

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Basaer seeks to instil love and reverence for the Holy Quran

‘BASAER’ RELIGIOUS INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO EMPOWER WOMEN

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The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, represented by the Women’s Education and Guidance Department, has launched Basaer, a religious initiative aimed at deepening the understanding and appreciation of the Holy Quran. The event was held under the auspices of Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Rawnaq bint Turki al Said.

The initiative targets over 200 women from various governmental and private institutions in Muscat Governorate, including Quran teachers, religious guides and female employees. Basaer seeks to instil love and reverence for the Holy Quran, promoting its values and teachings as a guiding light for both personal and community life.

“This initiative carries profound spiritual significance that Omani women need in their life journey,” said Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Rawnaq. “It represents a path to a happy and fulfilling life today and in the future, rooted in the teachings of the Holy Quran.”

She urged women to actively engage in such initiatives, noting that they offer invaluable opportunities to acquire religious knowledge and insight.

The opening day featured a keynote address by Shamsa al Rahbi, Director of the Women’s Education and Guidance Department, who highlighted the importance of adhering to the principles and teachings of true Islam, as revealed in the Holy Quran. She emphasised that true happiness and goodness in this life are found through obedience to divine guidance.

The programme also included two working papers: “The Message of Man in This Life, and the Role of the Holy Quran in Bringing Happiness to Humanity”, presented by Dr Thuraya al Barashdi, and “Real-Life Experiences of Individuals and Families Who Benefited from the Holy Quran”, presented by Shamsa al Rahbi.

PROGRAMME FOR GIFTED STUDENTS LAUNCHED



This forms part of the national ‘Tharwa’ programme for nurturing gifted students

NIZWA: The activities of the 2025 Summer Programme for Gifted Students in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate began on Tuesday. The programme, organised by the Directorate-General of Education in the governorate, targets more than 80 male and female students from various wilayats of the governorate as part of the national ‘Tharwa’ programme for nurturing gifted students.

Ahmed bin Marhoon al Busaidy, a senior gifted student care specialist, stated that the programme offers a rich experience combining creativity and knowledge. It aims to refine students’ personalities and enhance their future capabilities, with programmes tailored to their individual interests and talents, opening up diverse horizons in literature, science, technology and arts. — ONA

OMANI CITIZENS REPATRIATED SAFELY FROM IRAN

MUSCAT: In a successful repatriation effort coordinated by the Foreign Ministry, 313 Omani citizens have safely returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran via Bandar Abbas on Monday. The operation, conducted in collaboration with the Omani Embassy in Tehran and other relevant authorities, forms part of the government’s ongoing commitment to ensure citizens’ safe return.

The ministry extended its sincere appreciation to all parties involved



313 Omani citizens returned safely from Iran via Bandar Abbas

in this phase of repatriation efforts, while reaffirming its round-the-clock work to facilitate the return of all remaining citizens. — ONA

Oman boosts diplomacy to ease regional tensions

THE Sultanate of Oman continues to intensify its diplomatic efforts to contain the dangerous escalation unfolding in the region and to prevent the expansion of tensions resulting from repeated Israeli aggression.

These efforts are grounded in Oman’s steadfast approach centred on fostering constructive dialogue, upholding international law and advocating for peaceful solutions as the foundation for achieving regional security and stability.

Oman’s active engagement reflects its strategic vision of building trust among international actors and its pivotal role as a credible mediator in regional crises.

In this context, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, led the Omani delegation at the 48th Extraordinary Session of the GCC Ministerial Council, held under the presidency of the State of Kuwait, the current chair of the Council, to discuss the rapidly evolving regional developments.

The meeting concluded with a joint statement strongly condemning the Israeli attacks on the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, describing them as a blatant violation of national sovereignty and international law.

The statement called for urgent de-escalation and a return to diplomatic negotiations, while commending Oman’s prominent role in facilitating dialogue on the Iranian nuclear file, which is an essential pillar for resolving the ongoing conflict and



Sayyid Badr continued telephonic consultations with counterparts in a number of brotherly and friendly countries

strengthening regional security.

In parallel with these efforts, the Foreign Minister continued intensive telephonic consultations with counterparts in a number of brotherly and friendly countries, as well as key international partners, including Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

These discussions focused on aligning international positions, enhancing political and legal pressure to halt Israeli attacks immediately and pushing towards comprehensive negotiating tracks that would restore stability and avert the dangers of further military escalation in the region. — ONA

Oman named guest of honour at 56th Algiers International Fair

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is the guest of honour at the 56th edition of the Algiers International Fair, held at the ‘Safex Expo Center’ in the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria from June 23 to 28.

This participation underscores the strength of fraternal and economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, as well as the fruitful cooperation between the two countries across various fields.

The Omani delegation is headed by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with participation from several government and private sector entities. The Omani pavilion at the international fair features over 60 companies and establishments from diverse industrial, commercial and service sectors, including specialised firms in pharmaceuticals, transportation, electrical transformers, real estate, fisheries, tourism, food products, handicrafts, and more.

The participation aims to explore opportunities of trade and investment exchange, as well as discussing potential partnerships and export prospects to the Algerian market and regional and international markets.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment



IBTISAM BINT AHMED AL FAROOJIYAH
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion

The Algiers International Fair showcases Oman as a promising investment hub, highlighting available investment opportunities



Promotion for Investment Promotion, affirmed that Oman’s invitation as guest of honour at this event reflects the depth of bilateral and economic relations between the two countries. She noted that Oman views Algeria as a nation with promising opportunities for cooperation in investment, trade and industry.

She stated that this participation seeks to present Oman as a promising investment hub, highlighting available investment opportunities and showcasing its modern infrastructure, incentives and facilitations for investors, making it a strategic platform for accessing regional and global markets.

She added that the Omani pavilion offers visitors and investors an enriching interactive experience while providing a platform to enhance communication between Omani and Algerian companies.

The Algiers International Fair, held annually, attracts thousands of visitors and participants from around the world. Oman’s participation will bolster its commercial and investment presence on the international stage, opening new horizons for the Omani private sector to build sustainable partnerships that support economic diversification and regional integration efforts. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



ASMED held its dialogue session focused on enhancing opportunities for SMEs in the retail and construction sectors

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS
SMEs ROLE IN
KEY SECTORS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

In a move to strengthen collaboration and integration with key stakeholders, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) held its 15th dialogue session focused on enhancing opportunities for SMEs in the retail, construction and manufacturing sectors. The session, attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, brought together SMEs owners and stakeholders from across these sectors. It aligns with ASMED’s ongoing efforts to improve the business environment and make it more conducive and attractive to SMEs. The discussion aimed to amplify SMEs contributions by encouraging innovation, improving operational efficiency, fostering public-private partnerships and promoting awareness about SMEs as a vital pillar of the national economy.

The minister noted, “Omani companies should not only focus on the local market. We encourage expansion beyond Oman. The ministry supports entrepreneurs through structured, evidence-based decision-making. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour’s mandate to employ Omanis excludes those holding entrepreneurship cards.”

Key topics addressed included policies, legislation, licensing and support mechanisms that help SMEs develop creative solutions and form strategic partnerships. The session also opened the floor for questions, enabling business owners to share challenges and suggest viable solutions.

Oman is working towards a robust industrial future in line with national aspirations. In the past five years, significant milestones have been achieved in the industrial sector. The government is now focused on enhancing the competitiveness of national products, both locally and internationally.

Emphasising the importance of local content, the dialogue reinforced its role in developing economic infrastructure and improving the business ecosystem.

This drives productivity, boosts sector efficiency and fosters innovation, contributing to long-term economic and financial stability while promoting balanced and sustainable growth.

ROP WARNS AGAINST
FRAUDULENT TEXT
MESSAGES

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the General Directorate of Customs, has issued a warning regarding fraudulent text messages currently being circulated. According to the ROP, these messages are part of online scams targeting individuals, urging the public to exercise caution and verify information through official channels. Meanwhile, people are strongly advised not to share any personal or banking information with unauthorised parties or suspicious sources.

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THE Sultanate of Oman has called for intensified afforestation and land restoration efforts as the world observes World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on June 17, reinforcing its commitment to a more sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Speaking to the Observer, a senior official from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) emphasised that desertification is a critical environmental challenge facing nations worldwide. With the global population expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, the demand for nutritious food and clean water is increasing rapidly, making land restoration an urgent priority rather than an option.

“In Oman, we have devised multiple strategies to combat desertification through various projects and initiatives,” the official said. “These include reforestation, rangeland restoration, awareness campaigns and active collaboration between public and private sectors.” He noted that Oman has integrated desertification control into its national strategy, with a focus on environmental protection, sustainable land use and natural resource management.

Among the major initiatives undertaken by Oman are: Tree planting in arid regions such as Al Rumayl and Hayal to increase vegetation cover; Rangeland restoration projects in Dhofar targeting issues such as soil erosion, biodiversity loss and vegetation decline; Community awareness campaigns promoting sustainable agriculture; and Support for water-efficient crops and eco-friendly farming technologies.

“These efforts are essential in promoting



Oman’s afforestation and restoration efforts demonstrate how local initiatives can contribute meaningfully to global goals

food security, conserving biodiversity and building climate resilience,” the official added.

Globally, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought 2025 is being led by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This year’s official observance is taking place in Bogotá, Colombia, where policymakers, civil society organisations and indigenous representatives are gathering to advocate for land restoration as a cornerstone of sustainable development and lasting peace.

Held under the theme ‘Restore the Land; Unlock the Opportunities’, the event highlights the economic, social and environmental benefits of restoring

degraded lands for both people and the planet.

A UNCCD statement said: “Every \$1 used to restore land yields a return of \$7 to \$30 through enhanced ecosystem services and livelihoods, making for an investment case that the world cannot afford to overlook.” The organisation estimates that to restore 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030, the world must invest approximately \$1 billion per day.

In alignment with this vision, Oman’s afforestation and restoration efforts demonstrate how local initiatives can contribute meaningfully to global goals — ensuring food security, preserving ecosystems and fostering sustainable economic growth for future generations.

‘Tunisian Cinema Days’ ends today

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The ‘Tunisian Cinema Days’, organised by the Oman Film Society (OFS), in cooperation with the Embassy of Tunisia in Oman, ends today, June 18.

The event began under the theme ‘Human Creativity in Tunisian Cinema’ on June 16. The Cinema Days previewed a selection of the most important Tunisian feature and documentary films, along with dialogue seminars and discussion sessions with film-makers, with the aim of highlighting the Tunisian cinematic experience and promoting cultural and artistic exchange between the two countries.

The OFS emphasised that this initiative is part of its programmes aimed



The ‘Tunisian Cinema Days’ was celebrated in Muscat

at promoting Arab and international cinema and creating spaces for interaction between the Omani audience and various visual creations, especially those that address human and social issues with sophisticated artistic expression.

“This cultural cooperation with Tunisia and other countries, of which we are proud, confirms our shared

belief that cinema is not only a visual art, but a human language that unites, brings people together, expresses identity and preserves memory,” said Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, Chairman of the Oman Film Society.

The opening ceremony, held at the Ministry of Labour’s Grand Hall, was attended by a select group of diplomatic and cultural figures, a number of film-makers from Oman and Tunisia, and an audience interested in the seventh art.

The first day’s activities concluded with the screening of the feature film ‘My Son’ by director Mehdi Barsaoui (96 minutes). The film explores the relationship between a father and his son in the face of contemporary social challenges. It was presented in a sensitive visual style and received

great interaction from the audience, thanks to its narrative authenticity and sophisticated artistic treatment.

Ezzedine El Tees, Tunisian Ambassador to Oman, said that these days would not have been possible without the distinguished historical and fraternal relations between our two brotherly peoples, and the great and valuable cooperation and generous support we have received from the Oman Film Society, a pioneer in its field with its great efforts in serving Omani and Arab cinema and culture.

“This occasion represents an artistic bridge between our two brotherly countries, adding to the authentic cultural, economic and social bridges between Tunisia and Oman throughout their long shared history, present, and future.”

Campaign held in GCC cities to showcase khareef season

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is pressing ahead with efforts to boost tourism in Dhofar Governorate, notably by implementing promotional activities in key shopping malls across GCC cities. The campaign takes the theme ‘Your Summer is Green’.

The campaign focuses on Khareef Dhofar Season, one of the most prominent tourism attraction periods in the Sultanate of Oman. During the khareef season, which begins on June 21 every year, Dhofar Governorate is endowed with moderate weather and adorned with picturesque vegetation. To make optimum use of the

khareef season, the MoHT provides visitors with full information that enables them to engage in different tourism experiences and activities, including recreational events, nature exploration trips and visits to heritage and archaeological sites.

The information also includes an account of direct flight options to Salalah. This facilitates access to hotspots in Dhofar Governorate and enhances its appeal as a preferred summer destination. Besides attracting visitors from GCC states, the information boosts Dhofar’s presence on the regional tourism map.



The promotional activities provide an opportunity to introduce visitors to Dhofar Governorate’s tourism attractions and reflect the Sultanate

of Oman’s commitment to develop the tourism sector throughout the year.

The ministry launched similar

promotional campaigns during its participation in the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai in April 2025. Oman was represented at the event by Dhofar Municipality, which dedicated a special gallery in Oman’s pavilion to highlight the features, landmarks and events that will be held during Khareef Dhofar Season 2025.

Last month (May 2025), the ministry organised two workshops in Riyadh and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The workshops saw the participation of tourism sector partners from Dhofar Governorate, as well as Flynas and Flyadeal. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

BEAT JET LAG

TRAVEL SMART THIS SUMMER



AHMED AL KAABI

AS SUMMER vacation begins, airports across Oman are witnessing increased activity, with families heading to far-off destinations and students departing for academic programmes abroad. Whether it's the United States, Australia, or other countries requiring long-haul flights, travellers often face a common challenge – jet lag, or circadian rhythm disruption. Jet lag is more than just fatigue; it's a physiological condition that can significantly affect sleep quality, mood, digestion and mental performance. For families, it can interfere with vacation enjoyment and for students, it can impact academic readiness upon arrival. According to the Ministry of Health, jet lag occurs when the body's internal clock is not aligned with the local time of the destination. Symptoms include difficulty falling asleep or waking up, daytime drowsiness, poor concentration, digestive discomfort, irritability and even lowered physical performance – especially for athletes and those with demanding schedules. Here are four key strategies to help Omani travellers minimise jet lag this summer:

1. Adjust your sleep schedule in advance

Health experts recommend gradually shifting your sleep time before travel. If you're heading west, try going to bed 1-2 hours later than usual. If you're flying east, sleep earlier. This gradual adjustment helps your body synchronise with the upcoming time zone.

2. Arrive early to settle in

For students starting academic terms or travellers attending important events, arriving two days before your schedule begins can help your body adjust and perform better. This transition period is especially helpful for scholarship students travelling to or from destinations with major time differences.

3. Stay hydrated and eat light

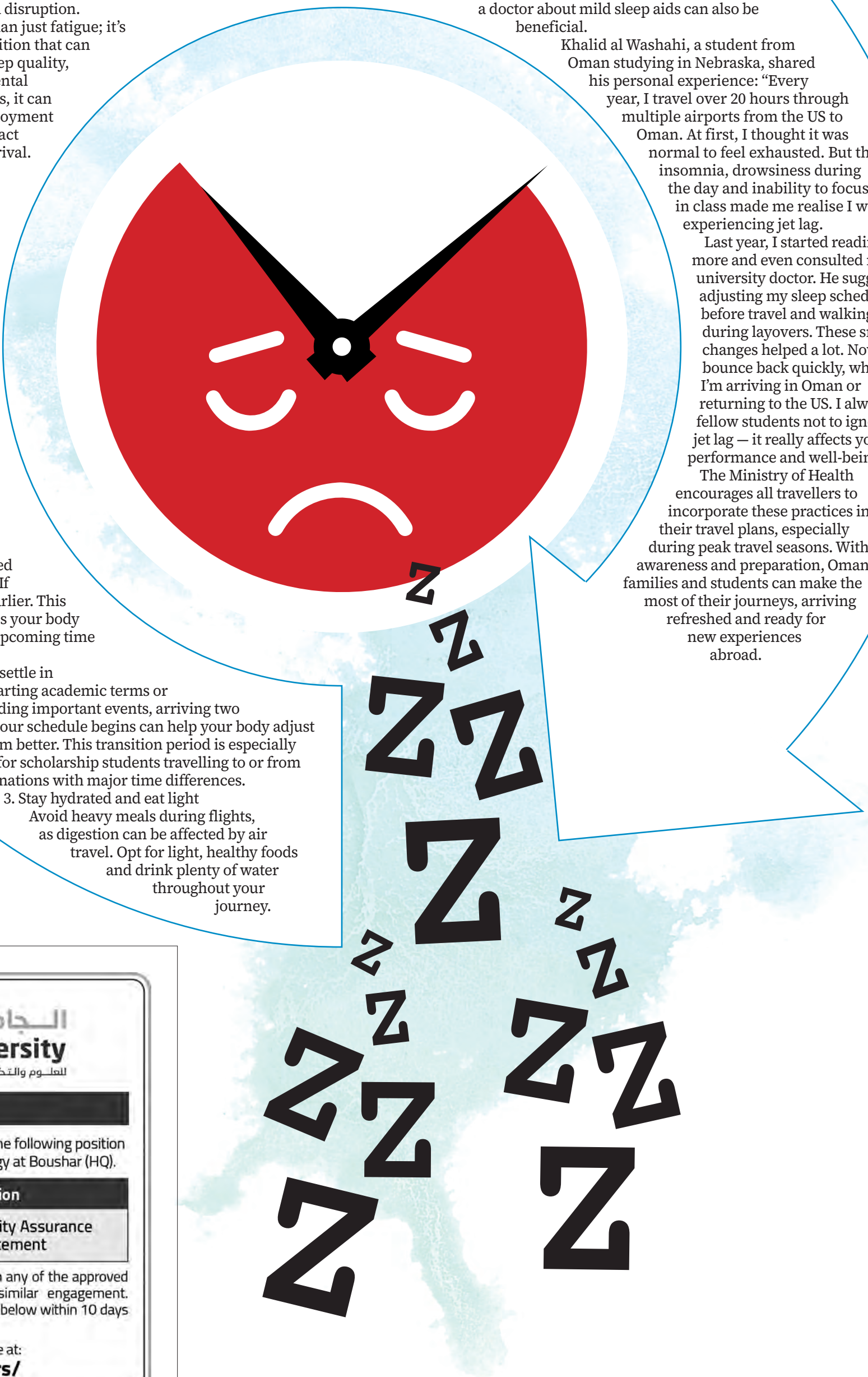
Avoid heavy meals during flights, as digestion can be affected by air travel. Opt for light, healthy foods and drink plenty of water throughout your journey.

Avoid caffeine, which can worsen jet lag symptoms and dehydrate the body. Walking around during flights and layovers also promotes circulation and reduces fatigue.

4. Control light exposure and nap strategically

Natural daylight helps reset the body clock. After arrival, spend time outdoors during the day, especially in the morning. If you feel sleepy during the day, limit naps to 15-20 minutes to avoid disrupting your night sleep. For frequent travellers or the elderly, consulting a doctor about mild sleep aids can also be beneficial.

Khalid al Washahi, a student from Oman studying in Nebraska, shared his personal experience: "Every year, I travel over 20 hours through multiple airports from the US to Oman. At first, I thought it was normal to feel exhausted. But the insomnia, drowsiness during the day and inability to focus in class made me realise I was experiencing jet lag. Last year, I started reading more and even consulted my university doctor. He suggested adjusting my sleep schedule before travel and walking during layovers. These small changes helped a lot. Now I can bounce back quickly, whether I'm arriving in Oman or returning to the US. I always tell fellow students not to ignore jet lag – it really affects your performance and well-being." The Ministry of Health encourages all travellers to incorporate these practices into their travel plans, especially during peak travel seasons. With awareness and preparation, Omani families and students can make the most of their journeys, arriving refreshed and ready for new experiences abroad.





الجامعة الوطنية
National University
العلوم والتكنولوجيا — Science & Technology

VACANCY

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for the following position for the National University of Science and Technology at Boushar (HQ).

Ref. No.	Position
HR/2025/VAC/0182	Director of Quality Assurance & Enhancement

Applicants must have a minimum of master's degree in any of the approved academic discipline with 10 years' experience in similar engagement. Interested candidates may apply online in the link given below within 10 days from 17th June 2025.

Job Details & Applications are Available at:
<https://nu.edu.om/careers/>

SHORT TAKES



Rescuers conduct a search and rescue work in a heavily damaged building, in Kyiv. — AFP

RUSSIAN STRIKES KILL 10 IN ‘HORRIFIC’ ATTACK ON KYIV

KYIV: Russia launched dozens of drones and missiles at Kyiv in the early hours of Tuesday, killing at least 10 people and wounding dozens of others, as negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow break down. President Volodymyr Zelensky described the latest overnight barrage as “one of the most horrific attacks” on Kyiv since the Kremlin launched its attack of Ukraine more than three years ago.

Zelensky said a total of 440 drones and 32 missiles were launched in the strikes nationwide and urged the international community not to “turn a blind eye”. Russian President Vladimir “Putin does this solely because he can afford to continue the war. He wants the war to go on,” he said. Journalists saw smoke billowing over the capital’s skyline at dawn and a multiple-storey housing block gutted by the attack.

Zelensky had been hoping to speak with US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Canada, but the US president cut short his visit, amid the escalating conflict between Israel and Iran. Russia hit some 27 sites in Kyiv overnight and some residents were left without electricity, officials said. — AFP

CHINA’S XI IN KAZAKHSTAN TO CEMENT TIES



Leaders pose for a picture at the China-Central Asia Summit in Astana, Kazakhstan. — Reuters

ASTANA: Xi Jinping celebrated China’s “eternal friendship” with Central Asia at a summit in Kazakhstan on Tuesday, as the Chinese leader blasted tariffs and sought to assert Beijing’s influence in a region historically dominated by Russia. The summit in Astana brought together Xi with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

At the summit, the group signed a pact of “eternal” friendship as Xi called for closer ties with the resource-rich region. “We should... strengthen cooperation with a more enterprising attitude and more practical measures,” said Xi in comments carried by state news agency Xinhua.

China has also shown willingness to invest in massive infrastructure projects in the region, part of its Belt and Road initiative that uses such financing as a political and diplomatic lever. In a meeting with Kyrgyzstan’s president, Xi called for moves to “advance high-quality construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway and foster new drivers of growth in clean energy, green minerals and artificial intelligence”. — AFP

EU PRESSES TO CUT DEFENCE RED TAPE IN RUSH TO REARM

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday unveiled a raft of proposals to slash red tape in the defence sector as the bloc pushes to rearm in the face of Russia. Europe is looking to ramp up its production of weaponry, spurred on by Moscow’s war on Ukraine and fears over the reliability of the United States under President Donald Trump. “The only way to ensure European peace is to make sure we are ready to defend ourselves credibly and quickly,” EU defence commissioner Andrius

Kubilius said. “With this package, we are putting forward ambitious proposals to cut red tape.” As part of the drive, Brussels says it wants to reduce the time needed for permits from the years it can take now to just 60 days. A senior EU official gave as an example an ammunition testing facility that needs to comply with a myriad of environmental and health and safety rules. “It can take up to three years or four years,” the official said. Under the proposed law,

authorities in the EU’s member states “will have 60 days to react” and if they do not respond in time it will be assumed permission is granted, the official said. The bloc is also seeking to ease access to EU funding for companies and to clarify investment rules that have often scared asset managers off from putting money into the defence industry. The proposals to cut bureaucracy are the latest volley in the EU’s efforts to boost its ability to rearm. — AFP

Gaza healthcare close to collapse as fuel runs out

THE World Health Organization on Tuesday pleaded for fuel to be allowed into Gaza to keep its remaining hospitals running, warning the Palestinian territory’s health system was at “breaking point”. “For over 100 days, no fuel has entered Gaza and attempts to retrieve stocks from evacuation zones have been denied,” said Rik Peeperkorn, the WHO’s representative in the Palestinian territories. “Combined with critical supply shortages, this is pushing the health system closer to the brink of collapse.”

Peeperkorn said only 17 of Gaza’s 36 hospitals were currently minimally to partially functional. They have a total of around 1,500 beds — around 45 per cent fewer than before the conflict began. He said all hospitals and primary health centres in north Gaza were currently out of service.

In Rafah in southern Gaza, health services are provided through the Red Cross field hospital and two partially-functioning medical points. Speaking from Tel Aviv, he said the 17 partially functioning hospitals and seven field hospitals were barely running on a minimum amount of daily fuel and “will soon have none left”. “Without fuel, all levels of care will cease, leading to more preventable deaths and suffering.”

Hospitals were already switching between generators and batteries to power ventilators, dialysis machines and incubators, he said, and without fuel, ambulances cannot run and supplies cannot be delivered to hospitals. Furthermore,



Palestinians gather to receive aid supplies in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

“For over 100 days, no fuel has entered Gaza and attempts to retrieve stocks from evacuation zones have been denied. Combined with critical supply shortages, this is pushing the health system closer to the brink of collapse

RIK PEEPERKORN

field hospitals are entirely reliant on generators, and without electricity, the cold chain for keeping vaccines would fail.

The health ministry in Gaza said on Monday that 5,194 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes on the territory on March 18 following a truce. The overall death toll in Gaza since the war broke out on October 7, 2023 has reached 55,493 people, according to the health ministry. “People often ask when Gaza is going to be out of fuel; Gaza is already out of fuel,” said WHO trauma surgeon and emergency officer Thanos Gargavanis, speaking from the Strip. “We are walking already the fine line that separates disaster from saving lives. The shrinking

humanitarian space makes every health activity way more difficult than the previous day.”

Meanwhile, Gaza’s civil defence agency said Israeli forces on Tuesday killed more than 50 aid seekers in the southern city of Khan Yunis, the latest deadly incident near an aid site in the Palestinian territory. Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that at least 53 people were killed and some 200 wounded as thousands of Palestinians gathered to receive flour at a World Central Kitchen (WCK) aid centre in the morning.

“Israeli drones fired at the citizens. Some minutes later, Israeli tanks fired several shells at the citizens, which led to a large number of martyrs and wounded,” he said. — AFP

INDONESIA VOLCANO SPEWS COLOSSAL ASH TOWER

JAKARTA: A volcano in eastern Indonesia spewed a colossal ash tower into the sky on Tuesday, authorities said, after they raised its alert level to the highest of a four-tiered system. Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki, a 1,584-metre-high twin-peaked volcano on the tourist island of Flores, erupted at 5:35 pm local time, the volcanology agency said in a statement.

“The height of the eruption column was observed at approximately 10,000 metres above the summit. The ash column was observed to be grey with thick intensity,” it said, after the alert level was raised. There were no immediate reports of damages or casualties.

Geology agency head Muhammad Wafid said residents and tourists should avoid carrying out any activities within at least seven kilometres of the volcano’s crater. — AFP

NETWORKS SURGES

‘Overvoltage’ caused huge April blackout



A major power outage that paralysed the Iberian Peninsula in April was caused by “overvoltage” on the grid that triggered “a chain reaction”, according to a government report released on Tuesday. The blackout had “multiple” causes, Ecological Transition Minister Sara Aagesen told reporters following a cabinet meeting, adding the system “lacked sufficient voltage control capacity” that day. Overvoltage is when there is too much electrical voltage in a network, overloading equipment. — AFP

ELECTORAL PROTESTS

Polish court ‘received 10,000 complaints’



Poland’s Supreme Court said on Tuesday it had received around 10,000 complaints over this month’s presidential vote, which was won by the right-wing opposition’s candidate. One complaint was from the electoral committee of Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, the candidate put forward by the pro-EU government. “We expect there to be a total of around 10,000” electoral protests once they are all registered, court officer Monika Drwal said. — AFP

RIISING TENSIONS

9 hurt as Kenya police clash with protesters



Security forces and hundreds of men armed with whips and clubs clashed with protesters in Kenya, leaving at least nine injured, as they demonstrated against the killing of a man in police custody. Journalists saw a police officer shoot a bystander at close range in the head, with video of the incident triggering outrage online. Tensions have risen as the east African country approaches the first anniversary of massive Gen Z-led protests sparked by tax rises. — AFP

Iran accuses G7 of siding with

Iranian, Israeli energy sites impacted by war

Military strikes between Iran and Israel have prompted concern about potential damage and disruption to the region's important oil and gas fields and infrastructure. Below are details about these sites and about how they have been affected so far:

- ◆ **SOUTH PARS GAS FIELD:**

Israel struck an installation at the South Pars offshore gas field on June 14 where Iran has partially suspended production. South Pars is part of the world's largest natural gas reserve which Iran shares with Qatar. The attack struck four units of Phase 14 of South Pars, around 200 kilometres from Qatar's installations, many of which are joint ventures with international firms, including U.S. giants ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips.
- ◆ **TEHRAN FUEL DEPOT AND REFINERY**

Israel struck a Tehran fuel depot and an oil refinery near the capital on June 14, Iran said, but authorities said the situation was under control.
- ◆ **HAIFA OIL REFINERY**

Israel's Bazan Group shut down its Haifa oil refinery, the country's largest, on June 16 after its power station was damaged in an Iranian attack. The refinery has a crude processing capacity of 197,000 barrels per day (bpd).
- ◆ **WHY SOUTH PARS MATTERS**

South Pars makes up around a third of the world's largest reservoir of natural gas. Iran shares the reservoir with major gas exporter Qatar, which calls its field the North Dome. Sanctions and technical constraints have meant most gas Tehran produces there is used domestically but it also exports some.
- ◆ **IRAN'S OIL**

Iran is OPEC's third largest oil producer and extracts about 3.3 million bpd of crude oil, and another 1.3 million bpd of condensate and other liquids, totalling about 4.5 per cent of global supplies. Its exports in recent months have reached 1.8 million bpd, their highest level since 2018, data from Kpler showed, driven by strong Chinese demand. Iran's production facilities are primarily in the southwest, in Khuzestan province, and in Bushehr province for gas and condensate from South Pars.
- Reuters



The SPQ1 gas platform is seen on the southern edge of Iran's South Pars gas field in the Gulf. — Reuters

China accuses Trump of ‘pouring oil’ on conflict

BEIJING: China on Tuesday accused President Donald Trump of “pouring oil” on the mounting conflict between Iran and Israel, after the US leader warned Tehran residents to “immediately evacuate”. Following decades of enmity and a prolonged shadow war, Israel launched a surprise aerial campaign last week against targets across Iran, saying it aimed to prevent its arch-foe from acquiring atomic weapons — an ambition Tehran denies. The sudden flare-up in hostilities has sparked fears of a wider conflict, with Trump urging Iran back to the negotiating table after Israel's attacks derailed ongoing nuclear talks.

Trump also issued an

extraordinary warning on his Truth Social platform: “Everyone should immediately evacuate Tehran!” Asked about Trump's remarks, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said: “Fanning the flames, pouring oil, making threats and mounting pressure will not help to promote the de-escalation of the situation, but will only intensify and widen the conflict.” “The Chinese side calls on all relevant parties, especially countries with special influence on Israel, to shoulder their responsibilities, take immediate measures to de-escalate tensions, and prevent the conflict from expanding and spreading.”

China's embassy in Israel on Tuesday also urged its citizens

to leave the country “as soon as possible”, after Israel and Iran traded heavy strikes. “The Chinese mission in Israel reminds Chinese nationals to leave the country as soon as possible via land border crossings, on the precondition that they can guarantee their personal safety,” the embassy said in a statement on WeChat. “It is recommended to depart in the direction of Jordan,” it added.

The embassy warned the conflict was “continuing to escalate”. “Much civilian infrastructure has been damaged, civilian casualties are on the rise, and the security situation is becoming more serious,” it said. — AFP



A woman weeps after knowing that a relative of hers has been killed in Israeli strikes. — AFP

IRAN accused the Group of Seven nations on Tuesday of siding with Israel in its call for “de-escalation” in their intensifying conflict, now in its fifth day. “The G7 must give up its one-sided rhetoric and tackle the real source of the escalation — Israel's aggression,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said. “Israel has launched an unprovoked war of aggression against Iran... in violation of... the UN Charter,” the spokesman said. “Hundreds of innocent people have been killed, our public and state facilities and people's homes are brutally demolished. “Iran is defending itself against a cruel aggression. Does Iran really have any other choice?” he asked.

At a G7 summit in Canada on Monday, leaders including US President Donald Trump had called for “de-escalation” of the conflict while stressing Israel had the right to defend itself. In a concluding statement, the G7 leaders said they were committed to “peace and stability” in the Middle East. “We affirm that Israel has a right to defend itself. We reiterate our support for the security of Israel,” said the statement. “Iran is the principal source of regional instability and terror,” it said. “We have been consistently clear that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon. “We urge that the resolution of the Iranian crisis leads to a broader de-escalation of hostilities in the Middle East,” the G7 statement added.

US President Donald Trump said he wants a “real end” to the conflict between Israel and Iran, not just a ceasefire, as the arch foe traded fire on Tuesday. The escalating clashes saw Israeli warplanes target military sites in Iran, killing a senior commander and drawing retaliatory missile fire from Iran.

Explosions were heard over Tel Aviv shortly after air raid sirens sounded in many parts of Israel following missile launches from Iran, the Israeli military said. The air force was “operating to intercept and strike where necessary to eliminate the threat”, the military said. About 20 minutes later, it said people could leave shelters as police reported debris fell in the Tel Aviv area and the fire brigade said it was tackling a blaze in the surrounding area.

The Israeli military said it killed senior Iranian commander Ali Shadmani in an overnight strike on a “command centre in the heart of Tehran”, just four days after his predecessor, Golan Ali Rashid, was killed in a similar Israeli attack. It also said it targeted multiple missile and drone sites in west Iran, including infrastructure, launchers and storage facilities, with black-and-white footage showing some of them exploding.

Despite mounting calls to de-escalate, neither side has backed off from the missile blitz that began on Friday, when Israel launched an unprecedented aerial campaign targeting



Emergency personnel work to extinguish a fire on a bus, in Herzliya, Israel. — Reuters

Israel for its de-escalation call

Evacuees from Israel arrive in Slovakia and Czech Republic

TEL AVIV: Flights carrying evacuees from Israel have arrived in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, authorities said on Tuesday, putting the two countries among the first to bring citizens home to flee the conflict between Iran and Israel. Another Central European country, Poland, said on Tuesday that the evacuation of Poles from Israel was planned for Wednesday and Thursday. Slovak authorities said the first evacuation flight with 73 people, including 25 Slovak tourists and five family members of Slovak diplomats working in Tel Aviv, had arrived in the capital Bratislava late on Monday. Foreign Minister Juraj Blanar said Slovakia had also

helped bring citizens of other countries to Europe, including 15 Poles, mainly children, 14 Czechs, nine Austrians, two Slovenians and one citizen each of Estonia, Spain and Malaysia. “Our partners are contacting us and we are preparing another flight on Tuesday, which should include citizens of the Slovak Republic, as well as citizens of the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Latvia and France,” Blanar said. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said Slovakia had helped evacuate seven Hungarians. Czech Defence Minister Jana Cernochova said that a flight with 66 people evacuated from Israel had landed near Prague. Poland

said on Monday that it was organising the evacuation of around 200 of its citizens from Israel via Jordan. On Tuesday, the Polish foreign ministry said it planned to use two planes from Egypt and Jordan for the evacuation, the first of which would take off on Wednesday. “The plane from Sharm El Sheikh will take off first, the one from Amman will take off second, most likely on Thursday morning,” said Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Henryka Moscicka-Dendys. “We want to service this connection with a military plane, because we see that there are not as many people willing to evacuate as it might seem.” — Reuters

Over 700 foreigners flee Iran to Azerbaijan, Armenia

BAKU: More than 700 foreign nationals have crossed from Iran into neighbouring Azerbaijan and Armenia since Israel began striking the country last week, government officials in Baku and Yerevan said on Tuesday. The Caucasus countries border Iran's northwest, with the closest crossing into Azerbaijan around 500 kilometres from Tehran by road. “Since the start of the military escalation between Israel and Iran, more than 600 citizens of 17 countries have been evacuated from Iran via Azerbaijan,” a government source said on Tuesday. The evacuees, who crossed the border via the Astara checkpoint on the Caspian Sea

coast, are being transported to Baku airport and “flood to their home countries on international flights”, the source said. Among those evacuated are citizens of post-Soviet countries Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as well as Germany, Spain, Italy, Serbia, Romania, Portugal, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, China and Vietnam. “In light of the evacuation need, Azerbaijan has temporarily opened its border for those leaving Iran,” the official said. India also evacuated 110 of its citizens from Iran through Armenia, Ani Badalyan, Yerevan's foreign ministry

spokeswoman, told journalists. Poland's foreign ministry said it would evacuate part of its embassy staff in Tehran via Baku. “We have decided to evacuate or support the departure of staff who do not need to remain in the country, so-called non-essential personnel,” Deputy Foreign Minister Henryka Moscicka-Dendys told reporters. “Our colleagues will try to reach the border with Azerbaijan,” she said, without specifying how many people were involved. Turkmenistan said it had also allowed the transit of around 120 people evacuated from Iran through its territory, mainly citizens of Central Asian countries. — AFP



People with foreign nationalities gather to leave on buses, in Tel Aviv. — Reuters

Iranian nuclear and military facilities. A new wave of Israeli strikes on Tehran — including a dramatic hit on state television headquarters that the broadcaster said killed three people — prompted both sides to activate missile defence systems overnight. A cyberattack on Tuesday crippled Sepah Bank, one of Iran's main state-owned banks, the Fars news agency reported.

Trump said on Tuesday that he wanted a “complete give-up” by Iran in return for peace. “I'm not looking for a ceasefire, we're looking at better than a ceasefire,” he told reporters on the plane home after cutting short his attendance at a Group of Seven summit in Canada. Trump again warned Iran against targeting US troops and assets in the Middle East, saying “we'll come down so hard, it'd be gloves off”. Trump had earlier issued an extraordinary warning on his Truth Social platform, saying: “Everyone should immediately evacuate Tehran!” Trump has repeatedly declined to say if the United States would participate in Israeli military action, although he has said Washington was not involved in initial strikes.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth said the United States was deploying “additional capabilities” to the Middle East. The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz left Southeast Asia on Monday, scrapping a planned Vietnam port call, amid reports it was heading to the region. After decades of enmity and a prolonged

shadow war, Israel launched its surprise air campaign last week, saying it aimed to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons — an ambition Tehran denies. Iran has responded with multiple missile salvos. The Revolutionary Guards vowed on Monday night the attacks would continue “without interruption until dawn”. State television said the Tel Aviv headquarters of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency was among the Guards' targets.

The escalation has derailed nuclear talks and stoked fears of broader conflict. At least 24 people have been killed in Israel and hundreds wounded, according to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office. Iran said on Sunday that Israeli strikes had killed at least 224 people, including military commanders, nuclear scientists and civilians. It has not issued an updated toll since then. Netanyahu said Israel was “changing the face of the Middle East, and that can lead to radical changes inside Iran itself”. Iran's ISNA news agency quoted a medical official saying all doctors and nurses had their leave cancelled and were ordered to remain at medical centres.

International calls for calm have mounted. The United States and Iran had engaged in several rounds of indirect talks on Tehran's nuclear programme in recent weeks, but Iran said after the start of Israel's campaign that it would not negotiate while under attack. — AFP

Qatar monitors radiation levels as Israel hits nuclear sites

DOHA: Qatar has been monitoring radiation levels in the Gulf as Israeli air strikes pound Iranian nuclear facilities, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Tuesday. “We are monitoring this on a daily basis,” foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari told a news conference. “We have nothing to be concerned about right now, but obviously prolonged escalation will have unpredictable consequences.” Israel launched an unprecedented air campaign against Iran's nuclear infrastructure on Friday, triggering deadly missile exchanges between the arch foes, which are now in their fifth day.

“We have to emphasise, when we are talking about the waters of the Gulf, it's the main source of water for all of us here in the region,” Ansari said. “The international community has to make it very clear that any targeting of nuclear facilities, any targeting of fuel or energy facilities in this region, would have ramifications that are unknown to us in the Gulf.” Iran has a nuclear power plant at Bushehr on the Gulf coast, though its uranium enrichment facilities, which have been targeted by Israel, lie hundreds of kilometres (miles) inland. The UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on Friday it had

been informed by Iran that the Bushehr plant had not been targeted. On Saturday, Israel struck a major Iranian gas facility on the Gulf coast serving the South Pars gas field, which is shared with Qatar. Ansari said Qatar's own facilities in the field were “secure” but condemned the Israeli strikes on Iran's energy infrastructure as “reckless”. Journalist heard a series of loud explosions in north Tehran on Tuesday, as Israel kept up its strikes on Iran's military and nuclear facilities for a fifth day. It was not immediately clear whether the blasts were the result of incoming Israeli strikes or Iranian air defence fire. — AFP

OPINION

How summer activities impact student development



**DR ZAINAB
AL AJMI**

ACCORDING to a noteworthy study conducted by Danylenko et al. 2021, which involved 1,054 students, 62 per cent of children engaged in educational activities during the summer, 24 per cent participated in business activities, nearly 40 per cent took part in hiking trips and 23 per cent attended a children’s health camp. The type of summer activity chosen influenced the indicators of students’ physical development as follows: educational activities were associated with a decrease in body length and left arm strength, whereas business activities, hiking trips and attendance at a health camp were associated with increased weight gain. These findings highlight the developmental impact of summer activities on students. Recent research has consistently shown significant gaps in students’ academic skills, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Despite these concerns, the summer break represents a valuable period during which students can recover both physically and mentally from the cumulative fatigue of a full academic year. Moreover, for many children, it provides opportunities to engage in enriching activities such as attending camps, travelling and visiting educational spaces, such as museums, parks and libraries, either with their families or through participation in

structured learning programmes. In an article published by the Varthana team on May 29, 2023, on varthana.com (What Students Need to Know About Summer Break and Getting Ready for School), the authors outline several ways students can make the most of their summer break:

1. Learn New Skills: Summer offers students a chance to reflect on their goals and develop personal and academic skills. Popular options include learning new languages for future academic and career benefits, as well as improving English proficiency to support learning in other subjects.
2. Access Educational Resources: Teachers can support students by recommending books, videos and educational platforms such as Study.com and National Geographic Kids, which can help students brush up on and enhance their knowledge.
3. Engage in Environmentally Friendly Activities: Summer is ideal for teaching sustainability. Students can participate in eco-friendly initiatives such as beach clean-ups, tree planting, kitchen gardening, conserving water and electricity, reducing plastic use and exploring alternatives.
4. Explore and Learn: Visiting historical sites during the break enhances students’ understanding of history by connecting classroom knowledge with real-world experiences and can significantly enrich

Wellness and recreation during the summer help improve and strengthen the physical and psychological health of children and restore their vitality

their learning. 5. Strengthen Family and Social Bonds: With more free time, students can reconnect with parents, grandparents and friends, building strong relationships and learning valuable life lessons from close family members. In conclusion, the appropriate use of free time in the summer can have a positive effect on children and help them cope with stress after the school year. Wellness and recreation during the summer help improve and strengthen the physical and psychological health of children and restore their vitality. In addition, organised recreation for schoolchildren during the holidays creates conditions for the development of their creative abilities and helps prevent neglect. The formation of healthy lifestyle habits among young people should be a primary goal. Active forms of summer recreation and health improvement, such as school and suburban camps, summer language camps and hiking trips, should be further developed. More attention should be paid to the forms and methods of organising summer vacations for school-age children, updating their content and improving the technologies of medical, psychological and pedagogical support (Danylenko et al. 2021).

Texas start-up sells fungi-based diapers to fight landfill waste

EVAN GARCIA

Each of Hiro Technologies’ MycoDigestible Diapers comes with a packet of fungi to be added to the dirty diaper before it is thrown in the trash. After a week or two, the fungi are activated to begin the process of biodegradation. Disposable diapers contribute significantly to landfill waste. An estimated 4 million tonnes of diapers were disposed of in the US in 2018, with no significant recycling or composting, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Diapers take hundreds of years to naturally break down. That means the very first disposable diaper ever used is still in a landfill somewhere. To tackle this, Hiro Technologies turned to fungi. These organisms - which include mushrooms, molds, yeasts and mildew - derive nutrients from decomposing organic matter. In 2011, Yale University researchers discovered a type of fungus in Ecuador that can feed on polyurethane, a common polymer in plastic products. They figured the fungus, Pestalotiopsis microspora, would be capable of surviving on plastic in environments lacking oxygen, like landfills. Hiro Technologies co-founder Tero Isokauppila, a Finnish entrepreneur who also founded medicinal mushroom company Four Sigmatic, said there are more than 100 species of fungi now known to break down plastics. Three sealed jars at Hiro Technologies’ lab show the stages of decomposition of a treated diaper over time. By nine months, the product appears as black soil - ‘just digested plastic and essentially earth,’ Isokauppila said. The company says it needs to do more research to find out how the product will decompose in real-world conditions in different climates and hopes to have the data to make a “consumer-facing claim” by next year. It also plans to experiment with plastic-eating fungi on adult diapers, feminine care products and other items. For now, it is selling ‘diaper bundles’ for \$35 a week online. Co-founder Miki Agrawal said the MycoDigestible Diapers had been generating excitement from consumers and investors since launching about a month ago, declining to give details. Agrawal said the company had chosen to focus on diapers as the top household plastic waste item. “There is a deleterious lasting effect that we haven’t really thought about and considered,” Agrawal said. “Because when you throw something away, no one’s asking themselves, ‘Where’s away?’” — Reuters

The missed message: Arab world at crossroads



**KHALID ALSAFI
AL HURAIBI**

COMEDIAN Eddie Griffin once posed a piercing question about faith: “You say you follow the messenger! Did you get the message?” For nearly two millennia, the Arab world, encompassing nearly half a billion people who share a linguistic and cultural heritage from the Sultanate of Oman to Morocco, the Comoros, and the Levant, has aspired to a positive global influence. A pivotal moment arrived with a charismatic social justice messenger whose core mission was universal: To remind humanity of timeless virtues, honesty, trust, modesty, chastity, courage, patience, generosity, hospitality, family bonds and good neighbourliness. This profound moral framework offered immense potential. Yet today, in our hyper-connected world, we seem to have failed in truly internalising and effectively sharing this essential message. I understand a cultural hesitation around the word ‘failure’, preferring terms like ‘struggling’. However, acknowledging shortcomings is crucial for progress. Without this honesty, we risk remaining trapped in unresolved cycles of challenge. The urgency for the Arab world to rediscover its moral voice and collective strength is starkly highlighted by the devastating conflicts and instability plaguing our region. External interventions and complex regional dynamics have fuelled immense suffering, evident by the denial of a decent life, food, and even water to a caged, starving population. This crisis underscores the profound need for a renewed Arab identity grounded in its foundational values.

The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

Global interest in the intellectual and cultural legacy of Islamic civilisation is rising, particularly among younger generations seeking depth beyond modern headlines

I believe our path forward lies in consciously leveraging these enduring morals to build modern forms of power, drawing on Joseph Nye’s concepts: hard, soft and sharp power. True hard power requires effective collective action. The Arab League, headquartered in Cairo, embodies this missed opportunity. Despite representing diverse and culturally rich nations with a combined population of almost 500 million and significant economic resources, they have consistently struggled to shake off the Arab League’s timid overall performance, translating potential into decisive, unified, and effective influence on regional crises or global affairs. Its impact remains fragmented, undermining the collective weight the Arab world could wield. Soft power flows from cultural appeal and intellectual contribution. While historical Islamic civilisation was a beacon of learning, contemporary Arab soft power often feels underdeveloped. Where are the globally recognised scientific pioneers, the groundbreaking technological innovations, or the universally resonant artistic movements rooted distinctly in Arab values today? Even established platforms like Al Jazeera Network, initially a significant voice, face criticism for perceived shifts away from independent Arab perspectives towards narratives subservient to the superpowers’ regional proxy, diminishing its unique soft power potential. Sharp power involves shaping perceptions through culture and information. Intriguingly, global interest in the intellectual and cultural legacy of Islamic

civilisation is rising, particularly among younger generations seeking historical depth beyond modern headlines. Yet, there is a conspicuous lack of coordinated, large-scale Arab initiatives to strategically channel this growing fascination. We are missing a crucial chance to shape narratives and build positive influence for the contemporary Arab world, allowing others to define our story. The message delivered centuries ago was never solely about the past; it was a blueprint for a just and moral society. The core virtues, honesty guiding governance, generosity shaping economies, courage defending rights, and hospitality welcoming diversity, remain profoundly relevant. Their erosion within our societies and our struggle to project them authentically outward weakens us. Reclaiming this moral compass isn’t nostalgia; it’s a strategic necessity. It demands introspection and commitment to progress. It requires investing in education systems that instill these values, fostering innovation hubs where ethics drive progress, building institutions that embody trust and social justice, and supporting cultural ambassadors who authentically represent the best of the Arab spirit. It is now, more than ever, that the Arab world must remember, embody, and project the timeless message of its core morals. By innovatively weaving these values into the fabric of modern hard, soft, and sharp power, we can move beyond struggle towards genuine renewal and influence. Our legacy and our future stability depend on getting and sharing this essential message once more.

Invest in peace, not in wars



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

EVERY war results in brutal consequences. The gruesome scenes, especially the recent deadly events in the Middle East, overshadow more positive long-term global trends concerning peace.

As history demonstrates, wars and conflicts have consistently been an enduring aspect of human existence. Regardless of the causes or the parties involved, every war is a tempest of destruction that devastates everything in its wake.

Populations living in the midst of conflict bear the brunt of its impact as wars directly destroy essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, homes, businesses and other national resources valued in the billions.

Yet the most devastating impact of wars and conflict is the exacerbation of poverty through the disruption of livelihoods.

“We are witnessing an unravelling of the protection of civilians and a decline in respect for international humanitarian law, Tom Fletcher, the UN relief chief, said during a Security Council meeting on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict on May 25.

Fletcher stated that the number of forcibly displaced individuals has reached a new high of over 122 million, with the majority displaced within their own countries. He noted that reports of enforced disappearances, torture, inhumane treatment and other forms of trauma were widespread.

In her address to the UN, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement President Mirjana Spoljaric said, “your state may not be at war today. Your family may be far from frontlines, but tides turn, new conflicts erupt and if you do not defend the rules of war today, you are accepting a world where wars are fought with increasing barbarity and disregard for our shared humanity.”

In its review report released at the end of December, Unicef stated that the impact of armed conflicts on children around the world reached devastating and likely record levels in 2024.

“The percentage of the world’s children living in conflict zones has doubled — from approximately 10 per cent in the 1990s to nearly 19 per cent today”, the report stated.

Looking at the news alone, it is challenging to determine whether more or fewer people are dying as a result of war compared to the past. One must rely on carefully collected statistics to enable meaningful comparisons over time.

According to the Armed Conflict Survey 2024, the level of conflict worldwide has doubled over the past five years, driven by wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Myanmar and other regions.

The report reveals that the war in the Palestine territory has witnessed horrific violence with the Israel Defence Forces’ (IDF) military campaign causing massive destruction of infrastructure including residential buildings, health facilities, energy

Although wars directly destroy essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, homes, businesses and other national resources valued in the billions, their most devastating impact is the exacerbation of poverty through the disruption of livelihoods

and water facilities, and schools, among others; and the internal displacement of the entire Palestinian population.

“Increasing levels of violence by the IDF and Israeli settlers have also taken place in the West Bank. Regionally, the war has had dramatic ramifications, notably resulting in an increase in direct confrontations between Israel and Iran (and its allies), as discussed above”, the report points out.

Whatever the reason for the war, both implicit and explicit nuclear threats have been the default stance of states possessing nuclear weapons for decades. Such threats are fundamental to the concept of deterrence, “If you attack, we will annihilate your society or your most critical military assets.”

Instead of perpetuating rhetoric against each warring nation, it is essential to unite and engage in negotiations. Unfortunately, even after the loss of countless precious lives and unimaginable destruction, our leaders have been unable to bring an end to these inhumane conflicts.

Preventing conflicts requires the same level of investment that nations allocate to military expenditures. All countries must be prepared to contribute effectively to the global peacebuilding efforts.

Our leaders must do everything in their power to ensure that this new era of geopolitics is not primarily remembered for violence.

They should take peace more seriously than ever before.

As war rages, anxious Iranians seek way home from Istanbul

SUSIE BOUYER

Dozens of worried Iranians huddled in the shade of an Istanbul bus shelter on Tuesday, waiting for a bus to take them back home despite an intensifying air war between Iran and Israel.

Flights to Iran were suspended on Friday after Israel launched a devastating attack on Tehran’s nuclear facilities, sparking a deadly confrontation which is now in its fifth day.

Although many have fled the Israeli bombardments of Tehran, other Iranians have been stranded abroad and are trying to get home to their loved ones, despite the ongoing air strikes.

“I want to look after my parents, they’re afraid,” said Babak Alpor, 34, who flew from Tehran to Istanbul to visit his brother who is studying in Türkiye’s largest city.

Horrified by the images of the bombings, Alpor decided to cut short his trip and go home to his parents, despite his mother begging him to stay with his brother.

But with all flights cancelled, he was forced to find another way home — a one-way bus trip back to the Iranian capital that will take 38 hours and cost him 5,000 Turkish lira (\$127).

“I’m not scared, but of course I’m sad. Nobody likes war.”

Next to him, a group of women were talking quietly in Persian.

Türkiye is a popular destination for tourists from neighbouring Iran, with 460,000 of them visiting in the first two months of the year, official figures show.

Elsewhere, an Iranian student hugged her mother and younger sister goodbye as they boarded the bus for Tehran, the anxiety plain on her face as it pulled away.

Her mother was afraid but decided to go back to be with another daughter who was stuck in Tehran and very frightened, explained the physiotherapy student who did not want to give her name.

Overnight, US President Donald Trump urged Tehran’s nearly 10 million residents to leave “immediately”, his words echoing warnings from Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

Despite the warnings, some travellers were trying to put on a brave face.

“It will be over soon, I think it will last a maximum of two or three weeks,” said Fahim, an Iranian tourist in his forties who was visiting Istanbul with his wife and two little girls. Although they will pass through Tehran, their bus journey of 2,700 kilometres (1,700 miles) will end in Sari, a town five hours northeast of the capital.

“Where we live, everything is OK,” he said in a show of confidence aimed at reassuring his young family. “Peace is coming.” But others know the cost of the conflict will be high.

“It will take at least 10 years to rebuild what has been destroyed in this war.” — AFP

Trump’s Iran choice: Talks or a bunker-buster bomb

PRESIDENT

Trump is weighing a critical decision

in the four-day-old war between Israel and Iran: whether to enter the fray by helping Israel destroy the deeply buried nuclear enrichment facility at Fordo, which only America’s biggest “bunker buster,” dropped by American B-2 bombers, can reach.

If he decides to go ahead, the US will become a direct participant in a new conflict in the Middle East, taking on Iran in exactly the kind of war Trump has sworn, in two campaigns, he would avoid. Iranian officials have already warned that US participation in an attack on its facilities will imperil any remaining chance of the nuclear disarmament deal that Trump insists he is still interested in pursuing.

Trump had at one point encouraged his Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff and possibly Vice President JD Vance, to offer to meet the Iranians, according to a US official. But on Monday Trump posted on social media that “everyone should immediately evacuate Tehran,” hardly a sign of diplomatic progress.

But if that diplomatic effort fizzles, or the Iranians remain unwilling to give in to Trump’s central demand that they must ultimately end all uranium enrichment on Iranian soil, the president will still have the option of ordering that Fordo and other nuclear facilities be destroyed.

There is only one weapon for the job, experts contend. It is called the Massive Ordnance Penetrator, or the GBU-57 and it weighs so much — 30,000 pounds — that it can be lifted only by a B-2 bomber. Israel does not own either the weapon or the bomber needed to get it aloft and over target.

If Trump holds back, it could well mean that Israel’s main objective in the war is never completed.“Fordo has always been the crux of this thing,” said Brett



DAVID E SANGER



JONATHAN SWAN

Iranian officials have warned that US participation in an attack on its facilities will imperil any chance of the nuclear disarmament deal the president insists he is still interested in pursuing.

McGurk, who worked on Middle East issues for four successive American presidents, from George W Bush to Joseph R Biden Jr. “If this ends with Fordo still enriching, then it’s not a strategic gain.” That has been true for a long time and over the past two years the US military has refined the operation, under close White House scrutiny. The exercises led to the conclusion that one bomb would not solve the problem; any attack on Fordo would have to come in waves, with B-2s releasing one bomb after another down the same hole. And the operation would have to be executed by an American pilot and crew. This was all in the world of war planning until the opening salvos on Friday morning in Tehran, when Netanyahu ordered the strikes, declaring that Israel had discovered an “imminent” threat that required “pre-emptive action.” New intelligence, he suggested without describing the details, indicated that Iran was on the cusp of turning its fuel stockpile into weapons. US intelligence officials who have followed the Iranian programme for years agree that Iranian scientists and nuclear specialists have been working to shorten the time it would take to manufacture a nuclear bomb, but they saw no huge breakthroughs.

Yet they agree with McGurk and other experts on one point: If the Fordo facility survives the conflict, Iran will retain the key equipment it needs to stay on a pathway to the bomb, even if it would first have to rebuild much of the nuclear infrastructure that Israel has left in ruins over four days of precision bombing.

There may be other alternatives to bombing it, though they are hardly a sure thing. If the power to Fordo gets cut, by saboteurs or bombing, it could damage or destroy the centrifuges that spin at supersonic speeds. Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on Monday that

this might have happened at the country’s other major uranium enrichment centre, Natanz. Israel took out the power supplies to the plant on Friday and Grossi said that the disruption probably sent them spinning out of control.

Trump rarely talks about Fordo by name, but he has occasionally alluded to the GBU-57, sometimes telling aides that he ordered its development. That is not correct: The US began designing the weapon in 2004, during the George W Bush administration, specifically to collapse the mountains protecting some of the deepest nuclear facilities in Iran and North Korea. It was, however, tested during Trump’s first term and added to the arsenal.

Netanyahu has pressed for the United States to make its bunker busters available since the Bush administration, so far to no avail.

Now the pressure is on. The Israeli former defence minister Yoav Gallant said on Monday that “the job has to be done, by Israel, by the US.” He said that Trump had “the option to change the Middle East and influence the world.” In the Pentagon, opinion is divided for other reasons. Elbridge A Colby, the Under-Secretary of defence for policy, the Pentagon’s No 3 post, has long argued that every military asset devoted to the wars of the Middle East is one diverted from the Pacific and the containment of China. For now, Trump can afford to keep one foot in both camps. By making one more run at coercive diplomacy, he can make the case to the MAGA faithful that he is using the threat of the Massive Ordnance Penetrator to bring the conflict to a peaceful end. And he can tell the Iranians that they are going to cease enriching uranium one way or the other, either by diplomatic agreement or because a GBU-57 imploded the mountain.

But if the combination of persuasion and coercion fails, he will have to decide whether this is Israel’s war or America’s. — NYT

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The seminar covered concepts of sports marketing from a civilisational and strategic perspective

‘SPORTS MARKETING AND INVESTMENT’ SEMINAR ORGANISED

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by the Olympic Academy of Oman, organised a specialised seminar titled “Sports Marketing and Investment” yesterday, Tuesday, at its headquarters. This initiative is part of its ongoing efforts to enhance modern economic concepts within the sports sector and explore diversified financial support for sports entities and institutions.

The seminar aimed to highlight the importance of shifting from traditional reliance on sponsors to innovative and sustainable financing models. This move aims to strengthen Oman’s sports infrastructure and support the goals of Vision 2040 in integrating sports as a contributing sector to the national economy.

The seminar covered concepts of sports marketing from a civilisational and strategic perspective, discussing challenges in diversifying income sources. It emphasised building effective commercial partnerships beyond traditional sponsorship. Additionally, it discussed sports investment as promising economic opportunities and the importance of developing an investor-friendly environment aligned with international practices.

Sajjad bin Mohammed al Lawati, Vice-President of the Oman Table Tennis Federation, presented various models and examples reflecting the current landscape of sports marketing, its opportunities and challenges. He stressed the need to broaden public understanding of sports’ dual role as an economic and social value. The seminar also highlighted successful practices in sports investment and underscored the importance of networking between sports institutions and both public and private sectors. This networking enhances the sports system’s financial self-sufficiency and helps achieve its developmental objectives.

This seminar aligns with the Olympic Academy of Oman’s direction to provide educational and training programmes that respond to institutional development needs in the sports sector. It aims to enhance its capacity to address economic challenges through scientific and practical methods.

Oman colts start beach handball campaign today



The draw clubbed Oman into a competitive group featured Iran, Spain, and Puerto Rico.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

THE OMAN U-17 beach handball team is all set to make their official debut at the 2025 IHF Men’s Junior Beach Handball World Championship on Wednesday when they will take on Spain and Puerto Rico in back-to-back Group A clashes in Hammamet, Tunisia. The draw clubbed Oman into a competitive group featured Iran, Spain, and Puerto Rico. The group was reduced to three teams following Iran’s official withdrawal due to the current situation there. With the top three teams in the group advancing automatically to the next round, Oman’s focus now shifts to securing a favorable seeding heading into the second phase of the tournament.

Oman team, coached by Jaber al Balushi, will play against Spain, a title contender and gold medalist at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games, in a strong opener and it will be followed by a fixture against tournament newcomers Puerto Rico later in the same day. Oman head coach Jaber al Balushi affirmed that the team in best shape to begin their campaign in the



Oman played four warm-up matches in Tunisia

World assignment. “We are well-prepared to face the world’s best in the opening game. Our recent friendly matches, especially the win against Tunisia, gave us confidence and helped us fine-tune our strategy beside the morale are very high of the players. We aim to put on a strong performance and secure momentum for the next round.” He said

Oman played four warm-up matches in Tunisia as part of their build-up for the 2025 IHF Men’s Junior Beach Handball World Championship. In the first preparatory match, the suffered to

a 2-0 defeat against Senegal and another loss against Cook Islands by 2-0 and then narrowly defeated by Hungary (0-2). In the concluding match they raised their morale by a 2-1 victory over the hosts Tunisia. The final match, played at the main championship venue, allowed Oman to test their readiness under real competition conditions.

Oman head coach Jaber al Balushi, Team Director Said al Hosni and administrative official Talib Afandi took part in the technical meeting held by the IHF where Oman’s official kit, match schedule, and the amended group format following Iran’s withdrawal were confirmed. The 2025 edition of the IHF Junior Beach Handball World Championship will feature 32 teams, marking the largest and most competitive edition to date.

Oman’s participation was made possible following a nomination from the Asian Handball Federation (AHF), after the team secured fourth place in the Asian Junior Beach Handball Championship in Thailand earlier this year and Qatar’s withdraw from the event.

MoCSY organises second edition of Woodball Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

The second edition of the Woodball Championship kicks off on Thursday, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), represented by the Sports Activities Department. The championship will run until June 21 and will take place at the sub-grass field of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

This championship follows the notable success of the first edition held last year on the beach courts of Sohar Sports Complex, which saw

broad participation and enthusiastic engagement from various age groups.

In a special statement, Mohammed al Neyadi, Head of the Amateur Sports Section and the official in charge of overseeing emerging, non-federated sports in the Sultanate of Oman, explained that Woodball is a sport suitable for all age groups and is known for its flexibility. It can be played on beaches, sand, grass, or even uneven surfaces adding an element of challenge and excitement to the game.

Al Neyadi pointed out that the sport closely resembles golf in style but has been



Woodball can be played on beaches, sand, grass, or even uneven surfaces

modified to be more accessible, diverse, and easier to play. Omani players have quickly achieved strong regional and international rankings, thanks to the game’s adaptability and inclusive nature.

He emphasised that the Amateur Sports Section was established as part of the Ministry’s new strategic direction to support emerging sports that do not yet have official federations or committees. The section aims to support these sports through organised events, the creation of national teams, and participation in international competitions aligning with Oman Vision

2040’s goal of building a “creative human-centered society.” In a related statement, Samira al Shaikhali, Director of Sports Activities at the MoCSY, expressed her pride in organising the second edition of the championship. We are pleased with the growing momentum around wooden ball, and this tournament reaffirms our commitment to supporting modern sports and providing space for their growth, she said. We’ve seen increasing numbers of participants and players from different governorates, which is a promising sign of the sport’s acceptance in the community.

She added that the Sports Activities Department is working to sustain these initiatives not just by organizing championships, but also through collaboration with schools, clubs and youth centers to spread the game further. We look forward to organising broader community tournaments, increasing the number of qualified coaches, and building a strong base of players who can represent Oman in international arenas. Woodball was first introduced in Oman in 2007 in preparation for participation in the 2010 Beach Games hosted in the Wilayat of Al Musannah.

SHORT TAKES



Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs).
— Reuters

BANGLADESH WIN TOSS, BAT IN FIRST SRI LANKA TEST

GALLE, SRI LANKA: A record-breaking fourth-wicket partnership between captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mushfiqur Rahim put Bangladesh in control at 292-3 on day one of the first Test against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

After a wobbly start at Galle, the pair stitched together 247 runs — the highest fourth-wicket stand for Bangladesh in Tests against Sri Lanka — steering the tourists to a commanding position at stumps.

Having elected to bat first, Bangladesh were reeling at 45-3 when the duo came together. What followed was a gritty rescue act — a partnership built on sound temperament, clever shot selection and an unflinching resolve as they dug their team out of early trouble.

Mushfiqur, the most capped Test player in Bangladesh history with 97 appearances, silenced his critics with a timely ton.

The veteran, under the pump after a lean patch spanning 13 innings without a half-century, rolled back the years with a knock of poise and purpose.

The 38-year-old has fond memories of Galle, having struck a monumental double hundred there in 2013, and once again turned tormentor-in-chief for the Sri Lankan bowlers.

He did enjoy a slice of luck — a tough chance spilled by debutant Tharindu Rathnayake on 25 — but made it count, navigating a nervy passage in the 90s, before scampering a quick single to notch up his 12th Test hundred.

Shanto, positive from the outset, kept the scoreboard ticking with deft footwork and a keen eye for the loose ball.

He brought up his sixth Test century — and second against Sri Lanka — with a cheeky paddle sweep off Prabath Jayasuriya, marking his first ton since November 2023.

Sri Lanka made early inroads with right-arm quick Asitha Fernando drawing first blood, removing opener Anamul Haque for a duck.

Off-spinner Rathnayake, handed his Test cap on the back of a prolific domestic season, struck twice in quick succession.

But once the Shanto-Mushfiqur duo got their eye in, it was one-way traffic. Sri Lanka also handed a debut to opening batter Lahiru Udara, another domestic heavyweight, while the hosts paused before the start of play to congratulate retiring stalwart Angelo Mathews. The 38-year-old Mathews, playing his 119th and final Test, will hang up his boots with over 8,000 runs, behind only Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene in Sri Lanka's all-time charts.

Mathews speaking before the start, said he was “extremely proud to have a wonderful journey, thankful for whoever was part of it”. — AFP



Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton (0) drives to the basket past Oklahoma City Thunder forward Chet Holmgren (7). — Reuters

Thunder hold off Pacers to take 3-2 NBA Finals lead

JALEN WILLIAMS erupted for 40 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder held off the Indiana Pacers to score a 120-109 victory and move to within one win of clinching the NBA Finals on Monday.

An enthralling game-five battle in Oklahoma saw the Pacers climb out of an 18-point first-half hole to get within two points of the Thunder in the fourth quarter.

But just as Indiana threatened the latest in a series of trademark comebacks, the Thunder found an extra gear with Williams and NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander steering the team to a pivotal victory.

The win leaves the Thunder 3-2 up in the best-of-seven series, meaning they can seal the NBA crown with victory in game six in Indianapolis on Thursday.

Williams finished with 40 points, six rebounds and four assists while Gilgeous-Alexander co-starred with 31 points and 10 assists, four blocks and two steals.

“My team-mates instill a lot of confidence in me to go out and be me,” Williams said. “And (coach) Mark (Daigneault) has done a good job of telling me to just be myself.

“I don’t got to be anything more and that’s given me a lot of confidence.”

Williams said Oklahoma City’s experience

in game one — when they blew a 15-point fourth-quarter lead to lose — had helped them close out victory.

“Tonight was the exact same game as game one, to be honest,” Williams said. “Learning through these finals is what makes this team good and we were able to do that.”

HALIBURTON INJURY WOE

Pascal Siakam led the Indiana charge with 28 points but the Pacers were left sweating on the health of star point guard Tyrese Haliburton after the loss.

Haliburton, whose fitness has been under a cloud since game two of the series, left the game in the first quarter with a right calf problem before returning later in the contest.

The Pacers talisman finished with just four points from a bitterly disappointing outing — all of them coming from free throws — as the Thunder’s vaunted defense clamped down on the Pacers.

“He’s not 100 percent, it’s pretty clear,” Pacers head coach Rick Carlisle said. “But I don’t think he’s going to miss the next game.

“We were concerned at half time and he insisted on playing... but he’s not 100 percent. There’s a lot of guys in the series that aren’t.”

Oklahoma asserted control early in the first quarter, stretching into a 29-17 lead after

Cason Wallace drained his first three-pointer of the playoffs.

With Chet Holmgren leading an inspired Thunder defensive display, the Pacers offense struggled to make any impression.

At the other end, Williams and Gilgeous-Alexander began to impose themselves, combining for 29 points in the first half.

Sensing an opportunity to build a commanding lead, Oklahoma City kept the points flowing and two Gilgeous-Alexander free throws pushed the lead to 18 points before Indiana cut it to 59-45 at half time.

With Haliburton a pale imitation of his usual self, another Thunder blowout looked on the cards.

But the Pacers improved the speed of their ball movement and an eye-catching bench cameo from Haliburton’s back-up T.J. McConnell suddenly turned the tide.

The Pacers outscored the Thunder 34-28 in the third quarter to trail by just eight points heading into the final frame.

A Siakam three-pointer with just over eight minutes left made it a two-point game at 95-93 as tension swept through the Thunder’s Paycom Center homecourt.

But that was as close as the Pacers would get, and with Williams and Gilgeous-Alexander combining for 20 fourth-quarter points, the Thunder pulled away to power home. — AFP

PGA Tour appoints Brian Rolappas as new CEO

FORMER NFL executive vice-president Brian Rolapp was named the CEO of the PGA Tour and PGA Tour Enterprises on Tuesday.

Rolapp, 53, spent 22 years with the NFL. He will take over the day-to-day operations of the PGA Tour later this summer in place of current commissioner Jay Monahan, who will step down at the end of his contract in 2026.

Per the PGA Tour, Monahan will focus on his role as a member of the PGA Tour and PGA Tour Enterprises boards during the remainder of his tenure. Monahan took over as commissioner in 2017.

“A year ago, I informed our Boards that upon completing a decade as commissioner, I would step down from my role at the end of 2026,”

Monahan said in a statement. “Since then, we’ve worked together to identify a leader who can build on our momentum and develop a process that ensures a smooth transition. We’ve found exactly the right leader in Brian Rolapp, and I’m excited to support him as he transitions from the NFL into his new role leading the PGA Tour.”

The search committee for the new CEO included Monahan, Tiger Woods, Adam Scott — both player directors on the policy board — and Arthur Blank, owner of the NFL’s Atlanta Falcons and chair of PGA Tour Enterprises’ management, development and compensation committee. Rolapp stands as a natural fit, having been the NFL’s lead media and business officer



Brian Rolappas

during a period of exponential growth by the league. He is considered a potential successor for commissioner Roger Goodell, and a new role as a CEO at a different pro sports endeavor likely won’t change that. Rolapp joined the NFL in 2003 and has been in his current role overseeing advertising, sponsorships and media contracts since 2017. Before then, he was the NFL chief operating officer and senior VP of media strategy and digital media. He also was the CEO of NFL Network and executive VP of NFL Media.

“I’m honored to join the PGA Tour at such a pivotal time,” Rolapp said in a statement. “The PGA Tour represents the highest level of competition, integrity and global

opportunity in the game of golf, and I believe deeply in the tour’s mission and its potential to grow even stronger. I’m ready to get to work — alongside our players, partners and leadership team — to build lasting value and deliver an even more dynamic future for the sport and our fans.” Woods applauded Rolapp’s arrival to the PGA Tour. “Brian’s appointment is a win for players and fans,” Woods said in a statement. “He has a clear respect for the game and our players and brings a fresh perspective from his experience in the NFL. I’m excited about what’s ahead — and confident that with Brian’s leadership, we’ll continue to grow the tour in ways that benefit everyone who loves this sport.” — Reuters



Esperance Sportive de Tunis' Abdramane Konate in action with Flamengo's Erick Pulgar. — Reuters

CHELSEA began their Club World Cup (CWC) campaign with a 2-0 victory against Los Angeles FC in a largely empty stadium on Monday as Brazilian giants Flamengo also got off to a winning start and a Benfica comeback denied Boca Juniors in a stormy encounter.

As the inaugural 32-team tournament gradually kicks into gear in the United States, Chelsea followed fellow European heavyweights Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich by claiming three points in their first group outing.

Yet while UEFA Champions League winners PSG were ominous against Atletico Madrid on Sunday, and Bayern put 10 past Auckland City, the Premier League team were more solid than spectacular against LAFC in Atlanta.

Pedro Neto and Enzo Fernandez got the goals for Enzo Maresca's side in the Group D match before nearly

50,000 empty seats at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium — not a great look for the tournament organisers.

New signing Liam Delap made his debut as a substitute and helped set up Fernandez's strike, with Chelsea hoping to reestablish themselves among the elite after their recent UEFA Conference League triumph and Champions League qualification.

Maresca said it was a "very good result" and was happy with Delap's display following his recent arrival from Ipswich Town.

"The good thing about Liam is he knows the way we want to play, so the process is quite quick," said the Italian.

"The environment was a bit strange, the stadium was almost empty, not full," added Maresca when asked about the crowd, as just over 22,000 attended the 71,000-capacity venue for a game played at 3:00 pm local time on a Monday.

LAFC were late qualifiers for the tournament, beating Club America in a play-off last month to replace

banned Mexican side Club Leon.

Chelsea went ahead just after the half-hour mark when Nicolas Jackson released Neto and the Portuguese winger turned inside LA defender Ryan Hollingshead before beating goalkeeper Hugo Lloris with a powerful strike.

Former Chelsea striker Olivier Giroud came on at half time for the Americans and Steve Cherundolo's team improved in the second half.

However, Delap entered the fray for Chelsea and made the killer second goal, crossing for the arriving Fernandez to control and finish.

DOMINANT FLAMENGO

Chelsea's next game will be against Flamengo, who began their campaign by easing to a 2-0 win against Esperance of Tunisia in Philadelphia.

Uruguayan international Giorgian de Arrascaeta gave the Brazilian giants a 17th-minute lead from an assist by Luiz Araujo, who made it 2-0 with 20 minutes remaining.

It was a dominant display from

Flamengo, who fielded a strong side featuring several Brazil internationals and gave a debut to Italy midfielder Jorginho following his arrival from Arsenal.

Jorginho will face former club Chelsea when the teams meet in their second match on Friday. Flamengo coach Filipe Luis is also an ex-player at Stamford Bridge.

There were vast sections of empty seats at Lincoln Financial Field too, with just 25,797 fans in a stadium that can hold close to 70,000.

STORMY

In contrast, there was close to a full house, and a raucous atmosphere, in Miami as Boca and Benfica played out an entertaining 2-2 draw in Group C.

The majority of the crowd was backing Boca and the Argentines roared into a two-goal lead, Miguel Merentiel and Rodrigo Battaglia both scoring in the first half.

Two-time European champions Benfica were given a lifeline in first-half stoppage time when Boca's

Carlos Palacios mistimed a challenge on Nicolas Otamendi and after a VAR review — which included a red card for protesting from the already substituted Boca midfield Ander Herrera — a penalty was awarded.

Veteran Angel di Maria converted from the spot to make it 2-1, but Benfica then had Andrea Belotti sent off in the 71st minute after a wild, high-footed kick into the head of Ayrton Costa.

But with six minutes remaining the Portuguese side equalised as Otamendi headed in to make it 2-2.

A disappointing result for Boca was compounded by a late red card for Nicolas Figal, who was dismissed for an ugly challenge on Florentino Luis.

"We're left with a bitter taste because we thought we could have won it," said Boca's Battaglia.

Tuesday's action begins with Borussia Dortmund taking on Fluminense of Brazil in New York in Group F, while Inter Milan face Monterrey of Mexico in Pasadena in Group E. — AFP



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NEWPHASE



The initiative aims to bolster local industries, encourage innovation and provide SMEs with access to viable business opportunities.

SMEs empowered under equal opportunitiesinitiative

MUSCAT: A new phase of support for Omani entrepreneurs was launched with the fourth edition of the National Equal Opportunities Initiative, spearheaded by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The initiative aims to bolster local industries, encourage innovation and provide small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with access to viable business opportunities.

Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, CEO of the Industrial Innovation Academy, stated that Madayn has empowered SMEs by offering technical support, capacity-building programmes and strategic partnerships that enhance competitiveness and ensure sustainable growth. One of the Academy’s key programmes is “Oman Makers”, which supports small factories with diagnostics, consulting and prototype development.

He also highlighted the “Sohar Production” initiative, a manufacturing hub offering reverse engineering services and precision design capabilities that reduce R&D costs. Additionally, the “Business Accelerator”, part of the Omani Start-ups Programme, connects start-ups with investment opportunities to scale both locally and internationally.

Numerous training programmes have also been rolled out, including those in AI applications, plastic machinery operations, legal skills and traditional ship modelling. The Academy has also identified critical service needs across Madayn’s industrial zones — such as maintenance, PR, legal and insurance services — which SMEs can fulfil.

These services are estimated to be worth over RO 6.7 million. — ONA

New iron ore concentrator project in Oman advances

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

THE development of a greenfield iron ore concentrator plant is gaining momentum at Sohar Port and Freezone, with international companies announcing key contracts for the supply of critical equipment and project management services.

A joint investment of approximately \$627 million is being made in the Sohar Concentrator Plant by Brazil-based global mining conglomerate Vale and leading Chinese steelmaker Jinnan Iron & Steel Group.

First unveiled last October, the state-of-the-art facility will produce high-quality iron ore concentrate for the manufacture of pellets and briquettes — crucial feedstock for the production of low-carbon steel via the Direct Reduction (DR) route.

The concentrator plant will process 18 million tonnes of low-grade iron ore annually, yielding 12.6 million tonnes of high-grade concentrate.

Vale has committed \$227 million to connect the new plant to its existing pelletisation facility, while Jinnan will invest approximately \$400 million to build, own and operate the plant.

On Tuesday, Finnish industrial machinery manufacturer Metso Corporation announced it had signed an agreement to supply core process equipment for the project.

The contract includes the delivery of heavy-duty grinding



Metso will supply core process equipment for the \$627 million Sohar Concentrator Plant. Picture for illustration only.

machinery with a total installed capacity of 25 MW, large slurry

A joint investment of approximately \$627 million is being made in the Sohar Concentrator Plant by Brazil-based global mining conglomerate Vale and leading Chinese steelmaker Jinnan Iron & Steel Group.

pumps and mill discharge pumps.

Commenting on the agreement, Piia Karhu, President of the Minerals business at Metso, said: “This project marks Jinnan’s first venture in Oman, a country rich in diverse mineral resources and with a strategic vision to develop its mining sector as part of broader economic diversification efforts.

“As a leading supplier of process technology and services for concentrator plants

worldwide, Metso is pleased to partner with Jinnan Iron & Steel Group on this greenfield initiative.”

Earlier, Chinese media reported that MCC Changtian International Engineering Company, a subsidiary of China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC Group), had been awarded a general contracting and project management contract by Jinnan Iron & Steel. MCC Changtian’s scope also includes development of a supporting stockyard, long-distance slurry transport systems and a dry tailings stacking system.

MCC Changtian is a leading Chinese engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) company specialising in metallurgical and infrastructure projects.

Once operational by mid-2027, the concentrator is expected to establish Oman as a

key global supplier of DR-grade iron ore. Joint venture partner Vale has indicated it intends to replicate this investment model across its proposed Mega Hubs in other locations, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Brazil and the United States.

Under this model, Vale will construct and operate ore concentration and briquetting plants, while local partners develop the required logistics infrastructure.

Metso is well-established as a supplier of mineral processing equipment for Oman’s industrial and mining sectors.

Earlier this year, the Finnish firm signed an agreement with Mazoon Mining, a wholly owned subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman (MDO), to supply key process equipment worth \$30 million for its copper concentrator plant located in Yanqul.

Oman sees sharp rise in premium fuel exports

MUSCAT: Refinery production in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a marginal decline of 0.1% by the end of April 2025, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Despite this minor decrease, the country witnessed a substantial surge in exports of premium-grade motor fuel and several key petrochemical products.

Production of regular petrol (M91) increased by 9.8%, reaching approximately 5.78 million barrels compared to 5.26 million barrels in the same period in 2024.

Domestic sales of regular petrol also rose by 2.5% to 4.56 million barrels. On the other hand, premium petrol (M95) production saw a slight drop of 0.3%, totalling 4.11 million barrels. However, its sales increased by 1.7%, reaching 4.23 million barrels.



Production of M91 increased by 9.8%, reaching approximately 5.78 million barrels.

Gas oil (diesel) production recorded a slight decrease of 0.7%, falling to 10.33 million barrels. Nonetheless, domestic diesel consumption rose by 4.9% to reach 4.67 million barrels. Jet fuel production was down by 8.1%, amounting to 3.38 million barrels,

with sales also declining by 8.7% to 1.25 million barrels.

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) production declined by 6.7% to 2.36 million barrels, compared to 2.53 million barrels in the same period last year. In contrast, LPG sales grew by 20.2%, reaching

1.30 million barrels. This rise in consumption suggests a strengthening domestic demand for gas-based fuels.

In terms of petrochemicals, production of gasoline derivatives rose by 8.7% to 59,500 metric tonnes, while paraxylene output increased by 10.5% to 196,700 metric tonnes. Polypropylene production, however, decreased by 6.9%, totalling 112,400 metric tonnes.

Despite this decline, polypropylene exports witnessed a dramatic increase of 461.9%, reaching 10,800 metric tonnes, up from just 1,900 metric tonnes the previous year.

Oman’s exports of regular petrol (M91) increased by 4.7% to reach 1.04 million barrels, while exports of premium petrol (M95) jumped significantly by 66.3%, totalling 690,700 barrels compared

to 415,400 barrels in April 2024. Conversely, diesel exports fell sharply by 23.4%, dropping to 4.56 million barrels from 5.96 million barrels a year earlier. Jet fuel exports also declined by 7%, reaching 2.05 million barrels, while LPG exports plunged by 69.8% to just 53,500 barrels.

Petrochemical exports showed a mixed performance. Gasoline exports increased by 3.6% to 58,200 metric tonnes. Paraxylene exports surged by 29.2% to 228,100 metric tonnes, while polypropylene exports rose by 3.8% to 79,200 metric tonnes.

Overall, while Oman’s total refinery output experienced a minor decline, the significant growth in premium petrol exports and petrochemical sales highlights the continued strength of the country’s downstream sector in international markets. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS



The programme focused on equipping participants with practical skills in financial planning, digital enablement, and strategic marketing.

Sohar International, Sharakah celebrate graduation of SME Programme

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to sustainable empowerment and inclusive growth, Sohar International, in collaboration with Sharakah, concluded the “Sohar International Women SMEs Development Programme” with a graduation ceremony held recently at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Ahmed Hassan Alawi al Dheeb, Vice Chairman of the General Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

Sohar International was represented at the event by Eng Aisha al Saifi, Chief Transformation Officer, Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer and Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer of Sohar International. The ceremony marked the culmination of a six-month transformative journey undertaken by ten Omani women entrepreneurs from across the Sultanate of Oman.

Designed to strengthen core business competencies and unlock future growth opportunities, the programme focused on equipping participants with practical skills in financial planning, digital enablement and strategic marketing.

The event commenced with a welcome speech delivered by Fares al Harthy, Assistant Manager of SME Development at the Fund for Development of Youth Projects, in which he emphasised the importance of empowering women entrepreneurs in supporting the national economy and promoting economic diversification.

This was followed by a speech from the bank delivered by Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, who highlighted the bank's role in supporting Omani women and enhancing their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Participants in the programme were then given the opportunity to share their experiences and how they benefitted from the initiative.

The event concluded with the distribution of graduation certificates to the participants in recognition of their efforts and dedication throughout the programme. Highlighting in his speech, Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer of Sohar International, said: “At Sohar International, we view empowerment as a long-term investment in national progress.

This initiative reflects our commitment to shaping a resilient and inclusive economy by equipping Omani women entrepreneurs with the tools to lead, innovate and grow.

By fostering capability and confidence, we are not only supporting individual success but also contributing to Oman's strategic vision for sustainable and diversified economic development.

We are proud to be part of a journey that nurtures entrepreneurial potential while aligning with Oman Vision 2040's priorities around human capital development, private sector competitiveness and inclusive growth“.

AHLIBANK LAUNCHES CHILD-FOCUSED BANKING APP AHLINEXT

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to advancing financial literacy and driving forward-thinking innovation, ahlibank has launched ahlinext, a first-of-its-kind, end-to-end child banking application in the Sultanate of Oman. Crafted to resonate with the aspirations of a younger generation, ahlinext represents a transformative step in raising financial awareness from an early age, empowering children to develop smart money habits while equipping parents



ahlinext represents a transformative step in raising financial awareness from an early age.

with meaningful tools to nurture responsible financial behaviour. With a youthful and engaging interface tailored to capture young minds, the app delivers substantive educational value in a format that aligns with modern family dynamics.

In doing so, it reinforces ahlibank's broader vision to contribute to the social and economic priorities of Oman Vision 2040 through technology-led, future-focused initiatives.

Lexus brings summer benefits for customers

GET an unbeatable summer offer on the purchase of a brand-new Lexus this summer! Buy your dream Lexus and get incredible benefits of 10 years/100,000 km of free service and 1st year free registration. Check out the dynamic lineup at Lexus Oman showrooms and explore luxury, performance, and state-of-the-art technology that crafts each Lexus vehicle.

The campaign that began on June 1, 2025 will last until July 31, 2025. Conditions apply. Please visit Lexus showroom for details.

For the SUV lovers, built to tackle rough terrains, Lexus' new addition to the flagship LX SUV series — the all-new LX 700h — features an advanced hybrid system. As powerful as ever, the LX comes equipped with a twin-turbocharged 3.5L V6 engine, producing 341 horsepower and 790 Nm of torque, paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission.

The new hybrid system increases fuel efficiency to 10.6 km/l and reduces carbon emissions to 213 g/km.

Also, it intelligently manages the transition between engine-



Check out the dynamic lineup at Lexus Oman showrooms and explore luxury, performance and state-of-the-art technology.

only and motor-only modes, optimising performance based on driving conditions. The new Lexus LX 700h prioritises reliability and durability, ensuring excellent performance both on-road and off-road.

The pioneer of Lexus' SUV range, the Lexus RX, is a stunner beyond just aesthetics. The sleek style and dynamic performance make it a popular choice of vehicle.

The RX is equipped with an inline 4-cylinder, 2.4-litre turbocharged engine that

produces 275 hp and 430 Nm of torque, paired with a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

Meanwhile, the hybrid-electric system combines a 2.5-litre petrol engine and electric motor to produce a total of 247 hp, which is paired with an electronically controlled continuously variable transmission (E-CVT) to provide a fuel consumption value of 20.7 km/l.

Similarly, a more eco-friendly trim — the hybrid-electric system

pairing a 2.4-litre turbocharged engine with an electric motor—is also available, delivering a combined power of 366 hp, mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

Experience the ES, one of the top-selling sedans in the Lexus lineup.

The ES is the perfect everyday companion, offering luxurious interiors and an exhilarating city-life experience. Indulge in sublime comfort, spaciousness and advanced intelligent safety technologies.

Update your personal details easily through Bank Muscat’s app

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing digital transformation and commitment to improving customer experience, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has introduced an enhanced KYC process, which is called now “Update Personal Details,” through Internet Banking and Mobile Banking.

The new process is fully automated and introduces a straight through processing (STP) system, which makes updating personal details seamless, instant and more efficient.

Customers can now enjoy a fully digital, hassle-free



The new process is fully automated and introduces a straight through processing system.

experience with fewer steps, fewer clicks and no ID scanning required, significantly reducing processing time; instant reminders when personal details are due for update within 30 days or have already expired; and instant notifications via SMS and email once the update is successfully processed.

To update the personal data on Mobile Banking, customers can log in their mBanking App > go to Requests > Update my information > Personal Details, then follow the on-screen instructions.

The details to update include declaration, personal details, address details and

employment details. Then after verifying the details and entering the OTP sent through the registered mobile number, the customers personal details will be successfully updated in the Bank's records.

This addition is a key part of the Bank's mBanking services, aimed at streamlining the customer experience. It highlights Bank Muscat's commitment to updating Mobile Banking in line with the latest developments in the sector.

The Bank remains dedicated to continuously enhancing its digital services to elevate customer satisfaction.

Thawani Pay launches in-app electronics store with flexible installment plans

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to enriching the everyday financial experiences of its users, Thawani has announced the launch of Thawani Store—a newly integrated feature within the Thawani app.

To mark this milestone, the company has entered a strategic partnership with the leading financing provider, National Finance to offer seamless and swift device financing solutions and Adhwa Al Billa Technology (ABT) to supply mobile and

electronic devices. In its initial phase, the collaborative initiative enables customers to purchase mobile phones of their choice, with laptops and a wider range of electronic devices soon to be available through the Thawani Store.

Representing a strategic advancement in the company's digital ecosystem, Thawani Store reflects the brand's ongoing mission to deliver innovative, user-centric solutions that transcend conventional payment services.



The company has entered a strategic partnership with National Finance.

This feature grants users' access to a curated selection of electronic products from a single vendor through a unified interface that ensures seamless purchases and timely delivery.

The service also enables customers to choose between full upfront payment or a flexible microfinancing through National Finance Company's plan, thereby enhancing affordability and convenience.

Commenting on the launch, Majid al Amri, Founder and CEO of

Thawani, stated: “At Thawani, we are constantly reimagining how technology can simplify lives and elevate consumer choice. More than a retail feature, the Thawani Store is a step towards embedding commerce within digital finance, where convenience, transparency, and control converge.

By integrating shopping and financing within a single digital touchpoint, we are empowering users with the freedom to shop on their terms while keeping their financial well-being at the core.

BUSINESS



The document aims to “establish clear standards for the accreditation of external auditors to ensure high-quality, ethical and lawful data audit services.

New personal data protection guidelines mandated for auditors

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has unveiled new standards and requirements for the accreditation of external personal data auditors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The document, issued in April of 2025, aims to “establish clear standards for the accreditation of external auditors to ensure high-quality, ethical, and lawful data audit services in Oman.” “In light of the increasing challenges of personal data protection in the digital age, the importance of ensuring private sector institutions’ compliance with relevant laws and regulations grows,” the ministry said in the document.

This document provides the necessary technical and administrative standards for accrediting external auditors to ensure they possess the qualifications, methodology and resources required to deliver high-quality and reliable audit services.

This ensures their ability to conduct compliance audits for institutions (controllers and processors) to verify that personal data processing procedures are in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Data Protection Law and its executive regulations,” the ministry added.

In order to qualify as external auditors, companies must adhere to several administrative, security and compliance and quality assurance requirements.

In regards to administrative and technical standards, auditors are required to have an active commercial registration for no less than 12 months and possess the necessary licenses to operate in the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition to holding essential certifications including ISO/IEC 27001 for Information Security Management and ISO/IEC 27701 for Privacy Information Management.

Furthermore, external auditing companies must have a qualified technical team with practical experience and recognised certifications such as ISO 27000 Lead Auditor CISA and CIPP. In addition to previous auditing experience, with a demonstrated and credible track record in providing auditing services.

Moreover, companies must maintain comprehensive documentation of procedures covering all audit phases (planning, execution, and reporting) in addition to a record retention policy of audit records, activities, results and correspondence for no less than five years.

Finally, the regulations require a minimum Omanisation rate of 30% within the technical teams of companies.

In regards to security and compliance, the standard requires auditors to adhere to all laws and regulations related to personal data protection. Companies must also have a comprehensive Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy, which outlines how data is managed and safeguarded against unauthorised access, modification, or disclosure.

Furthermore, companies must have the ability to conduct risk assessment audits and security gap assessments.

IGC prioritises local growth, clean energy in gas strategy

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

“OMAN’S gas is a national asset — and we manage it with that responsibility in mind,” said Abdulrahman al Yahyaei, CEO of Integrated Gas Company (IGC), as he outlined the company’s strategy to ensure natural gas drives both industrial growth and the country’s clean energy transition. At the heart of IGC’s approach is a clear principle: domestic needs come first. “In our model, local demand — especially for power generation and key industries — takes priority. Only after meeting those requirements do we allocate any surplus for export,” said Al Yahyaei in an interview with Oman Observer.

“This is how we protect economic stability while remaining active in the global LNG market.”

IGC manages more than 44 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas annually and plays a critical role in balancing the needs of over 140 domestic consumers with export flows via Oman LNG.

With the Sultanate of Oman exporting 11.4 million tonnes of LNG in 2024, IGC’s role in ensuring that this export growth does not compromise national needs is vital.

Al Yahyaei noted that IGC’s use of data-driven tools and real-time systems is key to achieving this balance. “We’ve introduced Oman’s first gas spot market and digital auction platform. This allows us to respond rapidly to



With Oman exporting 11.4 million tonnes of LNG in 2024, IGC’s role in ensuring that this export growth does not compromise national needs is vital.

changes in demand, whether it’s an industrial shortfall or a shift in export conditions,” he said.

Another major innovation is the launch of the Gas Applications Portal — a fully digitised platform for managing gas supply requests. “This gives us visibility across the entire value chain.

We evaluate requests based on economic impact, energy efficiency, and decarbonisation potential. It’s a strategic allocation, not just a supply exercise,” he added.

The company’s impact extends beyond conventional gas management. IGC plays an enabling role in Oman’s long-term decarbonisation goals, including the development of green hydrogen and low-carbon industries. One example is its involvement in supporting

Vulcan Green Steel in Duqm. “Vulcan is a landmark project — and our role is to ensure it has transitional gas during its ramp-up.

This allows the plant to begin operations while gradually shifting to electricity and green hydrogen. We’re creating a practical decarbonisation pathway,” said Al Yahyaei.

IGC has embedded this mindset across its operations. “We prioritise gas allocation to industries that are serious about sustainability — whether that means hydrogen readiness, carbon capture or electrification. These decisions shape the kind of industrial base Oman will have in the future,” he explained.

In parallel, IGC is facilitating the development of Oman’s fourth LNG train, aiming to



ABDULRAHMAN AL YAHYAEI
CEO of Integrated Gas Company

INVEST OMAN HOSTS ‘ADVANTAGE OMAN’ DIALOGUE IN BRUSSELS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

As part of its strategic agenda to expand global investment partnerships, Invest Oman, operating under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, convened the “Advantage Oman – Kingdom of Belgium” Business Dialogue in Brussels.

The event was held in collaboration with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Belgium and the Arab-Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce (ABLCC).

Designed to highlight the Sultanate of Oman’s evolving investment landscape, the dialogue aimed to foster deeper economic and trade relations between Oman and Belgium.

It brought together a distinguished audience of Belgian investors, industry leaders, and senior decision-makers, with a focus on high-potential sectors such as renewable energy,



The “Advantage Oman – Kingdom of Belgium” Business Dialogue is part of Oman’s ongoing global outreach to position itself as a regional gateway for investment and trade.

pharmaceuticals and life sciences, and tourism and leisure.

The platform facilitated direct engagement between Omani and Belgian stakeholders, enabling exploration of joint investment opportunities and commercial synergies.

The Omani delegation presented Oman’s strategic megaprojects, regulatory enhancements, and investor-centric reforms—underscoring

Oman’s commitment to creating a competitive and future-ready business environment.

Pankaj Khimji, Foreign Trade and International Cooperation Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, stated: “Oman places great emphasis on forging long-term partnerships with Belgium. This dialogue is a strategic step toward elevating our economic cooperation, introducing Oman’s competitive advantages,

expand liquefaction capacity to 15 million tonnes annually by 2030.

But this expansion, Al Yahyaei stressed, is not being pursued at the expense of local development.

“We’ve made it clear that gas for the fourth train will come from new upstream volumes. It’s not a reallocation; it’s an expansion with safeguards,” he said. Since its establishment in December 2022, IGC has moved quickly to centralise gas contracting, unify allocation policies, and shift the sector toward transparency and responsiveness.

But the transformation has not been without its challenges.

“Integrating different legacy systems and moving from a regulatory to a commercial model required a deep institutional shift,” Al Yahyaei admitted. “But we’ve built the foundation. Now, we’re focused on refining the system and scaling clean energy support.”

Ultimately, IGC aims to evolve from a conventional gas aggregator into a platform for managing clean molecules and enabling low-carbon industrial growth.

“Our long-term vision is clear,” Al Yahyaei concluded. “We want to ensure that every molecule of gas we manage drives national value — whether through job creation, industrial competitiveness, or climate resilience.”

As Oman charts a path toward Net Zero by 2050, IGC is positioning itself not only as a distributor of energy but as a strategic force shaping the future of the country’s economy and environmental footprint.

RISING DISRUPTIONS

Oil prices rise as conflict escalates



Oil prices rose on Tuesday on rising disruptions from the Iran-Israel conflict, although major oil and gas infrastructure and flows have so far been spared from any substantial impact.

Brent crude futures climbed \$1.23, or 1.7%, to \$74.50 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate crude was up \$1.08, or 1.5%, at \$71.43. Both contracts rose more than 2% earlier in the trading session. — Reuters

REAFFIRMED QUOTAS

US and UK announce trade deal



US President Donald Trump signed an agreement on Monday formally lowering some tariffs on imports from Britain as the countries continue working toward a formal trade deal.

The deal, announced by Trump and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer in Canada, reaffirmed quotas and tariff rates on British automobiles and eliminated tariffs on the UK aerospace sector. — Reuters

STEADY RATES

BoJ to slow pace of bond tapering



The Bank of Japan (BoJ) kept interest rates steady on Tuesday and decided to decelerate the pace of its balance sheet drawdown next year, signalling its preference to move cautiously in removing remnants of its massive, decade-long stimulus.

BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda said rising oil prices, if they persist, could affect underlying inflation in a way that could warrant action. — Reuters

OPINION

Food fraud: A hidden public health risk



DR MOZA ABDULLAH AL BUSAIDI
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The writer is a food safety consultant and board member of the Oman Consumer Protection Association

FOOD fraud — defined as the deliberate and intentional act of substituting, addition, tampering, altering or misrepresenting foodstuff for financial gain — has caused growing concerns over public health. Although the primary effect is usually the consumers’ pocket, the bigger impact is on consumer wellbeing, safety and trust, with the potential of causing major health issue or even death in some cases. The incidence of food fraud and adulteration has been on the rise in recent years, largely driven by the globalisation of supply chains and the growing complexity of the distribution networks. Such conditions create opportunity to unethical operators to create fraudulent goods that are increasingly difficult to detect. The world has witnessed many fraudulent acts in recent years, with seafood, olive oil, honey, spices, and dairy products being among the most commonly targeted items. According to a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in 2021, titled “Food fraud: Intention, detection and management”, numerous cases of food fraud have been documented worldwide. **KEY EXAMPLES INCLUDE:**

- In the Australian market, 20 per cent of honey was adulterated with substances

- such as cane sugar or corn syrup.
- A DNA test on 153 samples from 30 different brands of cod fillet in China, found that 58 per cent of the samples were substituted with other fish species.
- In Taiwan, low-grade palm oil and other cheap oils were labelled as high-grade olive oil
- In Pakistan, the world’s fifth largest milk producer, milk was adulterated with urea and contaminated water.

Other sources have reported additional cases, such as:

- Lead contamination in baby food (Fruit Puree pouches) in USA exceeded the limit 200 times affecting 65 children across 22 states, leading to a large-scale recall by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in late 2023.
- Spice contamination with Ethylene Oxide from Indian was banned by Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Maldives in 2024.
- In May 2024, the authorities in India uncovered an industrial dye was mixed with turmeric and chili powder to enhance colour.

In some of the biggest scandals unearthed earlier in 2008, Chinese infant formula was found adulterated with melamine, killing six babies and sickening over 300,000. The most notorious cases occurred in

Many people consume counterfeit and adulterated food products daily and often unknowingly, with these tampered foods growing into a global threat with economic and health consequences.

2013 in Europe when several major retailers were found to be selling beef products that contained up to 100% horse meat. On the other hand, misleading (or deceptive) food advertisements are other forms of misleading consumers into buying products. These ads influence their behavior by presenting food products as healthier, safer or more premium than is truly is. A common tactic used is the false health claims such as “Boosts immunity,” “Prevents cancer,” “Heart-healthy,” “Clinically proven.” These statements are often not backed up by a sound scientific evidence and intended to create false sense of health benefit. Similarly, labels claiming “100% natural” or “organic” or “no added sugar” can be misleading. These products may still contain processed ingredients, added sugars, or preservatives. Food fraud is not just about losing money, it can be deadly as well. Therefore combating fraud is not only to preserve trust but mostly safeguarding public health and the right to access safe and authentic food. Ultimately, protecting the integrity of our food requires a collaborative effort from government authorities enforcing stricter regulations, to industries adopting transparent practices, and consumers staying vigilant and knowledgeable.

BEIJING HAS MORE AT STAKE IN IRAN BESIDES JUST OIL

KA SING CHAN

Beijing has far more at stake in Iran besides just oil. China has not only benefited from importing heavily discounted Iranian crude, it has inched up its strategic infrastructure investments into the country since the duo signed a \$400 billion pact in 2021.

If the regime in Tehran is severely weakened or changes, China also will lose a key diplomatic lever in the Middle East.

Despite Washington’s efforts to use sanctions to curb oil exports from Iran, it has become an increasingly important supplier to China.

Crude shipments to the People’s Republic from Malaysia, a major trans-shipment hub, have tripled to 70 million tonnes last year from 2021, according to data from the Chinese Customs – third after Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, Iran’s strategic location makes it a crucial cog in President Xi Jinping’s signature Belt and Road policy to enhance his country’s physical and economic connectivity with the world. As of 2023, China accounted for 3% of Iran’s \$6 billion worth of foreign direct investments.

That pales in comparison to, say, Russia’s 27% contribution, but China is ramping up its support in other ways: Iran has turned to the People’s Republic for “thousands of tonnes of ballistic-missile ingredients”, for instance, to build its military prowess, the Wall Street Journal reported in June, citing sources. The trio also conducts regular joint naval drills together.

The escalating conflict threatens to undermine Beijing’s nascent ambitions in Gulf politics too. Just two years ago, Chinese diplomats hailed a “new paradigm” for resolving friction in the Middle East after they brokered a deal to restore diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

War also throws up a fresh test of China’s diplomatic ties further afield too.

Iran joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2023. However, India, a founding member, on Saturday issued a rare public rebuttal of the SCO’s statement denouncing Israel’s attacks, underscoring a potential rift between Xi and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has fostered closer ties with Israel.

The danger for China is this could be a moment that ultimately erodes its ambition to project power in the region and one that gives rise to rival infrastructure projects, such as the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, aimed at diluting Beijing’s influence.

For now, it appears the reshaping of the Middle East may not work in its favour. — Reuters

Green hydrogen: Treasure to global energy markets

AS the global pursuit of carbon neutrality accelerates, green hydrogen is quickly emerging as the cornerstone of a cleaner energy future and Oman is uniquely positioned to lead the charge. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, the Sultanate of Oman is not simply embracing another alternative fuel; it is shaping its role as a pivotal player in the energy systems of tomorrow.

With abundant solar radiation, expansive wind corridors, promising government policies, and world-class port infrastructure, Oman offers an unrivalled combination of natural and logistical assets.

While others contend with sluggish bureaucracy, Oman has enacted agile policies and rolled out attractive incentives that are already drawing serious investment.

This proactive approach provides the country with a vital head start. But the implications go far beyond economic gains.

In an era when energy independence equates to geopolitical influence, green hydrogen presents Oman with a chance to move from energy supplier to strategic architect on the global stage.

Globally, green hydrogen momentum is building at unprecedented speed. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that global electrolyser capacity could reach between 134 and 850 gigawatts by 2030, with up to 8 million tonnes of hydrogen produced annually. Germany has pledged €9 billion to establish 5 GW of domestic electrolyser capacity.

Japan has earmarked \$21 billion over 15 years in subsidies. Meanwhile, Australia’s Western Renewable Energy Hub envisions up to 26 GW of combined solar and wind dedicated to green hydrogen and ammonia export.

Saudi Arabia’s \$8.4 billion NEOM project plans to deliver 1.2 million tonnes of green ammonia annually by 2026 using 3.9 GW of renewable capacity.

For Oman, this transition is not just about sustainability. It’s a strategic leap one that can reshape the national economy and redefine the country’s place in global energy geopolitics.

Oman, however, is not simply



With abundant solar radiation, expansive wind corridors, promising government policies, and world-class port infrastructure, Oman offers an unrivaled combination of natural and logistical assets.



MARYAM AHMED YOUSEF AL NOFLI

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following this trend it is writing its own chapter. Under Oman Vision 2040 and its National Energy Strategy, the country aims to generate 30% of its electricity from renewables by 2030.

Established in 2022, Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) oversees the licensing, policy frameworks, land auctions, and infrastructure required to scale up the hydrogen economy.

By early 2024, Hydrom had signed six landmark agreements around the ports of Duqm and Salalah, partnering with major global firms such as BP, ACME, Uniper-DEME (Hyport Duqm), EDF-JPower-Yamna, ACTIS-Fortescue, Green Energy Oman, and Marubeni Samsung.

These deals, which represent approximately 15 GW of planned renewable capacity, are expected to produce over 700,000 tonnes of green hydrogen and draw nearly \$20 billion in investment.

Time is of the essence. As countries advance toward 2050 net-zero commitments, Oman’s natural endowment and control over key maritime routes position it to seize a narrowing window of opportunity.

Green hydrogen’s promise lies not only in its environmental credentials produced via renewable-powered electrolysis with zero emissions but in its remarkable versatility.

Unlike grey hydrogen, which emits greenhouse gases, or blue hydrogen, which depends on still-unproven carbon capture technologies, green hydrogen has the unique ability to decarbonise hard-to-abate sectors like steel manufacturing, aviation, maritime shipping, road transport, fertiliser production and large-scale

renewable energy storage.

Among the standout projects is Hyport Duqm, a collaboration between OQ, Uniper, and DEME Group, which will use 1.3 GW of solar and wind to operate a 500 MW electrolyser system, generating 60,000 tonnes of green hydrogen per year, convertible into 330,000 tonnes of green ammonia. Phase one is set for 2026.

Meanwhile, ACME’s Duqm based facility, a \$3.5 billion project powered by 3 GW of solar and 500 MW of wind, aims to deliver up to 900,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually.

In Salalah, consortia including EDF/JPower/Yamna and ACTIS-Fortescue plan to install 4–4.5 GW of renewable capacity to produce between 175,000 and 200,000 tonnes of green hydrogen annually, with the goal of exporting one million tonnes of green ammonia. These initiatives are beginning to pay off.

Oman is projected to claim 60% of the Middle East’s green hydrogen exports by 2030, outpacing regional competitors like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Beyond decarbonisation, this shift offers economic resilience.

As oil and gas gradually decline in global relevance, hydrogen promises to diversify Oman’s GDP, stabilise state revenues, and create an estimated 70,000 high-skill jobs, including 17,000 leadership roles, by 2050.

Oman’s integrated strategy sets it apart. Unlike nations struggling with fragmented regulations or isolated infrastructure, Oman offers a coordinated, investor-ready ecosystem led by Hydrom and supported by free-trade zones in Duqm and Salalah.

Its hydrogen programme matches or surpasses benchmark initiatives like Saudi Arabia’s NEOM or Australia’s Pilbara region not just in capacity but in execution. Now entering its implementation phase, Oman’s hydrogen vision is rapidly becoming reality. What began as policy ambition is evolving into structural transformation.

Green hydrogen is reinvigorating industry, attracting global alliances, and enhancing Oman’s international profile. Guided by Oman Vision 2040 and powered by its renewable wealth, Oman is no longer just entering the hydrogen race; it is helping define it.

ART/LIFE

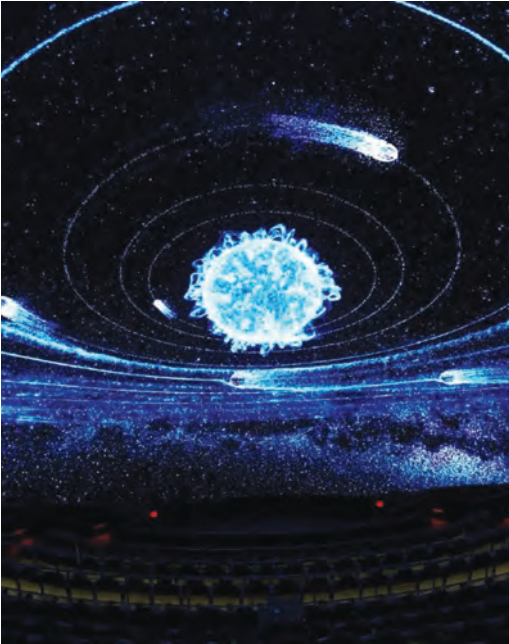


L I F E S T Y L E

HOW HORSE THERAPY TRANSFORMS LIVES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS^{> 20}

LIFESTYLE

Prague Planetarium unveils Europe’s first LED dome



FOLLOWING two years of extensive renovations, the Prague Planetarium celebrated the unveiling of its new fully digital LED dome on Saturday. The project marks a significant milestone for the institution, which aims to enhance its educational and astronomical offerings. The dome, measuring 22 metres in diameter, is expected to be the first of its kind in Europe, featuring approximately 45 million LED lights that create stunning, highly detailed images of the starry sky.

Jakub Rozehnal, director of Prague Observatory and Planetarium, emphasised the importance of this development, stating that the reconstruction was the largest in the facility’s 65-year history. “Everyone we have shown the new system to has been amazed,” he said. The digital upgrade is designed not only to improve visual quality but also to provide a more immersive experience for visitors, integrating modern technology with the planetarium’s longstanding reputation as a centre for astronomical education.

The new lighting system, manufactured by a prominent US-based company, stands out for its longevity, low maintenance requirements, and exceptional image contrast and resolution. This advanced technology dramatically enhances the viewing experience, allowing for more precise and vivid portrayals of celestial phenomena. Additionally, the system’s waste heat is repurposed to heat the entire building during the winter months, reflecting the facility’s commitment to sustainability.

The renovation cost approximately £12 million (\$13.8 million), illustrating the significant investment made in maintaining Prague Planetarium’s status as a leading astronomical educational centre. The planetarium, which opened its doors in 1960, attracts more than 250,000 visitors annually from around the world.

A key aspect of the renovation was the preservation of the site’s historical roots. In partnership with conservationists, the original projection device — crafted by the East German optics manufacturer Carl Zeiss Jena — is being retained in an adjacent room. This ensures the preservation of a vital piece of the planetarium’s history while embracing cutting-edge digital technology. —dpa

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



ART

A creation by Chinese-born French fashion designer Yiqing Yin exhibited at the Cite de la Dentelle et de la Mode as part of the exhibition “Air and Dreams” in Calais, northern France. —AFP



FILM

Actor Aaron Taylor-Johnson poses during a photocall for the film “28 Years Later” in London. —AFP



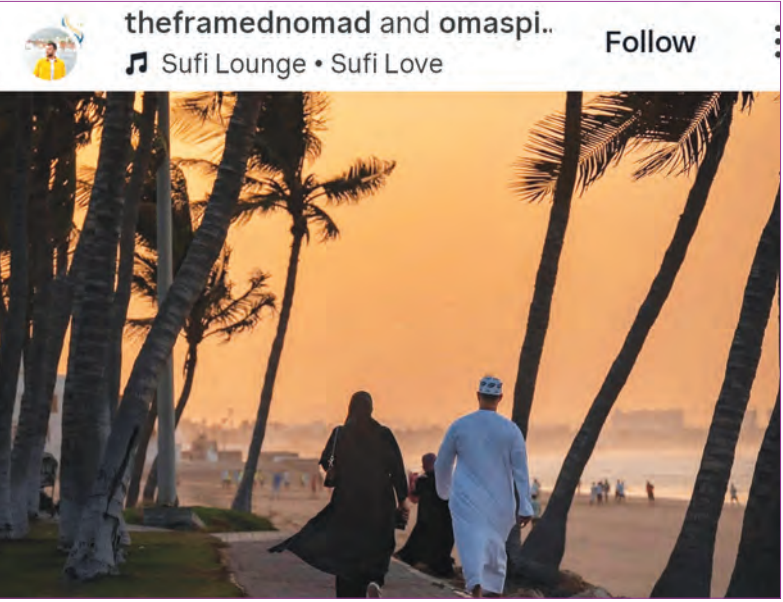
MUSIC

Canadian musician and photographer Bryan Adams speaks on stage about his photo exhibition “Wounded Veterans” held on the occasion of Germany’s first National Veterans Day. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Watching From Afar

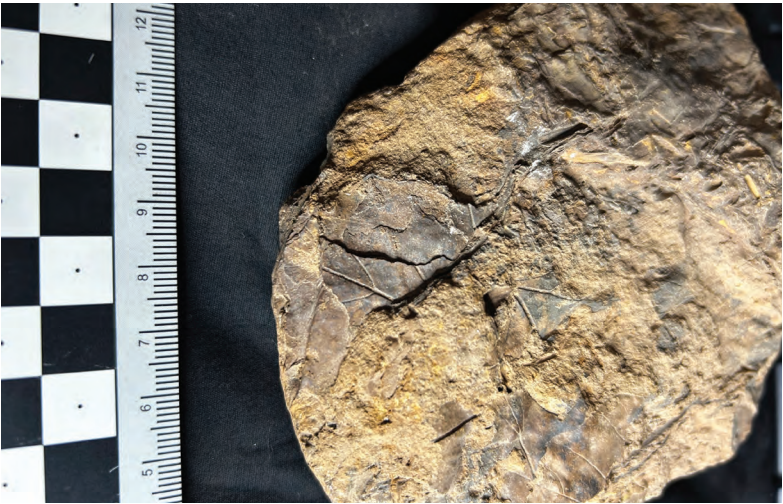


Beauty of Oman's Sunset

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

First fossil proof found that long-necked dinosaurs were vegetarians



In the movie “Jurassic Park,” a character proclaims there is nothing to fear from a towering Brachiosaurus because it’s a “veggie-saurus” that eats only plants. Littlefoot, the “Longneck” dinosaur in the “Land Before Time” series, eats leaves, or “tree stars.” But although pop culture and general scientific opinion have agreed for decades that the long-necked sauropod dinosaurs were herbivores, there was no definitive proof found in the fossil record. But there were hints of a diet full of green stuff. Fossils of sauropods, which stomped across the planet for 130 million years, are plentiful; additionally, herbivores tend to outnumber those of carnivores. The animals had small, peglike teeth, and their huge, lumbering bodies seemed ill-equipped to chase

down prey. “Plants were pretty much the only option,” said Stephen Poropat, a palaeontologist and the deputy director of the Western Australian Organic and Isotope Geochemistry Center at Curtin University in Perth. A study published in the journal Current Biology provides what may be the first concrete proof to support this argument, in the form of fossilised plants discovered in the belly of a sauropod. “It’s the smoking gun, or the steaming guts, as it were — the actual direct evidence in the belly of the beast,” Poropat said. Poropat, along with scientists and volunteers from the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, encountered the fossil on a dig in Queensland, Australia, in 2017. — KATE GOLEMBIEWSKI ? — NYT



La Dolce Vita, the Valentino way

“FASHION is not always seen as an art, and designers were not yet artists,” said Giancarlo Giammetti, the founder, with Valentino Garavani, of the Valentino brand. He was speaking on video from Rome about the fashion house they created in 1960. This month a large book about the house came out. “Valentino: A Grand Italian Epic” is a 576-page tome devoted to all things Valentino: drawings of gowns, archival photographs, advertisements,

“I was drawn to the craftsmanship and elegance of Valentino’s clothes long before we became friends,” Gwyneth Paltrow wrote in an email. “I had grown up seeing women like Mrs. [Marella] Agnelli and Jacqueline Onassis in his creations, and Valentino became a brand I aspired to wear. I cherish the vintage Valentino I have in my archive, especially a couture cape with feathers he gave me as a gift in the early 2000s.” The book, an updated edition of a 2007 version that has been redesigned, including a new layout

but which I was too shy to ask for,” Hathaway wrote in an email. “When he showed me the sketch, I couldn’t believe it. It was like he had read my mind and my heart.” The book works as a history of fashion photography, with images from Lord Snowdon, Bruce Weber, Deborah Turbeville, Steven Meisel, Jean-Paul Goude. One page has Claudia Schiffer surrounded by white-coated women in the Valentino atelier, photographed by Arthur Elgort in 1995. There is a lot of Valentino’s brightly pigmented signature shade



fashion features and many anecdotes from celebrity fans. Elizabeth Taylor discovered the label when she was filming “Cleopatra” in Rome. Clients like Audrey Hepburn and Nan Kempner liked how classic the classics were. Garavani never embraced fads and stuck to what critic Suzy Menkes described in the introduction as a penchant for “frothy, sensual, sweet-toothed glamour.” Matt Tyrnauer, who directed the 2009 documentary “Valentino: The Last Emperor,” said in an interview that the book shows the house’s role in the invention of fashion PR and modern advertising. “Fashion was the most rarefied world for a certain set of women of a certain class who patronised these houses, who were not interested in publicity or marketing because they didn’t need it, but the world was changing,” said Tyrnauer, who is credited as the author of the book (Menkes wrote the introduction). “Giancarlo Giammetti was at the vanguard of that.” Indeed, the house was savvy about dressing celebrities and maintaining friendships with people in the public eye.

and cover, has elements of oral history. Gloria Schiff, a one-time Vogue editor, recalled that Jacqueline Kennedy had been a client of Valentino since the 1960s. “I was playing tennis with Jackie Kennedy at the River Club one morning, and she seemed a bit down,” Schiff said. “This was some time after the assassination when she was really in mourning. She said, ‘Honestly, even if I wanted to go out, I have nothing to wear.’” Schiff arranged a meeting between the first lady and the designer. Garavani went on to design Kennedy’s wedding dress for her marriage to Aristotle Onassis in 1968. Sort of, Giammetti said. “We knew about the romance and gossip, but she never said, ‘Valentino, can you make a dress for me?’” She bought a dress from that season’s collection, which she wore to her ceremony. “The morning of the wedding, that dress was on the cover of WWD,” Giammetti said. “They made the scoop. We didn’t do anything.” Valentino did design a wedding dress for Anne Hathaway. “He somehow intuitively knew the exact dress I wanted, which was for the skirt to ombré into soft pink,

of red, which is recognised as its own Pantone colour, a mix of 100% magenta, 100% yellow and 10% black. It is shown on masses of models playing blindman’s buff with Garavani on a stretch of grass and on a top worn by Vogue editor Diana Vreeland in her Upper East Side apartment, in a room decorated in the same red. Vreeland said that Valentino “likes women who believe in overdressing, creating a role, giving a feeling that they will not disappear into the background.” “His woman must startle,” she said. “She must be riveting.” Over-the-top luxury and extravagance were hallmarks of the house as well. There are photos of Garavani wearing sunglasses and denim outside his 17th-century Château de Wideville in France. Others show his many pugs hanging out in Gstaad, Switzerland, or on the Valentino yacht. “Yachts, houses, paintings, entertaining, castles — none of the other designers is living that way,” publisher John Fairchild is quoted as saying. “Valentino outlives everybody. He’s the biggest high-liver I know.” — NYT

FEATURES



BY BUTHAINA AL RIYAMIYA

IN AL SEEB, near the coast, there’s a special place called Murabit Al Murasilat, which is actually an equestrian centre. It might look like just another riding school on the outside, but what makes it different is what they do inside. They run a programme that helps children with special needs, especially those with autism, motor difficulties or anxiety, through horse riding. This is all about giving kids a chance to grow, connect, and learn in a calm, supportive environment.

Over the past month, a psychologist named Hakima al Balushi has been running this horse therapy programme. She’s a trained psychologist who focuses on behaviour therapy and family support for children with special needs. The idea is simple but powerful: horses can do more than we think when it comes to helping children. They don’t just sit there; they respond to emotions and behaviour in a way that can help kids improve their speech, motor skills, or emotional balance.

Hakima explains that this therapy isn’t just for a certain type of child. It can help many different



kids, whether they’re dealing with anxiety, speech delays, or behavioural issues. She says, “There isn’t a case that benefits more than another. The horse helps each child in their own way. Some kids get calmer and more emotional control, while others start talking better or moving more confidently. It’s all about understanding each child’s needs and staying consistent.”

One story Hakima remembers really well is about a boy who hadn’t spoken in seven years. He’d tried speech therapy before, but nothing worked. Then one day, during a riding session, he suddenly said his first word — “Baba,” which means dad. Hakima says the boy’s face lit up. That moment meant everything because it showed how something as simple as riding a horse could unlock abilities that had been hidden for years. From then on, his speech started improving step by step.

The horses used in these sessions are carefully picked. They must be calm, patient and responsive. They also undergo special training to make sure they’re suitable for working with children who have different needs. The reason for this careful selection is scientific: studies show that horses are really good at picking up on people’s emotions and responding accordingly. This ability can help children feel safe and understood during the sessions.

It’s important to remember that this kind of therapy doesn’t always happen in hospitals or

clinics. Sometimes, it’s outdoors, with the open sky above, which makes it feel more relaxed and natural. That’s part of what makes this approach special — it’s not clinical or intimidating, but gentle and reassuring.

Supporting children with autism isn’t easy, especially when you look at the bigger picture. Around the world, autism affects about 1 in 100 children, according to the World Health Organisation. In some parts of the Middle East, including countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman, that number is increasing. It’s believed that up to 1% of children in some of these countries are now diagnosed with autism. That’s a lot of children who need understanding, support, and different ways to help them develop.

In Oman, the numbers are still being collected, but it’s clear that autism cases are on the rise. The government and healthcare providers are starting to pay more attention, opening clinics and centres that focus on early help. But there’s still a long way to go. Many families struggle to get proper support or don’t even recognise the signs early enough. That’s why projects like the horse therapy in Al Seeb are so important. They add new options for children and their families and show that there are different ways to bring about change.

The challenges faced by children with autism aren’t just about communication or learning. They also include social difficulties, sensory issues, and sometimes challenging behaviour. Because



of these challenges, families often feel stressed or unsure of how to help their children. In many Middle Eastern countries, society’s view of autism can be confusing or even dismissive. There’s still some stigma, which makes it harder for children and parents to seek support early.

In Oman, things are slowly starting to improve. There’s more awareness now than in previous years. News reports show that local organisations are trying new things — like combining therapies such as art, music, and traditional healing with modern treatments. Some communities even use storytelling and Islamic arts to encourage children’s development, aiming to make therapy more familiar and less intimidating.

Besides traditional methods, Oman is also exploring other new approaches, such as herbal remedies and alternative therapies that blend local culture with science. These efforts aim to help children feel more accepted and supported, especially in rural areas where healthcare resources might be limited or hard to access. The hope is that with more awareness and new ways to help, children with autism everywhere can have a better chance at living full, happy lives.

What’s happening at Murabit Al Murasilat shows that there’s hope. It’s about showing that even when the challenges seem big, there are ways to help children thrive. This horse therapy isn’t just about riding horses; it’s about building confidence, reducing anxiety, and encouraging communication in a gentle, natural way.

The project has already made a real difference for many families. Parents who once felt overwhelmed now see their children making progress — maybe saying their first words, showing more interest in playing with others, or simply becoming more relaxed and happy. And for the children themselves, it’s about more than just therapy; it’s about experiencing moments of joy and achievement that can inspire them for the future.

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