian aid in southern and central Gaza, according to medical sources.

In the latest incident, three Palestinian children were killed and another critically injured in an Israeli strike on a group of children on Al-Mansoura Street in the Shejaiya neighbourhood east of Gaza City, a medical source told Anadolu.

In another attack, Al-Awda Hospital in central Gaza reported receiving five fatalities and 15 injuries, including four critical cases, resulting from Israeli strikes on civilians waiting for aid south of the Wadi Gaza area.

Early on Saturday, medical sources told Anadolu that three Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces near an aid distribution point west of Rafah city in southern Gaza.



Three Palestinian children were killed in an Israeli strike on a group of children in the Shejaiya neighbourhood

Eyewitnesses said the victims were killed while waiting to receive humanitarian aid at distribution sites controlled by the Israeli army. Also, several Palestinians were shot near the Nitzarim area in central Gaza while attempting to access aid.

Since May 7, Israel has been bypassing UN and international

relief organisations by distributing limited aid through the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which is backed by Israel and the US but rejected by the UN.

Palestinians seeking aid through this mechanism have become daily targets of Israeli fire, resulting in many casualties.

Medical sources also reported multiple injuries in Gaza hospitals caused by recent Israeli airstrikes targeting various areas.

Eyewitnesses told Anadolu that northern parts of the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza were subjected to heavy Israeli artillery shelling.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza death toll rises to 55,908

At least 55,908 Palestinians have been killed in Israel’s genocidal war since October 2023, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

A ministry statement said that 202 bodies were brought to hospitals in the last 48 hours, while 1,037 people were injured, taking the number of injuries to 131,138 in the Israeli onslaught. “Many victims are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them,” it added.

Gaza’s Health Ministry reported that since May 27, at least 450 Palestinians have been killed and 3,466 others wounded while seeking humanitarian aid due to ongoing Israeli attacks.

Iran warns US against involvement in Israeli strikes, urges return to diplomacy

Istanbul, Turkey - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Saturday warned that the US participation in Israel’s ongoing attacks on Iran would be ‘very unfortunate’ and ‘extremely dangerous for everyone’.

Speaking to reporters in Istanbul ahead of the 51st Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul, Araghchi said: “Diplomacy worked in the past, it can work again. But to return to it, aggression must stop.”

He emphasised Iran’s readiness for peaceful negotiations, adding: “We are absolutely ready for a negotiated solution, just like in 2015.”



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi

The minister accused Israel of opposing diplomatic efforts, saying: “Israel is clearly against diplomacy.” He reiterated that halting hostilities was a prerequisite for any diplomatic progress.

Araghchi is expected to meet

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday in Moscow, according to reports from NBC News and Axios.

Araghchi, in an interview with NBC News in Geneva following talks with top European diplo-

mats, said Iran is ready to negotiate but insisted that Israel first must halt its aerial attacks.

Regarding if a deal with the US could be reached within the two-week time, he said it was up to the Trump administration ‘to show their determination for going for a negotiated solution’.

“Or they have something else in their mind, and they want to attack Iran anyway,” he continued.

The foreign minister suggested that the US ‘perhaps have this plan and they just needed negotiations perhaps to cover it up’, referring to Israeli air attacks.

He said Iran does not know if the US can be trusted anymore and called the Trump administration’s actions a ‘betrayal to

diplomacy’.

OIC special session

At Iran’s request, a special session with the participation of all members of the OIC will be held as part of the bloc’s 51st Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Istanbul, diplomatic sources said on Saturday.

The closed door meeting is scheduled for Saturday evening, according to information obtained from Turkish Foreign Ministry sources.

At a time when Israel’s attacks on Gaza and Iran continue, Istanbul is once again hosting a highly significant event, drawing global attention to Türkiye.

Anadolu Agency

Iran-Israel war: India on a tightrope

New Delhi, India - India maintains amicable relations with both Israel and Iran, which is the result of a delicate balancing act stretching back many years.

Now, New Delhi finds itself in a precarious position as the Israel-Iran conflict seems to be escalating into a broader confrontation with mounting death tolls and rising uncertainty.

India's diplomatic tightrope

Over the last decade, India has strengthened ties with Israel, particularly in defence and technology. India has acquired advanced weaponry, including Barak 8 defence missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), loitering munitions and sophisticated radar systems. In last month's short-lived conflict between India and Pakistan, New Delhi reportedly utilised various Israeli-origin weapons, underscoring the importance of the strategic defence partnership.

At the same time, India values its historical and cultural connections with Iran, as well as its strategic role in regional connectivity, energy security, and geopolitical balance. Tehran is also New Delhi's second-largest supplier of crude oil.

Importantly, Iran acts as India's gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Chabahar Port project on the Gulf of Oman, developed jointly by India and Iran, is central to this strategy, providing India with direct access to this region while bypassing



Pakistan.

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, a regional expert monitoring current events, said that 'India needs to maintain its balancing act to protect its security ties with Israel and protect its strategic interests and economic commitment to the Chabahar Port'.

"With such contrasting objectives, strategic ambiguity serves the purpose of India being dragged into the conflict, which is bound to widen if the war drags on," D'Souza, founder of the Mantraya Institute for Strategic Studies, told DW.

The escalating conflict in the Middle East presents India with tough choices - balancing energy security, economic stability and its delicate diplomacy between Israel and Iran

Safeguarding New Delhi's interests

Last week, India's Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement expressing deep concern at the recent developments between Iran and Israel.

"India urges both sides to avoid any escalatory steps. Existing channels of dialogue and

diplomacy should be utilised to work towards a de-escalation of the situation and resolving underlying issues," said the statement.

"India enjoys close and friendly relations with both countries and stands ready to extend all possible support," it added.

Sticking to its policy of strategic ambiguity and nonalignment,

India distanced itself from a recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) statement denouncing Israel's attacks on Iran.

The SCO is a 10-member bloc created by China and Russia to counter the Western-led global order. India is also a SCO member, despite its regional rivalry

with China. Responding to the escalation between Israel and Iran, the SCO expressed 'serious concern' and strongly condemned the Israeli military strikes.

P R Kumaraswamy, a professor of Middle Eastern studies specialising in Israeli politics at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told DW that India's strategic silence on the Israel-Iran conflict, mirrored by its decisive refusal to endorse the SCO, reflects a 'calculated, nuanced and matured approach' rooted in its national interests and geopolitical balancing.

"This approach, akin to its neutrality during the Ukraine-Russia war, also recognises the sentiments in several Arab capitals as they are caught between Israeli actions and a nuclear Iran as their neighbour," said Kumaraswamy.

"Strategic autonomy can also be pursued through calculated and minimalist responses without any rhetorical declarations."

D'Souza, however, said such a policy will be useful as long as the conflict between Israel and Iran is short.

"If it drags on, every move of India will be analysed and assessed, and its impartiality will be tested, which will be a test case for India's diplomacy," she said.

"It will come under pressure if the conflict prolongs. However, being a votary of diplomacy and dialogue is a prudent policy that will maintain India's principle of non-alignment," she added.

Earlier this week, India launched 'Operation Sindhu' to evacuate Indian nationals, starting with 110 Indian students from northern Iran. These students were assisted in crossing into Armenia by road under the supervision of Indian diplomats.

Following the successful evacuation from Iran, India extended the operation to include its nationals in Israel. Indian citizens who wish to leave Israel are being evacuated through land borders and then brought to India by air, according to India's Foreign Ministry.

DW

CONNECTING PYONGYANG AND RUSSIA



Staff members get off an international train from Pyongyang, North Korea at the Khabarovsk Railway Station in Khabarovsk, Russia, on Saturday. The train service, resumed operation after a five-year suspension (Xinhua)

What's in store for Ukrainians returning from Russian prisons?

Kyiv, Ukraine - When Yuriy Hulchuk returned to Ukraine after two and a half years of Russian captivity, he seemed strangely emotionless. A video on social media shows his mother hugging him upon his return, but he doesn't react. Days later, he spoke about the torture he suffered while a prisoner of war.

Hulchuk, 23, was born and raised in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. He studied foreign languages and although he didn't graduate, he was an exchange student in Hungary and Germany and also travelled throughout Europe and China.

When he couldn't find any work, he enlisted in the Ukrainian army in December 2021 to make ends meet. That's how Hulchuk ended up in the 36th Brigade of the Ukrainian Marine Corps, fighting in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol when the full-scale Russian invasion of his country began in 2022.

In April 2022, Hulchuk was captured by Russian forces and spent the next two and a half years in prison, including in the village of Olenivka in Donetsk, in the Russian-occupied part of eastern Ukraine.

The Olenivka prison colony has been described as a 'concentration camp' because of the conditions there. In July 2022, over 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war held in Olenivka were killed in an explosion that ripped through the barracks. Ukraine and Russia blamed each other for the incident. An analysis by the United Nations found Russia was likely at fault. Hulchuk was also held in western Russia in Ryazan, as well as in Mordovia, a Russian republic. He returned home in September 2024 a prisoner exchange.

Despite both men reporting



prisons. Zadorin joined the Ukrainian military in 2019 and served in the 35th Brigade of the Ukrainian Marine Corps. At the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, he was stationed on Snake Island in the Black Sea, where he was captured by the Russian navy. Almost two years later, in January 2024, he too returned home as part of a prisoner exchange.

Despite both men reporting

used to torture prisoners and that electric shocks were administered to prisoners' genitals.

Still, he said he does not want to reveal the name of the man who tortured him.

"To me, what he did was just part of all the evil things that were done to me," he said. "If I were to take revenge on the Russians who treated me so badly in captivity, then I'd also have to take revenge on Ukrainians who

physical violence in prison, like being hit over the head with bottles. "And I'm supposed to love them and consider them brothers?," he asked. "They came to kill me and my family without us ever having done anything to them."

Zadorin said he could identify every one of his torturers. "Sooner or later, everyone involved in such war crimes will be punished," he insisted. "That's already happening in some cases."

Both Hulchuk and Zadorin said they received generous payouts from the Ukrainian state to compensate them for their time in captivity. Funds were transferred to Hulchuk's parents' bank account the whole time he was in prison and he used the money to buy an apartment in Kyiv.

Returned prisoners can receive a disability pension due to suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Almost every returned prisoner of war is diagnosed with it and, as Zadorin pointed out, imprisonment can now be grounds for a disability pension. He plans to get a disability certificate soon.

Hulchuk plans to take another route. "Being classified as disabled also has disadvantages," he said. "For example, it's hard to find a job - even though you get aid payments."

DW

Humiliation, subjugation, torture - Ukrainian prisoners of war often recount degrading treatment and other horrors. What they choose to do after returning home from Russia varies widely

similar experiences, today Zadorin and Hulchuk have very different attitudes towards those who tormented them.

"I've been advised to publish the full name and address of the employee of the secret IK-10 (Russian prisons are numbered and start with IK) camp in Mordovia," Hulchuk said. "He's a medic there, a cruel man who likes to use electric shocks. There are guys there not afraid of beating you, with hands, feet, a pipe or a wet rag'.

Hulchuk said dogs were also

treated me badly." It's easier to forget and to look ahead, he said.

Remembering war criminals

Zadorin has a different opinion.

"I hate the Russians deeply because they inflicted so much pain and humiliation on us," he said.

He dropped to almost half of his original weight of 120kg (265 pounds). When he came out of prison, he weighed just 60 kilograms. 'I had to eat mice, toilet paper and soap,' he said.

Zadorin recounted severe

517 Indians return from Iran

New Delhi, India - Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that so far, 517 Indian nationals have returned to India from Iran under Operation Sindhu.

Jaiswal stated that a special flight from Turkmenistan's Ashgabat arrived in New Delhi on Saturday. The Indian government has launched Operation Sindhu to evacuate Indian nationals from Iran, given the deteriorating situation as a result of the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel.

In a post on X, Jaiswal stated: "Operation Sindhu continues. A special evacuation flight from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, landed in New Delhi at 0300 hrs on 21st June, bringing Indians from Iran home. With this, so far 517 Indian nationals from Iran have returned home under Operation Sindhu."

A fresh batch of Indian nationals evacuated from Iran landed safely in Delhi on Saturday under Operation Sindhu, as part of the Government of India's ongoing efforts to bring back its citizens from conflict-hit regions.



The Indian Embassy in Tehran coordinated the safe movement of students, while the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) ensured their safe return. An Indian national who was evacuated from Iran, Zaffar Abbas Naqvi, recounted how he and his family stayed indoors initially after hearing about the attack on Iran. They later moved to Mashhad, which also came under attack, prompting them to contact the Indian government.

Naqvi praised the swift action taken by the government and thanked Prime Minister Modi and UP CM Yogi Adityanath for

their support.

"Everything was going fine, but one day we heard that Iran had been attacked. We stayed indoors for some time. We then moved to Mashhad. Soon Mashhad came under attack. We then contacted the Indian government. The action was so swift that we cannot express our gratitude in words," said Naqvi.

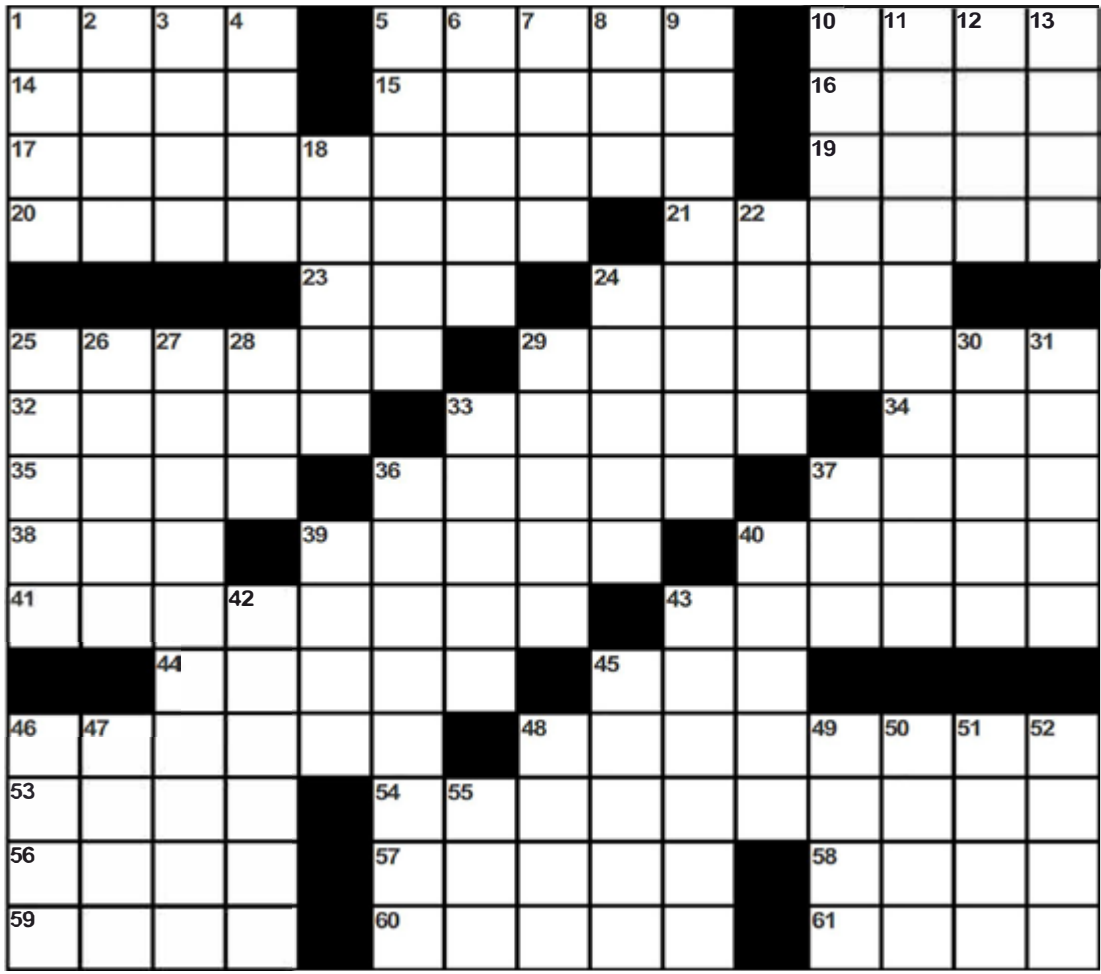
Kulsum, an Indian national evacuated from Iran, expressed relief at being back home safely, saying the situation in Iran was worrisome and the government's help was invaluable.

ANI

Systematic torture in Russian custody

Another Ukrainian man, Vlad Zadorin, 26, has also spoken of systematic torture in Russian

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Gibbons
 - 5) Exchange
 - 10) Gumbo ingredient
 - 14) Christian of Hollywood
 - 15) Merits
 - 16) Once again
 - 17) Headwear during the French Revolution
 - 19) Monetary penalty
 - 20) Common corrections
 - 21) Spanish buddies
 - 23) Definitely not good
 - 24) Confrontation
 - 25) Added filing aids to
 - 29) Make taller
 - 32) Unattractive citrus fruits
 - 33) Is an omen of
 - 34) Hotfoot it
 - 35) Sometimes it's proper
 - 36) More crass
 - 37) Mine find
 - 38) Anger
 - 39) References
 - 40) Made like a pigeon
 - 41) Days of rest
 - 43) Risque language
 - 44) Desert water hole
 - 45) _ segno (musical

- direction)
- 46) Lab burner
 - 48) Woo with song
 - 53) Endings for "east" and "west"
 - 54) Special Forces member
 - 56) "A Death in the Family" author James
 - 57) Filthy money?
 - 58) One of the Baldwins
 - 59) Certain pro basketball team
 - 60) "Oui" and "si"
 - 61) Ritz
- DOWN**
- 1) Up to the challenge
 - 2) Duo
 - 3) Exile island
 - 4) Observes
 - 5) Group of four
 - 6) X- (took a radiograph)
 - 7) Circle sections
 - 8) Biological identifier
 - 9) Shrubbery trellis
 - 10) Goofy and clumsy
 - 11) What a dubbed one enters
 - 12) Vegas alternative
 - 13) Fills with wonder

- 18) Yokels
- 22) Periodicals, briefly
- 24) Yields, as territory
- 25) City near Carthage
- 26) Greek marketplace of yore
- 27) State flower of Texas
- 28) Trash container
- 29) Waters, as a lawn
- 30) Large sea duck
- 31) Requiring a lot of attention
- 33) Shower alternatives
- 36) Piercingly
- 37) Temperature extreme
- 39) 24 cans of beer
- 40) Moses' spy in Canaan
- 42) Quarters of many quartets
- 43) _&Noble
- 45) John of tractor fame
- 46) Lima or kidney
- 47) Advise strongly
- 48) Ticks of the game clock, briefly
- 49) Kind of tide
- 50) Musician Guthrie
- 51) Below-average grades
- 52) Engrave
- 55) Have regrets

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Even if you've got the day off, your mind is still at the office or maybe on a financial matter. Rather than letting it take over your day (and your night), set aside an hour or two to concentrate on it. You should feel more grounded, and you may be more fully present for whatever social event is in store this evening, something your friends and/or significant other should appreciate!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Working may be the last thing you want to do now (or ever), but your loyal nature means that a call for help can't be ignored. Answer your phone and check your messages in case your boss or a colleague needs you. It may be a pain, but your karma benefits dramatically. You should still have plenty of time to join in on whatever activities are in the works tonight.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Other people are shelling out big bucks for fancy fun right now, but you've got a much better idea, one that your crowd or partner feels pleased to be in on. Music or art are likely involved, brightening matters up for everyone you know. If you can convince folks to dress up and scream along to some songs, even better. Let the good times roll!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 01. In 2019, machinery, mineral oils, sugar, meat and what else, were among the top exports from the country which generates almost half of South America's exports?**
- A. Iron ores
 - B. Maize
 - C. Food industry waste
 - D. Honey
- 02. In the UK TV series "Foyle's War" (2002-2015), what was Foyle's profession or occupation?**
- A. Police officer
 - B. Bookseller
 - C. Brothel madam
 - D. Artillery officer
- 03. Which points on the Earth can see a total eclipse of the sun?**
- A. Those inside the moon's penumbra
 - B. Those completely inside the Moon's umbra
 - C. All points on the daylight side of the Earth
 - D. All points from 3 hours after dawn to 3 hours before sundown
- Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. B**



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You're engaged in long-term planning of some sort at the moment, and the plans you make now have an extra kick. Even better, if you keep your eyes open, someone should come your way who gives you an entirely new perspective on what's to come. With this comes a deeper understanding, just what you need to mix up those long-term plans. This kind of enlightenment is a rare opportunity!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Some amazing interpersonal energy is flowing through you at the moment, which is perfect for enjoying celebrations of all kinds. If you've got plans to snuggle up at home with someone this evening, it should be a happy occasion indeed, whereas if you're single, going out and about could help you make an intriguing connection. Get ready for romance and open up to what's about to come knocking!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You've got energy to burn, and that's a good thing, because whatever you do tonight could last well into tomorrow or beyond! Others are definitely impressed by your stamina and style, as your carefully laid plans come together in a rather cinematic fashion, maybe better than you'd hoped. Be sure to take plenty of pictures to secure the memories that you're sure to make.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
There's a lot going on right now, and the odds are good that you're quite the social butterfly, flitting from person to person and party to party. Settle down for a few moments so a particular conversation can be more enlightening. Putting your heads together with someone gives both of you considerably more brainpower, and then some big, confusing matter turns out to be a piece of cake.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
If you're feeling sentimental right now, that's completely understandable, but you should also look toward the future. Luckily, you've got some great friends (or a partner) to pull your mind out of the past and into the present. Now is the best time to shed excess baggage, keeping only the valuable lessons learned and leaving the heavy stuff far behind.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
It's a great day for improvisation - and even more so tonight. Whatever plans you've got might just spontaneously self-destruct, but you embrace each new development as an opportunity for more fun. Those lucky enough to be along with you are definitely in for a wild ride! Wear your dancing shoes and your all-weather smile, and be sure to carry some extra cab fare!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
While everyone else is getting ready to party, you might not feel like going out at all. Should you let friends (or your partner) cajole you into socializing? There's good news: your attitude can determine whether your evening goes poorly or really well. It's not necessarily about what you do but the mood you bring to the evening. Resolve to have a good time whether you're out and about or home in bed.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Any crowd you're a part of now is feeling good vibes, in no small part to your stellar ideas for making life more of a party. You're also quite the social butterfly, flitting about and talking to everyone, making sure everybody's having a super time. You may also find yourself inadvertently playing matchmaker or getting matched yourself!



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Friends in high places net you the VIP treatment today, and just in time. Make sure you're ready for the red-carpet treatment. If you feel glamorous, you look glamorous, and suddenly you're ushered into the lounge while others look on with envy. If you play your cards right, you can pass on some of the good luck that's coming your way, making it all more fun for everyone.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

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

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

FLAMENGO SOAR

Brazilians qualify for knockout stage as group winners after stunning win against Chelsea

Philadelphia, US - Flamengo overturned a first-half deficit to defeat Chelsea 3-1 in their Club World Cup Group D clash on Friday. Second-half goals from Bruno Henrique, Danilo, and Wallace Yan secured the Brazilian side's second consecutive win which was enough for a place in the knockout stage of the tournament.

The Brazilian champions turned Philadelphia's Lincoln Financial Field into a tropical carnival, with 55,000 passionate supporters creating an atmosphere that was in stark contrast to Chelsea's casual approach to the tournament.

Just 24 hours after Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca said the competition had "a pre-season feeling" to it and that he would rotate key starters throughout the group stage, his side became the second European giants in two days to be humbled by Brazilian opposition.

Friday's result followed Paris St Germain's shock 1-0 defeat by Botafogo a day earlier which had ended Europe's 13-year dominance over South American opposition in intercontinental club football.

Pedro Neto's opener for Chelsea proved to be a false start as they were given the run around following the interval. Flamengo, under the tactical guidance of former Blues defender Filipe Luis, responded with a ruthlessness that their theoretically superior rivals could

not match. Bruno Henrique and Danilo struck in quick succession to flip the contest, before Nicolas Jackson's reckless red card - for a studs-up challenge that illustrated Chelsea's loss of composure - paved the way for youngster Wallace Yan to deliver the coup de grace. "When we conceded the first goal their fans started to be loud, and immediately after we conceded the second one,"

Bruno Henrique and Danilo struck in quick succession to flip the contest, before Nicolas Jackson's reckless red card - for a studs-up challenge

Chelsea's Marc Cucurella told DAZN, his words revealing the psychological impact of Flamengo's thunderous support.

Following Yan's goal, the supporters let out synchronised chants of "olé" to hail their team's achievement.

The result leaves Flamengo on top of Group D with six points from two matches, while Chelsea remain second with three. Esperance de Tunis are also on three after their win against Los Angeles FC who have yet to register a point.



Flamengo's Bruno Henrique celebrates after scoring against Chelsea 3-1 in their Club World Cup clash on Friday



Flamengo manager Filipe Luis celebrates with goalscorer Wallace Yan

We always believed we had a chance: Flamengo manager Filipe Luis

Philadelphia, US - Flamengo manager Filipe Luis said he was extremely proud of his team's resilience and composure as they fought back from a goal down to beat Chelsea 3-1 in their Club World Cup clash on Friday.

It was a win that put the Brazilian side in pole position to finish on top of the Group D standings ahead of the tournament knock-outs.

"I am very happy with the game. From the start, we always believed we had a chance," said Flamengo coach Filipe Luis.

"I know the quality of European clubs, especially the elite of football. There are 12 clubs in the world that are part of the elite. I'm surprised by these results. They are not very used to the (hot and humid) climate. South Americans are very competitive, in the Libertadores it's very difficult to win, but the best doesn't always win."

Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca was tight-lipped after a red card for his star striker Nicolas Jackson essentially killed off any chance the Premier League club had of rescuing a result against Flamengo, only four minutes after coming on.

It was Jackson's second straight red in a little over a month, after he was also sent off for another rough challenge in a Premier League match against Newcastle. On that occasion, Maresca said Jackson should learn and improve.

On Friday Jackson's reckless challenge left his team in a difficult situation, with the team finishing second in Group D facing the winners of a tough Group C featuring Bayern Munich, Benfica and Boca Juniors.

Jackson will miss Chelsea's third and final group game against Esperance de Tunis on Wednesday.

Inter's Acerbi threatens PSG fan over taunting

Miami, US - Inter Milan defender Francesco Acerbi lost his cool after a Club World Cup fan wearing a Paris St Germain shirt in Seattle taunted him about last month's Champions League final, with the Italian threatening to beat him up if the teasing continued.

The fan brought up a humiliating moment from Inter's 5-0 defeat by the French champions in Munich, in which Acerbi was left sprawling after some dazzling footwork by Bradley Barcola.

On a video that went viral on social media, the visibly annoyed Italian international sought the help of a translator during a meet-and-greet with fans. The translator told the fan in English on Thursday: "You must be serious with him."

Seconds later, Acerbi stepped



Francesco Acerbi

in to say in Italian: "I'm serious. Don't make fun of me - I don't like it. ... I'm crazy, I'll beat the crap out of you."

Acerbi then quickly moved on, posing for photos with other fans.

Inter were not immediately available for comment.

Esperance stay alive with win against Los Angeles

Nashville, US - Espérance kept their knockout phase hopes alive at the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 as Youcef Belaili's 70th-minute goal helped the Tunisians defeat Los Angeles FC at GEODIS Park in Nashville.

Esperance, now with three points, are level with Chelsea but sit in third place on goal difference. Flamengo have qualified for the knockout stage and secured top spot in Group D with a game to spare. LAFC have been eliminated.

LAFC had the majority of possession in the first half and looked dangerous at times, but they had goals by Denis Bouanga and David Martinez called back. The match remained scoreless at the break after the teams combined for six shots, the fewest for a half in the tournament.

"We played as a team today, and we fixed the problems that we had for the last game. We are



Youcef Belaili of Espérance celebrates after scoring against Los Angeles FC

grateful for the three points," said Espérance winger Elias Mokwana.

In the 49th minute, Espérance looked to have won a penalty after Youcef Belaili went down in the box from contact with Bouanga. However, after a VAR review, the call was overturned due to a lack of contact and Belaili yellow carded for simulation.

The Tunisian side finally broke through in the 70th minute. Mohamed Amine Ben Hamida made a long run and was dispossessed by Igor Jesus, but Belaili pounced on the loose ball in the box and beat Hugo Lloris with a hard, low shot inside the near post. Bouanga had a chance to give his side a lifeline with a late penalty, but saw the effort saved in stoppage time.

Both sides play their final group game on Tuesday 24 June. LAFC face Flamengo while Espérance meet Chelsea.

Benfica power past tiring Auckland after long half-time weather delay

Orlando, US - Benfica got their first win on the board in the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 after a long half-time weather delay, as they eventually overwhelmed a tiring Auckland City.

For much of the first half, the Portuguese giants were frustrated by an inspired show from Nathan Garrow. The young Auckland City keeper made a succession of brilliant saves from Benfica's stellar names, with the highlights outstanding stops from Vangelis Pavlidis and Angel Di Maria.

However, the Kiwis' resistance was finally broken deep into first half injury time when Jerson Lagos tripped Gianluca

Prestiani and Di Maria finally beat the keeper with a coolly converted spot kick.

After the thunderstorm-enforced delay, Auckland's Haris Zeb forced a decent save from Benfica keeper Anatoliy Trubin.

But Benfica turned it on after that and Pavlidis netted his 30th goal for Benfica this season with a lovely twist and cool finish in the 54th minute before a deflected Renato Sanches effort killed off any hopes for the New Zealanders. Leandro Barreiro poached a double within three minutes as Auckland tired, before Di Maria netted another penalty in injury time to make it six.



Ángel Di Maria of Benfica celebrates with teammates after scoring against Auckland City

It was a very intense game today. The first half was complicated, we only scored one goal, but we were confident

LEANDRO BARREIRO

"It was a very intense game today. The first half was complicated, we only scored one goal, but we were confident. There was a long break of course, but the important thing is that we won, we played a

good game, we were calm in possession of the ball," said said Barreiro.

Benfica now face Bayern Munich in Charlotte on Tuesday, needing just a point to be sure of qualification. Auckland City, meanwhile, round off their campaign against Boca Juniors.

Benfica coach Bruno Lage said it was a difficult game despite the one-sided scoreline.

"We played a good game. The first half was very hot, but we created enough opportunities to be winning by more than one goal. Having more than two hours during half-time allowed us to analyse the game in more detail."

OLISE SILENCES BOCA ROAR

Bayern reach last 16 after hard-fought win against the Argentinians

Miami, US - Bayern Munich reignited the flickering flame of European honour at the Club World Cup, battling through a tense, fiery showdown to claim a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Boca Juniors and storm into the last 16 on Friday.

Backed by a roaring sea of blue-and-yellow clad fans who turned the Hard Rock Stadium into a noisy outpost of their "Bombonera", Boca Juniors fought fiercely, but Bayern's resilience shone through in the closing stages.

After Harry Kane gave the German champions an early lead, Boca equalised through Miguel Merentiel, only for Michael Olise to score a late winner that lifted Bayern to the top of Group C on six points, two ahead of Benfica.

Boca, on one point, remain in contention as they face amateurs Auckland City in the last round of matches while Bayern will take on Benfica.

The win marked a welcome rebound for European sides, who have faced a tough run at the tournament with Porto, Paris St Germain and Chelsea all suffering recent defeats.

In a thrilling second half, Boca



After Harry Kane gave Bayern an early lead, Boca equalised through Miguel Merentiel, only for Michael Olise to score a late winner that lifted Bayern to the top of Group C on six points, two ahead of Benfica

Bayern Munich's Michael Olise celebrates with teammates after scoring against Boca Juniors in their Club World Cup match on Friday

made Bayern fight for every ball in a match brimming with tension and bite.

In a thunderous atmosphere, the German side made a bright start and thought they had taken the lead when Olise's in-swinging corner flew directly into the net, only for VAR to spot a foul on Boca's goalkeeper.

The pressure eventually told in the 18th minute when Harry

Kane latched onto a loose clearance and toe-poked a composed finish into the bottom corner after Konrad Laimer's cross from the right for his first goal in the tournament after drawing a blank in his team's 10-0 demolition of Auckland City.

Serge Gnabry scrambled the ball across the face of goal minutes later, but Kingsley Coman somehow failed to connect with what would have been a simple tap-in.

Manuel Neuer had little to do in the first half, though he was called into action to make two smart saves from Kevin Zenon as Boca refused to back down.

The Argentine side pressed higher after the break, showing typical grit and tenacity in the duels and slightly unsettling Bayern with their relentless aggression.

Spurred on by deafening chants from their travelling support, Boca clawed their way back into the contest, forcing several anxious moments in the German defence as tempers flared and challenges flew in.

In the 66th minute, Olise was harassed off the ball by three Boca players and Merentiel was fed in down the right and kept his composure to skip past Josip Stanisic before firing a shot past Neuer, sending the crowd into rapture as the whole stadium trembled.

Bayern's composure eventually told as Olise bent one into the bottom corner after being set up by Kane six minutes from time.

Messi lifts Miami's hopes with free-kick mastery

Miami, US - Lionel Messi scored an outstanding free-kick to help steer Inter Miami to a crucial FIFA Club World Cup win against FC Porto. It's an area of his game though that didn't come naturally.

When Lionel Messi first broke into the Barcelona team at 18, he was often the side's go-to man. With long hair and a quiet demeanour, he had blistering speed on the ball and left defenders behind with an ease rarely before seen. His teammates would get him involved as much as they could, sure he would make things happen. Yet at other times, Barcelona's golden boy would quietly step back and let the established stars around him take the lead.

When a free-kick was awarded, it was Deco, Xavi and Ronaldinho who gathered to plot the next move. La Pulga watched and learned. And over time, Messi made set pieces his own, both with Barcelona and with his national team. However, it didn't happen overnight. Dribbling and scoring came naturally to the Argentine, but free-kicks were less



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi scores against FC Porto

instinctive. But soon, like everything else he turned his hand to in football, he mastered it and turned it into an art form.

In Inter Miami CF's Group A match at the FIFA Club World Cup in Atlanta, Messi scored a stunning goal to seal the win for his side against FC Porto and keep their dream of reaching the knockout stage alive.

"Watch how Roman does it. Follow through, kid. Follow through."

Alfio Basile, who coached Argentina in two spells (1990-1994 and 2006-2008), was Messi's first head coach with the Albiceleste. During the 2007 Copa America in Venezuela, he pulled

Messi aside and suggested that, when striking the ball, he should bring his left leg further forward to generate more power and control.

Roman, of course, was Juan Roman Riquelme, the free kick specialist at the time for a side that went on to finish runners-up to Brazil.

Mastantuono's move to Real was too early, says River manager Gallardo

Pasadena, US - Franco Mastantuono's transfer to Real Madrid came too soon, while the 17-year-old was still developing and pivotal to River Plate's future, said coach Marcelo Gallardo ahead of the Argentine team's Club World Cup match against Monterrey.

Gallardo acknowledged Mastantuono's departure will leave a void in his squad after the Spanish giants completed a deal worth around \$45 million with River for the teenager earlier this month.

For the Argentine manager, the midfielder still needed more time to grow at the club, but he acknowledged the early transfer as an understandable part of modern football.

"It's natural, we train players for the world. Everything is happening earlier, young players are leaving faster, and I understand that those are the rules of the game," Gallardo told ESPN on Friday.

"Our sporting project for the year was with him. We have to readjust, because there are players who, by their nature, are difficult to replace.

"We knew that Mastantuono was going to leave at some point, but fans don't enjoy it that way. The market dictates the timing."

Gallardo said he's urging Mastantuono to stay focused on the tournament despite the noise around his move. "All I want is for him to play naturally, to try to forget about everything that's going on, which is difficult," he said.



Franco Mastantuono



Nuno Espirito Santo

Nuno extends Forest contract until 2028

Nottingham, England - Manager Nuno Espirito Santo has extended his contract with Nottingham Forest until 2028 after helping the club qualify for a European competition for the first time since 1995-96, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

Portuguese Nuno, who previously managed Wolverhampton Wanderers and Tottenham Hotspur, joined Forest in December 2023 and helped the team avoid relegation before guiding them to a seventh-place finish in 2024-25, their best top-flight campaign in three decades.

Forest narrowly missed out on a Champions League spot as they finished a point below fifth-placed Newcastle United, settling for a place in the Conference League's playoff round.

"I am delighted to be able to continue our journey at this fantastic football club," Nuno said in a statement after signing the new three-year deal.

"We have worked extremely hard to create a special bond between the players, the fans and everyone at the club, which helped us achieve great things last season."

Liverpool break club record to sign Germany midfielder Wirtz

Liverpool, England - Liverpool have signed Germany's Florian Wirtz from Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen, the Premier League champions said on Friday, as they smashed their transfer record to seal a deal for the attacking midfielder.

Leverkusen will receive a guaranteed amount of 100 million pounds (\$134.64 million) and a further maximum of 16 million pounds in potential bonuses.

That makes the 22-year-old Liverpool's most-expensive signing ever, ahead of Netherlands centre back and captain Virgil van Dijk who joined for 75 million pounds in 2017.

Wirtz, who signed a five-year

contract, also becomes the fifth 100 million pound plus signing in Premier League history, joining Chelsea midfielders Enzo Fernandez and Moises Caicedo, Arsenal's Declan Rice and Manchester City winger Jack Grealish.

"I feel very happy and very proud. Finally it's done and I was waiting for a long time - finally it's done and I am really happy," Wirtz said in a statement.

"I'm really excited to have a new adventure in front of me. This was also a big point of my thoughts: that I want to have something completely new, to go out of the Bundesliga and to join the Premier League."



Florian Wirtz

This was also a big point of my thoughts: that I want to have something completely new, to go out of the Bundesliga and to join the Premier League

FLORIAN WIRTZ

With two years left on his Leverkusen contract, Wirtz was also heavily linked with a move to German champions Bayern Munich and Pep Guardiola's City, who were looking to replace Kevin De Bruyne after the Belgian playmaker's exit.

Wirtz was instrumental at Leverkusen, leading them to an undefeated domestic league and

Cup double in the 2023-24 season while they went two league seasons without an away defeat.

The German bagged 57 goals and provided 65 assists in 197 appearances for Leverkusen, having joined the club from Cologne in 2020. He scored 16 goals, with 15 assists, in 45 matches last season as Leverkusen finished second to Bayern.

Capped 31 times by his country since his debut in 2021, Wirtz is the only player to register 10 or more goals and assists in the last two Bundesliga seasons.

While his arrival will add to Liverpool manager Arne Slot's midfield options, alongside Alexis Mac Allister, Ryan Gravenberch, Dominik Szoboszlai and Curtis Jones, Wirtz's versatility means he can also play on the left wing or as a false nine.

His signing is a statement of intent from Liverpool as they look to build on their success under Slot, the first Dutch manager to win the Premier League and the sixth coach to win the title in their first season.

INDIA'S FUTURE ARRIVES

Pant hits ton after Gill and Jaiswal centuries but England fight back to dismiss visitors for 471

Leeds, England - Fast bowler Josh Tongue helped England to breeze through the India lower order to skittle out the tourists for 471 in their first innings on day two of the first Test at Headingley, after they had been seemingly cruising on 430-3 earlier on Saturday.

From a strong overnight position of 359-3, Rishabh Pant (134) helped India to add runs in the morning session in thrilling style, before quick wickets - with India losing four for 24 runs before lunch - dragged England back into the match.

Wickets continued to tumble in the afternoon session as India failed to capitalised on their strong start. Having been seemingly in a hopeless situation, England now come to the crease with renewed hope.

Resuming the day on 359-3, India captain Shubman Gill (147) quickly moved past his highest score in Test cricket, and the second highest by a captain in their first Test match away from home. Pant was sweeping and scooping to his heart's content, often ending up on his knees, fittingly moving to his seventh Test ton with another six into the crowd, celebrated with a forward somersault.

Gill too tried to up the ante but was caught on the boundary



India's Rishabh Pant celebrates his century against England in the first Test in Headingley on Saturday

From a strong overnight position of 359-3, Rishabh Pant helped India to add runs in thrilling style, before quick wickets - with India losing four for 24 runs before lunch - dragged England back into the match

chasing another maximum by Josh Tongue for 147, Shoaib Bashir getting his first wicket having been the source of much of Pant's joy.

Karun Nair, playing in his first Test for India since 2017, did not last long as Ollie Pope took a stunning diving catch off the bowling of skipper Ben Stokes, with Nair departing after only four balls at the crease, without having troubled the score.

Pant eventually fell, trapped leg before wicket by Tongue for 134, before England's Mister Reliable Stokes struck again from the final ball before lunch, removing Shardul Thakur - who managed just one run - to give home supporters renewed hope. England continued their strong response with the bat as well, despite Jasprit Bumrah taking the wicket of Zack Crawley early in the innings. Ben Duckett was un-

beaten on 53, and Ollie Pope on 48 as the hosts reached 107 for 1 at tea.

On Friday, centuries from opener Yashasvi Jaiswal (101) and captain Gill fired India to a commanding 359-3 at the close of day one. Despite the clear, humid Headingley conditions seemingly favouring the batting side, England chose to bowl first, knowing each of the previous six Leeds Tests had been won by the side bowling first.

Ben Stokes' decision seemed ill-advised, with India openers KL Rahul and Jaiswal both looking in fine form, but Rahul fell for 42, with the England captain quickly removing debutant Sai Sudharsan for a duck from the final ball before lunch.



Najmul Hossain Shanto

Bangladesh draw first Test against Sri Lanka

Galle, Sri Lanka - Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto blasted twin centuries to help his side draw the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle on Saturday, while Angelo Mathews brought the curtain down on his red-ball career after more than 100 games for the hosts.

Shanto followed up his first-innings hundred with an unbeaten 125 in the second stanza after Mushfiqur Rahim was run out for 49, and Bangladesh declared on 285-6 to set Sri Lanka a steep victory target of 296 runs from 37 overs.

Sri Lanka lost a couple of quick wickets before Mathews, a veteran with more than 8,000 Test runs to his name, held steadfast with the bat - albeit barely scoring any runs. In the end, Bangladesh called it a day with the score on 72-4 with five overs left.

Bangladesh had made Sri Lanka toil on the opening two days, amassing 495 runs in their first innings including 148 for Shanto and 163 for Rahim, with Litton Das (90) unlucky to miss out on a century of his own.



Marketa Vondrousova

Vondrousova stuns Sabalenka to reach final

Berlin, Germany - Marketa Vondrousova powered past world number one Aryna Sabalenka 6-2 6-4 at the Berlin Open on Saturday to book a place in her first final since she won Wimbledon in 2023.

Czech Vondrousova controlled the tempo from the outset with surprisingly big serving on grass as she wrapped up the win in one hour and 20 minutes. She broke the Belarusian twice in the first set. The second set saw the players trade early breaks and Sabalenka saved two break points to stay in touch at 3-2, before the match settled into a rhythm at 4-4.

Sabalenka, who saved four match points against Elena Rybakina on Friday, could not repeat that escape as Vondrousova broke for 5-4 and served it out on her first match point with an ace.

"I feel like on grass you have to take risks, you know, and that was the point; I was like, okay, let's try. The match would con-

tinue otherwise, so you have to go for it. I was feeling really well today so, yeah, I'm just very happy," Vondrousova said.

"I didn't play for a long time, so I'm just so happy to be back healthy and so grateful to play these matches. When I saw the field, I was like, okay, let's try to win the first round, and now this is happening. So thank you guys for the support."

While Sabalenka struggled to find consistency, racking up 30 unforced errors, Vondrousova stayed measured and composed throughout, limiting her own tally to 12. She will play either Russian Liudmila Samsonova or Chinese qualifier Wang Xinyu in the final.

Despite previous wins over Sabalenka, this was Vondrousova's first career victory against a reigning number one. Currently ranked 164, the Czech has battled injuries since July 2024 and entered Berlin unseeded after missing three months with a shoulder injury.

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Young Brendel, in 1969



The revered pianist holds up his Echo Klassik lifetime achievement award in 2016

‘Music happens...’

OBITUARY: ALFRED BRENDEL HAILED AS ONE OF THE GREATEST MUSICIANS OF THE LAST CENTURY, BRITAIN’S STAR PIANIST ALFRED BRENDEL PASSED AWAY AT HIS HOME IN LONDON LEAVING BEHIND AN ILLUSTRIOUS VOID OF HIS 60-YEAR CONCERT CAREER



Alfred Brendel at his farewell concert in Vienna in 2008

Lauded pianist and author Alfred Brendel passed away quietly at his home in London on Tuesday at the age of 94. He gained fame for his sensitive interpretations of works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and Liszt, among others.

Born on January 5, 1931, in northern Moravia in the present-day Czech Republic, the boy of German, Austrian, Italian and Slavic heritage grew up on the Adriatic coast in what is now Croatia. He went to school in Zagreb, studied at the Conservatory in Graz, Austria, then moved to Vienna in 1950 and to London in 1970, which was his home until his death.

"I'm not somebody who looks for or needs roots," Brendel once said. "I want to be as cosmopolitan as possible. I prefer to be a paying guest. That's a lesson learned in the war."

and the theatre."

During Brendel's long and luminous career, critics often praised the lightness and aplomb of his playing style. With minimal body language and a dose of modesty, the "philosopher at the piano" — tall, gaunt and with thick horn-rimmed glasses — placed himself in the service of the composer.

"I often feel like a character actor," explained Brendel in an interview with DW in 2002. "I like — as far as possible — to slip into different roles." Brendel thus executed far more than just a blind trust in the score, once giving a possible explanation for that, too: "The years I spent under Nazi rule made me immune to blind trust."

The notes he played, and that are preserved, have left their mark on generations of musicians and music lovers.

"Music that is not played, but seems to happen all by itself," are the words Brendel found to describe two musicians he highly revered - his teacher Edwin Fischer and conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. That description might also apply to his own expansive body of work, which includes 114 CD releases.

A few choice composers
He was and remains an artist with a wide repertoire, even if he has his favourites.

During the 1960s, he became the first pianist ever to record the complete works of Ludwig van Beethoven. The recordings are widely considered among the best in existence. Schubert, Haydn, Mozart, Liszt, Busoni and Brahms were also among his other favourite composers.

In later years, Brendel focused on fewer composers, and once said a decade ago, "If you play the right pieces, the ones worth spending a life with, they become sources of strength that always radiate new energy and regenerate the performer's powers."

The last act
Brendel ended his 60-year concert career nearly two decades ago. His farewell performance at the Vienna Philharmonic on December 18, 2008, was voted one of the 100 greatest cultural moments of the decade by The Daily Telegraph.

Shortly afterward, he suffered an acute hearing loss and was only able to hear distorted tones. His 'retirement', however, saw him travel extensively to give lectures on music, read from the 11 books he penned, recite his own poems, and hold master classes for young pianists and string quartets.

And throughout, he retained his wry sense of humour. "If one had to hear Verdi incessantly in paradise, I'd ask for leave and the occasional visit to hell," he once said regarding life after death.
DW

If you play the right pieces, the ones worth spending a life with, they become sources of strength that always radiate new energy and regenerate the performer's powers

ALFRED BRENDEL

A couple of years after World War II, he gave his first concert at age 17. A year later, he won the Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition in Italy.

Decades of global concerts soon followed and Brendel gained several distinctions - three honorary doctorates from the universities of London, Oxford and Yale, and numerous prizes, including the Ernst von Siemens and the Herbert von Karajan awards, for lifetime achievement at the MIDEM Classical Awards in Cannes and Germany's ECHO Klassik in October 2016.

He was made an Honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1989 for his 'outstanding services to music in Britain', was awarded the Legion d'Honneur in 2004, and received the highest rank in the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2007.

In addition to his prolific output onstage, Brendel wrote numerous poems and essays and published books, including 'Music, Sense and Nonsense' in September 2015. He is widely regarded as a successful literary figure as well as a classical musician.

"I've always had a need not only to read but also to write," he once said. "In my younger years, I painted for a while. Now I find visual perception increasingly important. I go to museums, exhibitions, to the movies



time when the Earth receives the maximum amount of sunlight. This has a powerful symbolic meaning as well as clear energetic implications. Our energy levels reach their peak on this day, nature is in full bloom, and we are drawn to be more out and about, to do and achieve more, and take new risks.

Yang and Yin

Yang or masculine energy prevails and the Sun energises us, inspires us, motivates us to shine, to create, to express. From now on, darkness will slowly increase day by day: in the upcoming weeks and months leading up to the Fall Equinox, we will be reminded of the importance of honouring our energetic capacity and balancing activity with rest.

During the Winter Solstice instead, we experience the longest night and the shortest day of the year. Darkness prevails and asks us to turn inward, slow down, and prioritise being and feeling over doing and producing. Yin or feminine energy peaks at this time of the year. Our energy levels decrease, inviting us to explore our inner world and embark on a journey of self-discovery.

Honouring life's seasons

Whether we enter summer or winter, the reminder for us at this point of the year is to honour the season of life we are in, to embrace both, light and darkness, to celebrate beginnings and endings, masculine and feminine energy. These events are reminders of the cyclical nature of time, reminders that life is a wheel, that everything that turns around comes around, that there is a time for everything, which we don't get to decide. As we experience the maximum imbalance of darkness and light, we are invited to look at imbalances in our lives and within ourselves, not to punish or judge ourselves but simply to recognise where adjustments are needed. (ONA, moonomens.com)

'Summer Solstice' SETS IN

OMAN WELCOMES 'SUMMER SOLSTICE 2025', HERALDING THE KHAREEF SEASON IN DHOFAR FROM SATURDAY

People in Oman spent a hot weekend (tormented by temperatures ranging between 47°-48° C which compelled most to stay indoors) as the Summer Solstice 2025 marked the longest day of the year and the beginning of a fiery summer ahead.

The annual phenomenon occurs as the sun aligns directly over the Tropic of Cancer, marking the official astronomical start of summer in the Northern Hemisphere. This year's summer season will last approximately 93 days, 15 hours, and 37 minutes, according to astronomical calculations.

Al Mukhtar Saif al Saeedi, a member of Oman Astronomical Society, explained that this year's summer solstice was slated to occur precisely at 6.42am Oman time on June 21. In Muscat Governorate, residents experienced the longest day of the year, with sunrise at 5.21am, the sun reaching its highest point at 12.09pm, and sunset at 6:57 PM - resulting in a day length of 13 hours, 35 minutes, and 35 seconds.

The summer solstice represents a significant astronomical event where the Northern Hemisphere experiences its maximum tilt toward the sun, while simultaneously marking the winter solstice in the Southern Hemisphere. This phenomenon creates the longest daylight period and shortest night of the year across most Northern Hemisphere regions, including Europe, Asia, North America, and the Arctic Circle.

The summer solstice coincides with several notable natural phenomena in Oman. Astronomically, it signals the beginning of Khareef Dhofar (monsoon season) along the coastal regions from Dhalkut in the west to Mirbat in the east, when monsoon winds carry moisture-laden clouds from the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

Energetic portals

For millennia, the ancients have carefully observed the sky, tracking not only the Moon's phases and cycles but also the Sun's journey through the heavens and the corresponding shifts in the balance of light and

darkness.

Solstices and equinoxes represent powerful energetic portals that were known and celebrated long before clocks or calendars. Solstices occur twice a year, toward June 20/21 and December 20/21, while equinoxes take place around April 20/21 and October 20/21. These events are a reminder of the importance of honouring life's seasons and aligning with the energy available rather than fighting against it.

The beginning of 'cancer season' taking place on June 20, corresponds with the summer solstice in the Northern Hemisphere and the winter solstice in the Southern Hemisphere. Currently, we are experiencing the longest day of the year in the Northern part of the globe and the longest night of the year in the Southern one.

History and solstice observances

Solstice celebrations are one of the Earth's oldest ceremonies. These events have been revered by cultures all around the world and honoured in ways that stood the test of time thanks to the building of sacred sites perfectly aligned with the position of the Sun on these days. Stone circles and megaliths, such as Stonehenge and those on Easter Island, as well as ancient temples in Malta and Indonesia, and pyramids in Egypt and South America, were constructed several centuries ago.

These sites and many more are all aligned perfectly with the position of the Sun during the solstices or equinoxes. This position slightly changes throughout centuries because of a phenomena known as the precession of equinoxes. It has been discovered that, in several sacred sites, new structures have been added to original ones.

If we begin to dive into ancient history and study the nature of sacred constructions that survived to these days we are inevitably left in awe of the profound, precise, and vast knowledge of astronomy, geometry, and architecture people had back then. How did they do it? What tools did they use? How could they transport huge stones so skillfully? And why were these moments of the year so important for them?

Cycle of the Sun

There are so many things we may never know for sure, there are so many more questions than answers. What we can say for sure is that, no matter where we are from, our ancestors had a strong connection to the cycle of the Sun and lived in alignment with it. They recognised the cyclical nature of time, tracking the passing of seasons, honoring the dance of light and darkness, and celebrating the sacred changes marked by the solstices and equinoxes.

The summer solstice corresponds to the longest day and shortest night of the year, a

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