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GCC waste generation surges 154%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The waste management market in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is projected to grow from an estimated US\$68.3bn in 2025 to US\$97.4bn by 2030, according to a study by Mordor Intelligence. The sector is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 7.4% over the five-year period, driven by rising waste volumes and enhanced treatment infrastructure.

Latest figures released by the GCC Statistical Centre show that total waste collected across member states reached approximately 262.7mn tonnes by the



end of 2023, marking a 153.7% increase over 2019 levels. Of this, 192mn tonnes were treated, representing a 128.5% increase. The per capita share of house-

hold waste in the region declined by 17.4% to 1.4kg per person per day, reflecting a shift in consumption patterns and increased awareness. Household waste

volumes, which had peaked at 35.5mn tonnes in 2020, dropped to 30.8mn tonnes in 2023. Almost all the waste collected - 99.2% - was classified as non-

hazardous. Among the hazardous waste collected, 95.8% was exported for treatment, mainly involving recovery of metals and metallic compounds. The region

has met Sustainable Development Goal 12 targets for hazardous waste recycling and reuse, with a reported 30% recycling rate in 2023. GCC countries have collectively submitted 87 national reports under the Basel Convention on hazardous waste control.

Medical waste volumes have also shifted post-COVID-19. Hazardous waste from the health-care sector dropped 11.4% in 2023 compared to 2022. However, the region has expanded its treatment capacity significantly. The number of incineration facilities rose to 23 by the end of 2023, up 27.8% from 2022.

Industrial hazardous waste recorded a 23.8% increase over

the same period, indicating a rebound in industrial activity following the pandemic. Agricultural waste rose sharply to 2.5mn tonnes in 2023 - a 44% increase over the previous year. Waste from other economic activities rose from 11.9mn tonnes in 2019 to 14.3mn tonnes in 2023.

The GCC's evolving waste landscape, marked by declining household contributions and rising volumes from agriculture and industry, reflects both environmental policy shifts and economic recovery trends. Ongoing investments in treatment infrastructure and waste export mechanisms are central to the region's broader sustainability goals.

Oman advances work on national biotech strategy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has taken a key step towards shaping its National Biotechnology Strategy with the launch of an international tender to appoint a specialised consultancy firm to guide the initiative.

At its third meeting held on Sunday, the Biotechnology Supervisory Committee reviewed progress made since its previous session, including completion of preparatory work required to initiate the strategy. The meeting was chaired by H E Dr Rahma al Mahrrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innova-



tion. Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) floated the tender via the electronic platform of Authority for Projects, Tenders and Local Content.

The consultancy will be responsible for reviewing relevant

laws and regulations, identifying strategic priorities, drafting a financial plan, and proposing an executive roadmap for implementation. It will also recommend governance improvements and mechanisms for periodic review, with the strategy expected to

cover major biotechnology domains including red, green and white applications. Firms with 'Excellent' or 'First' vendor ratings are invited to submit bids by July 25.

Dr Kawthar al Balushi, Director of the National Biotechnology Strategy Project, briefed committee members on the timeline and activities for the next phase.

Coinciding with the committee meeting, a cooperation programme was signed to provide support for the strategy's preparation. The agreement brings together MoHERI, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and Oman India Fertiliser Company.

Malnutrition in Gaza leading to 'silent massacre'

Palestinian Territories - At least 86 people in Gaza, including 76 children and ten adults, have died due to hunger and malnutrition following Israel's blockade on the enclave, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The Health Ministry said the level of hunger and malnutrition in the enclave was leading to a 'silent massacre'.

'The Health Ministry holds the [Israeli] occupation and the international community responsible. We demand the immediate opening of crossings to allow food and medicine in,' the min-

istry said. In the last 24 hours, 18 people died in Gaza due to famine, it found.

Systematic ethnic cleansing

Hamas said Israel's actions across Gaza are 'systematic ethnic cleansing in which killing, starvation and thirst are used as tools of genocide'.

In a statement, Hamas said the deaths of more than 70 children from malnutrition were a 'stain on humanity' and the silence from the international community was an "additional crime".



03

Local projects thrive in Wadi Darbat during khareef



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It's not about the size of the role: Yousuf al Housni

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WATT A DRIVE

Mwasalat trialled its first ever electric bus on the scenic Ruwi-Muscat route earlier this month. Are more of such environment friendly measures needed in Oman? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



YOUR SAY

Gurpreet Bhatia
R&D manager

I'm glad that companies like Mwasalat are taking such initiatives that stand against climate change. However, steps must be taken to make electric vehicles more accessible and affordable to the general public if we expect to make any significant progress towards our goals of protecting our environment.

Reena Nambiar
Nurse

I took the trial ride and loved it! No vibrations, no fumes - just peaceful travel. If Oman wants to attract eco-conscious tourists and improve quality of life, this is a wonderful start. More vehicle charging stations and electric routes would encourage us all to choose greener options.

Ahmed al Amri
Passenger

I took the bus from Ruwi to Muttrah and must say that the experience was great. Seeing the electric bus gliding quietly through Ruwi felt refreshing. We need more of these, not just for tourism routes, but daily commuting. Less noise, no smoke and better for everyone's health. Oman is slowly becoming green and Mwasalat is taking the lead.

Saif al Harthy
Businessman

I believe sustainability begins with choices like this. Public transport

Fatma al Maamari
Student

It's a step in the right direction. With Oman's natural beauty and rising climate challenges, switching to electric transport is crucial. I hope electric buses become the norm. Clean, quiet and smart - it's exactly what Oman's

Arjun Menon
Businessman

Electric buses are an intelligent move. With rising fuel prices and environmental concerns, cleaner alternatives are essential. This pilot route is just a beginning. I'd like to see electric taxis and delivery vans soon. Oman has the sunshine - we should use it to solar power the future.

Nourah Akhtar
Teacher

Introduction of the Mwasalat elec-

tric bus is a step in the right direction to reduce our carbon footprint and improve sustainability of public transport. I believe that such environment friendly initiatives by companies like Mwasalat will encourage consumers and employees to follow sustainable practices that protect the environment in the long run.

Samita Chakraborty
Teacher

Allowing these buses to travel on smaller roads is a step we can take to increase accessibility to sustainable public transport and reduce our carbon footprint. However, we

future deserves. I'd love to see them running in Salalah, too!

rely heavily on oil and natural gas for electricity generation. Oman should focus on finding alternative sources of electricity - like solar energy - to sustainably preserve our natural resources.

Abdullah Abadi
Tourist guide

These measures are essential for reducing our carbon emissions and air pollution within our country. Since it's less ideal for us to walk or cycle to our intended destination in this heat, a demand for eco-friendly modes of transportation should be expected and met by these companies.

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SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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3rd Sports Spark kicks off at OCEC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) officially launched the third edition of Sports Spark, Oman's flagship indoor summer sports festival, with a grand opening ceremony on Thursday. Held under the patronage of Ahmed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, the event being held in Exhibition Halls 1 and 2 started on July 18 and will end on August 16.

Organised in collaboration with Muscat Governorate, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omran Group and Sabco Sports, with sponsorship from Sohar International, the festival aims to promote fitness, community wellbeing and social engagement during the summer.

Speaking about the launch, Said al Shanfari, CEO of OCEC, said, "This edition places strong emphasis on accessibility and affordability. We want everyone -



regardless of age and ability - to feel welcome and empowered to participate. Following the overwhelming success of last year's edition, which welcomed over 50,000 participants, Sports Spark 2025 is back with an even more dynamic and inclusive programme. This year's event aims to promote fitness, wellbeing and community engagement during the hot summer months in Oman by offering access to high-quality, air-conditioned facilities and a wide variety of sports and activities."

Sports Spark 2025 offers over 20 indoor sports, including football, basketball, volleyball, pickleball and badminton, with new additions like indoor golf and hockey. Facilities are available for booking at just RO2 per hour, making the event accessible for individuals, teams and clubs alike.

Following the success of last year's edition, this year brings an expanded programme. Highlights include the return of Fight Night, debut of Muscat Night Run on August 1 in collaboration

with Muscat Marathon, and the second season of the Phygital competition.

The inaugural Football Academy Cup will feature 32 youth teams, while Ninja Obstacle Series launched this year promises thrilling challenges inspired by global obstacle races.

Families can enrol children in the Sports Spark Summer Camp, while corporate groups can access wellness packages. The festival runs daily from 8am to 11pm. Details are available on www.sportsparkoman.com

RO2mn spent on maintenance work of aflaj across North Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Ibra

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has completed maintenance work of 162 aflaj in North Sharqiyah as part of efforts to sustain traditional water systems vital to agriculture and rural communities.

The work, covering 90% of a total target of 179 aflaj across several wilayats, cost more than RO2mn. The effort is part of the ministry's broader plan to rehabilitate aflaj damaged by extreme weather events, including the Al Mutayr depression that affected the governorate last year.

Hamad bin Rashid al Sawai from the Directorate General of Agriculture and Water Resources in North Sharqiyah said assessments were carried out by local agriculture and water departments in coordination with the Water Resources Department.



These teams assessed the extent of damage, developed technical plans, issued tenders and monitored project execution on site.

Of the total 179 targeted, 78 aflaj are in Dima wa al Taiyyin, 30 in Wadi Bani Khalid, 21 in Ibra, 19 in Al Qabil, 17 in Al Mudhaibi, ten in Bidiyah and four in Sinaw.

North Sharqiyah has a total of 571 registered aflaj, many of which are the key source of water for farming and domestic use across the governorate's diverse terrain. These traditional irrigation channels, recognised as a Unesco heritage system in Oman, continue to play a critical role in managing water resources, especially in remote and agriculture dependent villages.



Turtle returns to Ras al Hadd after 15 years

Our Correspondent
Sur

A green turtle has returned to its nesting site on Saih al Marai beach in Ras al Hadd more than 15 years after it was first tagged by Environment Authority (EA), offering fresh insights into the migratory fidelity of marine turtles in the Indian Ocean.

The turtle was initially numbered on September 7, 2010, as part of monitoring efforts at Ras al Jinz Nature Reserve. Its return confirms the long-held understanding that sea turtles tend to nest on the same beach where they were born, underscoring the importance of long-term tagging and tracking programmes, EA stated.

Known scientifically as *Chelonia mydas*, the green turtle is one of Oman's most studied marine species and is listed globally as threatened. Its distinct olive-green shell and long migratory behaviour have drawn interest of researchers and tourists alike. These turtles are known to travel vast distances between feeding grounds and nesting sites, often returning decades later to their original beach.

The beaches of Ras al Hadd and Ras al Jinz are among the largest nesting grounds for green turtles in the Indian Ocean. An estimated 20,000 turtles visit these shores annually, some from the east African coastline and the Indian subcontinent.

Local projects thrive in Wadi Darbat during khareef season

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Dhofar's Wadi Darbat becomes a hub of business activity during khareef driven by Omani entrepreneur-led initiatives that reflect growing innovation and entrepreneurship.

The wadi's natural beauty draws visitors from across Oman and the wider region, creating opportunities for economic activity ranging from boat rides and food kiosks to handicrafts and environmental awareness campaigns.

These small businesses are supported by government agencies aiming to empower local youth and tap into the tourism potential of the season. Wadi Darbat has emerged as a focal point for such efforts, with entrepreneurs offering services that cater to growing tourist demand while contributing to sustainable development.

Mohammed bin Mohsen al Maamari, owner of Darbat Boats Park, said his venture officially launched in 2008 with just three boats and four employees. Today, it operates over 85 boats and employs 48 staff members, including Omanis and expatriates. The expansion, which includes infrastructure improvements and addition of a café, was prompted by rising visitor numbers.

Salem bin Mohammed al Mashani, who runs Darbat Countryside Rest House, said the idea was to offer an authentic rural experience using traditional building materials such as clay and wood. The rest house also sells local products including honey,



Darbat Boats Park started in 2008 with just three boats and four employees. Today, we operate over 85 boats and employ 48 staff members, including Omanis and expats

MOHAMMED AL MAAMARI



pottery and ghee. He noted that rising interest in heritage accommodation has encouraged him to consider expanding the project. Saeed bin Muhad al Mashani,

owner of Darbat Huts, said his business began with three huts and now offers nine units in two designs. He said the project employs several young Omanis and

attracts tourists from Oman and the GCC. However, he cited challenges including the short duration of the tourist season, congestion and limited parking, calling

for long-term solutions to support year-round sustainability. Abdul Hakeem bin Amer al Mashani's Dhofar Tourism and Investment Company introduced

a zipline in 2022. Initially 120m long, the attraction now features two-way double lines and provides around 60 temporary jobs for Omanis. Plans for this year include constructing a main zipline with four outbound and four return lines, which is expected to create 140 job opportunities. He said the goal is to set up a foundation of skilled Omani staff to operate and manage adventure activities.

In the food and beverage sector, Mohammed bin Khaled Jaboub operates Café Vogue London overlooking Wadi Darbat, offering a menu of drinks, desserts and snacks in both indoor and outdoor settings. Jaboub said the café was inspired by his love of nature and a desire to combine modern design with the valley's scenic setting. He informed that the café has been well received by visitors seeking a quiet retreat amid the fog and greenery.

Jabal Akhdar steps up tourism drive with major infra push

Our Correspondent
Jabal Akhdar

Jabal Akhdar is advancing its position as a key tourism destination in Dakhliyah through new infrastructure projects, including a public park in Saih Qatna and the newly opened Celebration Square which is currently hosting Jabal Akhdar Festival 2025.

Sheikh Sultan bin Mansour al Ghafili, Wali of Jabal Akhdar, said the wilayat is seeing steady development that reflects an integrated vision aimed at improving quality of life and tourism infrastructure. "These projects represent a translation of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to convert the wilayat's natural and cultural assets into sustainable development opportunities," he said.

Construction of Jabal Akhdar Park is progressing, with completion reported at over 85%. With total investment exceeding RO1.1mn, the park is expected to open in August. Covering 20,000sqm, the site includes recreational and service facilities such as a 1,000sqm children's play area, walking and sports tracks, a multi-use open-air theatre, and 5,000sqm of green landscaping with 150 trees and 400 shrubs.

The project also features investment zones that include a café, a shop and space for electric games, besides prayer rooms and restrooms for men and women.

"These projects will enhance the tourism offering, provide platforms for national events, and



Jabal Akhdar is seeing steady development that reflects an integrated vision aimed at improving quality of life and tourism infrastructure

SHEIKH SULTAN AL GHAFILI

help support local businesses and job creation," said Ghafili. He added that the projects reflect a commitment to sustainability, innovation and promotion of Omani identity.

The wali informed that additional development phases are planned, focusing on attracting investment in ecotourism, smart agriculture and community services. He noted the importance of coordination between government agencies, the private sector and local communities to ensure long-term development impact.

Mohammed bin Ali al Wardi, Director of Projects Department at Dakhliyah Municipality, said the park is part of the governorate's broader plan to enhance urban spaces and promote tourism. He said Celebration Square in Saih Qatna, which was

officially inaugurated this month, is among the most significant cultural and tourism infrastructure projects in the governorate.

The square includes a central performance arena, parking, restrooms and family seating areas, designed to align with the natural topography of the mountainous setting.

Running till August 30, Jabal Akhdar Festival 2025 features cultural and artistic performances, exhibitions of local crafts, and stalls of agricultural produce.

"These initiatives support entrepreneurship and contribute to the local economy," said Wardi, adding that the developments aim to position Jabal Akhdar as a sustainable tourism destination with focus on infrastructure and an integrated visitor experience.

Al Alya Mosque: A testament to Oman's Islamic heritage

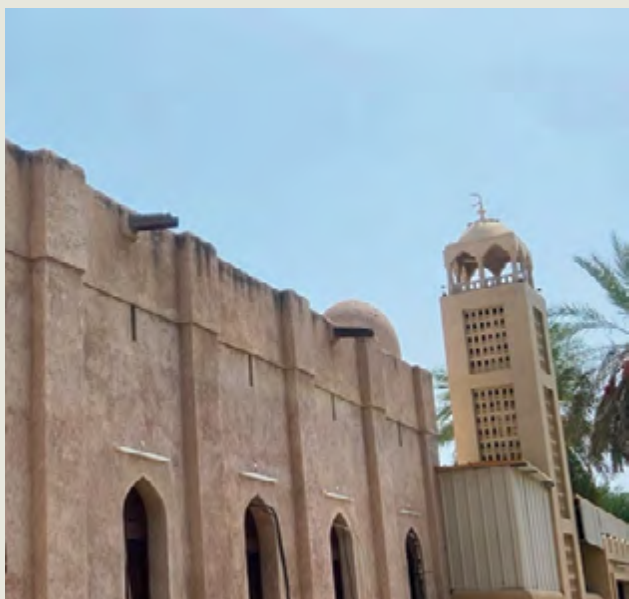
Our Correspondent
Rustaq

The Al Alya Mosque in Rustaq, South Batinah stands as one of Oman's most significant religious and historical landmarks. Built in the 17th century during the reign of Imam Nasser bin Murshid al Yarubi, the mosque reflects the depth of Islamic culture rooted in the region for centuries.

Located in the heart of Al Alya village, 800m from Rustaq Fort, the mosque serves both spiritual and social roles for local residents. Constructed on elevated ground, roughly 6m above the level of the village falaj, it is surrounded by orchards - some of which are waqf endowments, including Al Furod to the south and Al Jahal to the east - highlighting the mosque's importance in community life.

Ahmed bin Saif bin Khamis al Mazrouei, Administrator of the mosque's endowment, said the site's assets include 47 water shares in Al Maysar Falaj, valued at around RO94,000, besides orchards containing more than 550 date palms.

The mosque also played a civic role. Until recently, it hosted weddings and funeral gatherings, which were later shifted to Sablat al Alya. It was a meeting place for local leaders to discuss village affairs, and served as a venue for reconciliation and adjudication



sessions, often attended by imams and governors. Drinking water was made available to worshippers and visitors in earthenware vessels - jahal - filled from the falaj and suspended at designated spots.

Mazrouei noted the mosque's wider role as an academic centre. Renowned scholars and sheikhs once studied there, including Sheikh Suleiman bin Abdullah al Luwaihi, reflecting its historical role in religious education and community leadership.

The mosque is built on a rectangular plan, measuring 21m by 12m. The mihrab stands out for its proportions and understated inscriptions. Two metres wide and four metres high, it bears layered carvings of declarations of the Islamic faith. Enlarged in recent reno-

vations, it now has an enhanced visual impact. The mosque originally had three doors - two to the east and one to the north. A fourth door was added on the southern side to facilitate access for Friday sermons and for people with disabilities, while the northern door was sealed.

A traditional staircase, made of al alan wood, has remained intact since the mosque's construction. The mosque complex also includes a 15mX12m building once used as a dormitory for students and as a storage area.

Centuries after it was built, Al Alya Mosque continues to embody the spiritual, academic and civic life of Rustaq, preserving its architectural and cultural relevance in modern Oman.

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,674.39

FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)

India	223.79
Pakistan	739.69
Bangladesh	315.71
Philippines	148.10
Sri Lanka	783.56

*Rates as on July 20

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US consumer confidence rises in July

The consumer confidence index in the US rose by 1.1 points to 61.8 in July, exceeding market expectations.

The University of Michigan announced preliminary data for July on its consumer confidence index, which is based on the trends of American consumers.

The consumer confidence was expected to reach 61.4 during this period; the index was 60.7 in June.

The current economic conditions index rose by two points on a monthly basis to 66.8 in July.

The consumer expectations index also rose by 0.5 points to 58.6 during the same period.

Consumers' short-term inflation expectations fell from 5% to 4.4% in July. Long-term inflation expectations also fell from 4% to 3.6%.

MSX sees 64% jump in turnover as trading activity accelerates in H1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total trading value, or market turnover, at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) rose sharply to RO917.2mn in the first half of 2025, marking a 64% increase compared to the RO559.1mn recorded during the same period in 2024.

The number of transactions executed at the Omani bourse increased by 23.5% during the January-June period this year, rising from 119,000 to over 147,000. This growth was supported by a rise in the number of listed companies, their capital, and market capitalisation, offering investors a more diversified range of options.

The MSX benefited during the first half of the year from new listings over the past two years, which have boosted institutional investment and enhanced investor confidence. The exchange also gained from improved financial results and higher net profits posted by listed public joint-stock companies.

On a monthly basis, February



The number of transactions executed at the Omani bourse increased by 23.5% during the January-June period this year, rising from 119,000 to over 147,000. This growth was supported by a rise in the number of listed companies, their capital, and market capitalisation, offering investors a more diversified range of options

recorded the highest trading value in H1 2025, at RO234.5mn. June followed with RO229.4mn, while May came third at RO149.4mn. January posted the lowest trading value, at RO75.3mn, according to a report by the Oman News Agency.

Ahlibank topped the list of the most traded companies by trading value, with transactions worth RO164.2mn, representing 17.9% of the total. OQ Exploration and Production ranked second with RO108.1mn in trades, followed by OQ Base Industries at RO104.3mn. Bank Muscat took fourth place with trades totalling RO93mn, while Sohar International ranked fifth at RO83.7mn, representing 9.1% of the total trading value.

According to the report, the MSX's main index was impacted during the first half of the year by regional and global political developments, as well as volatility in most regional and international stock markets.

The main index closed at 4,500 points at the end of June trading, reflecting a decline of 75 points compared to its level at the end of 2024. The index recorded its only monthly gain in May, rising by 244 points, while its largest monthly decline was in February, down 107 points. It also fell by 68 points in March and 60 points in June.

The market capitalisation of securities listed on the MSX rose to RO28.27bn by the end of June trading, an increase of RO675.3mn compared to its level at the end of 2024. This growth was driven by rising stock prices, new listings in the bonds and sukuk market, and capital increases by several public joint-stock companies through the distribution of bonus shares.

In the first half of 2025, Asyad Shipping Company was listed on the exchange following its transformation into a public joint-stock company through an initial public offering of 20% of its capital, equivalent to 1.041bn shares.

The period also saw the transformation of Computer Stationery Manufacturing Company from a public joint-stock company into a closed joint-stock company. Additionally, Oman Investment and Finance Company merged with Dhofar International Development and Investment Company. As a result, Oman Investment and Finance Company was delisted from the Muscat Stock Exchange on July 2.

Foreign investors remain net buyers of GCC stocks for six consecutive quarters

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Foreign investors, including institutional and retail participants, remained net buyers on GCC stock markets during Q2 2025, recording net purchases of \$4.2bn compared to \$2.8bn in Q1 2025, according to a research report released by Kamco Investment.

The trend stayed positive, with net buying observed in four of the six months of H1 2025, and net selling in the other two. Total net buying reached \$7bn, up 39.8% year-on-year from \$5bn in H1 2024.

The highest net buying was recorded in Saudi Arabia at \$1.4bn. The UAE followed, with Abu Dhabi seeing consistent for-



eign interest, reaching \$1.33bn in Q2 2025. Kuwait ranked next with a net buy of \$696.5mn by foreign investors, followed by Dubai and Qatar with \$462mn and \$333.6mn, respectively.

Meanwhile, foreign investors were the largest net sellers of Omani equities, with net sales of \$29.6mn during the quarter, fol-

lowing \$459.2mn in net sell trades in the previous quarter. Bahrain also recorded net selling of \$27.9mn in Q2 2025.

The H1 2025 trading data indicated overall net buying across GCC exchanges, although trends varied by country due to net sales on some exchanges during Q1.

Foreign investors were net sellers in Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain during H1 2025, with combined net sales amounting to \$580.7mn, partially offsetting the aggregate net buying. UAE equities attracted the most foreign capital, with net buying of \$4.5bn during H1 2025, followed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with \$1.6bn and \$1.4bn, respectively.

Recently, Saudi Arabia's Capital Market Authority (CMA) announced a landmark regulatory change, allowing direct investment by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) citizens and residents in the kingdom's main stock exchange, the Tadawul. For the first time, these investors can access the market without intermediaries, significantly improving market access for regional investors, including current and former residents of Saudi Arabia and other GCC states.

Monthly data (excluding Bahrain) showed consistent foreign buying on Boursa Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar over all three months of the quarter. In contrast, Saudi Arabia recorded net selling by foreign investors in April 2025, followed by net buying in May and June.

According to the Kamco Investment report, Oman was the only GCC exchange to witness net selling by foreign investors in all three months of the quarter. Key factors influencing foreign investment flows included regional market performance, IPO activity, geopolitical developments, the economic health of individual countries, and crude oil prices.

Oman's associated gas production rises 11%

Muscat - Natural gas production in Oman, including domestic output and imports, grew by 0.3% to reach 22.716bn cubic metres by the end of May 2025, compared to 22.65bn cubic metres during the same period in 2024.

Preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that associated gas production increased by 11.1% by the end of May 2025, reaching 5.177bn cubic metres, compared to 4.658bn cubic metres in the same period in 2024.

Meanwhile, non-associated gas production, including imports, declined by 2.5% to 17.538bn cubic metres, down from 17.992bn cubic metres during the same period in 2024.

The statistics also showed that natural gas consumption in industrial projects decreased by 6%, reaching 11.458bn cubic metres by the end of May 2025, compared to 12.195bn cubic metres in the corresponding period last year. In contrast, gas consumption in power plants rose by 3% at the end of May, reaching 5.81bn cubic metres, compared to 5.64bn cubic metres in the same period in 2024.

The data also showed a 13.3% increase in gas consumption in oil fields, including in industrial zones, the Oman Mining Company, and Oman Cement, reaching 5.33bn cubic metres, up from 4.707bn cubic metres in the same period in 2024.

Gas consumption in industrial zones increased by 7%, reaching 113.8mn cubic metres, compared to 106.3mn cubic metres in the same period last year.

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Oil prices seek stability as output rises

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices fell below the key \$70-mark last week as increased output from OPEC+ group eased global supply concerns, while renewed US tariff threats under President Donald Trump weighed on demand expectations.

Brent crude settled at \$68.60 per barrel on July 18, down 2% for the week. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) dropped 2.3% to \$66.

OPEC's latest monthly report showed the group's crude oil output rose by 220,000 barrels per day (bpd) in June to 27.023mn bpd. Production from the broader OPEC+ alliance climbed by 349,000 bpd to 41.56mn bpd during the same period.

While OPEC maintained its 2025 global demand forecast, it still expects a 1.3mn bpd increase this year, bringing total demand to 105.13mn bpd. However, analysts said the stable demand outlook alongside rising supply has deepened expectations of a surplus, adding pressure to prices.

Further sentiment was dampened after Trump announced new tariffs on July 12, escalating



trade tensions with the European Union. The new package includes a sweeping 30% duty on all imports from the EU, effective August 1, adding to existing sector-specific tariffs already in place.

Neil Crosby, senior oil analyst at Switzerland-based data firm Sparta, told Anadolu that macroeconomic factors, including elevated US inflation and trade friction, are driving oil's retreat, adding that oil will stick to "around the \$70 per barrel range until something more drastic changes.

"Risk for me is still to the upside given a still brewing situation in Iran. And flat price already to an extent reflects the 'consensus' that the second half of this year is very long."

Osama Rizvi, energy and economy analyst at US-based market intelligence firm Primary Vision, said oversupply remains a concern. He noted OPEC+ production exceeded its quota by 830,000 bpd - well above the group's planned increase of 548,000 bpd.

"We are seeing strong supply from the US as Primary Vision's

Frac Job Count is essentially the same as of last year at 209 but oil prices are down by \$20," he said.

"It means that non-OPEC providers, such as US, have very low break-evens and are also resilient to price shocks. Demand is not strong as witnessed by the recent increase in distillate stockpiles in the US despite summer driving season."

"I therefore think that prices will remain range bound occasionally crossing \$70 but essentially averaging \$66-68 for the remaining year," he added.

Palash Jain, Middle East oil market specialist at London-based consultancy Facts Global Energy (FGE), said prices remain volatile within the \$66 to \$70 range.

"Overall, market fundamentals point toward increased upward pressure on crude prices in the near term. However, the upside potential remains capped due to lingering concerns over the potential negative impact of Trump's tariff threats on global oil demand," Jain said.

Anadolu Agency

Bitcoin's big gamble: Bubble or boom?

Doloresz Katanich

According to the latest survey by UK fintech firm Finder, Bitcoin could peak at \$162,353 this year, before settling at around \$145,167.

The survey gathered forecasts from 24 crypto industry experts. Predictions varied significantly, with the most optimistic expecting Bitcoin to reach as high as \$250,000 by the end of the year. On the flip side, the average lowest forecast is \$87,618, with some anticipating a drop to as low as \$70,000.

Bitcoin has recently surged to \$120,000, up from just under \$100,000 at the close of last year.

"There are a number of factors increasing demand for Bitcoin, including clearer and more favourable regulations, increased utility such as payments, and changing economic conditions," said Przemyslaw Kral, CEO of crypto exchange Zondacrypto, speaking to Euronews.

He added that new regulations, such as the EU's MiCA framework, have contributed significantly to the rally. The Markets in Crypto-Assets Regulation (MiCA) provides a unified legal framework for crypto-assets across the EU. Alongside growing institutional interest - particularly through exchange-traded funds (ETFs) - this has made crypto assets more accessible to investors.

Crypto-based ETFs allow investors to gain exposure to digital assets without directly purchasing them. These funds have seen a surge in popularity since Bitcoin ETFs began trading on US markets last year.



After recently hitting a new all-time high of \$120,000, the world's most popular cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, is expected to continue its upward trajectory, potentially surpassing \$160,000 in 2025

Is Bitcoin in a bubble?

While crypto's growing integration into mainstream finance has driven serious investor interest, some analysts warn that Bitcoin could be forming a so-called "bubble" - where prices are inflated due to hype and speculation rather than underlying value.

According to Professor Ravi Sarathy, an expert in crypto and international business strategy at Northeastern University, large institutional investors - including

MicroStrategy - have been amassing substantial Bitcoin reserves, potentially influencing the price. MicroStrategy currently holds Bitcoin worth approximately \$65bn.

Following a historically cautious stance, institutional investors have been drawn in by recent US measures permitting Bitcoin ETFs, making it simpler for both institutions and retail investors to gain exposure to these high-risk, high-reward assets.

Bitcoin's supply is capped at

21mn, meaning demand is likely to rise as availability remains fixed. "This has also led to the emergence of Digital Asset Treasuries - corporate investment strategies that pool funds to invest in cryptocurrencies and tokens, including Bitcoin," Sarathy noted.

"This further fuels demand and price growth. While there may be short-term corrections due to regulatory changes, longer-term appreciation could continue."

Washington's role in Bitcoin rally

Interest in Bitcoin has surged amid growing political support in the United States. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly called for the US to become the global hub for crypto. The current US administration has gone as far as declaring the past week 'Crypto Week', with lawmakers in the House of Representatives debating a range of bills that could shape the industry's regulatory future.

"Bitcoin and crypto more broadly are now being bolstered by the Trump administration - ironically so, given their original appeal as alternatives to government-backed currencies," said John Hawkins, senior lec-

turer at the University of Canberra.

Hawkins remains sceptical, arguing that Bitcoin "lacks any fundamental value" and has failed to achieve its original goal of becoming a widely used payment method. "It remains a speculative bubble," he added.

Others, however, view Trump's backing as a buy signal.

Desmond Marshall, Managing Director of Rouge International & Rouge Ventures, said, "With Trump embracing digital crypto assets, his sons engaged in major crypto projects, and a strong US dollar, the US government is reportedly building significant Bitcoin reserves. This is being mirrored by businesses adopting enterprise-level crypto strategies."

The most bullish analysts believe Bitcoin could climb to \$250,000 this year, spurred by continued institutional interest.

"Corporate and institutional demand is not slowing down. Retail investors are still largely absent, and nation-state adoption is only just beginning," said Martin Froehler, CEO of the trading platform Morpher.

Since the start of the year, Bitcoin's price has increased by nearly 25%, despite headwinds from global conflicts, trade tensions, and tight monetary policy in the US.

Is now the right time to buy?

Around 61% of Finder's surveyed experts believe now is a good time to buy Bitcoin.

However, caution is advised. "With such hype comes the need for careful consideration. No one can say with certainty whether

the price will rise or fall," said Zondacrypto's Kral. "We always recommend that investors do their own research and gain a solid understanding of Bitcoin before committing funds."

Kadan Stadelmann, CTO of Komodo Platform, expects Bitcoin's value to increase steadily over the next six months before a market downturn.

"Given that Bitcoin already touched \$110,000, and we've still got at least six months left in this bull run, I expect the peak to come in the first quarter of 2026, followed by a bear market," said Stadelmann.

When asked about the long-term future, Finder's panel of experts estimated that Bitcoin could reach \$458,647 by 2030 and potentially surpass \$1mn by 2035.

Could quantum computing threaten bitcoin?

Quantum computing is viewed by many experts as a potential threat to Bitcoin's cryptographic security.

Around 79% of respondents expressed concern that quantum computers could break the encryption protocols that underpin cryptocurrencies.

A quarter of the experts believe quantum computers could crack Bitcoin within five years, while another 25% think it's likely to happen within five to ten years. Around 29% expect it will take longer than a decade. Only 8% said quantum computing poses no threat, and just a third of the experts believe the Bitcoin community is adequately prepared for this future risk.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Europe-China trade tension on display ahead of Beijing summit

Nik Martin

The odds of a breakthrough to resolve trade frictions at next week's EU-China summit in Beijing appear slim after China cut the planned two-day talks to a single day.

The summit, set to mark the 50th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic ties, was moved from Brussels to Beijing after Chinese President Xi Jinping declined an invitation to attend. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa will now meet Xi, or Premier Li Qiang, in the Chinese capital.

"This is another sign of Beijing's limited willingness and ambition to engage with the Europeans," Alicja Bachulska, policy fellow of the Asia program at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), told DW. Bachulska said China's elites often view the EU as a mid-level power with limited leverage in trade negotiations.

EU complaints fall on deaf ears

The European Union's 400bn euro (\$467bn) trade deficit with China is driving the dispute, fueled by restricted access to the Chinese market for EU producers. China's industrial policies favour domestic suppliers, who benefit from huge subsidies, access to government contracts and favorable regulations.

EU officials say these policies have caused significant overproduction, leading to the "dumping" of cheap Chinese



As the European Union struggles to curb China's unfair trade practices, are tougher tactics needed to cut the EU's 400bn euro trade deficit?

electric vehicles (EVs) onto the EU market, harming the domestic auto sector.

"The scale of China's economy - the scale of subsidies, overcapacity and government intervention - is immense," Bachulska said, adding that, without "serious action" to protect Europe's auto industry, the EU risks "partial deindustrialization" within a few years.

The European Union has imposed tariffs of up to 45% on Chinese EVs and demanded an end to overcapacity and reciprocal market access to ensure a level playing field for EU exporters.

China, meanwhile, wants to replace EV tariffs with minimum price commitments,

alongside other concessions.

In April, the concerns about China's trade practices led the European Union to create an Import Surveillance Task Force to help protect the bloc's internal market, which could trigger EU anti-dumping duties or other safeguards.

The task force promptly noted an 8.2% increase in China's exports to the European Union in April, compared with the same month in 2024, which it attributed to Chinese exporters diverting US exports to the EU to avoid Trump's higher tariffs.

China denies giving domestic manufacturers unfair advantages and accuses the European Union of protectionism. Beijing justifies favoring local producers by citing national security and economic development needs.

China's rare earth curbs

With EU negotiators unable to secure significant access to the Chinese market, China's chokehold on rare earth minerals, which are essential for clean technology, chipmaking and

medical equipment, is another major point of contention.

According to the European Commission, the EU relies on China for 98% of its rare earth supply, as well as rare earth magnets.

China introduced curbs on rare earth exports last year, causing supply chain delays and production stoppages for EU firms. Subsequently, the value of rare earth shipments to the European Union fell by 84%, to \$15.1mn, in the first five months of 2025, according to Chinese customs data.

At June's G7 summit in Canada, von der Leyen accused China of "coercion" and "blackmail" over the curbs, adding that "no single country should control 80-90% of the market for essential raw materials and downstream products like magnets."

China's government has rejected the criticism. Last week, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry spokesperson suggested that the European Union's "mindset" needed to be "rebalanced."

China's Trump woes

Some EU observers see US President Donald Trump's tariffs, which helped upend decades of close trans-Atlantic relations, as an opportunity for the European Union to reset ties with the world's second-largest economy. Faced with major disruption to its US trade, they say China needs Europe more than ever and can be pushed to offer concessions during next week's summit.

DW



EU, UK slash oil price cap on Russian crude exports

London, UK - The UK and EU on Friday jointly announced a significant reduction in the crude oil price cap on Russian exports, in a move aimed at "targeting Putin's critical oil revenues."

The cap has been lowered from \$60 to \$47.60 per barrel, directly targeting Russia's oil revenues, which have already declined by 35% year-on-year to May, according to the UK government.

British Treasury chief Rachel Reeves, speaking at the G20 summit in South Africa, said the move was designed to apply "decisive" financial pressure on Russia.

"The UK and its EU allies are turning the screw on the Kremlin's war chest by stemming the most valuable funding stream of its illegal war in Ukraine even further," she said. "This decisive step to lower the crude oil price cap will target Russia's oil revenues and ramp up the pressure on Putin by exploiting his biggest vulnerability - while keeping energy markets stable."

The UK government said the

decision is intended to "clamp down on Putin's oil industry," undermining the global market value of Russian crude.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said: "As Putin continues

The price cap has been lowered from \$60 to \$47.60 per barrel, directly targeting Russia's oil revenues, which have already declined by 35% year-on-year to May

to stall on serious peace talks, we will not stand by.

"That's why we're striking at the heart of the Russian energy sector alongside the EU. Together we will continue to apply relentless pressure on Putin, squeezing his critical oil industry and cutting off funding for his illegal war in Ukraine."

Officials framed the measure as part of a broader international campaign to force Russia to ne-

gotiate an end to the conflict.

"Every financial blow against Russia's oil revenues is another step towards a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine, and a step towards security and prosperity in the UK and beyond, which is a key foundation of the government's Plan for Change," the UK government said.

According to the statement, to date, the UK has sanctioned more than 250 vessels involved in transporting Russian energy and pledged to provide \$2.2bn annually in military aid to Ukraine "for as long as it takes."

In addition to the oil price cap, the UK also announced new sanctions against Russian intelligence operatives it accuses of spreading "chaos and disorder" on Putin's orders.

The UK and EU, according to the statement, remain united in their determination to "ramp up economic pressure on Putin," with the aim of pushing him to the negotiating table to achieve what they describe as a "just and lasting peace" in Ukraine.

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New World Autos introduces new cutting-edge SINOTRUK in Oman

In a landmark event that combined strength, innovation and promise, New World Autos, the exclusive distributor of SINOTRUK in Oman, officially unveiled the globally renowned heavy-duty truck brand at a grand event held at Hotel Inter-Continental, Muscat.

The chief guest at the event was Wang Yunan, general manager, SINOTRUK International Middle East and Asia Sales Region. He was accompanied by Liu Yehui, chief representative, SINOTRUK International Middle East and Asia Sales Region, a press release said.

The evening marked, more than the introduction of a brand, the beginning of a shared journey built on engineering excellence, long-term partnerships and a vision for contributing meaningfully to Oman's growing oil and gas, mining, construction, roads infrastructure and logistics landscape.

Recognised as one of the world's largest and most respected manufacturers of heavy-duty trucks, SINOTRUK has a long-standing reputation for its cutting-edge technology, robust engineering and reliable performance. With more than 700,000 trucks exported to over 150 countries and being No 1 in China's heavy-duty truck exports for 20 consecutive years, SINOTRUK is a global force now geared to empower Oman's oil and gas, logistics and industrial sectors.

At the event, Abdullah bin Mohammed Saud Bahwan, CEO, Saud Bahwan Group, stated that SINOTRUK has arrived in Oman not just as a renowned brand, but as a dependable partner for progress. He emphasised the group's commitment to delivering outstanding after-sales sup-



port, driver training and an inspiring range of vehicles featuring advanced engineering, all aimed at setting new standards in customer satisfaction and business productivity.

The product line-up introduced at the event included the SINOTRUK MAX and the HOWO TX, both engineered to meet the evolving needs of oil and gas, mining, construction, logistics providers and industrial operators across Oman.

The SINOTRUK MAX, with its commanding presence, next-generation cab, high design electrical architecture and advanced safety and comfort features, offers a premium driving experience for oil and gas, mining and long-haul journeys.

The HOWO TX, designed with durability and versatility in mind, is a powerhouse of efficiency and reliability, ideal for both oil and gas, construction and cargo operations. The models are backed by powerful engines, high load-bearing capabilities and superior fuel efficiency, offering operators an exceptional combination of per-



formance and value.

To support the brand's entry into the market, New World Autos has invested in a dedicated showroom in Wattayah, a fully equipped service and parts facility in Al Mawaleh and a strategic after-sales network across Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah and Marmul. Comprehensive training programmes for drivers,

technicians, and service personnel have also been rolled out to ensure every SINOTRUK customer receives exceptional support at every step.

In a symbolic and inspiring moment during the event, the first few SINOTRUK customers in Oman were handed the keys to their new vehicles. Their enthusiasm and confidence in the

brand reflected the strong foundation being laid for SINOTRUK's journey in the sultanate.

Speaking after receiving his vehicle, one of the proud owners said, "For us, investing in SINOTRUK was a decision backed by facts. Proven global performance, robust engineering and features designed for real-world challenges. We believe the

models we have chosen will not only meet but exceed our operational expectations, giving us the edge we need in a competitive market."

He further emphasised the critical role of after-sales support, adding, "What truly sets SINOTRUK apart, especially for fleet operators like us, is the unmatched commitment shown by New World Autos. Their service and genuine spare parts infrastructure isn't just an afterthought, it is a strategic advantage. The state-of-the-art service facilities, skilled technical team and real-time parts availability ensure SINOTRUK's performance in the best way possible. Downtime is a fleet's greatest problem and with New World Autos, we have found a reliable partner who understands that."

Another customer added, "What stood out for us is SINOTRUK's focus on innovation without compromising on durability. Whether it is long-distance haulage or heavy construction work, we are confident that these trucks will perform exceptionally

well under Oman's varied terrain and demanding conditions."

Sharing his thoughts about New World Autos' after-sales support advantage, he said, "In an industry where every hour counts, New World Autos' proactive support model, predictive maintenance approach and genuine parts availability are not just promises, they are operational lifelines. It is reassuring to know we are not just buying trucks but entering into a relationship built on dependability, efficiency and long-term value."

The launch event concluded with meaningful networking and a shared optimism about the future. With SINOTRUK's arrival, Oman's commercial vehicle sector gains a powerful new player. One that is set to drive progress, elevate operational standards and support the nation's growth journey with confidence and reliability.

For customers eager to explore the SINOTRUK range, test drives and consultations are now available at the Wattayah showroom, supported by a robust service and parts infrastructure.

Emirates Franchise leads mission to Japan

The Emirates Franchise, an affiliate of the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, led a high-level trade mission to Japan from June 18 to 23, coinciding with Expo 2025 Osaka in Japan.

The mission aimed to highlight the advanced UAE model in the franchising sector, reflecting the development of the business environment in the UAE and its regional leadership in this field. The delegation was headed by Noor al Tamimi, chairman Emirates Franchise - Board Member of the Abu Dhabi Chamber and included senior representatives from across the UAE's business ecosystem.

Among them were Dr Ahmed al Shemili, acting general manager of the Ras Al Khaimah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hamda al Suwaidi, technical director of the association, and Ahood Salah al Menhali, events coordinator.

During visits to Tokyo and Osaka, the delegation met the Japanese Franchise (JFA) and engaged with economic institutions and companies.

Jindal Steel launches 'Losers Win Challenge'

Jindal Steel has announced the launch of the fourth edition of its flagship employee wellness initiative - the Losers Win Challenge 2025.

This 90-day health and fitness programme, conducted in collaboration with Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Sohar, is part of the company's broader vision to promote a culture of health, balance, and holistic well-being among its workforce. The initiative is championed by Harssha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Steel, Oman, a press release said.

A total of 95 employees are participating in this wellness challenge, which is designed to help them adopt healthier lifestyles through a structured



approach to physical and mental health. The programme includes two comprehensive body composition analyses, BMI assessments every 15 days, personalised diet plans, and one-on-one consultations with dietitians and

internal medicine specialists. All medical assessments and nutritional support are being delivered under the supervision of healthcare professionals at Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Sohar. The hospital is playing a central role

in delivering end-to-end care, including health screenings, dietary consultations, and the implementation of evidence-based wellness practices.

Harssha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Steel, Oman, stated, "The Losers

Win Challenge is a focused wellness initiative aimed at helping our people become healthier, fitter, and more fulfilled. With this edition, we aspire to create wellness champions who will inspire hundreds more to embrace fit-

ness as a way of life. We are grateful to Aster Al Raffah Hospital for designing a programme that aligns with our specific needs. This collaboration demonstrates the powerful impact that can be achieved when healthcare providers and responsible corporates work together to promote public health and community well-being."

Shailesh Guntu, deputy CEO of Aster Hospitals, UAE and Oman, said, "At Aster, we believe prevention and wellness are essential to long-term health. We are pleased to support Jindal Steel's progressive wellness initiative and remain committed to ensuring all participants receive the highest standard of care."

Sohar International celebrates 'Tomohi' 3rd cohort graduation

In a testament to its commitment to human capital development and its strategic role in driving national progress, Sohar International proudly hosted the graduation ceremony for the third cohort of its distinguished 'Tomohi' programme.

Held at the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat, the event took place under the esteemed patronage of H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the presence of Said Mohamed al Afi, chairman of Sohar International, and Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, CEO of Sohar International.

The ceremony was also at-



tended by members of the Board of Directors, senior executives from the bank's executive

management, esteemed VIP guests, and the families of the graduates — further underscor-

ing the significance of the occasion and the collective pride in celebrating this important mile-

stone.

Since its launch in 2018, the 'Tomohi' programme has con-

tributed to enhancing the capabilities of 55 ambitious Omani youth by developing their skills and strengthening their readiness for the job market. The successful employment of all 15 graduates from the third cohort within various departments across the bank further reflects Sohar International's commitment to transforming empowerment into tangible opportunities, reinforcing its dedication to nurturing national talent and integrating them into the financial sector.

Murshidi said, "Tomohi represents more than a developmental initiative - it is a strategic investment in Oman's future."

Bank Muscat wins Most Innovative Retail Award at Global Brands event

Bank Muscat, the financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won the Most Innovative Retail Award at the esteemed Global Brands Awards held recently in Dubai.

Salim Said al Shanfari, Bank Muscat's representative in Dubai received the award on behalf of the bank. The event celebrated outstanding brands from various industries, bringing together business leaders for a memorable evening, a press release said.

This recognition underscores the bank's relentless pursuit of excellence in providing cutting-edge financial solutions and services tailored to meet the evolving needs of its retail customers. It also reflects the bank's commitment to innovation and customer-centricity in the competitive banking landscape.

To enhance service delivery, Bank Muscat is actively improving its electronic channels and banking devices, ensuring that customers receive the best possible services at all times. In response to valuable customer



feedback, the bank has recently launched a new version of its Mobile App and revamped over 200 e-services, further demonstrating its dedication to innovation and creativity.

The Bank Muscat portfolio features a comprehensive array of retail banking services and products designed to meet the diverse needs of its customers. Offerings include personal finance, auto financing 'Sayyarati', housing finance 'Baituna', as well as travel and study financing options.

Customers can also open children's accounts, apply for credit or prepaid cards electronically, and access services for car insurance, checkbooks, and utility bill payments. In addition to these services, customers benefit from seamless fund transfers within Bank Muscat accounts and to other local banks, as well as international transfer services. They can make speed transfers to countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Egypt, along with multiple other countries via the SWIFT network.

The bank also offers a Zakat calculator and donation services, allows customers to update their 'KYC' data, apply for the Themaar savings plan, and explore investment opportunities through the Bank Money Market Fund, the Oryx Fund, and the Al Tharwa Fund.

This recognition underscores Bank Muscat's relentless pursuit of excellence in providing cutting-edge financial solutions and services tailored to meet the evolving needs of its retail customers in the competitive banking landscape

Kuwait's WAMD surpasses 1mn accounts

ACI Worldwide, an original innovator in global payments technology, and the Shared Electronic Banking Services Company 'KNET', the provider of electronic payment services in Kuwait, has announced that WAMD, Kuwait's real-time payment system, recorded significant growth in the number of transactions executed since its launch in June of 2024, making WAMD one of the world's most rapidly adopted real-time payment initiatives.

KNET utilized ACI's Digital Central Infrastructure solution to build the central payment infrastructure of WAMD, an interoperable, countrywide scheme that enables account-to-account (A2A) payment transfers via a bank's mobile app or internet banking service by using a phone number, a press release said.

WAMD was implemented in less than 15 months, redefining the pace for rapid digital transformation and innovation. Banks in Kuwait have lauded the scheme for delivering a seamless and user-friendly differentiated customer banking experience. With 100% of the country's banks now on board with WAMD, this extraordinary growth in real-time payments is expected to continue.

"As real-time payments become ubiquitous in Kuwait, consumers have gravitated toward secure, real-time payment methods, reshaping habits around convenience and efficiency while reducing reliance on cash. KNET's primary strategic focus is to provide a safe and reliable payment environment by enhancing existing infrastructure, and developing innovative payment systems."

LG launches 'Less Artificial, More Human' brand film

LG Electronics (LG) has unveiled a new brand film titled 'Less Artificial, More Human', inspiring customers to explore how life can be enriched through thoughtful moments and meaningful experiences powered by LG's Affectionate Intelligence.

This film is part of the ongoing Life's Good global campaign, initially introduced in August 2023 to spread a message of optimism worldwide, a press release said.

LG is committed to redefining the customer experience, ensuring that the essence of Life's Good is reflected in every aspect of its products, services and communications. In this evolving AI era, LG continues its pursuit of delivering more authentic experiences by keeping humans at the heart of AI innovation.



This year's campaign emphasises Life's Good moments in everyday life with LG's Affectionate Intelligence, which better understands and empathises with customers. By incorporating the company's human-centric philosophy, LG aims to move beyond technology-centric AI approaches, fostering deeper connections and more meaningful interactions between their products and users.

The new brand film heartwarmingly conveys how LG intuitively integrates its AI into customers' daily routines, offering support to foster personalized experiences that enhance life at home, work and on the go.

The film begins at home, where a family enjoys ordinary yet precious moments together, relieved from daily chores with LG AI Home solutions quietly adapting to their individual needs. Whether it's a gentle reminder to take an umbrella or automatically turning off the lights when everyone has left, the intelligent home simplifies routines so individuals can have the peace of mind to go about their day.

As the film continues, viewers can see how the workplace transforms into a balanced environment with optimal air quality and temperature control for enhanced comfort. On the road, the system intuitively understands the physical and emotional state of both the driver and passengers, providing personalised recommendations that make every journey more relaxing and reassuring.

"Our brand's focus is not just on AI technology itself, but on how it enhances customers' lives in meaningful ways," said Kim Hyo-eun, vice president and head of LG's Brand Management Division. "This campaign aims to showcase how LG's Affectionate Intelligence can positively transform our daily life, seamlessly integrating into everyday moments."

'Emirates First' opens First Class experience at Dubai International

'Emirates First' was officially opened at Terminal 3, Dubai International (DXB), offering a luxurious and unique airport experience for Emirates' First Class customers and Skywards Platinum members.

The check-in area has been meticulously upgraded with an opulent and refined private seating area, offering an exclusive check in process, a press release said.

As the world's largest operator of international First Class travel - offering 26,800 seats a week and the largest inventory of international First Class seats in the industry, Emirates continues to invest and uplift its customers' experience at every touchpoint on the ground and in the air. This is a clear demonstration of Emirates' commitment to renovating its ground products and providing more comfort to its customers.

Adel al Redha, Emirates' deputy president and COO, said, "We invest heavily in upgrading our ground products, and Emirates First is one of the areas that will offer a unique

and private environment to our First Class customers and Skywards Platinum members. We know our customers value privacy and convenience, and this will provide another level of hospitality to the check-in experience, as part of our efforts to continuously uplift the overall travel journey.

Now, our customers can enjoy a sleek transfer with our Chauffeur Drive Service, a swift check-in at the exclusive Emirates First, explore a world-class lounge before boarding, and relax into a multi award-winning inflight experience with Emirates."

Emirates First has been reimagined with premium customers in mind, and every detail of the travel journey considered to ensure a 'Fly Better' experience. From the moment customers reach the dedicated Emirates Terminal 3 departures area, and just a few steps inside, a grand golden entryway now signifies the entrance the private space, where a dedicated Emirates host verifies guest eligibility for entry.

IMMAF Youth World Championships begins

The sixth edition of the IMMAF Youth World Championships will get underway Monday at Al Ain for the very first time.

Held under the patronage Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, the event will run from July 21 to 27 at ADNEC Centre Al Ain, a press release said.

More than 1,000 male and female athletes from over 60 countries will compete in what is shaping up to be the biggest edition in the championships' history. Participants will compete across four age divisions - Youth D (10-11 years), Youth C (12-13 years), Youth B (14-15 years), and Youth A (16-17 years).

The UAE National Team enters the competition with 57 athletes, following a training camp in Phuket, Thailand, as part of their final preparations. The team is aiming for a strong showing and hopes to build on last year's success, where they finished fourth overall and secured 12 medals.

Mohammed al Hosani, a member of the MMA Committee, UAE Jiu-Jitsu and Mix Martial Arts Federation, said that hosting the championship in Al Ain for the first time with a record number of participants reflects the UAE's growing



The UAE National Team enters the competition with 57 athletes, following a training camp in Phuket, Thailand, as part of their final preparations

stature on the global combat sports map. He described the event as a sporting and cultural platform that promotes cross-cultural understanding and empowers youth.

"The championship serves as a launchpad for future champions and a bridge to connect nations through sports. A series of

tailored experiences have also been designed for the athletes and delegations, offering them a well-rounded Emirati experience that blends hospitality, entertainment, and cultural exchange.

"The UAE National Team is approaching the championship with high spirits and a strong sense of determination. We have all the confidence in athletes' capabilities to deliver a powerful performance that highlights the progress of MMA in the country," Hosani added.

Ukraine’s Zelenskyy proposes new round of peace talks with Russia

Kyiv, Ukraine - Kyiv has proposed a new round of peace talks to be held next week with Russia, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday.

In a video message posted on X, Zelenskyy urged ‘the pace of negotiations must be increased’ to ensure lasting peace. “A meeting at the level of leaders is needed,” he said, emphasising Ukraine’s willingness to do so.

Ukraine’s newly appointed Secretary of National Security and Defence, Rustem Umerov, was the one who sent Moscow the invitation, Zelenskyy said. He also previously led the delegation talks held in Istanbul last month.

The previous negotiations held in June failed to lead to a ceasefire agreement, but did result in a new prisoner of war exchange.

The first round of negotiations held on 16 May also resulted in a prisoner exchange, the largest one yet, but hadn’t yielded much result either regarding putting an end to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In his video address, Zelenskyy also urged Western allies to further toughen their sanctions against Russia.

“It is very important that the new EU sanctions package is also supported by other free European countries that are currently not part of the European Union,” Zelenskyy said.

“We are also working on the American track, there are agreements with President Trump that must be implemented as soon as possible,” he added.

A day prior to Zelenskyy’s address, the EU imposed new sanctions on Russia, targeting its oil and banks. It marks the 18th package of sanctions imposed by the EU since February 2022.

Earlier this month, the US President also threatened harsher sanctions on Russia if a peace agreement was not reached within 50 days.

Writing on his Truth Social platform, Trump framed the threat as a response to Russia ‘absolutely pounding Ukraine on the battlefield right now’.

“To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, before it is too late. Thank you,” the US president said.

Russia: Tsunami threat lifted after quake

Moscow/Hong Kong - The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre says there is no longer a danger of tsunami waves on Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula after two quakes - the larger with a magnitude of 7.4 - struck in the sea nearby on Sunday.

Its epicentre, according to the Kamchatka branch of the Unified Geophysical Survey of the Russian Academy of Sciences, was 115km from the regional capital Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

The larger quake was at a depth of 20km and occurred 144km east of the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, which has a population of 180,000, according to the US Geological Survey.

A few minutes earlier, a quake with a magnitude of 6.7 was recorded nearby.

The PTWC initially said there was a danger of major tsunami waves but later downgraded its warning before finally saying the danger had passed.

According to Russian media, the tremors were felt for roughly a minute, causing people to run out of buildings. The press service of the Main Department of the Ministry of Emergency Situations in the region said that specialists will begin examination of the buildings as soon as possible.

Local services went into high alert mode. There were no immediate information of possible damage or casualties.

On 4 November 1952, a magnitude 9.0 quake in Kamchatka caused damage but no reported deaths despite setting off 9.1-metre waves in Hawaii.

Typhoon Wipha in Hong Kong

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Observatory on Sunday issued its highest warning for tropical cyclone Typhoon Wipha which is descending on the city and is ‘posing a considerable threat’.

Authorities have hoisted the T10 signal, which is the highest-level warning, this morning at 9.20am (local time). It warned that the typhoon would skirt about 50km to the south around noon.

The highest-level warning, means that winds with mean speeds of 118km/h or more are expected. The last No 10 signal was during Super Typhoon Saola in 2023, with the storm causing 86 injuries, landslides and thousands of trees to fall according to local media, including the SCMP and Hong Kong Free Press.

The annual Hong Kong Book Fair and over 500 flights have been cancelled, the local media reported adding that the weather service urged the public to take precautionary measures.

If the eye of the tropical cyclone passes directly over Hong Kong, there may be a temporary lull. The Hong Kong Observatory warns that this lull will be followed by a sudden resumption of violent winds, so residents have been advised to stay in safe places. The water level rose to about 3 metres above Chart Datum at Tai Po Kau. Maximum gusts exceeding 103km per hour were recorded at Tate’s Cairn, Hong Kong Free Press reported.

The Hainan and Guangdong provinces remained on high alert after the storm brought rain and flooding to the Philippines.

A significant number of flights are cancelled or rescheduled, Xinhua news agency reported.

So far, Wipha has resulted in one reported injury involving a man and reports of uprooted trees, while 214 people have sought refuge in government shelters. As of 9am, the government had opened 34 temporary shelters with 214 people seeking refuge.

Over 500 weekend flights have been cancelled and the Airport Authority said 400 could resume in the afternoon at the earliest after the typhoon moved away from the city.

Several MTR lines will maintain a limited service, although those on open sections including the Light Rail and Airport Express have been suspended. Most ferry and bus services have also been suspended.

Agencies



‘WINTER’ IN CANBERRA



People chat around a fire pit during the ‘Winter in the City’ event in Canberra, Australia, on Saturday. The two-week event enlivened Canberra’s city centre with nightly fire shows and acrobatic performances (Xinhua)

Lunar soil could help humans live on the Moon, study finds

Hong Kong - The soil on the Moon might be able to sustain life, according to a new study.

Researchers from the Chinese University of Hong Kong developed a technology to extract water from lunar soil and used it to convert carbon dioxide into oxygen and chemical fuel. The technology does this by converting light from the Sun into heat.

According to the study, published in the Cell Press journal Joule, the research could ‘potentially open new doors for future deep space exploration’ because it could mitigate the expensive costs needed to bring essential resources such as water to the Moon.

A single gallon (3.78 litres) of water costs US\$83,000 to ship up by rocket, the study continued, with one astronaut drinking roughly four gallons (15.14 litres) a day.

“We never fully imagined the ‘magic’ that the lunar soil possessed,” said lead researcher Lu Wang.

However, the study notes that any strategies that are already in place to extract water from the surface of the Moon involve multiple ‘energy-intensive’ steps and do not break down how much CO2 is used by fuel.

The Moon’s extreme lunar environment will still make it challenging to harvest more oxygen and water from the land, the study continued, because there are ‘drastic temperature fluctuations’, radiation and low gravity to deal with.

The CO2 emitted from the breaths of the astronauts won’t be enough to supply all the water, fuel and oxygen that the team of astronauts might need.

Euronews



Merz’s Germany pivots toward Europe

Berlin, Germany - Germany has had an official friendship with France for more than 60 years in the form of the Elysee Treaty. Now there is also one with the United Kingdom - the first comprehensive bilateral treaty between the two nations since the end of the Second World War.

Above all, the treaty signed on Thursday provides for close security and arms cooperation, including mutual assistance obligations in the event of a crisis, though this is something that has long existed within NATO.

A few days before German Chancellor Friedrich Merz signed the treaty in London, French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte also paid a state visit to the UK that lasted several days, including a carriage ride with the royal couple and a state banquet. Their visit, too, was primarily about the security of Europe’s two nuclear powers.

Merz, Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer also travelled together on a train to Kyiv a few weeks ago to assure Ukraine of their continued support. Photos from the trip show the three of them in relaxed and informal conversation. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk joined them after taking another train.

An alliance born of necessity

‘E3’ is the relatively new acronym for the cooperation between the three major western European nations of Germany, France and the UK. Although France and Germany are already close partners within the European Union, the UK has been on the sidelines since Brexit, when it withdrew from the 27-member political and economic union.

But these differences have been set aside to address two pressing issues: the threat from Russia and uncertainty over whether US President Donald Trump would back European NATO states in the event of war. The nuclear deterrence of France and the UK, as Merz has repeatedly hinted, could supplement US protection for Europe, and perhaps even replace it in the longer term, should Washington turn its back on Europe altogether.

Merz: We were free-riders

Merz’s inaugural visit to Washington in June was generally deemed a success, and his joint press appearance with Trump went off without exposing any major rifts. By contrast, Trump and Vice President JD Vance had snubbed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in front of cameras in the Oval Office in February. The scene appalled Merz at the time.

Merz said little at his press conference with Trump and appeared to be nervous, while Trump talked all the more. The chancellor mainly promised more defence spending, and the US president seemed satisfied.

“Trump is not interested in partnership, but in vassalage,” University of Halle-Wittenberg political scientist Johannes Varwick wrote to DW.

Immediately after his election victory in February, Merz said that Europe should ‘achieve independence from the US’ in terms of defence policy. But this is unrealistic, said Henning Hoff from the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). “In view of Europe’s great dependence on the US in terms of security policy, openly turning away from Washington would be reckless and unwise,” he wrote to DW.

Varwick concurs: ‘There can be no question of independence’, either politically or militarily, he wrote.

In London, Merz hinted that while security cooperation with the UK can supplement the US defence guarantee, it could be no substitute. In a BBC interview, the chancellor also agreed with the US President when it came to European defence spending: “We know that we have to do more on our own and we have been free-riders in the past,” he said. “They are asking us to do more, and we are doing more now,” he added, referring to Germany’s new plans to massively increase its own defence spending.

Merz, who heads Germany’s conservative Christian Democratic Union, repeatedly accused the previous government under centre-left Social Democrat Olaf Scholz of neglecting relations with France and Poland. Immediately after taking office in May, Merz travelled to Paris and Warsaw to signal how much he values these two European partners.

He appeared to instantly forge a cordial understanding with Macron, but there were tensions with Polish PM Donald Tusk after Berlin introduced border controls with its neighbour to prevent illegal entry. Poland does not want to take back migrants and is also now controlling its border with Germany.

DW



Nearly 84 killed by Israeli army fire in Gaza, including starving people

Gaza City/Ankara - At least 84 Palestinians were killed, including 73 people waiting for humanitarian aid, and over 200 others injured on Sunday in new Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip, medical sources and officials confirmed.

Some 67 people lost their lives and 150 others injured when Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians waiting for humanitarian aid in the Al-Sudaniya area, northwest of Gaza City, medical sources told Anadolu.

Six more Palestinians were killed in a separate Israeli strike near the Al-Shakoush aid distribution centre, north of Rafah in southern Gaza, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

The attacks come amid a surge in Israeli assaults on Palestinians gathering in search of food and aid. According to official sources, the total death toll of those killed while seeking humanitarian aid has reached 891, with over 5,754 others injured since May 27.

Separately, three people were killed when Israeli drones dropped bombs near the Sheikh Radwan water basin in northern Gaza City.

Another three killings occurred in separate strikes in different areas, including northern Gaza, since dawn.

Israeli ground forces also carried out demolition operations in the eastern Gaza City neighbourhood of Shejaiya, blowing up multiple homes.



The total death toll of those killed while seeking humanitarian aid has reached 891, with over 5,754 others injured since May 27

Gaza’s ambulances blared their sirens in unison on Sunday in a desperate cry for help as Israel continued a stifling blockade that has caused a deepening famine in the enclave

Meanwhile, Israeli artillery shelled several areas in eastern Gaza City, while Israeli naval vessels opened fire toward Palestinian fishermen off the coast of Al-Qarara, west of Khan Younis in southern Gaza.

Sunday’s escalation adds to the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On Saturday alone, Is-

raeli airstrikes and gunfire killed over 130 Palestinians throughout the territory, including 38 individuals who were awaiting humanitarian aid and three children who succumbed to severe malnutrition, according to official Palestinian sources.

Israel has killed nearly 59,000 Palestinians, most of them

women and children, in the Gaza Strip since October 2023. The military campaign has destroyed the enclave, collapsed the health system and led to severe food shortages.

Deepening famine
Meanwhile, Gaza’s ambulances blared their sirens in unison on

Sunday in a desperate cry for help as Israel continued a stifling blockade that has caused a deepening famine in the enclave.

The distress call comes as an ‘urgent warning over worsening famine and the deteriorating health situation in the Gaza Strip’, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

Gaza’s government media office, for its part, described the current situation in Gaza as ‘extremely dangerous’, citing Israel’s full closure of all crossings for over 140 consecutive days.

“We are on the threshold of mass death,” the office said, accusing the international community of turning a blind eye to ‘the slaughter of Gaza through starvation and genocide’.

One million children starving: UNRWA

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) on Sunday once again accused Israeli authorities of using starvation as a weapon of war against the civilian population of Gaza.

In a statement on X, UNRWA said: ‘The Israeli Authorities are starving civilians in Gaza. Among them are one million children.’

It renewed its urgent call for the lifting of Israel’s ongoing siege, saying: “Lift the siege: allow UNRWA to bring in food and medicines.”

Despite international legal obligations to protect civilians and allow the delivery of aid, Israel has maintained a total siege on Gaza since March 2, bombing convoys, blocking border crossings, and targeting aid distribution points, actions that have been widely condemned as collective punishment and potential war crimes.

According to Gaza’s Health Ministry, dozens of children have already died from starvation and dehydration, while hundreds of thousands more are at risk due to widespread food insecurity and the collapse of healthcare services.

Anadolu Agency

Pope Leo calls for end to ‘barbarity’ in Gaza

Vatican City - Pope Leo on Sunday called for ‘an immediate halt to the barbarity of the war’ following an Israeli strike on the Holy Family Catholic parish in Gaza City that killed three civilians and injured several others, including the parish priest.

The attack occurred on Thursday morning at Gaza’s only Catholic church, where around 600 people had been sheltering.

The pope identified the victims as Saad Issa Kstandi Salameh, Foumia Issa Latif Ayyad, and Najwa Ibrahim Latif Abu Daoud, and said he was ‘close’ to them and their families, according to Vatican News.

Speaking on Sunday after the Angelus prayer at Castel Gandolfo, Pope Leo said the strike ‘is just one of the continuous military attacks against the civilian population and places of worship in Gaza’.

He appealed for ‘a peaceful resolution of the conflict’ and called on the international community to respect international humanitarian law, especially ‘the obligation to protect civilians, as well as the prohibition of collective punishment, indiscriminate use of force and forced displacement of the population’.

Anadolu Agency

US envoy urges end to tribal violence in Syria

Washington, D.C., US - The US special envoy to Syria on Sunday urged all warring groups in Syria to immediately cease hostilities and commit to peace.

“President (Donald) Trump’s decision to lift sanctions was a principled step, offering the Syrian people a chance to move beyond years of unimaginable suffering and atrocities,” Tom Barrack said in a statement on X.

“The international community has largely rallied behind the nascent Syrian government, watching with cautious optimism as it seeks to transition from a legacy of pain to a future of hope,” he added.

On July 13, clashes broke out between Bedouin Arab tribes and armed Druze groups in Suwayda. Violence escalated and Israeli airstrikes followed, including on Syrian military positions and infrastructure in Damascus.

Barrack said ‘this fragile am-



Tom Barrack

bition is now overshadowed by profound shock, as brutal acts by warring factions on the ground undermine the government’s authority and disrupt any semblance of order’.

The envoy emphasised that the burden of responsibility lies not only with the state but with all actors involved in the conflict.

“All factions must immediately lay down their arms, cease hostilities, and abandon cycles of tribal vengeance,” he urged. “Syria stands at a critical juncture - peace and dialogue must

prevail - and prevail now.”

Barrack’s statement follows the Syrian presidency’s announcement of a nationwide ceasefire on Saturday, intended to halt the recent violence and restore order to Suwayda province. Earlier, the envoy had announced a truce between Syria and Israel.

Security forces were deployed in the restive region and officials declared a halt to the clashes.

After the December 2024 ouster of Bashar al-Assad, a new transitional administration led by Ahmed al-Sharaa was formed in January.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged the Syrian government on Saturday to use security forces in the south to ‘immediately’ stop the violence between Druze and Bedouin groups and prevent further atrocities.

Anadolu Agency

Moroccan authorities battle forest fire

Rabat, Morocco - Moroccan authorities have been battling a forest fire near the northern city of Tetouan since early Saturday, amid intensive ground and aerial efforts to contain the flames and prevent them from spreading.

Fouad El Assali, director of Climate and Environmental Risks, and Reforestation at the National Water and Forest Agency said the fire broke out in the morning in a forest near the town of Mellalyène, which is administratively part of Tetouan.

El Assali told the national television website that firefighting teams on the ground are working intensively to contain the blaze, alongside the intervention of four ‘Canadair’ amphibious aircraft assisting in extinguishing operations.

He noted that it is still too early to assess the extent of damage to the forest cover.

In mid-July, the National Water and Forest Agency urged residents near forests in three provinces, particularly in the northern regions, to exercise



Forests cover about 12% of Morocco’s territory and are exposed annually to wildfires of varying severity

caution regarding fire risks.

It encouraged citizens to promptly alert authorities if smoke or suspicious activity is observed, and avoid behaviour that could lead to fires.

Authorities announced May 16 the allocation of US\$17mn to enhance wildfire response efforts during the summer of

2025.

Abderrahim Houmy, director general of the National Water and Forest Agency, said the number of wildfires in 2024 reached 382, marking an 82% decrease compared to 2023.

He added that fires in 2024 consumed 874 hectares of vegetation, with nearly 45% of af-

fectured areas consisting of secondary grasses and seasonal plants.

Forests cover about 12% of Morocco’s territory and are exposed annually to wildfires of varying severity, depending on climate conditions and human behaviour.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza-bound aid ship sets sail from Italian port to break Israel’s blockade

Istanbul, Turkey - A Gaza-bound aid ship set sail from the southern Italian port of Gallipoli on Sunday morning, aiming to break a long-standing Israeli blockade on the Palestinian enclave.

“This mission is for the children of Gaza,” the organisers, the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, said in a statement. “In the face of genocide and deliberate starvation, every act of solidarity matters. As long as Israel enjoys impunity, violence will continue.”

The ship *Handala*, a repurposed 1968 Norwegian fishing trawler, is carrying medical supplies, food, and aid equipment for Palestinian children in Gaza.

It is crewed by around 20 in-

ternational participants, including European lawmakers, rights activists, and journalists.

Organisers said the departure, initially scheduled for Friday, was postponed to Sunday due to ‘final technical and logistical preparations’. The ship is expected to navigate for approximately one week across the Mediterranean to reach waters near Gaza, covering a distance of around 80km.

The mission follows the Madleen voyage in June, which was intercepted by Israeli naval forces before reaching Gaza. The coalition emphasised that ‘intimidation and arrests will not stop this global wave of support for Palestinians’.



The ship *Handala*, a repurposed 1968 Norwegian fishing trawler, is carrying medical supplies, food, and aid equipment for Palestinian children in Gaza

Among the *Handala* passengers are French lawmakers Emma Fourreau and Gabrielle Cathala from the France Unbowed (LFI) Party, Palestinian-American activist Huwaida Arraf, and American union leader Chris Smalls.

“We are fully aware of the risks, but they are nothing compared to what children in Gaza endure every day. We stand for peace and international law,” MEP Fourreau said in statements before departure.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army has recommended reaching a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip after nearly two years of relentless war, a senior military of-

ficial said on Sunday.

“The army recommends that the political leadership reach an agreement,” the public broadcaster KAN said, citing the military official.

The official expressed hope that such a deal could be finalised ‘this week’.

The army is ready to show ‘flexibility’ depending on the decisions made by Israel’s political leadership, the source said, without elaborating. The comments come as the Israeli army intensified its offensive in Gaza, deepening its siege and starvation policies against civilians in the Palestinian enclave.

Anadolu Agency

Aktau plane crash: Azerbaijan to file lawsuits against Russia

Azerbaijan has received no meaningful response from Russia, seven months after the crash

Baku, Azerbaijan - Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has announced that his country is preparing to file lawsuits in international courts against Russia regarding the Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8243 plane crash near Aktau on 25 December last year.

The plane was en route from Baku to Grozny, and crashed near the Kazakh city of Aktau on the Caspian Sea, killing 38 people.

Three days after the crash, Aliyev said in an address to the nation that 'we can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia... We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done'. He later stated that Baku had made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

According to Azerbaijani media outlet Minval, Aliyev said on Saturday that even though the circumstances of the incident are 'as clear as day', Azerbaijan has received no meaningful response from Russia, seven months after the crash.

Aliyev added that the Azerbaijani prosecutor general has sent requests to the head of Rus-



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev

Azerbaijan's demands, according to Aliyev, are a guilty plea from Russia, prosecution of those responsible for downing the plane, payment of compensation to the families of the victims and compensation for damages suffered by AZAL

sia's Investigative Committee, and has thus far only been informed that 'the investigation is ongoing'. He described this stance as counterproductive and reaffirmed Baku's intention to seek international justice.

Azerbaijan has therefore informed Russia of its preparation

of a dossier for a corresponding lawsuit, said Aliyev. Referring to the investigation into the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 crash, which claimed 239 victims in 2014 and whose subsequent inquiry has lasted over a decade, he said 'we are ready to wait ten years, but justice must win. And

unfortunately, the situation, which is currently in limbo, does not contribute to the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Azerbaijan'.

Aliyev lays out demands

Aliyev claimed that Azerbaijan has a clear understanding of what happened to the Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) plane, and that Russian officials also possess the same information. "The question arises: why don't they do as any neighbour would do in a similar situation?" he remarked.

Azerbaijan's demands, according to Aliyev, are a guilty

plea from Russia, prosecution of those responsible for downing the plane, payment of compensation to the families of the victims and compensation for damages suffered by AZAL.

On February 4, a preliminary official report released by the Azerbaijani government showed that the plane had indeed been shot down by a Russian Pantsir-S air defence system.

Azerbaijani government sources exclusively confirmed to Euronews as early as 26 December that a Russian surface-to-air missile caused the plane to crash.

Euronews



Iran, European trio agree to resume nuclear talks next week

Ankara, Turkey - Iran and the European trio - the UK, France, and Germany - have agreed in principle to resume nuclear negotiations next week, Iranian state broadcaster Press TV reported on Sunday.

Citing a source, the media organisation said both sides have agreed to restart talks, but the time and place of the negotiations are yet to be finalised. In talks with Iran's foreign minister on Thursday, the top diplomats of the UK, France, Germany, and the EU had emphasised the urgency of returning to diplomacy for a nuclear deal, or else they were prepared to trigger the UN 'snap-back' mechanism - reimposing international sanctions.

Talks between Tehran and the US were being held through Omani mediators until Israel's surprise attack on Iran on June 13, which triggered a 12-day war. The attack came just two days before a planned sixth round of negotiations in Muscat.

Iran accused the US of complicity in the Israeli attack, which killed top Iranian military officials, nuclear scientists, and civilians. The US also launched strikes on three major Iranian nuclear sites, claiming to have them obliterated. A ceasefire took effect on June 24. While the US and Europeans say Iran can never have a nuclear bomb, Tehran argues its programme is meant for peaceful use of nuclear power.

After the talks with E3 and EU, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said it was the US that withdrew from the 2015 nuclear, and any new round of talks is only possible 'when the other side is ready for a fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial nuclear deal'.

"If EU/E3 want to have a role, they should act responsibly, and put aside the worn-out policies of threat and pressure, including the 'snap-back' for which they lack absolutely no moral and legal ground," he said on X.

Anadolu Agency

IN SEARCH OF A SAFER PLACE



People with their belongings travel via boats as the Ganga water level increases following heavy rainfall, in Patna, in Indian state of Bihar on Sunday (ANI)

Relative calm returns to Syria's Suwayda

Damascus, Syria - Syria's Health Ministry dispatched an urgent medical convoy to Suwayda on Sunday as relative calm returned to the southern province under a recently brokered ceasefire.

According to the state news agency SANA, the convoy includes 20 ambulances, specialised medical teams, and large quantities of medicine and emergency supplies.

The aid convoy was organised in coordination with the ministries of emergency management, social affairs, and relevant UN organisations, the agency reported.

Health Minister Musab Al-Ali said that the aid convoy had been ready for days but was delayed due to Israeli airstrikes.

He confirmed that the convoy was able to move on Sunday after Syrian security forces cleared out



tribal fighters and implemented a ceasefire announced by the presidency on Saturday.

Interior Minister Anas Khattab confirmed that the situation began to calm in Suwayda after the deployment of Internal Security Forces (ISF) in the northern and western regions.

Security forces 'were able to enforce a ceasefire within Suwayda city, paving the way for a prisoner exchange and the gradual return of stability throughout the province', he said on X.

"The deployment of the ISF in Suwayda represents a safety

valve for stability and calm, and a first step in controlling the chaos of weapons and consolidating security," he said. "Our compass is a complete ceasefire, allowing the state to fully assume its role in restoring normalcy to Sweida city and the rest of the province."

Anadolu Agency

Niger: Two Indians killed in attack

Niamey, Niger - In a terror attack, two Indians were killed while one was abducted in the Dosso region of Niger, as noted by the Indian Embassy in Niger.

The Indian Embassy in Niamey is in touch with the local authorities to repatriate the mortal remains of those killed and ensure safe release of the abducted Indian. The mission also cautioned all Indians in Niger to remain vigilant.

Arab News reported that unidentified armed attackers ambushed a Nigerian army unit providing security at a construction site.

Nepal PM Oli invited for a two-day visit to India in September

Kathmandu/New Delhi - Nepal's Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli has received an invitation from India for a two-day official visit in September, sources confirmed to ANI.

As per officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nepal, and another official from the Office of the Prime Minister, PM Oli has received an invitation for a visit to India from September 16.

"This possibly will be the shortest visit of the Nepali Prime Minister to India. He has received the invitation for two days starting from September 16. Preparations for the visit have started upon receiving the invitation," the official from the Foreign Ministry told ANI.

Nepali envoy to India, Shankar Prasad Sharma, in an interview with ANI on Saturday,

also hinted at the visit, stating that Prime Minister Oli would travel to India 'very soon', as both sides work toward finalising agreements in key areas.

The ambassador's remarks came two days after Prime Minister Oli confirmed that a visit to India is on the cards. Speaking to ANI, Ambassador Sharma said that while no dates have been finalised, the visit is expected soon. "I think he will come to India very soon," he said.

The Prime Minister's Office official, who spoke to ANI on condition of anonymity, also confirmed that preparations have started for his visit to India and are working on the agenda.

"There won't be an announcement of new and big agendas. The visit will focus more on strengthening the Indo-



Nepal's PM K P Sharma Oli and India's PM Narendra Modi

Nepal relation and move forward with the ongoing projects in Nepal," the official told ANI.

PM Oli, who assumed office in July last year for the fourth time, has yet to make an official

visit to India. He chose China for his maiden foreign visit, breaking the traditional practice of visiting India first after taking office.

In April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met PM Oli on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok. The two leaders reviewed bilateral ties and expressed satisfaction with the progress made in areas such as energy, connectivity, and people-to-people linkages.

Another official from the MoFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Nepal, confirmed that the Indian side has also informed of the possibility of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in November.

"It has been communicated that the Indian Prime Minister will visit Nepal in November. The Indian side hasn't communi-

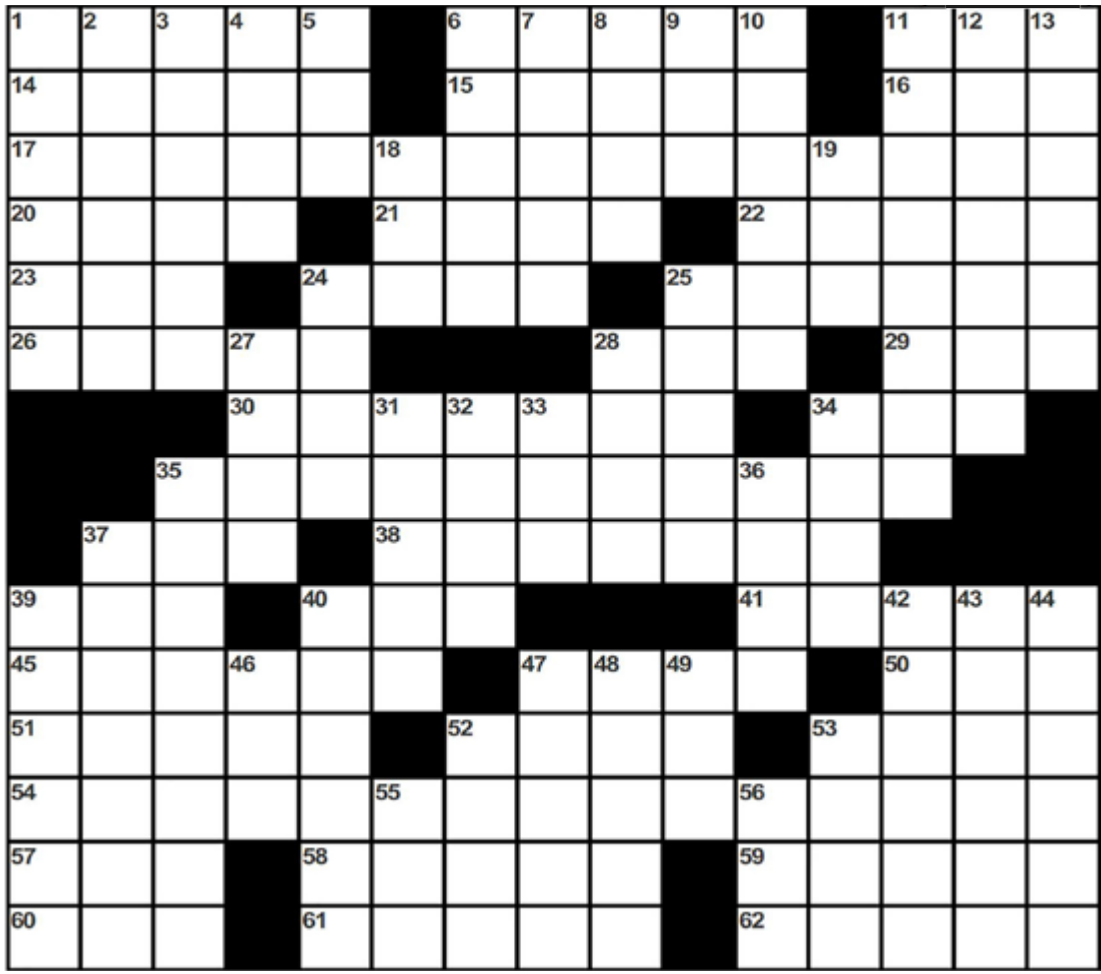
cated the dates, but they have given the probable month as November for the visit. Like before, his visit might focus on a tour to the religious sites of Nepal," the official told ANI.

As per official sources of Nepal, PM Modi's visit to Nepal is expected to be brief and symbolic, reinforcing the long-standing cultural and spiritual ties between the two countries.

The Indian PM, meanwhile, will visit the United Kingdom and the Maldives from July 23 to 26, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Sunday.

The visit to the UK is at the invitation of Prime Minister Keir Starmer, while the state visit to the Maldives is at the invitation of President Mohamed Muizzu. ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Go past an expiration date
6) They can eat your dust
11) Semicircular basin in a mountain
14) Haggard of music
15) Unaccompanied
16) "And what have we here?"
17) Legal quip (Part 1)
20) Some reddish deers
21) Touch borders with
22) Sound from a nest
23) Airport info, initially
24) Changes color, in a way
25) Fricker of "My Left Foot"
26) Hispanic dance music
28) Chesapeake in Maryland
29) Word in a tied score
30) Turncoat's crime
34) Certain compass dir.
35) Legal quip (Part 2)
37) "Thank you, may I have another!"
38) Ballpark vendors' offerings
39) Disney's football-kick-

ing mule
40) It's cut and dried
41) Part of a tall building
45) Ancient Rome's, Way
4 7) Dramatist's work
50) Unit of sun
51) Baseball or football
52) Rock outcropping
53) "Your majesty"
54) Legal quip (Part 3)
57) Golden-ager's nest egg, for short
58) Bird that gets down
59) Sudden burst of voltage
60) Final amt.
61) Like marsh plants
62) Atlas enlargement
DOWN
1) Campfire snacks
2) Jai-alai ball
3) Baptism of fire
4) Pandora's boxful
5) Where the cows graze
6) "You never know ..."
7) Intestinal obstruction
8) Cause for civil action
9) "Inning" contains three
10) "Halt!" caller
11) Sacred agreement
12) Cajole

13) Like some enemies
18) One-, street
19) Mama sheep
24) Call one's bluff
25) Bluegrass instrument
27) Begin to wake up
28) "Cheers" bartender
Woody
31) "... Frome"
32) "Hello, sailor!"
33) Tennis unit
34) In-, (existing)
35) Kitchen sink device
36) "The, Duckling"
37) Financial backing
39) Illuminated, as Victorian streets
40) Carroll's "Mad" tea drinker
42) Laundromat fixtures (Var.)
43) House annex
44) Shoestring hole
46) Anger
4 7) Was too nosy
48) Fine with the Stooges?
49) Word before "Khan"
52) Give up, as land
53) Created a spiderweb
55) Shake a leg
56) Air pump letters

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You need some help to get where you're going today. Of course, you're great on your own, better than most, and well known for doing amazing work independently. It's just that for now your personal energy responds better to teamwork. Any brainstorming session is bound to be of incredibly inspired. If you can fit some social time into your busy schedule, so much the better. You make everyone feel just right.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
If you've been wishing for love, you may suddenly find yourself in the company of a smart new friend. If you've been hoping for (and working toward) major progress at work, a new love could pop up from out of nowhere. If you want to grapple with a big family issue, your career could take off in a brand-new di-rection. All this means is that though you can't always get what you want, you sometimes get a generous replacement.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
That old advice "don't talk to strangers" doesn't really apply to you. In fact, at the moment talking to new folks is both simple to do and amazingly rewarding. If you're at a shop, ask someone for help deciding what looks good. If you're waiting for a train, ask that interesting person what's new in their world. On the job, make chitchat with someone you've never dealt with before. New connections bring remarkable opportunities.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In which sport is there a hog line, and sometimes a hogger?
A. Cheese rolling
B. Gumbboot throwing
C. Curling
D. Caber tossing

02. Brazil is the largest country on which continent?
A. North America
B. South America
C. Asia
D. Africa

03. In what field is Robert Mapplethorpe known?
A. Sculpture
B. Experimental dance
C. Jazz
D. Black and white photography

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. D

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Your well-planned approach to work, to your love life, or to an issue with a good friend is about to run up against someone else's beliefs about how things ought to be done. Your natural reaction is to stick to your guns and argue for your way, which is, after all, the best way. Still, diplomacy is essential right now. Allow them to make a contribution. Maybe by joining the two approaches.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You've made a real connection. Now you need to push it along into something you really want it to be. Think about deepening the link and discovering all the mutually supportive nooks and crannies you two share. Start with a genuine expression of your feelings about their work, their social genius, their intuition, and then follow up with some thoughtful questions about how they do it.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
A new financial possibility seems quite appealing, but it's not like you to rush into anything, and this isn't a good time to start! Before you invest or make any other decisions, use your critical faculties. Read up some more, find folks who've been there before, and ask some hard questions. Most people are quite helpful when they see that you mean business and that you're committed to thinking both short and long term.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
That strange feeling is back, and it's making you itch for movement. It doesn't have to be forward motion. Lateral movement can be just as effective. Look for a new work project, maybe you can trade responsibilities, or just change the furniture around at home. You could also take a trip and head out of town in some random direction.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You're usually sweet as can be: mellow, friendly, and pretty much willing to do whatever it takes to get along with people. When an underdog gets involved, though, you do whatever it takes to help out no matter what the cost. When someone in need or in trouble crosses your path today, warn your people to make way. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

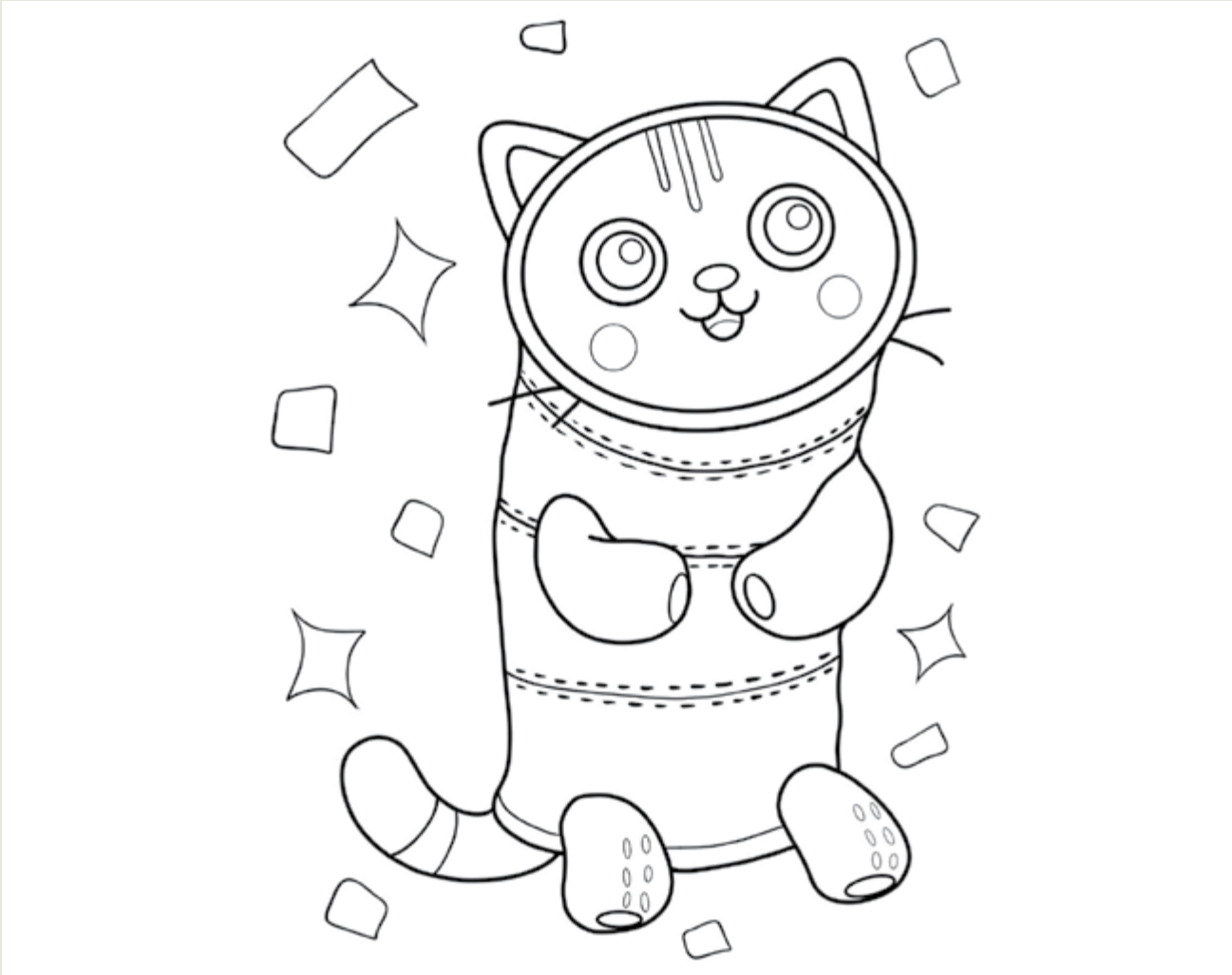
AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Life's a party for you now. In fact, you're practically the guest of honor! Since it's all about you, expect some odd venues or behaviors, like an eccentric art studio filled with people wearing glammed-out '70s clothes. You're getting all the credit for everyone's fun, and of course you deserve it. Expect a few to understand your freaky genius and be totally entranced.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Caution with your feelings is one thing, but refusing to let yourself feel vulnerable is another, and it's a killer! Listen to your instincts about this new situation. They should tell you what to do. If you feel anxious, talk about everything (and your new plans) with someone close who has given you a few reality checks previously. If all goes well, get ready to open up.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Some really weird energy is blowing your way, bringing with it the possibility of unusual outbursts and big, crazy ideas. Someone close rubs you the wrong way or does something completely unexpected, but try not to get het up when you can instead show off your ability to adapt. Let the situation unfold and just see where it's heading. Something very positive may result.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The information you're getting from around you is a little hard to understand, at least in any way you've tried so far. Fortunately, you're quite comfortable in the realm of the unreal, where edges don't have to meet and mysteries are generally better left untouched. Your grip on the situation, slippery as it is, should still help you find your way.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

G	S	E	Y
L	E	O	K
N	H	E	O
N	O	L	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ANN: FROM SCARS, SHE SOARED

Cancer survivor Berger guides Germany to shootout win over France in Euro quarters

Basel, Switzerland - Ann-Katrin Berger pulled off a stunning final save as Germany beat France 6-5 in a penalty shootout to set up a Euro 2025 semi-final showdown with world champions Spain after a bruising encounter that ended 1-1 after extra time on Saturday.

The Germans pulled off a superb comeback from a goal down and a straight red card for defender Kathrin Hendrich after 13 minutes, battling their way back into the game and eventually getting the better of their opponents in a thrilling shootout.

Hendrich was sent off after a VAR review established that she had pulled the hair of Griedge Mbock Bathy in the box, and Grace Geyoro's subsequent penalty had the power to get over the line despite Berger getting a strong hand to it.

On the ropes and struggling, the Germans suddenly levelled, Sjoek Nuesken catching the defence napping by darting towards Klara Buehl's near-post corner and flashing a header into the net in the 25th minute.

With the well-organised Germans defending doggedly,



Ann-Katrin Berger of Germany miraculously claws away Janina Minge's misdirected defensive header during their Euro quarterfinal against France on Saturday



I was not happy that we had to go to the penalty shootout because I would have loved to have won the game in 90 minutes

ANN-KATRIN BERGER

France had two goals ruled out for offside and Nuesken had a second-half penalty saved.

Even before the penalty shootout, Berger pulled off a contender for the 'save of the tournament', back-peddalling before diving acrobatically to claw away Janina Minge's misdirected defensive header and keep the scores level.

With neither side managing to

score in extra time the game went to penalties, and Berger got the shootout off to a great start for the Germans by saving from Amel Majri, but they were brought back to level pegging when Sara Daebritz struck her spot kick off the crossbar and over the goal.

Berger, a cancer survivor who sports a tattoo to cover up a scar from her treatment that says "All

we have is now", then fired home from the spot herself before making her decisive save. She dived to her left to deny 21-year-old defender Alice Sombath, sending the Germans through to the last four.

"I was not happy that we had to go to the penalty shootout because I would have loved to have won the game in 90 minutes and have it done and dusted," Berger

told reporters before paying tribute to her squad.

"I think credit should go to the team, not me, because maybe it (my save) was the decisive moment in the penalty shootout, but we, everyone here, should talk about this with him (coach Christian Wueck) now about the performance of the team, because that was amazing and incredible."

Iran edge Jordan to complete Women's Asian Cup line-up

Amman, Jordan - Iran handed Jordan a 2-1 defeat in Amman on Saturday to claim the final berth at next year's Women's Asian Cup finals, which will be held in Australia in March.

Second-half goals from Sara Didar and Negin Zandi earned Marziyeh Jafari's team a win that secured top spot in Group A of the preliminaries ahead of the Jordanians due to their better head-to-head record. The Iranians are the last team to qualify for the finals after matches in Group A were postponed due to the recent Israel-Iran conflict.

Australia will host the 12-team tournament in Sydney, Perth and Gold Coast from March 1 to 21 and Joe Montemurro's home side will be among the favourites to lift the trophy.

Defending champions China, who have won the title a record nine times, will also be joined at the finals by South Korea, Japan, Bangladesh, India, Taiwan, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, the Philippines and North Korea.

The draw will take place in Sydney on July 29.

"There's a real energy building, not just here in Australia but across Asia, and this diverse, high-quality line-up shows just how far women's football has come," said Sarah Walsh, the event's chief organising officer.

"With so much talent and so many great stories coming together, this is going to be a tournament to remember."

Teenager Lencina's double helps River crush Instituto

Córdoba, Argentina - Santiago Lencina struck twice as River Plate hammered 10-man Instituto ACC 4-0 on Saturday, making for two wins from two matches for the visitors in Argentina's Clausura championship.

River top Group B standings with six points, while Instituto sit seventh with three points.

Facundo Colidio put River ahead in the 44th minute, with a deflected shot before 19-year-old Lencina doubled their lead just moments before half-time with a left-foot strike that deflected off Instituto centre back Fernando Alarcon.

Lencina made it 3-0 in the 67th minute with a well-controlled shot after receiving the ball in the box, while Instituto were reduced to 10 men six minutes later, after midfielder Francis Manuel Mac Allister received a red card for a foul on Lencina.

River made the most of the red as Giuliano Galoppo added a fourth goal to wrap up all three points in style at the Estadio Juan Domingo Peron in Cordoba.

Lencina was one of River's standout players, keeping the opposition defence on their toes as he scored his first two goals in the Argentine top flight.

"It was a dream day. Since I was a kid, you always dream of this moment ... I'll never forget it," Lencina told ESPN.

'Man City player for life' De Bruyne excited about fresh start at Napoli

Naples, Italy - Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne is raring to go at Serie A champions Napoli after not being offered a contract extension by Manchester City, and said linking up with compatriot Romelu Lukaku was part of the appeal.

Regarded as one of the greatest midfielders in Premier League history, De Bruyne ended a glittering decade-long spell at City at the end of last season and joined Napoli on a free transfer last month.

"I have been in the Premier League for so long and in the end I made the decision to go out of England," De Bruyne told reporters on Saturday. "I have done what I have done and in the end I am a Man City player for life. It was also with the way that it ended for me, I thought, it is time to find a new challenge.

"When I had the whole project in front of me and then the fact that I could play in Italy and still



Kevin De Bruyne (R) and Antonio Conte

play at a high level was exciting for me."

De Bruyne, 34, said he had much to learn in Italy, but with Belgium teammate Romelu Lukaku by his side, the learning curve looks far less steep as he adjusts to Antonio Conte's side.

"Napoli already are champions but they are still improving their squad... I am hoping that I can help the team grow and I will also learn from them, a new way of playing, a new competition."

"Romelu was happy (about the move), I spoke with him in the national team (camp), he wanted me to join. I know Romelu since we were 13-years-old, so we are really tight together. When we played in Chelsea we lived together for two or three months.

"It makes it a little bit easier that I know him because he is somebody who can translate for me and it helps because he knows the coach, he knows the team."



Eddie Howe (R) with Alexander Isak

Manager Howe 'confident' Isak will remain at Newcastle

Glasgow, Scotland - Newcastle head coach Eddie Howe is "confident" striker Alexander Isak will start the 2025/26 season at St James' Park after the Sweden international was left out of Saturday's 4-0 pre-season friendly defeat at Celtic.

Isak has been the subject of transfer speculation this summer, with Liverpool one of the clubs linked with the forward, who scored 23 goals for Newcastle last season.

"I think it's difficult for me to give 100 per cent clarity on any player," Howe told Sky Sports, when asked about Isak's future after the defeat at Celtic Park.

"I'd never sit here and do that because it's football and you never know what can happen. All I can say is that Alex is happy at Newcastle. He loves the players he plays with, the staff, the team and I've never had any issue with him.

"I'm confident he's going to be here at the start of the season."

Isak, along with Brazil midfielder Joelinton, both missed Saturday's defeat "to have their minutes managed" according to the club's official website, with Howe's side well beaten by the Scottish champions.

The match gave Newcastle

Isak has been the subject of transfer speculation this summer, with Liverpool one of the clubs linked with the forward

fans a first opportunity to see new signing Anthony Elanga, who came on during the second half with his side already 2-0 down.

Elanga could get some more minutes under his belt when Newcastle face Arsenal in their next pre-season match on 27 July, in Singapore.

Manchester United lack pace in midfield, says Amorim after draw with Leeds

Manchester, England - Manchester United have plenty to improve on and need more pace in their midfield, manager Ruben Amorim said after the Premier League side began their pre-season preparations with a goalless draw against Leeds United.

United had their worst-ever Premier League campaign in the 2024-25 season, finishing 15th in the standings, and also failed to qualify for the Champions League as they lost the Europa League final 1-0 to Tottenham.

The Old Trafford side failed to impress in the draw with newly



Ruben Amorim

promoted Leeds in Stockholm on Saturday, despite the inclusion of new signing Matheus Cunha.

"We suffered a little bit when we tried to press high, they kick the ball, win the second ball and they were a danger in that moment," Amorim told MUTV.

"We have a lack of pace, especially in the middle of the park, and you can feel it, (so) that's hard to bring the ball (forward). But we created chances. We have a lot to do but it was a first test against a Premier League team, with two different teams, so it was a good test..."

OBLIQUE LIGHTS UP LONDON

Seville leaves Olympic champion Lyles in his wake in London Diamond League sprint

London, England - Oblique Seville left Olympic champion Noah Lyles chewing his dust on Saturday as the Jamaican blasted out of the blocks and kept the hammer down to win the London Diamond League 100 metres in a hot 9.86 seconds.

Seville, so impressive through the rounds at last year's Olympics before coming last in the final, roared into a two-metre lead after 20 metres and was never threatened as he came home clear, with Lyles finishing strongly, but not enough, for second in 10.00.

A sold-out 60,000 Olympic Stadium crowd braved early storms to watch some superb performances as athletes start to build towards September's world championships in Tokyo.

Julien Alfred won the women's 200m in a scorching personal best of 21.71 seconds, Briton Charlie Dobson was a surprise winner of the 400m, 18-year-old Kenyan Phaniel Kipkosgei Koech won the 1,500m and Mykolas Alekna won the discus with a Diamond League record of 71.70



Jamaica's Oblique Seville celebrates after winning the London Diamond League 100 metres on Saturday

I am proud of how I ran amongst a stacked field. I was the only one to run under 10 seconds today, it is something special and phenomenal heading into a major championship

OBLIQUE SEVILLE

metres. As always, however, it was the 100m that was the centre piece, with, as always, Lyles at the centre of that.

The American, who had been struggling with an ankle injury, began his season in earnest last

week with victory over 200m in Monaco and was in confident mood clad in a fetching mauve one-piece on Saturday.

However, it was the red blur of Seville that caught the eye after a brilliant pick-up stage

that effectively settled the race by 25 metres.

"I am proud of how I ran amongst a stacked field. I was the only one to run under 10 seconds today, it is something special and phenomenal heading into a major championship," said Seville, who has yet to turn his talent into individual gold on the world stage.

Lyles was also upbeat. "I feel great after that, I feel extremely healthy and I am feeling no pain," he said. "I wanted the win but I think it was my fastest-ever season opener, so I will take that

result today." The women's Olympic 100m champion, St Lucia's Alfred, was hugely impressive winner of the 200m, forging clear in the latter stages to clock a meeting record. British duo Dina Asher-Smith (22.25) and Amy Hunt (22.31) followed her home.

In a high-quality 1,500 metres field it was rising star Koech who took the honours, forcing past Britain's world champion Josh Kerr on the inside 200 metres out and driving clear to win in 3:28.82.

His compatriot, Olympic champion Emmanuel Wanyoni,

made it a middle-distance double by taking the 800m. Canadian Marco Arop, whom he beat by one hundredth of a second in last year's Olympic final, came off the final bend in the lead but Wanyoni surged through to win in 1:42.00.

Medina Eisa, 20, beat fellow Ethiopian Fantaye Belayneh in a fantastic women's 5,000 metres, battling in a back-and-forth final 200 metres to snatch victory in 14:30.97 as Belayneh set a personal best of 14:30.90.

Despite the injury absence of Olympic champion Keely Hodgkinson, there was plenty to cheer for the home fans in the women's 800m as Georgia Hunter Bell ran a superbly-judged race to win in 1:56.74 from American Addison Wiley.

There was British success in the men's 400m too but not what was expected as Dobson overhauled favourite Matt Hudson-Smith on the line.

Dobson was 10 metres adrift entering the final straight but finished like a train to sweep past five rivals and looked stunned when he saw his personal best of 44.14 seconds on the screen. World and Olympic silver medallist Hudson-Smith, tying up, finished second in 44.27.

Alekna did not let a wet circle impact his performance as he won the discus with a mighty 71.70 throw - a Diamond League record but almost four metres off the world record the Lithuanian set in the United States in April in a performance dubbed "weather doping" because of the assistance gained from high winds.



Scottie Scheffler

Scheffler closes in on British Open title

Portrush, Northern Ireland - Scottie Scheffler kept a cool hand on the tiller to stay on course for his first British Open title with a serene 67 on a spectacular day of shot-making in Saturday's third round.

Birdies and eagles rained down on a sun-kissed Royal Portrush links with home favourite Rory McIlroy, England's Tyrrell Hatton and defending champion Xander Schauffele all tucking into the scoring feast.

Thunderous roars wafted across the County Antrim coast, the loudest for some McIlroy magic, but world number one Scheffler was laser-focused to move to 14 under par and a four-stroke lead heading to the final day.

Barring a sudden loss of form by the three-times major champion, the last round looks like being a scrap for the minor places, although Scheffler is not out of sight.

"I had another good day today," Scheffler said. "I was

Sometimes in major championships it can be tough to make birdies, and today was one of those days where I was able to hole a few

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

pretty patient and felt like I was hitting it really nice.

"Sometimes in major championships it can be tough to make birdies, and today was one of those days where I just had to give myself some looks and was able to hole a few."

Li Haotong maintained his challenge, a 69 taking him to 10 under par, and he will be the first Chinese man to be in the final group at a major. England's Matt Fitzpatrick finished a further shot back after a disappointing 71.

McIlroy's five-under 66 kept alive the Northern Irishman's hopes of lifting the Claret Jug on home soil, 11 years after his previous British Open title. He is in a group on eight under with Americans Chris Gotterup and Harris English, and Hatton.

"I've got a chance. I need to get off to a great start like I did today, and if I can do that, anything can happen," McIlroy said.

After his majestic second-round 64, the 29-year-old Scheffler was becalmed early on Saturday and three-putted for a par five at the second hole.

Playing partner Fitzpatrick missed a par putt on the first but responded with an eagle at the second to join Scheffler on 10 under.

Arensman lightens Ineos spirits amidst doping cloud

Bagnères-De-Luchon, France - Thymen Arensman gave Ineos-Grenadiers something to cheer about, despite a doping cloud hanging over the team, as he won the 14th stage of the Tour de France following a superb solo ride in the 182.6-km mountain trek between Pau and Superbagneres on Saturday.

Slovenian Tadej Pogacar retained the overall leader's yellow jersey as he took second place by beating chief rival Jonas Vingegaard in a two-man sprint finish, one minute 12 seconds behind Arensman, the first rider from the British outfit to win on the Tour in two years.

Ineos Grenadiers have been facing questions about one of their team carers, who is at the centre of allegations involving alleged message exchanges in 2012 with a doctor connected to the notorious Operation Ader-

lass doping scandal, which rocked the sporting world in 2019.

Bradley Wiggins won the Tour in 2012 with the team, which was then known as Team Sky before Chris Froome went on to win another four for the squad.

The team carer was seen at the beginning of the Tour in Lille but has not been sighted in recent days.

"I have no idea about this, you have to ask the management about this. I'm just focused on my job, doing my own thing," Arensman told reporters.

Ineos Grenadiers were not immediately available for comment.

Although no formal charges have been brought, the development has cast a shadow over the team's Tour campaign.

"Ineos Grenadiers Cycling Team is aware of recent media



Thymen Arensman celebrates after winning the 14th stage of the Tour de France on Saturday

allegations relating to the 2012 season and a member of its staff. These allegations have not to date been presented to the team by any appropriate authority," the team said in a statement.

The team added that it had formally requested information from the International Testing Agency (ITA) and reaffirmed its zero-tolerance policy regarding doping violations.

The ITA said it would not further comment on the matter.

Operation Aderlass, which began with a raid during the 2019 Nordic World Ski Championships in Austria, implicated athletes and medical personnel across several sports, including cycling.

The doctor at the centre of the case, Mark Schmidt, was later convicted and sentenced to prison for administering illegal blood transfusions.

Bublik claims Gstaad title

Gstaad, Switzerland - Alexander Bublik added a clay-court milestone to his 2025 European summer surge on Sunday at the EFG Swiss Open Gstaad.

The second-seeded Kazakhstani held off Juan Manuel Cerundolo 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 to clinch the trophy in the Swiss Alps. Competing in his first clay final, Bublik regained his composure after a difficult second set to earn his sixth ATP Tour singles title.

"First of all, Juan, as I told you at the net, this was not tennis. It was complete torture," joked Bublik at the trophy ceremony.

"This is my sixth title and I have played the greats of the game, but this final I will remember as one of the toughest I ever played. So good job to you and congrats to your team, it was really good."



Alexander Bublik

Bublik is now 17-5 in tour-level matches since the beginning of the Madrid Open in mid-April, a tally that also includes the title run in Halle. Although he was

upset in the first round at Wimbledon earlier this month by Jaume Munar, the 28-year-old bounced back in style this week to claim the Gstaad crown.

Olympic champion Zheng takes short break after elbow surgery

Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen said on Saturday she would take a short break from the WTA Tour after undergoing elbow surgery.

The 22-year-old Chinese player was eliminated from this year's Wimbledon tournament in the first round by Czech Kateřina Siniakova earlier in July.

"Now begins the recovery journey," she wrote on Instagram. "Over the next few weeks and months, I'll be focusing entirely on rehab — doing everything I can to come back stronger and healthier."

She won the women's singles title at the Paris Olympics in 2024 and claimed the last of her five WTA titles at the Pan Pacific Open in Japan in October of that



Zheng Qinwen

year.

Zheng has never won a Grand Slam title, but reached the 2024 Australian Open final, the quarter-finals of the US Open twice

and the last eight of this year's French Open.

Zheng added she had arthroscopic surgery on her right elbow on Friday.

USYK UNDISPUTED

Ukrainian demolishes Dubois with fifth-round knockout to become world heavyweight champion

London, England - Oleksandr Usyk floored Briton Daniel Dubois in the fifth round of a thrilling contest at Wembley Stadium on Saturday to once again become the undisputed heavyweight boxing world champion.

The win saw Usyk retain his WBC, WBA and WBO belts and reclaim the IBF belt he vacated last year before a rematch with Tyson Fury, with Dubois upgraded to champion and then defending the title against Anthony Joshua last September.

Usyk's skill was evident from the outset as he sidestepped everything thrown his way with deceptive ease and connected



Oleksandr Usyk lands a blow on Daniel Dubois during his demolition job at Wembley

repeatedly with his jab, putting on a masterclass in counter-punching against an opponent 11 years younger than him.

Asked about the win, Usyk said: "38 is a young guy, remember! 38 is only (the) start! "I want to say thank you to Jesus Christ. I want to say thank you to my team and Wembley, thank you so much! It's for the people.

"Nothing is next. It's enough, next, I don't know. I want to rest. My family, my wife, my children, I want to rest now. Two or three months, I want to just rest."

Usyk, who improved his professional record to 24-0, is now a three-time undisputed champion, twice in the heavyweight division and once as a cruiser-weight.

Despite weighing in at a career-heaviest 227.3 pounds on Friday, Usyk floated around the ring with an almost balletic grace and prevented Dubois from making the most of his superior size.

The Ukrainian comfortably outclassed his opponent in three

of the first four rounds, but most of the damage was dealt out in a brutal fifth-round beatdown.

The Ukrainian sent his opponent to the canvas with an over-hand right, before a booming left hand right on the chin dashed Dubois' dreams and brought an end to the bout.

Dubois was defiant after his loss, telling DAZN: "I have to commend him on the performance, I gave everything I had.

"Take no credit away from that man. I'll be back. I was just fighting, trying to pick up round by round. It is what it is."

The Ukrainian also hinted at a potential third fight against Britain's Fury, who he beat twice last year.

"Maybe, we have three choices, (Fury), Derek Chisora and Anthony Joshua. Maybe Joseph Parker. Listen, I cannot now say because I want to go back home," he added.

The unification fight was a rematch of one that Dubois lost by a controversial ninth-round knockout in Wroclaw, Poland, in 2023, after Usyk was given time to recover from what the referee ruled was a low blow.

Fighting earlier on the undercard, Briton Lawrence Okolie beat South African Kevin Lerena by unanimous decision in a lacklustre contest.



Manny Pacquiao dominated his fight against Mario Barrios early on but could not finish the job against his younger rival

Pacquiao draws with Barrios in comeback fight

Las Vegas, US - Manny Pacquiao's bid to become the oldest welterweight champion in boxing history fell short Saturday night as he failed to beat Mario Barrios at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

But he didn't lose, either.

Instead, the 46-year-old Pacquiao and the 30-year-old Barrios fought to a majority draw, with one judge giving Barrios a 115-113 win and the other two judges scoring it a 114-114 draw.

The result allowed Barrios (29-2-2, 18 KOs) to retain his WBC welterweight belt.

"I thought I won the fight," Pacquiao said afterward. "I mean, it was a close fight. My opponent was very tough. It was a wonderful fight. It was good."

Pacquiao (62-8-3, 39 KOs) already holds the record for oldest welterweight champion, winning the belt via split-decision over Keith Thurman in 2019. The Filipino legend was enshrined into the International Boxing Hall of Fame last month.

Pacquiao dominated Saturday's fight early on, showing energy against his younger foe. Ultimately, though, CompuBox stats had Barrios landing more punches (120-101) and more jabs (45-20).

Kulkarni appointed deputy head coach of Oman men's cricket team

Muscat - Oman Cricket announced the appointment of Sulakshan Kulkarni as the deputy head coach of the Oman men's cricket team.

A seasoned cricketing mind and former first-class cricketer, Kulkarni brings with him over two decades of elite coaching experience and a deep understanding of the game, having contributed significantly to Indian domestic cricket and international assignments.

A former Mumbai stalwart, Kulkarni played first-class cricket from 1985 to 2002, shar-



Sulakshan Kulkarni

ing the dressing room with legends such as Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin Tendulkar.

He also boasts an illustrious record with seven Ranji Trophy and Irani Cup titles with Mumbai, as a player and coach then. He was also named among the probable squad in India's 1987 World Cup squad.

His coaching portfolio spans across top Indian domestic teams, including Mumbai, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra.

his guidance, Mumbai lifted both the Ranji Trophy and the

Deodhar Trophy, while West Zone emerged victorious under his strategic leadership.

Kulkarni, a gritty batter and an elite coach, has played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of numerous international stars such as Rohit Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, Suryakumar Yadav, Cheteshwar Pujara, and Avishkar Salvi.

In 2018, he also served as the Batting Consultant for Nepal, during the ICC World Cup Qualifiers Division II, where Nepal secured ODI status for the first time in its history.

With more than 20 years of coaching experience for national, international and Indian Premier League teams, Kulkarni's appointment underscores Oman Cricket's commitment to building a strong and competitive team structure with solid backroom staff led by Duleep Mendis ahead of key international fixtures such as the ICC EAP Asia Qualifier Final and the on-going cycle of the ICC CWC League 2, both of which are a step to the T20 World Cup 2026 and Cricket World Cup 2027 respectively.

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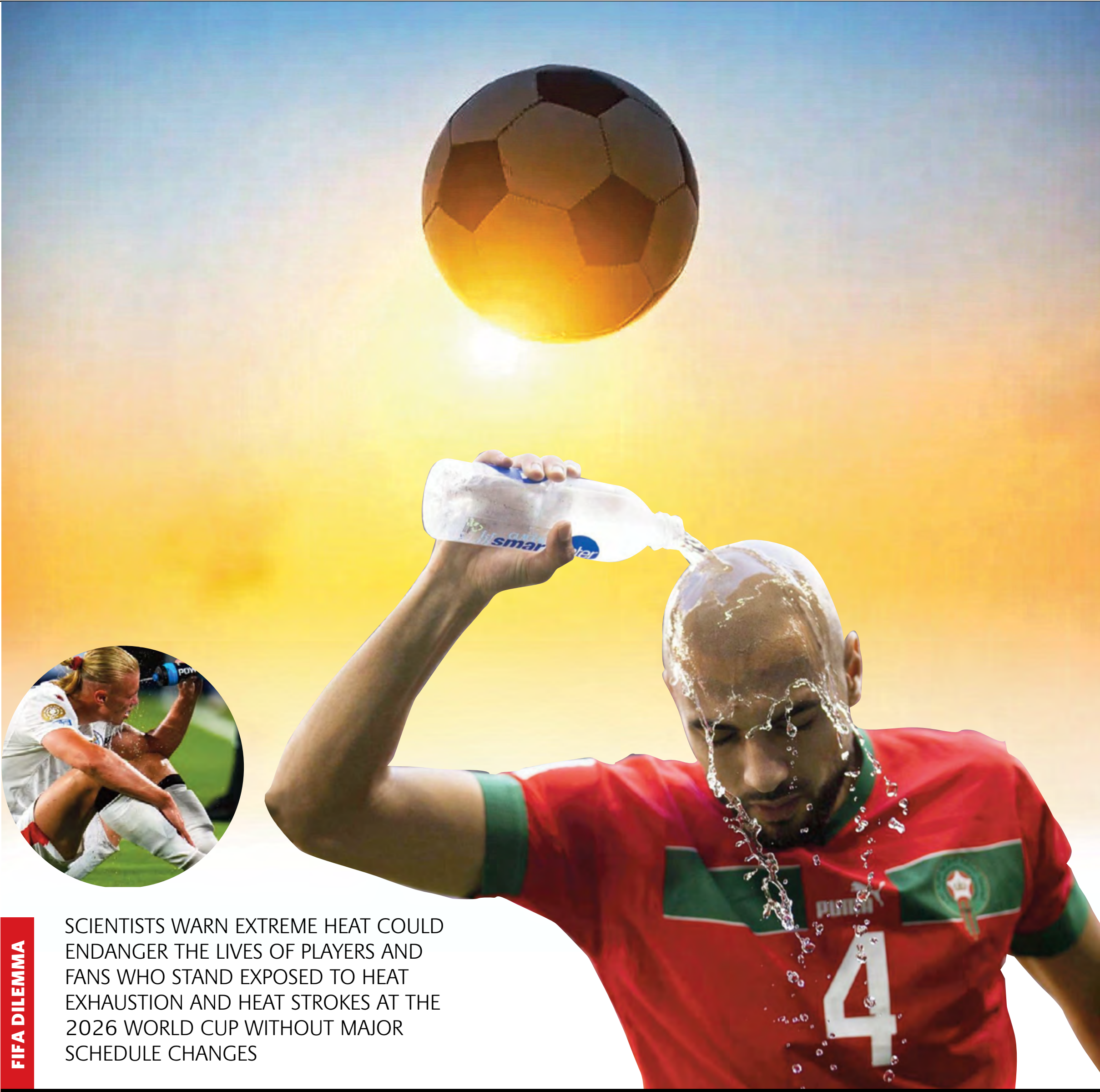
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FIFA DILEMMA

SCIENTISTS WARN EXTREME HEAT COULD ENDANGER THE LIVES OF PLAYERS AND FANS WHO STAND EXPOSED TO HEAT EXHAUSTION AND HEAT STROKES AT THE 2026 WORLD CUP WITHOUT MAJOR SCHEDULE CHANGES

Different strokes

Football had a fierce reckoning with heat at the recently concluded FIFA Club World Cup in the United States, a sweltering preview of what players and fans may face when the US co-hosts the World Cup with Mexico and Canada next summer.

With temperatures rising worldwide, scientists warn that staging the World Cup and other football tournaments in the Northern Hemisphere summer is getting increasingly dangerous for both players and spectators.

Some suggest that FIFA may have to consider adjusting the football calendar to reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses.

"The deeper we go in the decade, the greater the risk without considering more dramatic measures, such as playing in the winter months and/or cooler latitudes," said Professor Piers Forster, director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures in Leeds, England.

"I'm getting increasingly worried that we are only one heatwave away from a sporting tragedy and I would like to see governing bodies lean into the climate and health science."

Since then, the three-month period of June, July and August globally has warmed by 1.05 degrees Celsius, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Meanwhile,

European summer temperatures have increased by 1.81 degrees Celsius. The rate of warming has accelerated since the 1990s.

Climate scientists say that's a factor that needs to be considered when playing high-intensity outdoor sports like football.

"If you want to play football for 10 hours a day, they'll have to be the hours of the early morning and late evening," climatologist Friederike Otto from Imperial College, London, stated. "If you don't want to have players and fans die from heat-stroke or get severely ill with heat exhaustion."

Adapting to changing climate

Extreme heat and thunderstorms made an impact on FIFA's newly expanded tournament for club teams. The Club World Cup was held in 11 American cities from June 14 to July 13.

FIFA adapted by tweaking its extreme heat protocol to include extra breaks in play, more field-side water, and cooling the team benches with air fans and more shade.

Still, Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernández said the heat made him dizzy and urged FIFA to avoid afternoon kickoffs at the World Cup next year.

The global football players' union, FIFPRO, has warned that six of the 16 World Cup cities next year are at "extremely high

“*I'm getting increasingly worried that we are only one heatwave away from a sporting tragedy and I would like to see governing bodies lean into the climate and health science***”**

PROF PIERS FORSTER



risk" for heat stress.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino addressed the heat concerns on Saturday, saying the handful of World Cup stadiums that are covered would be used for day-time games next year.

Extreme heat could become an even bigger challenge at the following World Cup in 2030, which will be co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco. Games are scheduled to be played in afternoons and early evenings from mid-June to mid-July. All three countries have already seen temperatures rise above 40 degrees Celsius this summer.

FIFA downplayed the heat risk in its in-house evaluation of the 2030 World Cup bid, saying "weather conditions are difficult to predict with the current development in global and local climate, but are unlikely to affect the health of players or other participants."

Heat exhaustion risk

The physical effects of playing 90 minutes of football in direct sunshine during the hottest part of the day can be severe and potentially result in hyperthermia - abnormally high body temperatures.

"When players experience hyperthermia, they also experience an increase in cardiovascular strain," said Julien Périard of the University of Canberra.

"If core temperature increases exces-

sively, exertional heat illness can occur," leading to muscle cramping, heat exhaustion, and even life-threatening heat stroke, he said.

Many sports events held in the summer adjust their start times to early morning or late night to minimise the risk of heat-related illness, including marathons at the Olympics or track world championships.

Morning kickoffs, however, are rare in football, where World Cup match schedules are often set with European TV audiences in mind.

It would be hard for FIFA to avoid day-time World Cup kickoffs given the packed match schedule as the number of participating teams increases from 32 to 48 in 2026.

Calendar rethink

Heat mainly becomes an issue when the World Cup is held in the Northern Hemisphere, because June and July are winter months in the Southern Hemisphere.

FIFA has always stuck to its traditional June-July schedule for the men's World Cup, except in 2022, when it moved the tournament to November-December to avoid the summer heat in Qatar. Something similar is expected when neighbouring Saudi Arabia hosts the tournament in 2034.

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