

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:52 AM

DHUHR 12:12 PM

ASR 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB 07:00 PM

ISHA 08:22 PM

VOL. 44, NO. 213

PAGES 20

BAISAS 200

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MANAGING IN-FLIGHT EAR PAIN

FLYING

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INBRIEF

KHAREEF 2025 TO BE CULTURAL SHOWCASE

Dhofar is gearing up for a bold relaunch of its renowned Khareef Dhofar Season, with visitor numbers projected to increase by 10 to 15 per cent. The surge is set to be driven not only by upgraded event zones and expanded cultural programmes, but by a major policy shift that puts small local businesses and artisans at the heart of the festival.

“This year marks a turning point in how the season is designed and delivered,” said Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, during a press conference in Salalah. “Our goal is to create a richer, more inclusive experience — one that celebrates heritage, empowers communities and strengthens Dhofar’s position on the regional tourism map.”

All major event zones have been renamed in Arabic to reinforce cultural identity and heritage continuity. Activities will extend beyond Salalah to include the Wilayats of Taqah and Sadah — areas that attract increasing seasonal residency and tourism — as part of a decentralised approach to regional development.

The rebranded Modern Waterfront (formerly “Uptown”) in Ateen Plain will host upgraded entertainment programming in a newly designed layout. Health Park, previously known as Salalah Public Park, is now a year-round fitness and wellness hub, with expanded activity schedules during Khareef. **SEE P2**

INDIA ORDERS INSPECTION OF BOEING 787S



NEW DELHI: India’s aviation regulator has ordered all Boeing 787s being operated by local carriers to be inspected after an Air India crash killed 270 people this week, the aviation minister said on Saturday, adding the authorities were investigating all possible causes.

The aviation regulator on Friday ordered Air India to conduct additional maintenance checks on its Boeing 787-8/9 aircraft equipped with GENx engines, including assessments of certain take-off parameters, electronic engine control tests and engine fuel-related checks. “We have also given the order to do the extended surveillance of the 787 planes. There are 34 in our Indian fleet,” aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu told a media briefing in New Delhi. **SEE ALSO P5**

Iran warns Israel allies

TEHRAN WARNED ISRAEL’S ALLIES THAT THEIR MILITARY BASES IN THE REGION WOULD COME UNDER FIRE

IRAN SAID 78 PEOPLE HAD BEEN KILLED ON THE FIRST DAY AND SCORES MORE ON THE SECOND DAY OF ATTACK

ISRAELI OFFICIAL SAYS IRAN HAD FIRED AROUND 200 BALLISTIC MISSILES IN FOUR WAVES

NETANYAHU SAID ISRAEL’S STRIKES HAD SET BACK IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME POSSIBLY BY YEARS



People use their phones at an impact site following Iran’s missile attack in Rishon LeZion, Israel, on Saturday. — Reuters

IRAN AND ISRAEL traded missiles and air strikes on Saturday, the day after Israel launched a sweeping air offensive against its old enemy, killing commanders and scientists; and bombing nuclear sites in a stated bid to stop it building an atomic weapon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel’s strikes had set back Iran’s nuclear programme possibly by years but rejected international calls for restraint, saying the attack would be intensified.

“We will hit every site and every target of the Ayatollahs’ regime and what they have felt so far is nothing compared with what they will be handed in the coming days,” he said in a video message.

In Tehran, Iranian state TV reported that around 60 people, including 20 children, had been killed in an attack on a housing complex, with more strikes reported across

No talks: Oman

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman, affirmed that the Iran-US talks scheduled for Sunday, in Muscat won’t be held, noting that diplomacy and dialogue are the only way to achieve lasting peace.

Earlier, a series of phone calls continued between Sayyid Badr and a number of counterparts across the globe. The phone calls come as part of the ongoing diplomatic efforts to contain the dangerous military escalation and tensions in the region, triggered by Israel’s direct attacks on Iran since the early hours of Friday morning. Over these calls, Sayyid Badr underscored the importance of halting the aggression and deterring the aggressor through peaceful means. — ONA

the country. Israel said it had attacked more than 150 targets.

In Israel, air raid sirens sent residents into shelters as waves of missiles streaked across the sky and interceptors rose to meet them. At least three people were killed overnight. An Israeli official said Iran had fired around 200 ballistic missiles in four waves.

US President Donald Trump has lauded Israel’s strikes and warned of much worse to come unless Iran quickly accepts the sharp downgrading of its nuclear programme that the US has demanded in talks that had been due to resume on Sunday.

But with Israel saying its operation could last weeks and urging Iran’s people to rise up against their clerical rulers, fears have grown of a regional conflagration dragging in outside powers.

The United States, Israel’s main ally, helped shoot down Iranian missiles, two US officials said. **SEE ALSO P6**

US protesters hit streets before Trump’s military parade

WASHINGTON: Thousands of people on Saturday rallied nationwide against the policies of US President Donald Trump ahead of a rare military parade on his 79th birthday — but the killing of a Democratic lawmaker in Minnesota cast a pall over the day’s events.

Trump was quick to condemn the targeted shootings of two lawmakers outside Minneapolis — one died along with her husband, while the other and his wife have been hospitalised with gunshot wounds. The shocking murder was the latest in a

string of incidents of political violence, including an attempt on Trump’s life in July last year and an April arson attack on the home of Pennsylvania’s governor, who is a Democrat and Jewish.

The shootings prompted Minnesota state authorities to call on residents not to attend protests by the so-called “No Kings” movement organised across the United State, which began at noon (16:00 GMT) in some East Coast locations.

Organisers said the rallies would be the largest since Trump returned to office in



Demonstrators hold signs as they protest the Trump administration during the “No Kings” rally in Los Angeles, California on Saturday, on the same day as President Trump’s military parade in Washington, DC. — AFP

January, adding that they were “rejecting authoritarianism, billionaire-first politics and the militarisation of our democracy.”

“I’m here because the things that are happening in this administration are very disturbing,” Sarah Hargrave, 42, said in the Washington suburb of Bethesda, where about 1,000 people rallied.

Organisers said they expected millions of people in more than 1,500 cities including New York, Houston, Seattle, Atlanta and Trump’s second home in Palm Beach,

Florida to protest. A small group even gathered in Paris.

Thousands more demonstrators are expected to turn out in Los Angeles to protest against Trump’s deployment of troops in America’s second-largest city following clashes sparked by immigration raids.

Downtown, Trump planned a giant celebration of the US Army’s 250th birthday — and his own — in Washington with tanks, helicopters and nearly 7,000 troops at a reported cost of up to \$45 million. — AFP



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SHORT TAKES

NCSI PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY FROM TODAY

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) will commence a public opinion survey on Sunday, focusing on employment, social protection, sports and entertainment. The survey will run until 25 June as part of the Centre’s ongoing efforts to produce accurate data that reflects societal realities; and supports policy and decision-making processes.

Saada bint Abdullah al Maawaliyah, Director of the Information Reports Department at NCSI, stated that the survey aims to gauge Omanis’ views on the labour sector and monitor trends in sports participation and recreational activities. It also seeks to evaluate public satisfaction with tourism services across the Sultanate of Oman’s governorates. She called on all selected participants to engage actively and share their views objectively, stressing that their input will directly contribute to improving and developing services provided to the public. She reaffirmed that all information gathered will be treated with strict confidentiality, in line with Royal Decree No 55/2019.

Article (11) of the decree stipulates that individual statistical data shall remain confidential and be used solely for statistical purposes in an aggregated format. — ONA



BLUE WHALE RESCUED IN SHINAS

SHINAS: The Environment Authority in the Al Batinah North Governorate received a report of a blue whale that was swept away in Shinas near Al Duwanij Beach in Shinas. Specialised teams from the Environment Department in Al Batinah North Governorate handled the incident but they had to put off action awaiting high tide following which the whale was returned to sea on Friday in good condition. It took the rescue teams of the Environment Department in Al Batinah North Governorate a huge effort to rescue the 8-metre long blue whale and return it to sea. — ONA

Dhofar reimagines Khareef as cultural showcase

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 14

DHOFAR IS GEARING UP for a bold relaunch of its renowned Khareef Dhofar Season, with visitor numbers projected to increase by 10 to 15 per cent. The surge is set to be driven not only by upgraded event zones and expanded cultural programmes, but by a major policy shift that puts small local businesses and artisans at the heart of the festival.

“This year marks a turning point in how the season is designed and delivered,” said Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, during a press conference in Salalah. “Our goal is to create a richer, more inclusive experience — one that celebrates heritage, empowers communities and strengthens Dhofar’s position on the regional tourism map.”

All major event zones have been renamed in Arabic to reinforce cultural identity and heritage continuity. Activities will extend beyond Salalah to include the Wilayats of Taqah and Sadah — areas that attract increasing seasonal residency and tourism — as part of a decentralised approach to regional development.

The rebranded Modern Waterfront (formerly “Uptown”) in Ateen Plain will host upgraded entertainment programming in a newly designed layout. Health Park, previously known as Salalah Public Park, is now a year-round fitness and wellness hub, with expanded activity schedules during Khareef.

A dedicated family zone called Children’s Time has been introduced at Awqad Park, offering interactive educational experiences.



DR
MOHAMMED
AL SHESHAI

The heritage-themed Return to the Past area has been redesigned with new theatre spaces, improved visitor flow and increased capacity for cultural showcases.

At Ateen Square, the 2025 season will feature an expanded programme of immersive audiovisual experiences, with the number of scheduled light, sound and laser shows rising from 600 last year to nearly 1,000 this year. Designed to captivate audiences with high-impact storytelling and visual spectacle, these performances aim to deepen visitor engagement and showcase Dhofar’s cultural themes through innovative multimedia formats. Putting Omani SMEs at the Centre

Perhaps the most impactful change lies in the elevation of local enterprise. Dr Al Ghassani emphasised that this year’s season adopts a deliberate strategy to integrate Omani small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and

artisans across all major venues.

“Dedicated efforts have been made to ensure these businesses are not only represented, but featured prominently,” he said. From heritage crafts and natural products to homegrown culinary offerings, local producers will be given priority access to high-footfall zones and logistical support.

In remarks to the Observer, Dr Mohammed al Sheshai, Director General of the Media Directorate in Dhofar Governorate, stressed the role of media in amplifying Khareef’s value proposition both domestically and internationally. “We are committed to delivering comprehensive and professional media coverage to reflect the depth of Dhofar’s offerings,” he said. “It is not just about promoting events — it’s about strengthening Oman’s image as a destination for culture, sustainability and opportunity,” he said.

Dr Al Sheshai noted that media engagement this year will focus on storytelling, strategic visibility and broader regional outreach — helping attract not only tourists, but also investors and collaborators aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Drug use awareness initiative launched

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

As part of a national community initiative to raise awareness about drug abuse and its dangers, the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali launched the ‘Jabel Omrak’ campaign under the auspices of Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. The launch event was attended by members of the local health committee, officials and those active in public health and youth outreach efforts.

The campaign comes as the wilayat’s official entry in the nationwide community competition organised by the Ministry of Health, represented by the National Committee for Drug and Psychotropic Substance Prevention. The initiative seeks to engage all segments of society in tackling the growing challenges of drug abuse through awareness, education and collaboration.

Al Ghabshi stressed the importance of collective responsibility in protecting the community. “Preventing

drug abuse is not the duty of institutions alone — it requires the active participation of families, educators, civil society and young people themselves,” he said. He commended the campaign’s organisers for their commitment and emphasised the critical role of grassroots engagement in building a healthier society.

The campaign’s central goal is to foster a sustainable culture of awareness about the dangers of drug use. It also seeks to promote individual and collective responsibility, empower youth

to make informed choices and build strong partnerships with government agencies, schools, healthcare institutions and civil society organisations.

By encouraging early prevention and dialogue, ‘Jabel ‘Omra’k’ aspires to reduce the stigma around discussing addiction and mental health, while providing young people with the tools and support needed to make positive life decisions. The campaign will roll out a series of educational and interactive activities over the coming weeks.

World Donor Day: ‘Your blood donation means life to others’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

June 14 is observed as World Donor Day and in Oman, the Department of Blood Bank Services under the Ministry of Health has been conducting a campaign on the importance of donating blood. Community drives were also organised on the same day.

On this day, blood banks around the world celebrate the heroes of life who give hope with blood. The theme

for World Blood Donor Day 2025 is “Blood connects us all: share a blood donation, save a life.”

“With every bag of blood you donate, you give a new chance to three people eagerly awaiting hope and bring a smile to their families’ faces,” stated the campaign from Khoula Hospital. More than 100 million donations are collected annually in 170 countries.

“The Sultanate of Oman is a pioneer in efforts to promote a culture of donation and enhance safe stocks,”



Oman is one of the leading countries in blood donation campaigns.

stated Oman’s Blood Bank Services.

Regular donations help save lives, support medical operations and care for mothers and children.

Sami al Zedjali, who has a career in the banking sector; and enjoys biking and travelling, has been donating blood for 20 years. “It has become such a natural part of my life that I hardly think twice about it. What motivates me? Knowing that a small act on my part can literally save someone’s life, even if I never meet them. There’s a quiet joy in that,”

he said. The campaign on Saturday emphasised that in every bag of blood you donate, you give a new chance to three people eagerly awaiting hope and draw a smile on the faces of their families. There are 12,700 donation centres worldwide, but there is always a demand. Joining in the initiative, the Indian Social Club conducted a blood donation drive at the central blood bank in the Wilayat of Bausher; and the campaign was inaugurated by G V Srinivas, Ambassador of India to Oman.

SHORT TAKES



Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi with Azzedine al Tayse, Ambassador of Tunisia to Oman.

OMAN, TUNISIA SEEK
WAYS FOR CINEMA
COLLABORATIONS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Oman Film Society, as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance cultural and artistic cooperation with other countries, forged understanding with Tunisia to promote films of both countries and to explore ways to make joint productions besides hosting joint cinema nights in Muscat.

This was stated by Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, Chairman of the Oman Film Society (OFS), who met with Azzedine al Tayse, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to the Sultanate of Oman recently.

Accordingly, both sides agreed to find ways to develop bilateral relations in the field of cinema, in addition to reviewing prospects for cooperation in organising cultural events that contribute to enhancing artistic and cultural avenues.

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screenings of distinguished Tunisian films, along with dialogue sessions with Tunisian filmmakers and critics.

Through this initiative, the association seeks to present rich Arab cinematic experiences and enhance cultural exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tunisia, contributing to revitalising the local cinema scene and broadening the horizons of the Omani audience towards regional cinema.

Both sides hoped that by agreeing to promote each other's cinema productions, cultural exchanges would be made possible through the most powerful medium, which would enhance bilateral relationship through understanding and tolerance.

Salalah Port ranks second in Gulf

BALQNEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

In a remarkable achievement that reflects Oman's growing stature in global maritime trade, Port of Salalah has been ranked second among the largest ports in the Gulf region according to the World Bank's Container Port Performance Index (CPPI) 2025. The index evaluates ports based on key metrics such as operational efficiency, container handling speed and infrastructure quality.

This recognition underscores Port of Salalah's strategic value, not only as a transshipment hub but also as a catalyst for economic diversification and tourism development under Oman Vision 2040.

According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, this achievement will increase cargo throughput, enhance Oman's reputation as a reliable logistics hub and generate new job opportunities — especially

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in logistics, manufacturing and SMEs around the Dhofar Governorate.

Dr Hamad bin Rashid, Economics expert highlighted the economic significance of the port's new ranking: "A port of this stature builds investor confidence in Oman's business environment. It also facilitates value-added industries such as re-export, packaging and light manufacturing, contributing directly to GDP growth." Beyond its role in cargo movement, Port of Salalah is fast emerging as a desirable stop for international cruise ships, particularly during Khareef season, when the Dhofar Governorate becomes a lush and

cool retreat. The port's improved ranking is expected to further boost its appeal among global cruise operators.

"Cruise lines are increasingly selective, preferring ports with high safety standards, efficient entry procedures and modern facilities. Salalah's new status makes it a strong contender for inclusion in more cruise itineraries, offering economic opportunities for local tour operators and artisans." The government continues to support the port's ecosystem with improved highway connections and logistics zones, laying the groundwork for long-term growth.

Ultimately, Port of Salalah's ranking as the second-best port in the Gulf is more than just a position on a global list — it is a validation of Oman's strategic vision and maritime ambition. It reflects the country's commitment to infrastructure excellence, logistical competitiveness and regional integration.

OMAN REVIEWS ITS
'ONE HEALTH' EFFORTS

THE Sultanate of Oman participated as the guest of honour at the One Health Regional Conference for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, hosted by the Republic of Tunisia. The Sultanate of Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

Dr Al Sabti delivered a speech in which he reviewed the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to implement the One Health approach. He pointed out that the conference constitutes a vital platform for exchanging experiences and best practices, enhancing collective efforts and strengthening regional and international cooperation to address health challenges according to an integrated and comprehensive approach that places human, animal and environmental health at the core of its concerns.

He highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to implement the One Health approach. "The Sultanate of Oman has played a leading and distinguished role in international forums on the issue of antimicrobial resistance, highlighted by its organisation and hosting of the Third High-



Oman's delegation at the One Health Regional Conference for MENA region, was headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health. — ONA

Level Global Ministerial Conference for the first time in the MENA region in Muscat in 2022. Besides, the Muscat Conference and the Muscat Final Statement, signed by 47 countries, marked the starting point for preparations for the United Nations High-Level Meeting to discuss the issue of antimicrobial resistance, held in New York

on September 26, 2024," he said.

"Within the framework of our commitment to sustainability and the environment (climate change), we launched the Carbon Neutrality Project, which represents a strategic pillar for supporting environmental health by achieving net-zero emissions by 2050," he added. — ONA

SHABAB OMAN II DOCKS AT PORT OF BARCELONA



BARCELONA: The Royal Navy of Oman's ship Shabab Oman II docked on Friday at the Port of Barcelona in the Kingdom of Spain. The visit marks a stop on the vessel's seventh international voyage to Europe, titled "Glories of the Seas". As part of this journey, the ship will visit several ports and destinations across the continent. — ONA

Employer Survey
project 2025

Objective:

The Employer Survey Project aims to collect and analyze the opinions and expectations of employers regarding the skills and specializations of graduates from higher education institutions, in order to guide the development of academic and training programs, and enhance their alignment with labor market needs. This contributes to improving the quality of education and bridging the gaps between higher educational outcomes and the private sector's requirements."

Who is targeted
in the Employer Survey?

Target Group:

All employers and recruitment officers across various economic sectors.

Large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that employ graduates from higher education institutions.

Steps to Participate:

1

Access to the employers' survey link

2

Completing the electronic questionnaire

ANNOUNCEMENT

Updating Suppliers and Contractors Data on "TAWTEEN" Platform

Nama Group invites all licensed suppliers and contractors operating in accordance with the Sultanate of Oman's regulations to update their information/data on the "TAWTEEN" platform, affiliated with the Ministry of Labour. This update is necessary to ensure continued engagement and eligibility to participate in tenders and business opportunities offered by the Group's companies. This update should be completed within two weeks from the date of this announcement.

For inquiries or further information, please contact the Suppliers and Contractors Registration Sections at Nama Group companies, or reach out Nama Holding via the following email: Fatma.AIMahrouqi@holding.nama.om

Best regards,
Procurement and ICV Department – Nama Group

SPOTLIGHT

MANAGING IN-FLIGHT EAR PAIN

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

FLYING

DURING the summer can be exciting, but for many travellers, air pressure changes during a flight can trigger ear

discomfort or pain — a condition commonly known as “airplane ear.”

This uncomfortable sensation happens when the air pressure inside your middle ear doesn’t equalise with the air pressure outside. The Eustachian tube — a narrow passage connecting the middle ear to the back of the nose and throat — is responsible for maintaining this balance.

During takeoff, the air pressure outside the body drops, creating excess pressure inside the ear. During descent, the reverse occurs, and the outside pressure becomes greater, causing the eardrum to retract inward.

While most passengers can adjust naturally, those with colds, sinus infections, allergies, or structural issues like a deviated septum may struggle to equalise the pressure. Such individuals are more prone to ear pain or even temporary hearing loss during flights. According to the Ministry of Health, several simple strategies can help prevent or reduce the discomfort of airplane ear. These include:

Yawning, swallowing, or chewing gum during takeoff and landing.

Avoiding naps during ascent or descent, as staying awake helps regulate pressure. Using decongestant nasal sprays if you have a cold or allergy symptoms (after consulting a doctor). Avoiding travel during acute sinusitis or severe nasal congestion. Using filtered earplugs designed to regulate pressure changes more gradually.

Staying well-hydrated to stimulate natural swallowing. Additional methods include using ear drops before boarding, drinking fluids, and chewing gum to activate the muscles that open the Eustachian tubes.

Most symptoms resolve within a few hours post-flight. However, persistent ear pain, hearing loss, dizziness, or fluid discharge may require medical attention from an ENT specialist. Children, especially infants, are more vulnerable to ear discomfort due to narrower Eustachian tubes and their inability to consciously equalise pressure.

Parents can help by: Breastfeeding or bottle-feeding during takeoff and landing.

Offering a pacifier to infants to encourage swallowing.

Giving older children hard candy, a juice box with a straw, or chewing gum if they’re over four years old.

Avoiding the use of decongestants in young children due to potential side effects. Understanding airplane ear and taking a few preventive steps can make a significant difference in your flying experience. By preparing ahead and knowing how to relieve pressure, you can enjoy your travels without unnecessary discomfort.

Always consult a healthcare provider if you experience frequent issues or have preexisting ear conditions to ensure safe and comfortable flights.

CHEW GUM, YAWN, OR SWALLOW DURING TAKEOFF AND LANDING

STAY AWAKE DURING ASCENT AND DESCENT

USE NASAL SPRAYS IF CONGESTED (WITH MEDICAL ADVICE)

STAY HYDRATED AND AVOID FLYING WITH SINUS INFECTIONS

USE EARPLUGS DESIGNED TO CONTROL AIR PRESSURE CHANGES

USE EARPLUGS DESIGNED TO CONTROL AIR PRESSURE CHANGES

TIPS TO PREVENT ‘AIRPLANE EAR’

FOR KIDS: USE PACIFIERS, FEED DURING TAKEOFF/ LANDING, OR OFFER DRINKS WITH STRAWS

SEEK MEDICAL HELP IF PAIN OR SYMPTOMS PERSIST POST-FLIGHT



SHORT TAKES



Russian service personnel captured by Ukrainian forces are released during the latest exchange of prisoners of war in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, as they pose with Russian flags at an unknown location in Belarus. — Reuters

UKRAINE, RUSSIA CONDUCT ANOTHER POW SWAP

KYIV: Ukraine and Russia conducted another POW swap -- the fourth one in a week -- the warring sides said on Saturday, under agreements reached in Istanbul earlier this month.

“We continue to take our people out of Russian captivity. This is the fourth exchange in a week,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on social media.

“In accordance with the Russian-Ukrainian agreements... another group of Russian servicemen was returned from the territory controlled by the Kyiv regime,” Russia’s defence ministry said on Telegram.

Kyiv also said it had received another batch of 1,200 unidentified bodies from Russia, which it said Russia claimed “belong to Ukrainian citizens, including military personnel,” as part of the Istanbul agreements as well. Ukraine did not say whether it returned any bodies to Russia.

Photos published by Zelensky on Telegram showed men of various ages, mostly with shaved heads, wearing camouflage and draped in Ukrainian flags.

Some were injured, others disembarked from buses and hugged those welcoming them, or were seen calling someone by phone, sometimes covering their faces or smiling.

Moscow’s defence ministry released its own video showing men in uniforms holding Russian flags, clapping and chanting “Russia, Russia”, “glory to Russia” and “hooray”, some raising their fists in the air.

The exchange came as Russia repeatedly rejected ceasefire calls and intensified its offensive along the front line, and especially in the northeastern Sumy region, where it seeks to establish a “buffer zone” to protect its Kursk region, previously partly occupied by Ukraine.

Zelensky claimed Russia’s advance on Sumy was stopped, adding that Kyiv’s forces have managed to retake one village. — AFP

EGYPT BLOCKS ACTIVISTS’ BID TO MARCH TO GAZA BORDER

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have blocked activists’ efforts to hold a march to the Gaza border to draw attention to Israel’s blockade of the war-torn Palestinian territory, organisers said on Saturday. Several dozen activists hoping to join the planned Global March to Gaza were stopped on the edge of Cairo as they attempted to reach the Suez Canal city of Ismailiya, the organisers said.

From there they had hoped to

travel by road to the North Sinai city of El Arish, the starting point for their planned march to the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing on the Gaza border.

Most of the activists were ordered onto buses back to the capital after several hours of questioning, but some remained in custody, the organisers said. “We were blocked for six to seven hours before security forces violently dispersed our group,” one organiser said.

At least one activist was expelled from Egypt, several sources said, adding to dozens more denied entry or expelled in the run-up.

Egyptian authorities have not commented on the reported expulsions. The foreign ministry had warned that while Egypt backs efforts to put “pressure on Israel” to lift its Gaza blockade, any foreign delegations intending to visit the border area must obtain prior permission. — AFP

India orders inspection of Boeing 787s after crash

INDIA’S

aviation regulator has ordered all Boeing 787s being operated by local carriers to be inspected after an Air India crash killed 270 people this week, the aviation minister said on Saturday, adding the authorities were investigating all possible causes.

The aviation regulator on Friday ordered Air India to conduct additional maintenance checks on its Boeing 787-8/9 aircraft equipped with GENx engines, including assessments of certain take-off parameters, electronic engine control tests and engine fuel-related checks.

“We have also given the order to do the extended surveillance of the 787 planes. There are 34 in our Indian fleet,” aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu told a media briefing in New Delhi.

“Eight have already been inspected and with immediate urgency, all of them are going to be done.” He did not say whether government officials will be involved in the inspections.

Air India operates 33 Boeing 787s, while rival airline IndiGo has one, according to data from Flightradar24.

In a statement, Air India said it is currently completing the one-time safety checks directed by the Indian regulator, adding that “some of these checks could lead to higher turnaround time and potential



A crane removing aeroplane’s tail from the wreckage after the June 12 Air India flight 171 crash, is pictured in a residential area near the airport in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Air India crash sparks scrutiny of 787s as India panel to make a report in three months, minister says

delays on certain long-haul routes.”

The planes, however, have not been grounded, but a source on Friday said the Indian government was considering that as an option.

Naidu also said the government will look at all possible theories of what led to the crash.

Air India and the Indian

government were looking at several aspects of the crash including issues linked to its engine thrust, flaps, and why the landing gear remained open as the plane took off and then came down.

At least 270 bodies have been recovered from the site of the crash, Dhaval Gameti, president of the Junior Doctors Association at B J Medical College, said.

Naidu said a government panel was investigating the crash and will issue a report within three months. “We are going to improve every necessary thing that is going to come our way, to improve the safety,” he said at the briefing.

Dozens of anxious family members have been waiting outside an Ahmedabad hospital to collect bodies of loved ones killed in the crash, as doctors were working overtime to gather dental samples from the deceased to run identification checks and DNA profiling.

Rafiq Abdul Hafiz Memon, who lost four relatives in the incident, said he was not getting any answers from authorities and was “very hassled”. “We have lost our children ... we are not understanding anything. Please help us get information about our children. Tell us when they are going to release their bodies,” Memon said.

Another father was upset about not being able to get the body of his son, Harshad Patel, saying he was told by authorities it will take 72 hours for DNA profiling. — Reuters

Rosatom to build Kazakhstan’s first nuclear power plant

ASTANA: Russia’s state nuclear corporation Rosatom has been tapped to lead an international consortium to build the first nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan, the Central Asian country’s atomic energy agency said on Saturday. Other proposals came from the state-owned China National Nuclear Corporation, as well as French and South Korean companies.

“We welcome Kazakhstan’s decision to start the nuclear power plant construction project,” Rosatom’s chief executive officer Alexei Likhachev said in a statement posted on Saturday to the company’s Telegram channel.

“The result will be the construction of a nuclear power plant based on the most advanced and efficient design in the world, which is based on Russian technology.”

It was not immediately clear which other companies would participate in the Rosatom-led consortium, nor the cost and timeline of



An aerial view shows the village of Ulken and the proposed nuclear power plant site near the village of Ulken. — AFP

Rosatom’s proposal.

Likhachev said the plant would employ VVER-1200 Generation 3+ reactors, a technology developed in Russia and used both domestically and abroad.

The two-reactor plant will be built in the village of Ulken, about 250 miles northwest of Almaty, the commercial capital. Kazakhstan plans to have 2.4 gigawatts of nuclear capacity by 2035. The oil- and gas-

rich nation of 20 million has not had any nuclear power generation capacity since 1999 when the BN-350 reactor on the shores of the Caspian Sea was decommissioned.

The Kazakh atomic energy agency, established this March, said it had reviewed various proposals for reactor technologies and assessed them based on nuclear power plant safety, personnel training and other criteria. — Reuters

جامعة الشرقية
A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite specialized companies to participate in the following auctions:

Auctions details:

Auction No.	Description	Document fees	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit	Bids Submission Deadline
ASU/37/24/25	The main restaurant in the Student Services Center	OMR 10	19/06/2025	23/06/2025 at 09:00 AM	26/06/2025
ASU/41/24/25	A shop specializing in shawarma and falafel in the new female dormitory	OMR 10	19/06/2025	23/06/2025 at 10:00 AM	26/06/2025
ASU/42/24/25	A Shop selling health and beauty products in the new female dormitory	OMR 10	19/06/2025	23/06/2025 at 11:00 AM	26/06/2025
ASU/45/24/25	Vending machines for refreshments, beverages, and other items	OMR 10	19/06/2025	23/06/2025 at 12:00 PM	26/06/2025

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the auctions should obtain the auction document during official working days from Sunday to Thursday, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM.
- Auction collection process:** The interested companies shall follow the following steps:
1 - The payment should be made directly to ASU under the following bank account:

Account Name	AL SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY
Account Number	0423010693610011
SWIFT CODE	BMUSOMRX

2 - After payment, send the receipt to (abdullah.al-harathi@asu.edu.om) or via WhatsApp at +968 25401118.
3 - The auction document will be sent to the company via email.
4 - Companies that hold Riyadh certificate are exempted from auction document fees, They should send a copy of the Riyadh certificate and the commercial registration to the email or WhatsApp number mentioned in the announcement.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids.
http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- The required experience to participate in the auctions is no less than one year in the service provision field.
- Please scan the QR code to access the bidding guide to learn about the procedures followed in the auctions process.
- For further details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: abdullah.al-harathi@asu.edu.om or 25401118.

SHORTTAKES



A poster displaying the portraits of Iranian military generals and nuclear scientists, killed in Israel's attack, hangs on a bridge in Tehran. — AFP

DEATH TOLL OF SCIENTISTS KILLED CLIMBS TO 9

TEHRAN: Iran has confirmed the deaths of three more nuclear scientists in the Israeli air strikes targeting the country's nuclear programme and military leadership, according to the Tasnim news agency on Saturday.

The scientists - Ali Bakai Karimi, Mansour Asgari and Said Borji - were killed in Israeli air strikes, it reported. This brings the number of known fatalities among Iran's nuclear experts to at least nine. Under international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols, civilians are granted explicit protection during armed conflict.

Scientists are generally classified as civilians unless they are directly participating in combat operations. Targeted killings outside those specific conditions may constitute a violation of the laws of war.

Israeli launched a large-scale attack on Iran early on Friday. — dpa

IAEA: NO INCREASED RADIATION AFTER ATTACK ON ISFAHAN

VIENNA: No increased radiation levels have been detected following the Israeli air strike on the Iranian nuclear facility in Isfahan, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In a post on X on Saturday, the IAEA said it remains in close contact with the Iranian authorities, following several strikes on facilities on Friday. Located in central Iran, 440 kilometres south of Tehran, Isfahan is widely suspected to be the primary location for Iran's secret nuclear weapon development programme.

Among other things, uranium ore is prepared for enrichment in Isfahan. Several nuclear research facilities are located in and near the city of some 2.2 million inhabitants. Tehran repeatedly claims that its nuclear programme only serves peaceful purposes. — dpa

GERMAN FM REROUTES TO SAUDI ARABIA ON ME TOUR

RIYADH: German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul pressed on with his tour of the Middle East on Saturday despite the conflict raging between Israel and Iran, arriving in the Saudi capital Riyadh on a hastily reworked itinerary.

Wadephul, who took office last month under the coalition government of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, met with his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan in Riyadh. Stability in the Middle East following Israeli strikes on Iranian territory and Tehran's retaliatory attacks were likely to dominate the talks, along with the Gaza war.

Saudi Arabia and Oman have strongly condemned Israel's attacks, with Riyadh branding them a clear violation of international law. Oman said they represented "a dangerous and reckless escalation."

Originally, Wadephul was to travel from Egypt to Lebanon and reach the Syrian capital Damascus on Saturday. Visits to Jordan and Israel on Sunday were also on the agenda. However, as developments in the Middle East quickly became unpredictable, the minister cancelled his visits to Beirut, Damascus, Amman and Jerusalem.

Wadephul planned instead to travel on to Qatar on Saturday for a meeting with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani. — dpa



First-responders gather outside a building that was hit by an Israeli strike in Tehran. — AFP



A man stands inside his damaged house at an impact site following the Israeli strikes in Tehran. — Reuters

IRAN and Israel traded missiles and airstrikes on Saturday, the day after Israel launched a sweeping air offensive, killing commanders and scientists and bombing nuclear sites in a stated bid to stop it building an atomic weapon.

In Tehran, Iranian state TV reported that around 60 people, including 20 children, had been killed in an attack on a housing complex.

In Israel, air raid sirens sent residents into shelters as waves of missiles streaked across the sky and interceptors rose to meet them, killing at least three people. An Israeli official said Iran had fired around 200 ballistic missiles in four waves.

US President Donald Trump has lauded Israel's strikes and warned of much worse to

come unless Iran quickly accepts the sharp downgrading of its nuclear programme that the US has demanded in talks that had been due to resume on Sunday.

But with Israel saying its operation could last weeks, and urging Iran's people to rise up against their rulers, fears have grown of a regional conflagration dragging in outside powers, with global economic and financial repercussions.

The United States, Israel's main ally, helped shoot down Iranian missiles, two US officials said.

Iranian fire still struck residential districts in Israel, however, and Defence Minister Israel Katz said Iran's leadership had crossed a red line.

"If (Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali) Khamenei continues to fire missiles at the

Israeli home front, Tehran will burn," he said in a statement.

Iran had vowed to avenge Friday's Israeli onslaught, which gutted Iran's nuclear and military leadership and damaged atomic plants and military bases, killing 78 people including civilians according to Iran's UN envoy.

Tehran warned Israel's allies that their regional military bases would come under fire too if they help shoot down Iranian missiles, Iranian state television reported.

Iran's own ally, the Yemeni Ansar Allah group, fired missiles at Israel on Friday night but at least one appeared to go astray, injuring five Palestinians including three children in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Red Crescent said. However, 20 months of war in Gaza and a

IRAN & ISRAEL TRADE FIRE ON DAY 2

DONALD TRUMP HAS LAUDED ISRAEL'S STRIKES AND WARNED OF MUCH WORSE TO COME

IRAN LAUNCHES DOZENS OF MISSILES, ISRAEL SAYS SOME INTERCEPTED

DOZENS REPORTED DEAD AS TEHRAN APARTMENT BLOCK HIT

ISRAELI DEFENCE MINISTER WARNS THAT 'TEHRAN WILL BURN'



A destroyed building is pictured at a site in Tel Aviv hit by a missile fired from Iran. — AFP

conflict in Lebanon last year have decimated Tehran's strongest allies, Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, reducing its ability to project power across the region along with its options for retaliation. Gulf Arab states that have long mistrusted Iran but fear coming under attack in any wider conflict have urged calm as worries about disruption to the Gulf region's crucial oil exports boosted the price of crude by about 7 per cent on Friday. Iran's overnight fusillade included hundreds of ballistic missiles and drones, an Israeli official said. Three people, including a man and a woman, were killed and dozens wounded, the ambulance service said. In Rishon LeZion, south of Tel Aviv, emergency services rescued a baby girl trapped in a house hit by a missile, police said. Video showed teams searching through the rubble of one home. And in the

western suburb of Ramat Gan, near Ben Gurion airport, Linda Grinfeld described her apartment being damaged: "We were sitting in the shelter, and then we heard such a boom. It was awful."

The Israeli military said it had intercepted surface-to-surface Iranian missiles as well as drones, and that two rockets had been fired from Gaza.

With Iran's air defences heavily damaged, Israeli Air Force chief Tomer Bar said "the road to Iran has been paved".

In preparation for possible further escalation, reservists were being deployed across Israel. Army Radio reported units had been positioned along the Lebanese and Jordanian borders.

In Iran, explosions were heard overnight across the capital, state media reported. Fars

News agency said two projectiles had hit Mehraband airport, located inside the capital, which is both civilian and military.

State television reported that a 14-storey housing complex, Shahid Chamran, had been flattened by a missile. It said 60 people had been killed, though there was no immediate official confirmation.

Israel's military did not immediately comment on that report. Iran's UN envoy Amir Saeid Iravani said 78 people had been killed in Israel's strikes on Friday and more than 320 wounded, most of them civilians.

Israel sees Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to its existence, and said the bombing campaign was designed to avert the last steps to production of a nuclear weapon — even though US intelligence says it has seen no sign that this is imminent. Israeli UN envoy Danny

Danon called the strikes "an act of national preservation".

A military official on Saturday said Israel had killed nine Iranian nuclear scientists, and that the damage to the nuclear facilities at Esfahan and Natanz would take "more than a few weeks" to repair.

Tehran insists the programme is entirely civilian in line with its obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and that it does not seek an atomic bomb.

However, it has repeatedly hidden parts of its programme from international inspectors, and the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported it in violation of the NPT.

Israel, which is not an NPT signatory and is widely understood to have developed a nuclear bomb, has said it cannot let its main regional foe gain atomic weapons. — Reuters

OPINION

The balance between passion and job market



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AS the school year comes to an end, high school graduates undergo the process of higher education applications, paving the path that will determine their future.

Most students are forced to choose between what they are truly passionate about and what would secure them a spot in today's fluctuating job market. And while some career paths offer a combination of both. Many students have to choose between one of the two and deal with the consequences.

The balance between one's passion for a specific career path and the possibility of securing a job after graduation is becoming a common challenge due to several factors. From a cultural perspective, some conservative societies prefer girls to work at specific jobs like teaching or health care which makes the choice limited and more complicated, especially since both fields involve long hours of social interaction in situations that demand special skills.

Other factors include the diversity of today's job market with routine jobs being

easily replaced by technology and artificial intelligence while new roles require more training and special skills that may not be available to most graduates. Another important point to consider is the influences of once parents and what they perceive as a more employable field of study which is not necessarily free from bias and stereotypes made about certain jobs.

One may choose to follow the path they truly enjoy and deal with the struggle to secure a job with a stable income, while someone else would prioritise job stability over passion.

To freshly graduated students, this decision may seem like the biggest choice of their lives. And while it may be, it is not as black and white as it is made up to be.

Overall, the stress over future possibilities can take a huge mental toll on youngsters, especially with their sudden exposure to the beginning of adult life and its responsibilities. Students at this stage need to acknowledge that whatever choice they make is not the end of their lives, but the start of their careers and

Some may choose to follow their passion, embracing the struggles that come with securing a stable income, while others may prioritise job security over personal fulfilment

success.

Choosing the right field of study is the main step to a flourishing future. Partially because employees with little to no interest fail to create huge success in fields they do care about as they are only focused on profit. On the other hand, others achieve true success driven by passion.

When my teenage sons were choosing what field to study after graduating from high school, I reminded them that such a choice would not only determine their income but also where they would be spending the majority of their time as well as their social status and circle of friends.

In my opinion, when choosing a career, students should be mindful of the importance of balancing passion towards a particular field and the chances of employment to avoid frustration, talk to the career adviser in your school who can help you recognise your passion and attend, career exhibitions that provide more information about the jobs opportunities so you can make a well-informed decision.

SCHOOL SHOOTING
FUELS DEBATE ON
AUSTRIA'S GUN LAWS

BLAISE GAUQUELIN

With Austria still reeling from last week's deadly school shooting that killed 10 people, a debate is now raging over the Alpine country's gun laws. The unprecedented case of deadly gun violence stunned the country of almost 9.2 million people, which ranks among the 10 safest in the world, according to the Global Peace Index.

While politicians have called for tighter restrictions on private gun ownership in the wake of the shooting in Graz, interest in firearms and demand for weapons training courses has surged.

"You can't imagine how many people have signed up for shooting courses" since Tuesday's attack, Viennese gun dealer Markus Schwaiger, who also offers training courses at shooting ranges, said. "People are worried that gun laws are about to get tightened" in the coming months, he added.

Austria has a relatively high number of weapons in circulation, with more than 1.5 million registered to about 370,000 owners.

According to industry expert Aaron Karp, Austria has a 'strong gun culture' centred around "hunting and sports shooting, especially in the countryside", which is rich with game.

The Alpine nation is also one of the European countries with the largest number of small arms in circulation per capita, said Karp, one of the authors of the Small Arms Survey, which compiles data on gun ownership.

Famous for the Glock pistol, invented by Austrian engineer Gaston Glock, gun ownership is deeply rooted in the country — and has been on a steady rise in recent decades: only about 900,000 weapons were registered in Austria in 2015, according to official figures.

For Schwaiger, "rising populism" has also played its part, with right-wing politicians tapping into people's anxieties over crises, arguing that the world has become a more dangerous place.

"For twenty years, right-wing populism has been scaring people" and "every crisis causes sales to skyrocket," he said. The shooting at a secondary school in the southern city of Graz by a 21-year-old former pupil was the deadliest postwar mass shooting in Austria. But a study published online in 2020 in the European Psychiatry journal suggests that the number of violent deaths in Austria has been increasing in lockstep with the number of weapons.

In order to join the European Union in 1995, Austria had to regulate the sale of firearms, which temporarily led to a drop in violent deaths — until the financial crisis of 2008 hit.

According to the study, the positive effect of the reform has been "offset by the global economic slowdown", which increased anxiety among the public and thus the tendency to purchase weapons.

— AFP

Attack on Iran poses a
threat to world peace

ISRAEL'S 77-year occupation of The State of Palestine is a history of broken promises, shattered treaties, and the gradual realisation amongst most of the world that Netanyahu and the Zionist Colony of Israel cannot be trusted and why they pose a threat to world peace.

On September 13, 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government. This agreement could have led to peace.

Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated not long after by Yigal Amir, a Zionist, due to Rabin's role in the Oslo Accords. Zionism is an ideology not of peace but war, not peaceful co-existence but territorial expansionism. Most of the world understands this.

The breaking of the Oslo Accords and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin should have been the definitive lesson in the futility of appeasing a Zionist regime bent on conquest and domination. Oman as always has been the peacemaker, always the principled honest broker seeking to resolve disputes through negotiation.

Nonetheless, Oman has always made it clear that it will only normalise relations with Israel when Palestinians are given their own State. In peace negotiations Israel always claim they seek peace, always the victims never the aggressors. It always claims it has the right to defend itself. But what does this mean? Where are Israel's so-called frontiers in Palestine?

The frontiers before the six-day war in 1967? The frontiers immediately after 1967? Because its frontiers change daily. Armed Israeli settlers continue to occupy more Palestinian homes and land with impunity. Following that meeting between Rabin and Arafat in 1993 Clinton brought back memories of the UK Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.



An Iranian drives near the Azadi Square in Tehran. — AFP



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Chamberlain returned to England from Munich in 1938 having signed the Munich Agreement with Adolf Hitler. Upon his arrival, he famously declared "Peace in our time," believing he had prevented war.

Chamberlain was naive. He failed to understand the true nature of Nazism. In the same way Rabin and Arafat were naive because they failed to understand the true nature of Zionism. The world has a choice.

Stop the aggressive Zionist expansionist agenda now or face the danger of World War Three. Winston Churchill made the following statement in relation to the Nazis: "If

you will not fight for right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory is sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival.

There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than to live as slaves." The appeasement of evil is not diplomacy but capitulation and some threats to human civilisation must be confronted. We should learn from history.

Adding a ‘SPLASH of COLOUR’ with words



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

METAPHORS, idioms and colloquialisms have become an ever-increasing component of the English language, therefore making it difficult for English as a second language learners to keep their heads about them in the face of what I see as the ‘metaphorical gymnastics’ what is now the global language.

It may be somewhat of a challenge you see, for a non-English speaker to recognise the true meaning of a comment that someone is “showing their true colours now.” The actual meaning is that the person has revealed their true manner, nature or character now. This usually occurs due to a change in their circumstances or relationship. It has nothing to do with what colour the person is, is wearing, or any part of their appearance, but is a metaphor for their manner, the way they treat or react to people; their nature, the way they behave towards others; or their character, their distinctive mental and moral qualities.

The word ‘colour,’ in fact has a genuine diversity within the English language that is probably not helped, in language learning, by the fact that the word is spelled differently in the Americas, with the spelling of ‘color,’ not at all indicative of any difference in meaning. ‘Colour’ and ‘color’ mean the same thing but are drawn from different origins and in the matter of the differences in linguistic

standardisation on the two sides of the Atlantic, the derivations result from whether the words have Latin or French origin.

America, seeking even subtle forms of independence in the early 19th century, eagerly embraced the spelling differences published by the American lexicographer Noah Webster in his 1828 dictionary. There are hundreds of words, not only spelled differently ‘on either side of the pond,’ which is itself a metaphor describing the Atlantic Ocean as a pond and referring to the two (American and United Kingdom) civilisations without naming them, in an absolute example of how identifying the differentiation between idioms and colloquialisms can challenge the language learner.

The reality is that they don’t have to and can take comfort in the fact that beyond a lesson or two, they will find that ‘knowing’ the difference is less important than understanding that this amazing language is, in common use, as likely to be figurative, as literal.

Familiarisation is the only way to both understand, absorb and utilise even some of the idioms and colloquialisms they will encounter in life. However, that familiarisation will be greatly enhanced by embracing metaphors and synonyms, which sounds dreary, but can be fun.

The distinction, linguistically, is that an idiom has a non-literal meaning, while a

Such are the joys of this amazing language, which, used well, or heard and understood well, and with an extensive enough vocabulary, can add so much colour, there’s that word again, to any discussion or conversation

colloquialism is a phrase that is likely to be in common usage, based upon regional specificity. Now there is no way that an English language learner would identify the Atlantic as a ‘pond,’ because in fact, it’s a massive great ocean, so the use of the word ‘pond’ is clearly not literal, making it an idiom. Wouldn’t you agree? Yet, the reference to ‘either side of the pond,’ is also clearly a unique distinction, most likely made by someone from either the States, or the British Isles, therefore regional, therefore more correctly a colloquialism, correct? Such are the joys of this amazing language, which, used well, or heard and understood well, and with an extensive enough vocabulary, can add so much colour, there’s that word again, to any discussion or conversation.

Wait a minute! What’s the difference between a discussion and a conversation? Is there a difference? Yes! A discussion is probably more formal, more structured, focused, usually on a specific issue, between several people and will usually have stated objectives.

Whereas, on the other hand, a conversation is generally informal, usually between two people, usually personal, often private, humorous, anecdotal and more intimate, a ‘shared’ experience.

I know, you’re thinking “It’s alright for you. You’re English.” And you are right of course, but within any language lies lifelong personal enrichment and that can’t be bad... Can it?

AI’s arrival at work reshaping employers’ hunt for talent

TOM BARFIELD

Predictions of imminent AI-driven mass unemployment are likely overblown, but employers will seek workers with different skills as the technology matures, a top executive at global recruiter ManpowerGroup said at Paris’s Vivatech trade fair. The world’s third-largest staffing firm by revenue ran a startup contest at Vivatech in which one of the contenders was building systems to hire out customisable autonomous AI “agents”, rather than humans. Their service was reminiscent of a warning last month from Dario Amodè, head of American AI giant Anthropic, that the technology could wipe out half of entry-level white-collar jobs within one to five years. For ManpowerGroup, AI agents are “certainly not going to become our core business any time soon,” the company’s Chief Innovation Officer Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic said. “If history shows us one thing, it’s most of these forecasts are wrong.” An International Labour Organization (ILO) report published in May found that around “one in four workers across the world are in an occupation with some degree of exposure” to generative AI models’ capabilities. “Few jobs are currently at high risk of full automation,” the ILO added.

But the UN body also highlighted “rapid expansion of AI capabilities since our previous study” in 2023, including the emergence of “agentic” models more able to act autonomously or semi-autonomously and use software like web browsers and email. Chamorro-Premuzic predicted that the introduction of efficiency-enhancing AI tools would put pressure on workers, managers and firms to make the most of the time they will save. “If what happens is that AI helps knowledge workers save 30, 40, maybe 50 per cent of their time, but that time is then wasted on social media, that’s not an increase in net output,” he said.

Adoption of AI could give workers “more time to do creative work” — or impose “greater standardisation of their roles and reduced autonomy,” the ILO said. There’s general agreement that interpersonal skills and an entrepreneurial attitude will become more important for knowledge workers as their daily tasks shift towards corralling AIs. Employers identified ethical judgement, customer service, team management and strategic thinking as top skills AI could not replace in a ManpowerGroup survey of over 40,000 employers across 42 countries published this week.

Nevertheless, training that adopts those new priorities has not increased in step with AI adoption, Chamorro-Premuzic lamented.

“For every dollar you invest in technology, you need to invest eight or nine on HR, culture transformation, change management,” he said.

He argued that such gaps suggest companies are still chasing automation, rather than the often-stated aim of augmenting human workers’ capabilities with AI. — AFP

Green crime goes global

In late 2024, Brazilian federal police dismantled a sprawling illegal gold mining network in Pará, exposing a criminal enterprise that stretched far beyond the rainforest. The operation, part of a broader crackdown on illicit mining in Indigenous territories, uncovered links to money laundering via shell companies and fraudulent permits, with funds traced to accounts in Dubai, Miami and Panama.

During the raids, Brazilian authorities seized drones, encrypted phones and fuel-laden barges — all tools of a well-financed transnational operation. The bust confirmed what researchers have warned about for years: environmental crime in the Amazon is now deeply entangled with global financial crime. The armed groups behind them are corrupting officials and increasingly operating at an industrial scale.

Environmental crime has become so extensive that it is reshaping the global policy agenda, evolving from a niche concern to an urgent topic of international diplomacy. Discussions about how to prevent it feature prominently at United Nations climate negotiations. There have also been official deliberations through the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), ministerial meetings at economic summits such as the G20 and joint statements from geopolitical groups such as the BRICS+. Environmental crimes are far more than a form of ecological vandalism. They can undermine national security, economic stability and disrupt climate action and biodiversity protection. According to the Financial Action Task Force, environmental crimes such as illegal logging and mining, wildlife trafficking and hazardous waste dumping generate annual revenues of up to \$280 billion, exceeding the profits of human trafficking and the illegal arms trade.

The growing awareness of the transnational threats posed by environmental crime is reshaping international, regional and national responses. Forest and nature loss are no longer viewed only as environmental concerns, but increasingly as high priorities for law



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ILONA SZABÓ

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Environmental crime has become so extensive that it is reshaping the global policy agenda, evolving from a niche concern to an urgent topic of international diplomacy.

enforcement and criminal justice.

At the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) in Colombia last year, several governments and regional organisations — including the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank — called attention to the relationships between environmental crime and biodiversity loss. And ahead of this year’s UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil, illegal deforestation and associated crimes are emerging as a potential theme, given their implications for nature loss, carbon dioxide emissions and global warming.

Meanwhile, the UN has intensified efforts to tackle environmental crime under its transnational crime prevention mandate. Efforts to combat forest crimes and wildlife trafficking have gained momentum over the past decade, especially since the 2015 Doha Declaration. In late 2024, UNTOC established an open-ended intergovernmental expert group tasked with evaluating existing legal frameworks, identifying critical gaps and considering the feasibility of establishing a dedicated UNTOC protocol on crimes affecting the environment.

Several other intergovernmental institutions are also wading into these debates and looking for ways to counter environmental crimes. The G20, for example, has taken modest steps towards integrating environmental crime into its broader economic and financial stability agenda.

In 2017, it agreed on a set of “high level principles on combating corruption related to illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products.” Then, at the 2024 G20 summit in Brazil, delegates highlighted the destabilising financial and economic effects of nature crimes, particularly those coming from illegal supply chains in commodities such as timber, minerals and wildlife products. For the first time, the G20 collectively endorsed measures to track and disrupt illicit financial flows linked to environmental crime.

Similarly, the BRICS grouping has tentatively identified environmental crime as a point of mutual concern and cooperation, following a 2021

meeting where member-state environment ministers explicitly acknowledged the threats posed by wildlife crime. Earlier this year, BRICS+ foreign ministers issued a statement highlighting the importance of tackling illicit financial flows connected to environmental crimes. Given the group’s significant global economic footprint, its growing alignment on this issue sends a powerful message.

Of course, coordinating and reconciling these diverse international efforts poses a challenge. Each forum approaches environmental crime differently. While the COPs are about protecting the climate and nature, UNTOC is focused on law enforcement and criminal justice; and the G20 and the BRICS+ are primarily concerned with illicit financial flows. The task now is to bring thematic and diplomatic coherence to these efforts.

Fortunately, the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice is exploring ways to harmonise disparate agendas, including by linking environmental crime to the countering of illicit financial flows.

Similarly, the BRICS+ summit in Rio de Janeiro in July, COP30 in Belém and the G20 summit in November all offer promising entry points to align priorities and strategies.

Ultimately, tackling environmental crime will require more than isolated national efforts. The problem demands sustained diplomacy across an array of international platforms. Governments, businesses and civil-society groups can each play to their strengths: the COP processes offer environmental legitimacy, UNTOC provides legal scaffolding, the G20 brings economic clout and the BRICS+ brings geopolitical weight and the potential for South-South cooperation.

Closer coordination across these forums would not only sharpen the global response but also lower the costs of multilateral environmental crime fighting and improve the results. In an era of geopolitical volatility and institutional drift, strategic coordination is essential to any effective global response to environmental gangsters.

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SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The Oman U-17 had completed a training programme in Muscat.

OMAN U-17 BEACH HANDBALL TEAM CAMP IN TUNIS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

The Oman U-17 beach handball team are gearing up in the underway external camp in Tunisia ahead of the 25th IHF Men’s Junior World Championship which will begin in Tunisia from Tuesday to next Sunday. Oman, making their debut on the world stage, will compete in Group A, alongside former champions and powerhouses including Iran (2017 champions and 2022 bronze medalists), Spain (2018 Youth Olympic gold medalists), and Puerto Rico.

Under the guidance of head coach Jaber al Balushi, the national squad is undergoing an intensive external training camp in Tunisia, featuring a series of friendly matches against elite international teams to boost their readiness for the prestigious global event.

As part of their build-up, the Omani team had played against Senegal on Saturday night, followed by a match against Brazil on Sunday. On Monday, the team will play Mexico in the morning session and the host nation Tunisia in the evening session. These preparatory matches are intended to simulate real match conditions and provide valuable competitive exposure to the young squad ahead of the championship.

Oman earned their spot in this year’s World Championship after receiving a nomination from the Asian Handball Federation (AHF), following Qatar’s withdrawal from the tournament. Oman had previously secured fourth place in the Asian Junior Beach Handball Championship in Thailand while Qatar ended in third place.

The national team had completed a rigorous two-month domestic training programme in Muscat before heading abroad to fine-tune their skills. The Omani delegation is determined to deliver a strong performance despite the challenges of debuting on such a grand stage. Oman’s group stage campaign will open against Iran on June 17, followed by back-to-back fixtures against Spain and Puerto Rico on June 18.

Zverev battles Fritz in Stuttgart Open final



ALEXANDER ZVEREV reached the final of the Stuttgart Open where he faces nemesis Taylor Fritz in a duel of top seeds in his bid for a second title of the year on Sunday.

Top seed Zverev saved a set point in the first set of his semifinal on Saturday against another American, third seed Ben Shelton, to win 7-6 (10-8), 7-6 (7-1).

Fritz defeated Canadian fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-4, 7-6 (7-5) on a hot afternoon.

Fritz has won the last four matches against Zverev to lead their series 7-5, including at last year’s Wimbledon, US Open and ATP Finals.

Neither Zverev nor Fritz faced a break point on Saturday while Zverev wasted six break points against the big serving Shelton.

“I am happy to be in the final. I will do everything to win tomorrow,” Zverev told broadcasters DF1 as he bids for a first title

on grass and 25th of his career.

In a rematch of their recent Munich final which Zverev won, the German wasted two break points against Shelton before taking the tight tie-break on his fifth set point with a service winner.

Zverev had a slight wobble by missing the first three after leading 6-3, and then had to save one at 7-6 down after conceding four points in a row.

Two more break points for Zverev came and went early in the second set, and another two — then match points - at 5-4. But Zverev then breezed through the second tie-break and wrapped up matters with his 15 ace on fourth match point, to go with 35 winners.

“It was a good match. I had break points, but not really because he fired an ace and winners. He is probably the best server in the world,” Zverev said.

Earlier, Fritz hit 10 aces and did not face a break point against Auger-Aliassime who managed 15 aces but also accumulated 23 unforced errors, while Fritz had just 12.

Fritz clinched the first set thanks to

a break in the 10th game when Auger-Aliassime hit a forehand wide on a hot afternoon.

Fritz missed his second break point in the fourth game of the second set but prevailed in the tie-break on second match point when Auger-Aliassime hit a backhand wide.

“I am so happy. It seemed it came down to a few points. I felt very lucky to get break in first set. I had more chances in the second. The tiebreak was close but it is great to be in the final,” Fritz said.

Last year’s US Open and ATP Finals runner-up Fritz bounced back well from a disappointing first-round exit at the recent French Open in his start into the grass court season, where he was won three of his eight career titles — all of them in Eastbourne. Speaking before the second semifinal, Fritz said he has no preference: “I don’t care, it will be a very tough match either way.”

Stuttgart is among the tune-up events for Wimbledon which starts on June 30.

— dpa

England Football Icon David Beckham awarded knighthood

LONDON: Former England football captain and global fashion icon David Beckham was knighted on Friday for his services to sport and charity, with The Who singer Roger Daltrey and actor Gary Oldman also receiving the honour.

Beckham, who played 115 times for England as well as for some of the world’s most high-profile clubs including Manchester United and Real Madrid, will now be known as “sir” and his wife Victoria, a former member of the Spice Girls pop group, will be known as Lady Beckham.

The 50-year-old, who has long been in the running for a



Britain's King Charles talks with David Beckham and Penny Lancaster. — Reuters

knighthood, was appointed an officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2003 — a lesser award in Britain’s honours system.

Victoria later received the same award for services to the fashion industry.

“Growing up in east London with parents and grandparents who were so patriotic and proud to be British, I never could have imagined I would receive such a truly humbling honour,” Beckham said in a statement issued to the Press Association. “I’m so lucky to be able to do the work that I do and I’m grateful to be recognised for work that gives me so much fulfilment,” he added.

BRAND BECKHAM

Beckham’s knighthood is the culmination of years of tireless efforts to transcend football and turn himself into a global icon at the intersection of sport, fashion and business.

The honour, one of the highest bestowed by the UK state, “is a powerful symbolic marker”, Marie Agnes Parmentier, professor of marketing at the University of Montreal and author of several papers on “Posh and Becks”, explained to AFP.

Even at the height of his football career, Beckham was building his global brand with thought to his retirement. — AFP

SHORTTAKES



Sam Burns plays his shot from the 12th tee. — Reuters

BURNS FIRES 65 TO GRAB US OPEN LEAD

OAKMONT, Pennsylvania: Sam Burns held the second round clubhouse lead at the US Open on Friday as overnight leader J J Spaun struggled late at Oakmont Country Club while Rory McIlroy was flirting with the cutline and Bryson DeChambeau looked certain to head home early.

Burns went out early from the 10th tee and covered the punishing Oakmont layout with a sparkling five-under-par 65 that put him at three under on the week for the year's third major and one shot clear of Spaun (72).

Burns, who mixed six birdies with a lone bogey, ran into trouble at his final hole where an errant tee shot forced him to take a penalty drop but left his next shot on the green and then curled in a 22-foot, left-to-right putt up the hill to save par.

Only three players under par for the week at Oakmont

Scheffler fails to make move, seven shots off lead

Defending champion DeChambeau misses halfway cut

Spaun had led Burns, who finished hours earlier, by one shot with four holes to play but fell back after a three-putt bogey at the 15th, where his birdie attempt raced by the cup, and another dropped shot at the par-three 16th. A determined Spaun drew level with a 22-foot bounceback birdie at the 17th but was unable to scramble for par at the last after finding the rough behind the green.

Viktor Hovland chipped in from the greenside rough for eagle at his eighth hole, the par-four 17th, en route to a 68 and was two shots back of Burns and one of just three players in the clubhouse under par on the week.

Pre-tournament favourite Scottie Scheffler, fresh off the worst first-round score relative to par of his majors career, mixed four birdies and five bogeys for a one-over 71 that left him at four over on the week.

Defending champion Bryson DeChambeau, who came into the week looking to become the first back-to-back US Open winner since Brooks Koepka in 2018, was at 10 over on the week with one hole to play. — Reuters



Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton (0) shoots the ball against Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2). — Reuters

Thunder down Pacers to level NBA Finals at 2-2

SHAI Gilgeous-Alexander scored 15 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter as the Oklahoma City Thunder rallied for a gritty 111-104 victory over the Indiana Pacers that leveled the NBA Finals at two games apiece on Friday.

Frustrated for much of the game by Indiana's relentless defense, NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander found a way to fight through.

He followed a three-pointer with a pull-up jumper to give the Thunder their first lead since the first half with 2:23 remaining.

They wouldn't trail again. Gilgeous-Alexander, who didn't get to the free-throw line in the first half, added six free-throws in the final 44 seconds.

"It's a dog fight," Gilgeous-Alexander said after another intense, physical battle between the two teams. "Every time you step on the floor, on both ends of the floor they make you work."

Jalen Williams scored 27 points, Chet Holmgren added 14 points and 15 rebounds and Alex Caruso chipped in with 20 points off the bench for the Thunder.

Pascal Siakam scored 20 points to lead Indiana, adding eight rebounds, five assists and five steals.

Tyrese Haliburton scored 18 points, Obi Toppin added 17 off the bench and the Pacers led by 10 late in the third quarter.

But Oklahoma City — who dropped

back-to-back games just twice this season and haven't lost consecutive games in the playoffs — clamped down defensively in the fourth, determined not to fall in a 3-1 hole.

"We knew it when we woke up this morning — 3-1 is a lot different than 2-2 going back home," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We played with desperation to the end the game and that's why we won."

Gilgeous-Alexander said the Thunder must "maintain the same desperation" when they host game five on Monday.

The Thunder are seeking their first title since the franchise relocated to Oklahoma City in 2008, having won it all in 1979 as the Seattle SuperSonics.

The Pacers, chasing their first NBA title, struck first in another fast-paced opening quarter in front of their energized fans, making four of their first five shots and building a nine-point lead midway through the opening period.

Oklahoma hit back, putting together a 9-0 run to tie it, but the Pacers — with a strong defensive effort on Gilgeous-Alexander and four steals from Pascal Siakam — emerged from the first period with a 35-34 lead.

The back and forth battle continued in the second, when Oklahoma City led by as many as six but could never pull away and Haliburton converted a three-point play — driving through traffic for a layup and making the free throw, his first of the series — to put Indiana up 60-57 at halftime.

By then, tensions had already ratcheted up. Toppin was assessed a flagrant foul for a check that sent Alex Caruso sprawling under the basket.

Thunder center Isaiah Hartenstein confronted Toppin and both received technical fouls.

'UNREAL' GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER

Oklahoma City's Luguentz Dort was later assessed a flagrant foul for swiping an arm over Toppin's head.

Toppin gave Indiana the first double-digit lead of the game with a dunk that put them up 86-76 late in the third.

But the Thunder dug deep, tying it up four times in the fourth quarter before Gilgeous-Alexander came through.

"You're up seven at home you've got to dig in and find a way and we were not able to do it tonight," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "But give them credit. They kept attacking, kept attacking, and their defense was great down the stretch."

Oklahoma City closed the game on a 12-1 scoring run, and Gilgeous-Alexander was the driving force.

"He's unreal," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said, although Caruso said nothing Gilgeous-Alexander does surprises him anymore.

"I've seen him do it night after night," Caruso said. "He doesn't show a lot of emotion on the court, but he's one of the most competitive guys in this league." — AFP

Leclerc crashes, Russell top in Canadian GP practice

MONTREAL: George Russell set the pace for Mercedes in the second Canadian Grand Prix practice on Friday after Red Bull's Formula One champion Max Verstappen led the opening session at Montreal's Circuit Gilles Villeneuve. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc sat out the later session after crashing in the first, leaving mechanics plenty of work to repair the car.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll, who missed the previous race in Spain due to hand and wrist pain, crashed at turn seven in second practice for his home grand prix and smashed the front left suspension.

Russell's time of one minute 12.123 seconds compared to Verstappen's earlier afternoon effort of 1:13.193.

The pair qualified on the front row



Red Bull's Max Verstappen after practice. — Reuters



Mercedes' George Russell ahead of the Canadian GP. — Reuters

last year with identical times, with Russell on pole but Verstappen going on to win the race for a third year in a row.

They also clashed in Spain two weekends ago, with Verstappen left on the brink of a ban after driving into the Mercedes.

The Dutch driver was only ninth in Friday's second practice, behind Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton, with McLaren's Lando Norris the closest to Russell and only 0.028 slower.

"The car is jumping like crazy in the rear, like the ride is terrible," reported Verstappen over the radio.

Mercedes' strong form was emphasised by Russell's rookie teammate Kimi Antonelli setting the third best time, 0.288 off the pace.

Runaway championship leaders

McLaren had made a comparatively slow start to the weekend until Norris' lap, with Australian Oscar Piastri seventh and sixth and testing upgrades including a new front wing.

Piastri leads Norris by 10 points after nine of the season's 24 rounds.

Williams' Alex Albon was second and fourth in the sessions, but strangely missed his garage when pitting in the second and had to go around again, with teammate Carlos Sainz third and seventh.

Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso ended the day fifth.

Leclerc brought out the red flags when he hit the wall at the second chicane with 45 minutes remaining, causing extensive damage to his Ferrari. Ferrari said the survival cell needed to be replaced. — Reuters



South Africa's Aiden Markram lifts the ICC Test Championship Mace with teammates. — Reuters



South Africa's Temba Bavuma lifts the ICC Test Championship Mace with teammates. — Reuters

SOUTH AFRICA

BEAT AUSTRALIA

BY FIVE WICKETS

TO WIN WTC

SOUTH AFRICA

won the World Test Championship (WTC) on Saturday, completing a remarkable turnaround to beat Australia by five wickets as they successfully chased down an imposing 282-run target.

But it was an edgy finish as they took 27.4 overs to slowly score the 69 runs needed to secure success on the fourth day at Lord's after resuming at 213-2 overnight.

In so doing, South Africa completed a successful pursuit of the joint second-highest winning fourth-innings total in test history at the London venue.

It was a first major cricket triumph for South Africa, who had earned an unwanted reputation for failure when on the cusp of victory over the last decades in limited overs competitions.

This was their first appearance in the WTC final, with opener Aiden Markram delivering a heroic innings of 136 to ensure success.

Markram, who reached his century late in the third



South Africa's Aiden Markram in action. — Reuters

It was a first major cricket triumph for South Africa, who had earned an unwanted reputation for failure when on the cusp of victory over the last decades in limited overs competitions.

day, added 34 more runs on Saturday, accumulating carefully before falling to a sharp catch by Travis Head with six runs needed to win.

Kyle Verreynne hit the winning run and was four not out at the end along with David Bedingham, who scored an unbeaten 21.

NERVES

“It was the most nervous I’ve ever been. I didn’t want to come out and bat but when Aiden went out I had to,” said Verreynne.

South Africa started the fourth day favourites to win but nervy, given a litany of past disasters, and would have been

further on edge when captain Temba Bavuma was out in the third over of the morning.

A rising delivery from Australia skipper Pat Cummins took an edge and saw Bavuma depart, having added only one run to his overnight total of 65.

Australia made two unsuccessful reviews of not out decisions as they sought a further breakthrough before Mitchell Starc clean bowled Tristan Stubbs for eight with 41 runs still needed.

Markram and Bedingham then diligently put together a 35-run partnership to see them to the brink of success, before the win was secured in the last over before lunch.

South Africa, who came into the contest as underdogs, won the toss on the opening day and gambled by putting Australia into bat. But with Kagiso Rabada returning figures of 5-51, they were vindicated as the defending champions were dismissed for 212. South Africa’s reply of 138 meant Australia had a 74-run lead, significantly increased after scoring 207 in their second innings, with their tail order recovering after they had slumped to 73-7. — Reuters

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Oman’s industrial exports to Saudi Arabia surge to RO 1.618 billion

OMANI industrial exports rose by 8.6 per cent year-on-year during the first quarter of 2025, reaching RO 1.618 billion, up from RO 1.49 billion in the same period of 2024.

According to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in May, the growth reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s strengthening industrial footprint in regional markets, particularly Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia saw a 28.3 per cent increase in imports of Omani industrial goods, reaching RO 259 million — highlighting the deepening economic ties and rising demand for Omani products in the Kingdom.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsiyah, Director-General of Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment

Saudi Arabia saw a 28.3% increase in imports of Omani industrial goods, reaching RO 259 million.

Promotion, attributed the growth to the efforts of the Economy, Trade and Industry Committee under the Oman-Saudi Coordination Council.

“This committee has focused on easing trade barriers, harmonising customs

procedures, enhancing border transit, and digitally linking the two countries’ trade systems,” she explained.

A key development has been the use of the Rub Al Khali border crossing, now a vital commercial artery facilitating the smooth flow of goods and services between the two nations.

The committee is also advancing cooperation in areas such as intellectual property, e-commerce, competition and export development. Nasra noted that Saudi Arabia is now Oman’s second-largest trading partner within the Gulf region. She emphasised Oman’s openness to increased Saudi investment, especially in special economic and free zones that offer state-of-the-art infrastructure and attractive incentives — aligned with Oman Vision 2040

and Saudi Vision 2030.

Mazen bin Humaid al Siyabi, Assistant Director-General at the Directorate General of Industry, noted that there has been marked progress in industrial cooperation between the two countries, with joint meetings, workshops and investor engagements intensifying over the past year.

He said that “priority sectors such as advanced manufacturing, technology and supply chains have seen notable growth in collaboration, laying the groundwork for industrial integration and shared innovation.”

The ministry’s focus on diversifying markets, boosting productivity and enhancing competitiveness is bearing fruit, he added, positioning Oman’s industrial sector as a key driver of economic diversification. — ONA

Oman and Uzbekistan strengthen trade and investment ties

TASHKENT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Uzbekistan have pledged to deepen cooperation across a wide range of sectors, following the conclusion of the fifth session of the Omani-Uzbek Joint Committee held in Tashkent.

The Omani delegation was led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, accompanied by Wafa bint Jabr al Busaidy, Ambassador of Oman to Uzbekistan.

Their Uzbek counterparts were headed by Laziz Kudratov, Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade, along with senior officials from both nations.

Discussions during the session focused on expanding collaboration in trade, investment, energy, logistics, agriculture, higher education, tourism and culture. Both sides also highlighted the growing importance of public-private partnerships in driving sustainable growth.

A significant outcome of the meeting was the agreement to enhance cooperation in the air transport sector, including increased operating rights. Both sides expressed interest in strengthening logistical partnerships, particularly by facilitating the re-export of Uzbek products through Omani ports, reinforcing Oman’s role as a regional logistics hub.

The two countries also agreed to intensify cooperation in scientific research, innovation, and higher education, with a view to supporting knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives.

Furthermore, the committee underlined the importance of closer engagement between chambers of commerce and business communities in both countries to boost trade volumes and investment flows.

On the sidelines of the committee meeting, Al Yousef held bilateral talks with several senior Uzbek officials, including Sherzod Shermatov, Minister of Digital Technologies, and Bakhtiar Odilovich Saidov, Minister of Foreign Affairs. These meetings provided an opportunity to address existing trade challenges and explore new investment prospects.

Al Yousef also participated in roundtable discussions involving Omani and Uzbek business leaders, where he promoted Oman

Both also highlighted the growing importance of public-private partnerships in driving sustainable growth.

as a strategic investment destination.

A detailed presentation on the “Invest in Oman” initiative was delivered by Omar al Harthy, Senior Investment Analyst at the ministry, highlighting the incentives, regulatory reforms, and infrastructure that make Oman attractive to foreign investors.

The Omani delegation also conducted a number of field visits, including to the American University of Technology in Tashkent, a subsidiary of Ozman Investment Company, and the Innovation Centre under Uzbekistan’s Ministry of Digital Technology.

These visits served to identify areas for potential collaboration in education and digital transformation.

The delegation visited facilities operated by AKFA Group, a leading Uzbek company involved in industrial manufacturing and education. Meetings were also held with representatives of Uzbek companies specialising in electronic payment systems, e-commerce and textiles.

Adding further significance to the visit, Al Yousef attended the inauguration of the Tashkent branch of the Golden Integration Oil and Gas Company.

The launch coincided with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Golden Integration and Oman’s Seih Al Sariyah Company, signalling a new chapter of cooperation in the energy sector.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to updating and activating existing bilateral agreements to reflect emerging priorities and global economic trends. — ONA

Fahad Mohammed Riaz Represents Oman at PETnology Europe 2025

Advocates for Sustainable PET Packaging Solutions

Zurich, Switzerland

May 28, 2025

Fahad Mohammed Riaz, Vice Chairman of Mohammed Riaz & Partner LLC, represented the Sultanate of Oman and his family-run enterprise at the prestigious 30th PETnology Europe Conference, held on 27-28 May 2025, at Lake Zurich, Switzerland. The theme of this year's conference focused on High-Tech Smart Solutions for a Sustainable PET Packaging Future, bringing together global industry leaders to discuss forward-thinking approaches to PET innovation.

Fahad joined a distinguished panel of experts, including Michael Feltes (ALPLA), Paulo Correia (LOGOPLASTE), Otto Hofstetter (OTTO HOFSTETTER), and Darrel Smith (WESTERN CONTAINER), sharing insights and experiences from across the global PET packaging landscape.

In his address, Fahad highlighted the rapid strides made by Mohammed Riaz & Partner LLC in Oman's water bottling sector through their homegrown brand, Sarooj Water. “A few years ago, we ventured into the water bottling business and experienced remarkable growth in just three years,” he noted. “We produce our own preforms, blow our bottles, cap, fill, and distribute – making us fully integrated in the production cycle.”

He added, “We currently produce around 1 billion preforms per year and are expanding further with a new production line that will introduce the 25/22 neck – a first in the Middle East – with the goal of doubling our capacity while maintaining a local focus.”

Fahad emphasized the company's commitment to Oman Vision 2040, which champions sustainability and innovation. “Our focus is on ultra-lightweight preforms and small format bottles. We have successfully reduced plastic usage in our preforms by over 30% and continue to work toward even greater reductions.”

In closing, Fahad expressed his gratitude to PETnology and fellow industry leaders, stating, “It's an honor to stand among pioneers shaping the future of sustainable packaging. I thank everyone for this incredible opportunity to share Oman's journey on this global stage.”

The participation of Mohammed Riaz & Partner LLC at PETnology Europe 2025 marks a significant milestone for the Omani manufacturing sector, signaling the country's emergence as a serious player in sustainable PET innovation.



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The Employer Branding Awards celebrate organisations that exemplify excellence in talent strategy.

Sohar International named Middle East best employer brand

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its position as a distinguished employer of choice in the region, Sohar International was recently awarded the prestigious ‘Middle East Best Employer Brand’ award, an accolade conferred by the World HRD Congress in association with the Employer Branding Institute.

Known for its rigorous and multi-tiered selection process — comprising expert recommendations, independent research and jury evaluation by global industry leaders — the Employer Branding Awards celebrate organisations that exemplify excellence in talent strategy and forward-thinking people practices.

Sohar International’s recognition underscores its steadfast commitment to fostering a performance-driven, inclusive culture — anchored in the belief that human capital is central to long-term value creation and institutional growth. Representing the bank at the ceremony, Mahira al Raisi, Chief People Officer at Sohar International, attended the event and received the award on behalf of the bank — further highlighting the leadership’s active role in driving the bank’s people agenda forward.

Commenting on the achievement, Mahira al Raisi, Chief People Officer at Sohar International, stated, “Our people are integral to every milestone we achieve and every transformation we lead.

“At Sohar International, we believe that sustained performance stems from an environment where talent is nurtured, ideas are valued and purpose is shared. We approach human capital with the same clarity and ambition that drives our business strategy — ensuring our people grow as the organisation evolves.

“From fostering inclusive leadership to building next-generation capabilities, our focus on empowering individuals at every level is a strategic imperative that supports our broader goals of being a resilient and future-forward institution. This recognition reaffirms that the investment we place in our people is both meaningful and measurable.”

Sohar International’s selection for the award was based on its ability to deliver impact-driven HR practices aligned with the bank’s overarching transformation agenda.

The jury commended the bank’s integrated talent strategy — ranging from proactive recruitment models and competency-based development pathways to inclusive leadership pipelines and retention mechanisms designed to future-proof the workforce.

AHLIBANK LEADS RO 100 MILLION SOVEREIGN SUKUK ISSUANCE

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its growing leadership in Oman’s capital markets, ahlibank, together with its Islamic window ahli islamic, has successfully led the issuance of an RO 100 million Sovereign Sukuk for the Government of Oman, in collaboration with other local institutions.

The transaction, which closed on June 4, 2025, was significantly oversubscribed by 2.6 times, with the final orderbook reaching RO 260 million.

Through a well-executed investor engagement strategy, ahlibank was able to tighten the average yield to 4.625%, lower than the initially set profit rate of 4.65%, thereby securing optimal pricing and outcomes for the Ministry of Finance.

This transaction marks a major milestone for ahlibank as it represents the bank’s first sovereign Sukuk issuance mandate from the Ministry of Finance. Executed in under two weeks, the issuance highlights ahlibank’s strong

institutional relationships and its capacity to mobilise the market swiftly and efficiently.

The Sukuk attracted robust demand from a diverse investor base, including retail investors, conventional and Islamic banks, insurance companies and pension funds. The robust investor response underscores the market’s strong confidence in the Government of Oman’s fiscal discipline, prudent economic policies and stable macroeconomic framework.

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Sharing his thoughts on the new Nautilus, a spokesperson from Arabian Car Marketing Company said, “To make a vehicle of this calibre available at such a rare price is our way of giving customers the opportunity to own not just a premium SUV, but a true expression of luxury, design and technology.”

With its confident stance and refined elegance, the Lincoln Nautilus turns every arrival into a statement. From its



With its confident stance and refined elegance, the Lincoln Nautilus turns every arrival into a statement.

contemporary silhouette and signature grille to the sculpted rear fascia and elegant full-width light bar, the Nautilus is a study in sophistication. A newly designed spoiler adds both flair and aerodynamic efficiency, while the Reserve trim ups the ante with stunning 21” bright machined aluminium wheels, highlighting prestige from every angle.

Inside, the Nautilus is an oasis of serenity. Ambient lighting, acoustic side glass and high-end materials create a tranquil, immersive experience.

The redesigned steering wheel is wrapped in premium Wollsdorf leather, with precision European stitching that elevates the touch-points of every drive. At the heart of the cabin sits a high-definition 11.1-inch

LCD Capacitive Touchscreen, offering intuitive control over infotainment and navigation systems.

The Nautilus is not just about luxury, it is built to perform. A 2.0-liter turbocharged engine delivers an impressive 250 hp and 380 Nm of torque, perfectly paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission and Lincoln’s intelligent all-wheel-drive system.

Adaptive suspension and AWD disconnect ensure a composed and responsive ride, while Auto Start-Stop technology adds to its efficiency.

Equipped with Lincoln Co-Pilot360, the Nautilus brings intelligent safety to the forefront. From BLIS with Cross-Traffic Alert to Pre-Collision Assist with Pedestrian Detection and Lane-Keeping System, every drive is underpinned by proactive protection. Add in Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop-and-Go and Lane Centering, and long journeys become as effortless as they are enjoyable.

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MUSCAT: General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, is making summer driving more rewarding with its exclusive Summer Campaign, offering unbeatable value across the Mitsubishi lineup.

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and keyless entry ensure a secure and effortless drive. EMI starts from RO 89, with free service for 5 years or 100,000 km. The L200, available in Double CAB and Single CAB variants, combines rugged capability with modern comfort.

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Stability and Traction Control and a heavy-duty suspension, it ensures optimal performance in any condition. Spacious interiors, keyless entry and high-grade fabric seats make every journey more convenient. EMI starts from RO 89 for SCAB and RO 99 for DCAB, with free service for 2 years or 30,000 km.

Along with special financing, customers can enjoy free insurance and registration, Llumar window tint, a RO 50 gift voucher and Mitsubishi’s 6-year unlimited kilometre warranty, providing long-term peace of mind.

“This summer, savings take centre stage as we bring customers unbeatable value on the Mitsubishi range,” said Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC. “Whether it’s thrilling road trips or everyday drives, our campaign ensures financial flexibility and support to maximise summer enjoyment — with confidence and comfort.”

ROP & Bank Muscat: Continued partnership to combat financial fraud

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) continue the successful awareness campaign aimed at educating the community about the risks of electronic financial fraud and effective prevention strategies.

Recently, three awareness videos were launched across various media and social media platforms, delivering crucial messages about emerging types of fraud that utilise suspicious websites, links and electronic transactions.

The campaign emphasises the importance of safeguarding



The campaign emphasises the importance of safeguarding personal information.

personal information, particularly the risks associated with sharing PIN numbers during these transactions.

The first video warns against suspicious websites that exploit users’ personal data, urging caution when interacting with digital platforms that masquerade as legitimate services.

The second video addresses the dangers of fake links promising jobs or products, which can lead to data theft.

While the third video focuses on the importance of not sharing financial data or bank account credentials, highlighting the need for vigilance in the face of rising cybercrime.

This collaboration between ROP and Bank Muscat reflects a commitment to enhancing community safety by equipping individuals and businesses with the knowledge to recognise fraudulent schemes.

The campaign aims to inform the public about various fraud types and the ever-evolving tactics used by fraudsters, while also providing practical advice on how to protect their financial information. It emphasises the necessity for users to verify the credibility of any website, link, or platform before disclosing

sensitive personal or financial information, to prevent falling victim to fraud and identity theft.

Bank Muscat is dedicated to strengthening partnerships with various institutions, including the ROP and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, to combat electronic financial fraud.

The bank seeks to empower the public with essential information to identify and avoid fraud. For any inquiries regarding electronic fraud, individuals can contact the Royal Oman Police at 80077444.

BUSINESS



Artist's render of Al Jabal Al Aali project.

OMANI MOUNTAIN DESTINATION PROJECT MOVES TO DESIGN PHASE

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 14

PLANS for the establishment of a landmark mountain destination in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar — one of Oman's highest summits — have advanced to the design stage. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has invited qualified international consultancy firms to bid for the master planning and detailed engineering design of the estimated RO 1.2 billion mega development. Known as Al Jabal Al Aali project, or the Omani Mountain Destination, the development is envisioned as a mixed-use residential, hospitality and wellness district spanning an 11.8 km² site atop Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The selected consultant will be responsible for the comprehensive infrastructure design, including planning, architecture, engineering, and tender preparation and award for major infrastructure and building components.

Part of a prestigious portfolio of sustainable cities promoted by the ministry, Al Jabal Al Aali will feature more than 2,500 homes, 2,000 hotel rooms, a health and wellness hub, as well as biodiversity and sports facilities. Situated at an elevation of 2,400 metres above sea level, the destination

promises cooler climes and breathtaking natural surroundings — rugged mountains, deep ravines, terraced farms and endemic juniper trees. In addition to the overall master plan, the selected consultant will be responsible for the comprehensive infrastructure design, including planning, architecture, engineering, and tender preparation and award for major infrastructure and building components. A key highlight of the development is the Western Wellness Village, an integrated health and ecotourism cluster featuring approximately 500 residential and hotel units backed by RO 200 million in investments. Spanning 630,000 m², the village will underscore the project's appeal as a premier wellness destination.

Designed to harmonise with the natural terrain, the new district will include paved walkways, open squares, green spaces and water features. Mobility solutions will be enhanced by a proposed cable car system, while an extreme sports facility will cater to thrill-seekers with options such as mountain biking, bungee jumping and rock climbing. Upon full build-out across multiple phases, Al Jabal Al Aali is expected to host a population of around 10,000 residents. The project forms part of Oman's broader urban development vision, which aims to attract billions of Omani rials in investment over the next decade across a suite of integrated tourism and residential projects. Alongside the flagship Sultan Haitham City in Al Khoud (Muscat Governorate), the portfolio includes Al Thuraya City in Bausher, a growing array of integrated neighbourhoods under the 'Sorouh' brand, and other smart, sustainable urban developments.

Submissions for Al Jabal Al Aali tender close on July 10, 2025

OMAN'S BROAD MONEY SUPPLY EXPANDS 7.5 PER CENT

MUSCAT: Oman's broad money supply rose by 7.5 per cent year-on-year to RO 25.4 billion by the end of April 2025, according to the latest figures released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). This growth was driven by a 12-per cent increase in narrow money and a modest 0.6 per cent rise in quasi-money, which includes savings and time deposits in Omani rials, certificates of deposit, margin

deposits and foreign currency deposits in the banking system. Despite this growth, currency held by the public declined by 7.5 per cent, while demand deposits surged by 16.8 per cent. In terms of interest rates, the weighted average rate on Omani rial deposits edged down slightly to 2.549 per cent in April 2025 from 2.580 per cent a year earlier. Meanwhile, the rate on Omani

rial loans decreased from 5.604 per cent to 5.555 per cent over the same period. The overnight interbank lending rate also fell to 4.392 per cent from 5.212 per cent in April 2024. This was attributed to a drop in the weighted average repo rate, which declined to 5 per cent, compared to 6 per cent a year earlier, aligning with monetary policy moves by the US Fed. — ONA

Food investments sector in Madayn reach RO 164m

INVESTMENT

in Oman's food industries sector continues to grow, with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announcing a total investment volume exceeding RO 164 million across 98 projects. These ventures span more than 1.5 million square metres and provide employment for over 3,600 people across Madayn's various industrial cities. Khalid bin Sulaiman al Salhi, Director General of Marketing and Commercial Affairs at Madayn, revealed that 13 new food industry projects have been localised in the first five months of 2025, drawing in over RO 14 million in investment. These projects, covering 224,000 square metres, include production facilities for vegetable oils, flour, tuna,



These ventures provide employment for over 3,600 people across Madayn's various industrial cities.

bottled water, food packaging, and logistics. Al Salhi confirmed that more projects are in the pipeline, with several contracts currently under review. Madayn has also designated specific zones for food industries in all its cities,

including newly developed areas in Al Mudhaihi, Thumrait, and Suwaiq. One of the flagship initiatives under development is the "Madayn Agricultural Project," aimed at promoting sustainability and innovation in

the food sector. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Madayn also plans to establish greenhouse facilities in several industrial cities to bolster local food production and support entrepreneurship. In a step towards international collaboration, Madayn signed a memorandum of understanding with a South Korean company to set up a smart farming project focusing on Korean fruits and a farm-based café concept. Madayn is intensifying marketing efforts both locally and internationally to promote food sector investment, including participation in specialised trade exhibitions. The food industry is a cornerstone of Oman's industrial development and a critical contributor to the country's food security and economic diversification goals under Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Stronger trading drives weekly gains on MSX

MUSCAT: Trading activity on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) picked up pace last week, with average daily volumes rising 19.2 per cent to RO 13.1 million, compared to RO 11 million the previous week. This increase came despite a shorter trading week due to the Eid Al Adha holiday. The uptick was fuelled by robust investor interest in companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority, which reported strong financial results. Local institutional investors and funds were also active net buyers, accounting for 69.3 per cent of total trading value. The combined trading value for the week reached RO 39.3 million. Notable contributors included OQ Basic Industries (RO 7.69 million), OQ Gas Networks (RO 6.1 million), OQ Exploration and Production (RO 6.07 million) and Asyad Shipping (RO 4.69 million). Together, these four companies accounted for 62.4



The uptick was fuelled by robust investor interest in companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority.

per cent of total trading. Despite the increased activity, the MSE's main index slipped by 35 points to close at 4,543 points, ending a six-week streak of gains amid profit-taking in key stocks. The industrial index fell 94 points, financials were down 44 points, services dropped by 12 points, and the Shariah index

edged down 3 points to 441. Market capitalisation rose by RO 82 million, closing at RO 28.88 billion. This was largely driven by gains in OQ Exploration and Production, whose market cap increased by RO 136 million after shares climbed by 17 baisas to 312 baisas.

The company has scheduled an extraordinary general assembly for June 24 to consider amending its articles of association, including a proposal to allow share buybacks. Elsewhere, Al Anwar Investments invited shareholders to its AGM on June 30 to discuss a 4 baisa-per-share dividend and 4 per cent bonus shares. The company's shares ended the week at 85 baisas. Meanwhile, Fincorp Financial Services announced plans to exit the brokerage sector and transition into investment activities, pending approval from the Financial Services Authority and shareholder consent at an EGM on June 29. In the education sector, the Omani Education and Training Investment Company reported a net profit of RO 7.2 million for the first nine months of its fiscal year ending on August 31— up from RO 6.5 million in the same period last year. — ONA

TUMULTUOUS EFFORT

Trump approves Nippon Steel, US Steel pact



US President Donald Trump approved Nippon Steel's \$14.9 billion bid for US Steel on Friday, capping a tumultuous 18-month effort by the companies that survived union opposition and two national security reviews. Trump signed an order saying the tie-up could move forward if the companies sign an agreement with the Treasury Department resolving national security concerns posed by the deal. — Reuters

ECONOMIC TRAJECTORY

US consumer sentiment improves



US consumer sentiment improved for the first time in six months in June as trade tensions between the US and China eased, but households worried about the economy's trajectory. The rise in sentiment reported by the University of Michigan's Surveys of Consumers on Friday was, however, overshadowed by Israel's missile strikes against Iran, which boosted oil prices to multi-month highs. — Reuters

EMERGENCY PLAN

Egypt halts fertiliser production



Egyptian fertiliser producers were forced to halt operations on Friday due to a drop in natural gas imports from Israel, industry sources said. They said major Israeli gas fields had suspended operations following Israel's military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities and missile factories. In response, an emergency plan was enacted prioritising gas allocations, including cutting supply. — Reuters

OPINION

Income tax: A strategic test of fairness and fiscal vision



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of business and politics section at Oman Observer

OMAN stands at a pivotal juncture in its fiscal evolution—where traditional oil revenues alone can no longer guarantee long-term sustainability, and where new financial tools are needed to anchor the state's ambitions under Vision 2040.

Among the reforms under consideration, personal income tax remains one of the most consequential, though still subject to timing and public readiness.

This is not about immediate implementation, but about preparing the groundwork for a modern taxation system that reflects Oman's strategic maturity.

Income tax, if introduced thoughtfully, represents more than just a new revenue stream. It embodies a shift in how a nation defines shared responsibility.

In Oman's case, the proposed structure is highly selective—targeting only individuals with net annual earnings above RO 30,000, who represent a narrow segment of the population. The rate under discussion is a modest 5 per cent, placing Oman well below global tax averages.

This approach ensures that those who have benefitted most from the country's economic system contribute a fair share, without burdening the broader population. It's a move rooted in equity, not austerity.

The income tax proposal also signals the government's intent to close systemic loopholes that have enabled high-income individuals to shield earnings under corporate structures, avoiding the 15 per cent corporate tax.

These practices, though technically legal, erode trust in the tax regime and weaken the state's fiscal base.

A personal income tax helps balance the system—ensuring that revenue flows are not distorted by creative accounting or structural arbitrage.

It complements other reforms, including VAT and customs adjustments, which aim to diversify income without compromising fairness.

For foreign investors, the tax carries little to no direct impact. Oman has signed comprehensive double taxation agreements with key trading partners, meaning any tax paid in Oman reduces liabilities elsewhere. Moreover, the tax applies to individuals—not corporations—so the fundamentals that attract foreign capital remain intact.

Contrary to alarmist narratives, the policy has been designed with competitiveness in mind, ensuring that Oman continues to offer one of the region's most stable and attractive investment climates.

The most critical variable now is timing, not design.

The government has made clear that income tax will only be enacted when conditions are favourable—when digital systems are in place, when enforcement is consistent, and when public understanding is sufficient to support the transition.

This caution reflects lessons learned from international experiences: rushed implementation of tax reforms can backfire.

Oman's methodical pace is a sign of policy prudence, not hesitation.

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VISION 2040 REQUIRES BOLD BUT BALANCED MOVES
Oman's Vision 2040 aspires to a knowledge-driven, diversified economy.

That ambition demands a stable fiscal platform—and that, in turn, requires a broad-based contribution model. Relying solely on oil or VAT is not sustainable. Income tax, even in its limited proposed form, is a strategic bridge toward long-term resilience.

Moreover, by taxing only the wealthiest, the state affirms its commitment to social equity, while signalling to international partners that it is serious about transparency, governance, and economic discipline.

While technical preparations continue, what is equally important is a national conversation around the role of tax in state-building.

Citizens must see taxation not as a cost, but as an investment in shared prosperity. To win trust, future tax policy must be paired with clear communication, visible results in public services, and mechanisms for accountability.

A fair tax system is not just about rates—it's about how the money is spent, and whether it improves lives. Income tax in Oman is not yet a reality—but it is on the horizon. When it arrives, it will do so as part of a larger national transformation: from a rentier state to a participatory economy. If implemented with foresight and fairness, it will mark a new chapter in Oman's fiscal independence.

This is less about taxing wealth, and more about laying the foundation for a modern, accountable state—one where every rial paid is a step toward national strength.

OMAN CONTRIBUTES TO GLOBAL WHALE MIGRATION ATLAS



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate.

IN A landmark step for marine conservation, Oman has contributed to a major new global initiative to map and safeguard the migratory "superhighways" of whales.

The Blue Corridors platform (BlueCorridors.org), launched this week by WWF and an international coalition of scientists and conservation groups, digitally charts decades

of whale tracking data to drive action on ocean protection worldwide.

Oman's unique satellite tracking data, gathered through the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and marine research group Future Seas and supported by the Environment Authority, is now part of this global dataset; helping to illuminate how whales travel through the region's waters and beyond.

"We've contributed Oman's dataset to this collaborative effort," Suad al Harthy from the Environment Society of Oman confirmed, "offering insights that will support international efforts to protect whales from rising threats such as ship strikes, fishing gear entanglement, underwater noise and climate change".

For the first time, BlueCorridors.org brings together three decades of global tracking data, integrating it with maps of overlapping marine risks to create a dynamic tool for governments, scientists and policymakers.

The initiative highlights the movement of whales through the territorial waters of multiple countries and underscores the urgency of international collaboration, especially as seven of the world's 14 great whale species remain endangered or vulnerable despite decades of conservation efforts.

"Oman's contribution is a vital part of this global effort," said Dr Andrew Willson of Future Seas Oman, one of the contributing researchers. "By understanding where whales travel, and where they face the greatest risks, we can work together on more informed conservation plans to protect them — not just in Oman's waters, but across the migratory routes that connect the dots between important habitats used by the whales for breeding and feeding."

Launched ahead of World Oceans Day (8 June) and the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, the project also advances global goals to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 — part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

Building capabilities for a sustainable economy

THE Oman Vision 2040 includes strategic positioning such as improving the use of human resources, innovation and institutional development.

ICV further these objectives by including local human resource development as a requirement within industrial and commercial agreements. It also encourages the public-private partnership for the establishment of training and vocational institutes and other skills development programmes aimed at enabling Omanis to fully engage in the economy.

EXPLORING WORKFORCE CAPABILITIES

Workforce capabilities are the skills, knowledge, attitudes and actions that empower employees to execute their duties and align with the strategic objectives of the organisation.

In relation to sustainable economies, workforce capabilities encompass not only technical capabilities, but also include soft skills, leadership, innovation and ecological awareness.

An agile and adaptive workforce is important for stimulating innovation, increased productivity and global market competitiveness.

In Oman, workforce development mitigates the challenges of ensuring that the economic returns from industrialisation and foreign direct investments are retained domestically, thus promoting employment opportunities, income and social development.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. IMPROVING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING: A strong education system and vocational training offer a solid base for workforce capability enhancement. Oman is improving educational coverage. However, the alignment of educational content with labour market requirements still needs more attention.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): The TVET has



A strong education system and vocational training offer a solid base for workforce capability enhancement.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/ In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

to be comprehensive and aligned with high priority growth areas like energy, logistics, tourism and information technology. Curricula development through public-private partnerships would enhance compliance with industry expectations.

STEM Education: Focusing on the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) during secondary and higher education levels is fundamental in shaping the career pathways of the youth.

Life-Long Learning: The workforce can stay relevant by encouraging continuous education through various online courses, professional certifications and programmes that provide training while working.

2. DRIVING LOCALISATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER INITIATIVES: The Oman economy benefits from foreign direct investments and multinational corporations.

Nevertheless, maximising the In-Country Value (ICV) impacts requires local employee training and expatriate skill development.

On-the-Job Training (OJT): Expatriate staff should be required to deliver formalised OJT to Omanis, thereby facilitating skills transfer.

Mentorship Programmes: Experienced Omanis can guide youths, catalysing professional learning and enabling them to take on leadership roles sooner.

Knowledge Management Systems: Ensuring ongoing expertise by documenting the processes, conducting workshops and sharing internally sustains the institutional memory and expertise.

3. ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS: Partnerships among government agencies, educational institutions and the private sector are essential to create effective and agile workforce ecosystem.

Sector Councils: The creation of sectoral councils that include industry, education and policy leaders can strategically advance economic needs.

ICV Scorecards: The implementation of ICV scorecards to measure a company's progress in developing its workforce can promote accountability and stimulate investment in human capital.

National Workforce Development Plans: Integrated skill mapping, labour market forecasting and planning at the strategic level require skills gap identification and intervention design.

4. ENTREPRENEURIAL AND INNOVATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: Insolvency cannot occur without one being able to think outside the box and being an entrepreneur; it is an absolute necessity in the modern economy.

Entrepreneurship Education: The creation of self-employment and SMEs can be achieved by including entrepreneurship in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Innovation Hubs: Start-up accelerators and incubators can be of great assistance to young Omanis in establishing their own businesses if provided the appropriate resources and support.

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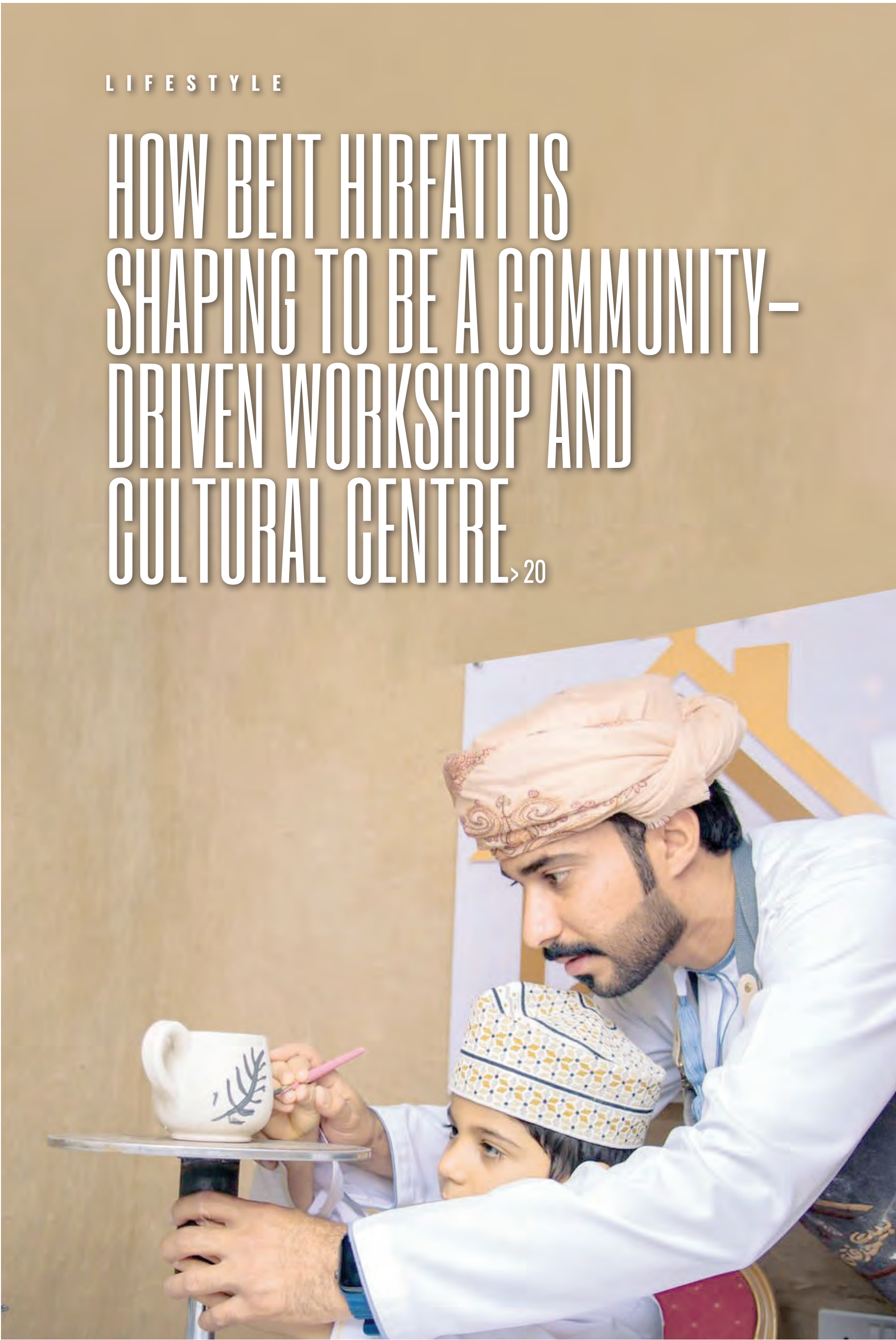
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FASHION

Hats on! A milliner talks Ascot’s most important accessory



AT HER London studio, Merve Bayindir carefully glues on dried flowers onto a pale pink saucer hat. Nearby, an array of other colourful headpieces are on display.

The Turkish-born milliner has been busy making hats for guests attending the annual Royal Ascot racing event, where headwear is a must.

“It is the biggest runway. It’s the Oscars. It’s the Golden Globes... that is what it is for us... milliners, because you can’t see that many amazing hats in one spot at the same time for a week,” she said.

The horse-racing event, held in Ascot just outside London, kicks off on June 17 for five days. It has become as much known for the colourful fashion as for the sport.

Its various enclosures have different dress codes — the strictest is for the royal enclosure.

“You have to have minimum ten centimetres of diameter on a hat,” Bayindir said.

“So (for) the ladies in royal enclosure, we always say make sure that your hat is not a fascinator,” she added, referring to elaborate, decorative headpieces, often fixed on a band or clip.

For the Queen Anne and village enclosures, hats, headpieces or fascinators are allowed.

In terms of colours, Bayindir said designs in pale pink and blue were annual staples, with fuchsia, sage green and lilac also proving popular lately. As for size, the bigger the better.

“It doesn’t matter who you are, you can be the star and take that chance and be outrageous,” she said.

“Royal Ascot itself has a very big personality. So you need to sort of support that big personality and be part of it if you want to be really enjoying the environment.” — Reuters

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



TRAVEL

Visitors stand near the Sphinx of the ancient Egyptian king Amenemhat III (19th century BC) at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo’s central Tahrir Square. — AFP



CELEBRATION

Dancers dressed in festival costumes perform during the 127th Independence Day celebration at Quirino Grandstand in Manila. — AFP



MUSIC

Ukrainian music band “Kurgan and Aggregate” performs in the basement of one of the city’s theatres at their charity concert in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Exhibit



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New T-Rex ancestor discovered in drawers of Mongolian institute



Scientists have uncovered surprising new insights into the family tree of tyrannosaurs, revealing that bones stored for decades in a Mongolian institute actually belong to a previously unknown species. These fossils, initially discovered in southeastern Mongolia in the early 1970s, were mistakenly identified as part of Alectrosaurus and stored away for fifty years. Recently, during a visit to the institute, PhD student Jared Voris noticed discrepancies in the specimens. Further analysis confirmed they belonged to a new, slender tyrannosaur species named Khankhuuluu mongoliensis, meaning “dragon prince of Mongolia,” due to its smaller size compared to the iconic T-Rex. This species measured approximately four metres (13 feet) long and weighed around 750 kilogrammes, comparable in size to a large horse. Its discovery provides crucial

clarity about tyrannosaur evolution, which previously had a confusing and “messy” family history. Khankhuuluu is believed to have migrated from Asia to North America about 66 million years ago, travelling across a land bridge that once connected Siberia and Alaska. This migration played a significant role in the development of North American tyrannosaurs. The family path of these predators was complex — one lineage evolved into the massive T-Rex, which reigned as the top predator until it was wiped out 66 million years ago by a catastrophic asteroid impact. Prior to this, smaller relatives like Pinocchio rex, with its long snout, and larger relatives like Tarbosaurus, one of the biggest Asian tyrannosaurs, emerged. The discovery of Khankhuuluu underscores how many fossils may still be waiting to reveal more about the ancient tyrannosaur family. — AFP



STUDIO GHIBLI’S TOP FIVE FILMS



JAPAN'S Oscar-winning anime house Studio Ghibli turns 40 this month. Here are the studio's top five films that have delighted fans over the decades:

- 'NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND' (1984) -**

Studio Ghibli was founded in 1985, but this post-apocalyptic story featuring a young, independent princess curious about giant insects is considered its first film. It was based on a comic-strip series that Ghibli co-founder Hayao Miyazaki wrote for a magazine targeted at anime fans. Set 1,000 years after a war that destroyed human civilisation, the story takes place in a valley protected from toxic air emitted from poisonous forests. Miyazaki won critical acclaim and a cult following for the film about Nausicaa, who discovers the forests' secrets after getting embroiled in conflicts between countries trying to revive a lethal “giant warrior”.
- 'MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO' (1988) -**

This beloved Ghibli classic is set

- in the 1950s Japanese countryside where two young sisters with a sick mother move from the city. They encounter the cuddly yet mysterious forest spirit Totoro and Catbus, a 12-legged grinning cat with a hollow body in the form of a bus — two characters who have become the Studio Ghibli mascots. The film was turned into a play for the first time by Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company in 2022.
- 'PRINCESS MONONOKE' (1997) -**

The tale of a girl raised by a wolf goddess in a forest threatened by humans was a smash hit in Japan and raised Miyazaki's profile internationally. A young prince on a journey to find a cure for his curse meets San, also known as Princess Mononoke — meaning a spirit or monster in Japanese. The prince sets out to find ways to avoid wars between destructive humans and animal gods, centred around the ultimate god which is nature itself. Ghibli expert and Tufts University professor Susan Napier described “Princess Mononoke” to AFP as “serious, dark and violent”.
- 'SPIRITED AWAY' (2001) -**

Miyazaki won his first Oscar with

- this film about a girl who gets lost in a mystical world of gods and spirits where she tries to save her parents, who are turned into pigs. In order to survive, 10-year-old Chihiro is told by a mysterious boy to get a job at an enormous Japanese bathhouse run by a witch. In a story infused with Japanese beliefs and traditions, Chihiro gains confidence through her work and solves the boy's curse before rescuing her parents.
- 'THE BOY AND THE HERON' (2023)**

Miyazaki's second Oscar-winning film — and likely the 84-year-old's last feature — follows a boy struggling to accept his new life after his mother dies in the haunting fire-bombing of Tokyo during World War II. Everything changes when he meets a talking heron and embarks on a journey to an alternate universe, shared by the living and the dead, to find his missing stepmother. In a documentary, Miyazaki, visibly affected by the 2018 death of Ghibli co-founder Isao Takahata, said the pair had had a “love-hate relationship” and that he had based the character of the grand-uncle on him. — AFP

FEATURES



to give locals, especially young Omanis, a tangible connection to their heritage, and a platform to showcase their creativity.

Starting humbly, with limited resources and self-taught skills, Said faced numerous challenges. Finding the right equipment and accessible training spaces was tough. Yet, each obstacle became a catalyst for innovation. Fuelled by passion, he slowly developed Beit Hirfati into more than a mere workshop — it became a community hub, a cultural beacon and an educational centre. Workshops cover not just pottery creation, but delve deep into techniques of wheel throwing, glazing and decorating, designed



to be inclusive of all ages — from curious children to seasoned artisans.

The impact on the local community has been profound. School children, in particular, often attend workshops driven less by chance and more by a newfound enthusiasm for their cultural roots. Parents have seen their children's creativity flourish as they learn to shape earth with their own hands, igniting a sense of pride in their heritage. This is a vital aspect of Oman's cultural preservation — the desire for younger generations to understand and appreciate the craftsmanship behind traditional objects, reconnecting them with a shared historical identity.

Oman's reverence for pottery runs deep. Historically, earthenware was not only utilitarian but also a form of artistic expression. Ancient Omanis crafted intricate vessels, with some decorated with patterns that reflected regional identity and artistic motifs. Pottery remains embedded in Oman's cultural DNA, with evidence of its significance visible across archaeological sites. Baked into the earth of Oman are countless stories — of trade, daily life and artistic mastery — that stretch back as far as the Iron Age, cementing pottery's place as a cornerstone of Oman's long heritage.

Said's vision with Beit Hirfati is to honour this legacy and revive it in a way that resonates with today's society. Cultural collaborations have expanded the project's reach — partnering with schools, universities and cultural organisations across Oman and the Gulf. These collaborations have served to rekindle pride in Oman's traditional crafts and attract international interest, acting as a bridge between the past and the present. There's a growing realisation that crafts like pottery are not just relics of history but living expressions of cultural identity that can thrive in modern society.

Looking ahead, Said dreams of expanding Beit Hirfati into a certified centre for traditional arts, establishing branches across various governorates of Oman. His aspiration is to create a network that nurtures and celebrates Oman's diverse crafts — be it pottery, weaving, embroidery, or other ancestral skills threatened by the rapid encroachment of modernity. He believes that these crafts are vital threads in the fabric of Oman's cultural tapestry and must be preserved, not just as tourism attractions but as living traditions that empower local artisans and inspire future generations.

Said often reflects on the importance of perseverance and passion. "Start, even if it's small," he advises young Omanis with an entrepreneurial spirit or a yearning to reconnect with their roots. "Take your time to learn, and let your passion guide you. Crafts have soul. When you work from the heart, people will feel it, and they will support you."

To understand the significance of Said's revival efforts, it's essential to consider Oman's long history with pottery. The country has an ancient legacy of creating earthen ware, dating back thousands of years. Archaeological excavations across Oman have unearthed tens of thousands of shards of pottery — vessels that testify to a sophisticated tradition of craftsmanship that was once vital to daily life, trade and cultural expression. From the bustling ports of Suhar to the rugged mountains of Al Hajar, pottery played an essential role in blending utility with artistry. These relics provide a tangible link to Oman's past, illustrating how fundamental clay was in connecting communities, shaping economic exchanges and expressing cultural identity.

But as time progressed, modernisation and technological advances began to threaten this ancient craft. Mass-produced ceramics, plastic ware and the influence of global markets saw traditional pottery fade into the background, risking extinction. For many Omanis, especially the younger generations, pottery became a forgotten chapter of their history, overshadowed by rapid urbanisation and digital landscapes.

Yet, a new wave of Omanis are breathing life into their roots. There's a palpable reawakening among the youth — an awakening to the significance of indigenous crafts and a desire to reclaim their cultural identity. Enthusiasts and artisans now see traditional crafts not merely as relics but as vibrant expressions of modern-day pride. This revival is part of a broader cultural renaissance that has prioritised preserving Oman's historic traditions amidst the convenience of technology-driven lifestyles.

It's in this context that Beit Hirfati emerged — not just as a workshop, but as a symbol of this cultural resurgence. The name, meaning "The House of My Craft", encapsulates the spirit of belonging and pride. Said envisioned his space as a sanctuary where traditional techniques could be learned, cherished and passed down. The project was born out of a desire

HOW BEIT HIRFATI IS SHAPING TO BE A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN WORKSHOP AND CULTURAL CENTRE

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

THE STORY of Beit Hirfati is a testament to the enduring spirit of cultural revival and the deep-rooted connection Oman has with its ancient craft traditions. It all began with a young Omani man named Said al Hinai, whose first encounter with clay sparked a journey that would intertwine history, identity and modern innovation. At a glance, it may seem like a simple story about pottery, but beneath it lies a rich narrative of revival, pride and resilience — an emblem of Oman's ongoing reawakening of its cultural roots in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Said's journey into the world of clay was unplanned but profoundly impactful. He didn't possess a professional background in ceramics nor an entrepreneurial blueprint in mind. Instead, what he carried was an authentic love for traditional crafts and a desire to preserve Omani heritage for future generations. His hands first touched clay not in a workshop, but in a moment of pure curiosity — touching earth that seemed to whisper stories of ancestral life. In that simple act, he found a connection that felt both timeless and deeply personal: clay was more than a medium; it was a living history.