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Shura highlights plight of sacked workers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Youth and Human Resources Committee of Majlis A'Shura has called for immediate resumption of the job security benefit previously extended to laid-off workers, citing significant social and economic repercussions of its suspension.

Chaired by Younis al Mandhari, the committee met on Tuesday to examine the impact of freezing the benefit disbursed by Social Protection Fund. Members raised concerns about the worsening living conditions of those affected and emphasised the need to resume the aid to ensure psychological and social stability for impacted individuals and their families.

The committee urged relevant authorities to take immediate steps, including empowering governorates and promoting decentralised decision-making in employment and redundancy



matters. Members noted that such an approach would facilitate faster, locally-tailored solutions aligned with the specific needs of each governorate.

There was strong emphasis on the need to create job opportunities based on qualifications and professional experience of

laid-off workers, alongside implementation of requalification and skills development programmes to support their reintegration into the labour market.

The committee also called for building a comprehensive and regularly updated database of jobseekers and laid-off individuals

to better inform national employment policies and future strategies.

Among the proposed measures was amendment or introduction of legislation to improve protection mechanisms for the national workforce. The committee discussed

38% of 2025 employment target achieved in H1

Muscat - Ministry of Labour has announced that 17,228 Omanis were employed or enrolled in training-to-employment programmes during the first half of 2025 representing 38.28% of its annual employment plan target.

According to the ministry's detailed indicators released on Tuesday, 12,936 individuals were employed by the end of June. The private sector absorbed 10,620 of these hires from the total target of 24,000,



compared to 2,316 in the public sector from a target of 10,000, indicating an overall completion rate of 38%.

The training-to-employment programme saw 4,292 hires in this period, against a combined

target of 11,000, recording a 39% achievement rate. Of these, 3,819 were in the private sector and 473 in the public sector.

The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to advancing workforce localisation policies and improving employment outcomes for Omani nationals in both public and private sectors. It stated that it continues to coordinate with sector-specific skill units and relevant authorities to meet national workforce goals.



WHALE FOUND DEAD ON AL ASHKHARA BEACH

Specialists of Environment Authority in South Sharqiyah responded to a report of a dead whale washed ashore on Al Ashkhara beach on Tuesday, taking immediate action to assess and manage the situation. According to a statement issued by the authority, an initial examination revealed that the whale died from asphyxiation following entanglement in ropes. The incident highlights the serious threats posed by marine debris, particularly abandoned fishing nets, to marine ecosystems.

'One beating heart needed for Oman's World Cup dream'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Newly appointed head coach of Oman's national football team, Carlos Queiroz, has set a clear objective - securing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Speaking during his introductory press conference in Muscat on Tuesday, the Portuguese coach outlined his strategy and called for national unity in pursuit of what he described as a historic opportunity.

"We cannot lie to ourselves. If we lie to and deceive ourselves, we will not be able to achieve success," Queiroz said. "Honesty is very important, and here we are for smart work to achieve success on the field."

Officially appointed in July, Queiroz has previously helped six different countries qualify for the World Cup. He stressed that achieving such a milestone with Oman would require collective commitment from all stakeholders.

"Everyone should understand that this is an important mission and the efforts of everyone - players, clubs, managers and officials - must be combined," he said. "This is an opportunity that



Oman has over 5mn people, but we need to have one beating heart. This dream is our mission, and we must bring this pride to Oman through discipline and correct behaviour

CARLOS QUEIROZ

has never existed in the history of Oman. We must seize it to achieve the dream."

The 71-year-old coach has already begun work by assessing the team and individual players. The national side is scheduled to hold a training camp in Türkiye ahead of its participation in the

Central Asian Championship in Uzbekistan.

"Oman has over 5mn people, but we need to have one beating heart," Queiroz said. "This dream is our mission, and we must bring this pride to Oman through discipline and correct behaviour."

The former Real Madrid man-

ager noted that a more detailed plan will be unveiled in October outlining the roadmap to World Cup qualification.

"The priority now is to mobilise the energy and resources for World Cup qualification," he said. "After October, we will present the plan on how to advance with Omani football."

The 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, offers expanded qualification slots, making it a potentially more accessible tournament for emerging football nations like Oman.

Oman, UN step up cooperation to bolster disaster and climate resilience

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) have agreed to strengthen cooperation to enhance national preparedness for environmental disasters and climate-related risks.

In a joint meeting held in Mus-

cat on Monday, the two sides discussed Oman's ongoing efforts to integrate disaster risk reduction into environmental and urban planning, and to build resilience across key sectors. The talks focused on developing strategic partnerships and joint action plans that reinforce the ability of environmental, social and economic systems to respond to future climate chal-

lenges.

'The meeting reaffirmed the importance of building national capacity and preparedness in the face of increasing environmental hazards,' EA said in a statement, noting that climate change remains a major concern for countries across the region.

On Tuesday, the UNDRR team met officials of the National Emergency Management Centre

and were briefed on the emergency management system in Oman and the role of the centre.

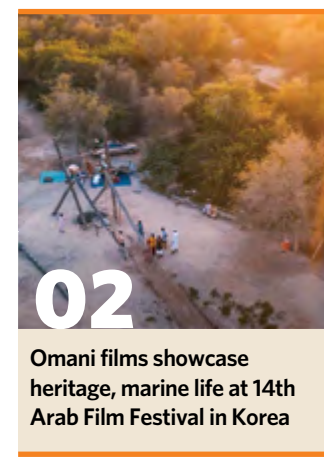
The sultanate has taken several steps in recent months to improve disaster risk management, including signing an agreement in May to establish three new emergency centres in Suwaiq, Suhar and Sur — areas historically vulnerable to extreme weather. The centres will

serve as safe shelters for people displaced by natural disasters and other emergencies, providing them humanitarian support and essential services.

In June, authorities launched a new electronic platform aimed at enhancing the country's emergency response capabilities. The digital system is designed to coordinate efforts of multiple government bodies during crises,

from early warning to recovery.

The platform links key entities such as the Ministry of Health, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and Royal Oman Police, enabling real-time data sharing and faster decision-making. It also connects governorate-level emergency subcommittees and operational centres to streamline national and local coordination.



02

Omani films showcase heritage, marine life at 14th Arab Film Festival in Korea

Omani films showcase heritage, marine life at 14th Arab Film Festival in Korea

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Film Society (OFS) presented two Omani productions - *Al Manyoor* by Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi and *Never Dive Alone* by Fahad bin Ramadan al Maimani - at the 14th Arab Film Festival in Korea. Organised by Korea-Arab Society, the festival ran from July 18 to August 3 and featured entries from 12 Arab countries.

The Omani films were screened at Busan Cinema Centre and Gwangju's National Asian Culture Centre. Both films were also made available on Naver TV extending reach to audiences across South Korea.

OFS's participation aligned with its ongoing efforts to enhance the presence of Omani



Participation in the festival in Korea is an important milestone. It is not only a cultural and artistic accomplishment, but also a responsibility to preserve and share the maritime heritage of the sultanate

MOHAMMED BIN ABDULLAH AL AJMI



A working still from *Al Manyoor*

cinema on international platforms, promote national productions that reflect the identity of Omani society, and share cultural narratives with a wider audience.

Al Manyoor focuses on the traditional game of Al Zamt, capturing the competitive spirit and preparations of teams, venue setup and judging procedures. Central to this tradition is the Al Manyoor, a large traditional wooden apparatus fitted with a motor designed to produce a loud sound. "Delving into a treasured cultural heritage, the film is in documentary format and relies on the distinctive sound of the Al Manyoor to tell the story," Ajmi said.

He described *Al Manyoor* as an attempt to document a "living tradition closely associated to coastal life through a cinematic language that resonates

globally".

Never Dive Alone follows the journey of Omani sailors Faisal al Yazidi and Ahmed al Busaidi, highlighting their bond with the sea. The film explores the natural marine beauty of Oman, blending adventure with environmental reflection.

Ajmi described participation in the festival in Korea as an important milestone. "It is not only a cultural and artistic accomplishment, but also a responsibility to preserve and share the maritime heritage of the sultanate," he stated.

Participating in film festivals abroad is part of OFS's broader vision to support and empower Omani filmmakers and to showcase their creative work in global forums that celebrate artistic expression and cultural diversity.

Haj Mission reports 96% pilgrim satisfaction

Muscat - Omani Haj Mission for 1446 AH has reported increased satisfaction among pilgrims, with overall satisfaction for services in Mina and Arafat camps reaching 96%, compared to 89% last year.

The figures were shared at a press conference held on Tuesday by H E Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashidi, Undersecretary in Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs and Head of the Haj Mission for 1446 AH.

H E Rashidi stated that satisfaction with haj and umrah companies in Makkah and Madinah - covering awareness, guidance, logistics, food and other services - reached 98%. Satisfaction with security services stood at 100% and 99% for health services.

The electronic registration system for Omani pilgrims also received high praise, recording a satisfaction rate of 99%. Satisfaction with entry and exit services via land and air ports reached 97.6%.

According to the ministry, 5,122 pilgrims travelled by road and 8,878 by air, taking the total number of pilgrims to 14,000.

Several initiatives were implemented this year to improve the haj experience, including Awqaf Bait al Rabat, which supported over 150 pilgrims with assistance amounting to more than RO150,000.

Indian Embassy screens short anti-drugs film ‘Paru’

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indian Embassy in Muscat hosted a screening of *Paru* on Monday in the presence of H E GV Srinivas, Indian Ambassador to Oman, as chief guest, and Omani actor Talib al Balushi as guest of honour.

Paru is a short film made as part of the World Malayalee Federation's anti-drug campaign.

Written and directed by Kabeer Yousuf, *Paru* tells the story of an Indian couple living in a Gulf state whose drug-addicted teenage son dies prematurely.



The tragedy pushes the mother into mental distress, requiring treatment, while the father struggles to cope with his disturbed

personal and professional life. The narrative unfolds as a journey through grief, struggle and rediscovery of love.

Produced by Ameen Mohammed and Sajimon George under the banner of Bhavalaya, the 37-minute film explores the

emotional burden of drug abuse, particularly on mothers who often suffer in silence.

Oman-based actors Anita

Rajan and Somasundaram play the lead roles, supported by Kiran Hariprasad, Ashok Kumar, Ryan George and Vishruth. The film also features students from Thalassery Brennan HSS in Kerala.

Dr J Ratnakumar, founder of Bhavalaya and Global Chairman of World Malayalee Federation, said, "As an organisation active in Oman for over a decade, our efforts have always aimed to bring people together through art, literature and film."

The film's cinematography, editing and makeup are credited to Vishnu Venugopal, Jaffer PC and Azra Aleem respectively.

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ملتقى
العمل 2025

Workplace reforms in focus at Work Forum

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The Future of Work Forum, hosted by Ministry of Labour as part of the ongoing 12-day Work Forum 2025, concluded on Tuesday in Salalah after two days of dialogue between local and international experts, regional organisations, and public and private sector leaders.

The forum's second day featured panel discussions and a roundtable session that examined evolving labour dynamics, talent development and the role

‘Future of Work Forum’ facilitated dialogue between local and international experts, regional organisations, and public and private sector leaders

of social dialogue in building sustainable work environments.

A key session titled ‘Foster-

ing an Enabling Work Environment and Attracting Talent’ presented four working papers covering the role of social protection systems, career guidance strategies, public-private sector collaboration, and the importance of occupational health and safety in stimulating productivity.

Another session, ‘Social Dialogue and the Future of Labour Markets’, brought together researchers and experts to debate challenges and propose solutions for improving policy-making. Participants focused on

models of social dialogue that support balanced relationships between workers, employers and policymakers.

Alongside the discussions, an exhibition titled ‘Future Talents: Thought and Work’ running till August 7 is showcasing vocational college student projects.

The 12-day Work Forum 2025 that opened on August 3 forms part of Oman's broader efforts to reform labour policies, empower the national workforce, and enhance adaptability of its labour market in line with Vision 2040.

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14 new investment projects in agriculture in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, through its Tatweer investment platform, has announced 14 new agricultural and commercial investment opportunities across several wilayats in North Sharqiyah governorate.

The opportunities, presented in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) and the Office of the Governor of North Sharqiyah, aim to attract private sector investments in agriculture, real estate development, and commercial ventures. Brochures detailing the investment packages are available for purchase starting August 5.

Hamad bin Rashid al Sawai, Assistant Director General at the Directorate General of Agriculture and Water Resources in North Sharqiyah, said the initiative seeks to enable private sector institutions to invest in modern agricultural practices.

"The focus is on establishing integrated projects that utilise advanced techniques in cultivation, irrigation and post-harvest processing," he said. "The goal is to ensure sustainability and enhance the competitiveness of local products regionally and globally."

Among the 12 agricultural op-



portunities offered by MAFWR, five are dedicated to fig cultivation in the village of Al Quway'ah in Sinaw, covering 20 acres. Other key projects include a vegetable farming venture using greenhouses and open fields in Masroon, Ibra (8 acres), and a date processing factory in the industrial zone of Dima Wa al Taiyyin (2,135sqm).

Additional projects target palm cultivation in Al Ghabi, Bidiyah (100 acres), as well as potato, garlic and onion production in Barzman, Sinaw - each covering 6.3 acres. A combined garlic and onion project is also being offered in Maghsar, Al Qabil, on a 6-acre plot.

The focus is on establishing integrated projects that utilise advanced techniques in cultivation, irrigation and post-harvest processing... The goal is to ensure sustainability

HAMAD BIN RASHID AL SAWAI

Badr bin Ahmed al Habsi, Director of Planning and Investment at the Governor's Office, informed that a commercial investment opportunity in Ibra aligns with the objectives of

Oman Vision 2040 and aims to support local economic development and job creation for Omanis. He highlighted another opportunity in Mudhaibi, where investors were invited to develop and operate multi-use industrial shops on a 2,565sqm site. "The project is designed to support SMEs and enhance the local business environment," he noted.

The investment contract offers a 10-year term with a one-year grace period for preparation and setup.

The initiative is part of broader national efforts to stimulate economic diversification, support sustainable farming practices, and promote private sector participation in local development.

Work begins on two dams to boost water security in North Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has launched two new dam projects in North Sharqiyah aimed at improving groundwater levels and managing rainwater, with a combined cost of more than RO116,000.

The projects include the construction of a surface storage dam in Al Rashbi village in the wilayat of Dima wa al Taiyyin and a groundwater recharge dam in Quraisha village in the wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid.

Dr Abdul Aziz bin Ali al Mashikhi, Director General of Agriculture and Water Resources in North Sharqiyah, said the ministry is undertaking several dam projects across Oman under three categories - groundwater recharge, protection and surface storage.

"These projects contribute to regulating natural water flow,



supporting groundwater reserves and reducing flood risks," Dr Mashikhi said. "The dams also ensure water availability for development activities and help strengthen agricultural capacity in rural areas."

The surface storage dam in Al Rashbi will have a capacity of 4,000 cubic metres and is being constructed at a cost of RO70,175. The groundwater recharge dam in Quraisha will store up to 45,000 cubic metres of water and is being built at a cost of RO46,504. Both projects are expected to be completed by

April 2026.

"These dams will help improve water levels in nearby wells and aflaj, enhance agricultural activity, and contribute to expanding green cover in the region," Dr Mashikhi added.

The construction works include building the dam structures, installing cement supports and reinforcement bars in the rock foundations, spillway covering, and installing control valves and drainage systems. The projects will also include protective features to reduce the risk of pipe blockages and erosion.

Vehicle registrations rise 5.5% to nearly 1.8mn

Muscat - The total number of registered vehicles in Oman reached 1,798,062 till the end of June this year, marking a 5.5% increase compared to the same period last year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Private vehicles made up the majority of registered vehicles, accounting for 79.3% with 1,425,308 units. Commercial vehicles followed at 14.7%

(264,913), while rental vehicles represented 2.3% (41,386).

The remainder included taxis, government vehicles, and other categories.

White vehicles remained the most common on Omani roads, representing 42.3% of the total, or 761,358 vehicles. Silver was the second most popular colour at 12.9% (231,822), followed by grey with 181,140 registered vehicles.

In terms of engine capacity, vehicles with engines between 1,500cc and 3,000cc comprised the largest share at 54.5% (979,300), while those with capacities between 3,001cc and 4,500cc made up 22.2% (399,770).

Vehicles weighing under 3 tonnes formed the largest weight category, representing 90.7% of total registrations, or 1,631,392 vehicles.

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*Rates as on August 05

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices rise on Fed rate cut hopes

Oil prices increased on Tuesday, driven by growing expectations that the US Federal Reserve (Fed) may cut interest rates in September, amid signs of a softening labor market in the United States.

International benchmark Brent crude was trading at \$69.48 per barrel at 0750GMT, up 0.30% from the previous session's close of \$69.27. American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 1.86% to \$66.77 per barrel, from \$65.55 in the previous session.

Markets were buoyed by comments from San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly, who said the time for rate cuts is approaching, citing mounting evidence of a weakening US labor market and the absence of persistent inflationary pressures, including from tariffs.

Nama PWP launches RFQ tender for Oman's first waste-to-energy project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of Oman's strategic direction towards sustainable waste management and the adoption of clean energy solutions, Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Nama PWP) – the sole procurer of the sultanate's power generation and water production capacities – has announced the commencement of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) process for the country's first utility-scale Waste-to-Energy (WTE) Project, located in Barka.

With a projected capacity of 95-100MW and a scheduled commercial operation date expected in the second quarter of 2031, the WTE Project marks a major milestone in fuel diversification within the electricity sector.

The project is being developed under the leadership of Nama PWP, as nominated by the Authority for Public Services Regulation, in close collaboration with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah).

This landmark initiative supports Oman's national objectives to reduce, treat and manage waste volumes effectively, while transitioning towards a low-carbon economy. The WTE Project is expected to contribute ap-



By utilising advanced thermal conversion technologies, the Waste-to-Energy Project would enable the safe and efficient processing of municipal solid waste into reliable baseload electricity

With a projected capacity of 95–100MW and a scheduled commercial operation date expected in Q2 2031, the Waste-to-Energy Project marks a major milestone in fuel diversification within the electricity sector. The project is expected to contribute approximately 760GWh of renewable energy annually

proximately 760GWh of renewable energy annually, starting in 2031, further strengthening the sultanate's commitment to its Net Zero targets.

Nama PWP has invited quali-

fied and experienced entities to submit their statements of qualification for participation in this transformative project. The launch of the RFQ tender marks a crucial step in delivering innovative, clean and efficient power solutions that contribute to a greener and more resilient energy future for communities across Oman.

"The Waste-to-Energy Project represents a strategic leap towards achieving Oman's vision for sustainable energy and responsible waste management," said Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, CEO of Nama PWP.

"We are proud to lead this pioneering initiative in collaboration with be'ah and the Authority for Public Services Regulation. This project not only supports our national Net Zero ambitions, but also reinforces our commitment to delivering innovative and resilient power solutions for the future of the Sultanate of Oman," he added.

Abdullah Rashid al Sawafi, Chief Energy Transition Officer at Nama PWP, said, "The Waste-to-Energy Project is a landmark initiative in Oman's transition towards a more diversified and sustainable energy mix."

He explained that by utilising advanced thermal conversion technologies, the project would enable the safe and efficient processing of municipal solid waste into reliable baseload electricity. This would not only significantly

reduce the volume of waste sent to landfills, but also play a critical role in decarbonising the power sector.

"From a grid operations standpoint, introducing a stable and dispatchable energy source will enhance system reliability and support the broader integration of variable renewable resources such as solar and wind. This project exemplifies our commitment to pioneering environmentally responsible solutions that contribute meaningfully to Oman's Net Zero aspirations and its shift towards a circular economy," Sawafi added.

ahlibank's net profit rises 10.7% to RO22.4mn in first half of 2025

Our Correspondent
Muscat

ahlibank announced its interim financial results for the first half of 2025, reflecting sustained strength across both operational and financial indicators. The bank's net profit for the first half of 2025 increased to RO22.36mn, marking a 10.7% year-on-year growth compared to the corresponding period last year.

In a press statement, ahlibank stated that this performance is the result of a forward-thinking strategy anchored in innovation, sustainability, and deeply rooted values. Throughout its journey, the bank has upheld a distinguished track record through high-quality financing initiatives, advanced digital offerings, and socially driven programmes.

During the six-month period ending June 30, 2025, ahlibank recorded notable gains across all key performance metrics, demonstrating a consistent upward trajectory compared to the same period in 2024. Net loans, advances, and financing rose by



ahlibank's first-half results for 2025 reflect our clear strategic direction, relentless innovation, and the enduring trust of our stakeholders

SAID ABDULLAH AL HATMI

12.7% to RO3.161bn, driven by strong demand across both retail and corporate segments.

The bank's total assets increased by 13.6%, reaching RO3.911bn, reflecting its expanded portfolio and prudent balance-sheet growth. Customer deposits advanced by 15.6% to

RO3.020bn, supported by growing customer trust, sustained engagement, and the bank's solid market positioning.

ahlibank reported that operating income climbed 13.1% to RO57.26mn, while operating expenses rose by 14.6% to RO24.6mn during the same period.

Commenting on the bank's performance, Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, said, "Our first-half results for 2025 reflect our clear strategic direction, relentless innovation, and the enduring trust of our stakeholders. We are proud to support Oman's economic vision while maintaining sustainable growth across our operations and banking solutions."

During the first half of 2025, ahlibank continued to strengthen its contribution to Oman's economic growth through its pivotal role in financing strategic projects in the renewable energy sector. These efforts support the nation's objective of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The bank also reinforced its

leading position in the capital markets by successfully managing the issuance of sovereign sukuk on behalf of the Government of Oman – a testament to investors' strong confidence in the bank's financial expertise and capabilities.

Additionally, ahlibank affirmed its leadership in the debt capital market by managing the issuance of Tier 1 perpetual bonds for United Finance Company, the first such issuance in Oman's leasing and finance sector in recent years.

As part of its ongoing digital transformation journey, ahlibank has rolled out a suite of forward-thinking digital solutions designed to enhance the customer experience, drive financial inclusion, and support the evolving needs of businesses and individuals alike.

During the second quarter of this year, ahlibank witnessed significant expansion in its branch network, marked by the opening of four new branches targeting diverse customer segments and key locations to enhance accessibility to its premium banking services.

SEZAD kicks off Duqm Summer Series with focus on AI, innovation

Duqm – The Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD) kicked started the Duqm Summer Series on Tuesday, spotlighting AI and automation as key drivers of local business innovation. The inaugural session, featuring Saeed Abdul Ghafoor, CEO of Star Drones, offered practical insights into successfully integrating AI into operations.

Abdul Ghafoor, whose company built TARIQ, Oman's first locally manufactured drone, emphasised the transformative potential of AI-driven innovation.

"Integrating AI isn't just about deploying technology it's about creating a new mindset," Abdul Ghafoor remarked. "At Star Drones, we've seen AI-driven automation cut operational downtime by 40% and improve yield accuracy by nearly 30%. This isn't just innovation for innovation's sake, it genuinely enhances productivity."

Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, highlighted the urgency of adopting AI more broadly in manufacturing and related sectors. "Companies globally are seeing unprecedented benefits from AI and Duqm is perfectly



At Star Drones, we've seen AI-driven automation cut operational downtime by 40% and improve yield accuracy by nearly 30%. This isn't just innovation for innovation's sake, it genuinely enhances productivity

ABDUL GHAFLOOR

positioned to replicate and even exceed these successes," Akaak noted.

"Today, the focus isn't merely on theoretical applications but on practical strategies that deliver tangible outcomes for businesses."

International data supports this. According to McKinsey & Company's 2024 research, manufacturers deploying AI see, on average, productivity increases of up to 45%, alongside cost reductions nearing 20%.

Moreover, the World Economic Forum reports that advanced AI adopters in its Global Lighthouse Network achieve re-

ductions in material waste by 30% and emissions by as much as 50%.

"AI adoption is no longer optional, it's a fundamental element of competitive advantage," Akaak added. "Through the Duqm Summer Series, we're ensuring our local business leaders can effectively translate global lessons into local successes."

The next session in the Duqm Summer Series will address workforce development on August 12, led by Development Bank's Auf al Aufi, continuing SEZAD's commitment to practical, impactful discussion.

Donald Trump says he is 'getting very close' to trade deal with China

Washington, US – US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the United States and China are quickly closing the gap on a potential trade agreement, which would see the world's two largest economies significantly reduce tariffs on each other's imports.

"We're getting very close to a deal. We're getting along with China very well," Trump said in an interview with the CNBC television network. "I think we'll make a good deal. It's not imperative, but I think we will make a



A file photo showing US President Donald Trump with Chinese President Xi Jinping

good deal."

The US president continued to downplay speculation that he is eager to meet with Xi Jinping. Although he acknowledged having "a very good relationship" with Xi, Trump clarified that he is not actively pursuing a face-to-face meeting. Such a meeting could potentially take place "before the end of the year most likely," but only in the event that a trade agreement is successfully finalised, he added.

"If we don't make a deal, I'm not going to have a meeting. I

mean, you know, what's the purpose of meeting if we're not going to make a deal?" Trump asked rhetorically, underlining the conditional nature of any such diplomatic engagement.

Back on April 2, Trump announced a wide-ranging tariff policy targeting countries around the world.

He subsequently introduced a baseline tariff rate of 10%, which would be applied to various nations as negotiations progressed on an individual basis.

The president imposed a

deadline of 1 August for countries to reach agreements with his team or risk facing increased import duties.

In a separate move, China was given until August 12 to come to terms with the Trump administration or face tariffs exceeding 80%. However, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer indicated on Sunday that this deadline may not be final, suggesting the timeframe remains subject to ongoing discussion.

Anadolu Agency

EU suspends retaliation against US tariffs by 6 months

Peggy Corlin

As the European Union and the US continue negotiating a joint statement to formalise their tariff deal, the EU executive is again postponing a package of countermeasures that were due to enter into force on August 7.

The European Commission will suspend a package of trade countermeasures targeting 93bn euro worth of American goods which was scheduled to take effect on August 7, as it

continues to negotiate a joint statement formalising the agreement struck by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and US President Donald Trump on July 27.

"The EU continues to work with the US to finalise a joint statement, as agreed on July 27," EU spokesperson Olof Gill said, adding, "With these objectives in mind, the Commission will take the necessary steps to suspend by six months the EU's countermeasures against the



EU will suspend a package of trade countermeasures targeting 93bn euro worth of US goods which was scheduled to take effect on August 7

US, which were due to enter into force on August 7."

In line with the agreement

reached, the US reduced its tariff rate to 15% last Thursday.

Gill said the step gained the EU immediate tariff relief, "a first important foundation is laid for restoring clarity to EU companies exporting to the US".

Trade dispute is not over

However the trade dispute between the EU and the US is not over, as both sides still need to negotiate certain points of the

agreement that have led to differing interpretations.

Furthermore, the US Executive Order of July 31 does not provide relief to the EU automotive industry as expected (it remains subject to 25% tariffs), nor does it exempt strategic sectors such as aircraft.

As negotiations continue, the Commission should postpone through urgency procedure the retaliation package it adopted against the US tariffs.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Tesla awards Elon Musk \$29bn in bid to keep him as CEO



Jenipher Camino Gonzalez

Tesla said it sees Elon Musk as a "magnet for hiring and retaining talent" as the company moves more towards developing AI-powered automated transport and robotics

Electric auto giant Tesla granted its CEO Elon Musk shares of the company worth some \$29bn in a deal aimed at keeping him at the helm of the firm.

Tesla described the deal as an "interim award," a "good faith" payment to honor Musk's more than \$50bn pay package from 2018 that was struck down by a Delaware court last year.

Delaware judge Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick had upheld her earlier order that Tesla revoke Musk's multibillion-dollar pay package, arguing that Musk engineered the pay package in sham negotiations with directors who were not independent.

The ruling was part of a lawsuit filed by a Tesla stockholder who challenged Musk's 2018 compensation package.

It all comes as Tesla shares have plunged 25% this year, amid flagging sales, and intensifying competition from both the big Detroit automakers and China

Musk's earlier role in the administration of US President Donald Trump, and focus on political pursuits, have also left investors worried.

Under the deal, Musk can claim the new award if he remains in a top executive role for another two years.

Additionally, Musk is only eligible for the money if a court does not reinstate the 2018 package, which is currently on appeal.

"While we recognise Elon Musk's business ventures, interests and other potential demands on his time and attention are extensive and wide-ranging... we are confident this award will incentivize Elon to remain at Tesla," said a special committee Tesla formed this year to consider Musk's compensation.

Tesla board members Robyn Denholm and Kathleen Wilson-Thompson said Musk was a "magnet for hiring and retaining talent at Tesla," noting that the company is transitioning from its electric vehicle focus "to grow towards becoming a leader in AI, robotics and related services."

Investors and analysts reacted positively to the deal, with Tesla shares rising nearly 2% in early trading.

DW

US tariffs attack nations' sovereignty: Russia

Istanbul, Turkey - Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday that the US uses tariffs and sanctions to attack countries' national sovereignty, adding that no "tariff wars" or sanctions can alter the "natural course" of history.

"Sanctions and restrictions are a regrettable reality of today's historical stage, which affects the entire world," Zakharova said in a statement.

"Washington cannot come to terms with the loss of hegemony in the emerging multipolar world order and continues to pursue a neocolonial policy in an attempt to maintain its position," she noted.

Maria emphasised that the US is using "politicised levers of economic pressure" against its rivals. She added, "This US policy is a direct attack on the national sovereignty of states and an at-

tempt to interfere in their internal affairs. It also poses risks such as slowing economic growth, causing supply chain damage, and global economic disintegration." She said the increasing economic pressure on some countries, including Brazil, runs counter to the "free trade" approach previously promoted by Western countries.

"We believe that no tariff wars and sanctions can do anything about the natural course of history. We have a huge number of partners, like-minded people, and allies who share this approach among the countries of the Global South and, first and foremost, BRICS," Maria added.

Maria declared that Moscow is willing to strengthen cooperation with those countries in order to counter "illegal unilateral sanctions pressure" and establish a "truly multilateral, fair, and equal world order."

Anadolu Agency



الأنوار للاستثمارات ش.م.ع Al Anwar Investments SAOG

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Directors' Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the un-audited consolidated results of Al Anwar Investments SAOG (AAI) for the three - month period ended on 30 June 2025.

Financial Overview of Al Anwar Investments Group ("AAI")

The Company reported a net profit of OMR 767,000 for the three-month period ended on 30 June 2025 as against a net profit of OMR 679,000 for the same period ended on 30 June 2024, an increase of 13%.

The total comprehensive income for the three months ended 30 June 2025 was OMR 1,459,000, compared to OMR 1,281,000 for the same period ended 30 June 2024—an increase of 14%.

Net asset per share of the Group as of 30 June 2025 is 126 Baisas per share as against 151 Baisas per share on 30 June 2024. The decline in net asset per share is due to the issuance of OMR 5 mil rights issue at discount to the book value and the issuance of 4% stock dividend to shareholders of AAI.

Associate Investments update

1. Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 2,036,904 for the three-month period ended on 31 March 2025 as compared with OMR 1,296,730 during the previous period, an increase of 57.10%. Net profit after tax for the period was OMR 131,716 as compared to a loss of OMR (549,590) in the previous period.

2. Voltamp Energy SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 18,548,413 for the three-month period ended on 31 March 2025, as compared with OMR 6,538,459 during the previous period, an increase of 184%. This significant growth was driven by strategic initiatives, meticulous planning and market collaboration. Net profit after tax (attributable to shareholders of Parent Company) for the period was OMR 3,059,492 compared to net profit of OMR 627,224. This improvement was achieved through focused cost of sales, a cost leadership strategy, improved design processes and enhanced productivity.

3. Arabia Falcon Insurance Company SAOG

The Company has reported Insurance Revenue of OMR 6,191,808 during the three -month period ended on 31 March 2025 as compared to OMR 5,025,598 for the previous period, an increase of 1.23%. The Net profit after tax for the period was OMR 489,623 compared with of OMR 630,518 in the previous period, a decrease of 22%.

4. Al Ruwad International for Education Services SAOC

The Company has reported lower revenue for the three months period ended on 30 April 2025, primarily due to lower number of students enrolled in the school during academic year.

5. National Biscuits Industries Ltd. SAOG

The company recorded a Net Revenue of OMR 4,857,000 for the three months period ended on 31st March 2025 as compared to OMR 4,628,000 for the previous period, an increase of 5%. The net profit after tax for the period was 236,000 as compared to OMR 314,000 in the previous period, a decrease of 24.8%.

6. The National Detergent Co. SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 7,053,189 for the three-month period ended on 31 March 2025, as compared with OMR 6,445,697 for the previous period, a growth of 9%. Net profit for the period was OMR 359,545 compared to profit of OMR 394,791 in the corresponding period of last year, a decrease of 8.93%. The company's flagship brand, BAHAR, improved its market share during the quarter, with growth observed in both the domestic and export markets.

7. Oman Chlorine SAOG

The Oman Chlorine Group (Consolidated) has reported revenue of OMR 7,102,604 for the three-month period ended on 31 March 2025 as compared with OMR 8,555,488 in the previous period, a decline of 17%, mainly due to a drop in selling prices. Net Profit (attributable to Parent Company Shareholders) for the period was OMR 496,272 as compared to a profit of OMR 423,895 in the previous period, an increase of 17.1%

Future Outlook

Oman's economy is expected to continue to improve. S&P Global Ratings has revised Oman's rating outlook from BB+ to BBB- with positive outlook. These developments have been driven by government measures such as VAT introduction, subsidy reforms, and restructuring efforts in key sectors like energy and gas.

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

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

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

Thanks, and Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to express our greetings and good wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pray to Allah to grant him and his government success to lead the country and the people to greater prosperity and progress.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, FSA, Muscat Stock Exchange, Bankers, Auditors for their continued support to AAI and the group companies.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Directors of all Al Anwar associate companies for direction given to the managements of the respective companies. I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the management team and all employees of the group companies.

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

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of
Al Anwar Investments SAOG

Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2025 OMR'000	30 June 2024 OMR'000	Audited 31 March 2025 OMR'000
Assets			
Investment in associates	30,021	30,554	29,392
Investments at fair value	34,665	14,508	32,352
Property and other assets	2,284	2,274	2,284
Receivables and prepayments	288	495	1,866
Cash and bank balances	423	453	485
TOTAL ASSETS	67,681	48,284	66,379

Equity			
Share capital	27,234	21,218	26,086
Legal reserve	4,930	4,674	4,930
Fair value reserve	2,338	2,790	1,646
Retained earnings	3,227	3,443	4,756
Total Shareholders' Equity	37,729	32,125	37,418

Liabilities:			
Bank borrowings	28,553	15,988	28,790
Payables	1,399	171	171
TOTAL LIABILITIES	29,952	16,159	28,961
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	67,681	48,284	66,379

Net assets per share attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company (in Baisas)	126	151	130
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UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED

	30 June 2025 OMR'000	30 June 2024 OMR'000
Share of results of associates	793	406
Realised Profit / (loss) on sale of investment	-	435
Net Increase / (decrease) in value of investment at fair Value through Profit or Loss	592	278
Other income	57	13
Net income	1,442	1,132

Administrative expenses	(130)	(116)
Financing charges	(447)	(245)
Director fees and remuneration	(98)	(92)

Total expenses	(675)	(453)
Profit / (loss) for the period before tax	767	679
Income tax	-	-
Net profit / (loss) after tax for the period	767	679

Other comprehensive income (expense):
Item that will not be reclassified to profit or loss

Share of other comprehensive profit / (loss) of associates	(18)	124
Net change in fair value of investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	710	478
Other comprehensive profit for the period	692	602

Total comprehensive Income (loss) for the period attributable to Equity holders of Parent Company	1,459	1,281
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Earnings profit (loss) per share attributable to shareholders of Parent Company (in Baisas)	3	3
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Note:1) The complete accounts will be send by mail to any shareholders who requests them in arabic or english as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.
2) Financial statements are available on MSX website.

Oman's tourism and hospitality sectors undergo transformative growth: Report

Oxford Business Group's Growth Perspectives Video explores the sector's expanding contribution to diversification

Oman's tourism and hospitality sectors are undergoing significant expansion as the country advances its long-term development goals under Vision 2040.

A new Growth Perspectives Video produced by Oxford Business Group (OBG), in partnership with Omran Group, examines how investment, innovation and sustainable practices are helping to position tourism as a key contributor to national progress.

The video, titled 'Oman's tourism and hospitality sectors undergo transformative growth', highlights the country's target of attracting 11mn tourists annually by 2040, supported by around RO20bn in projected investment to the sector, according to National Tourism Strategy 2040.

Particular focus is placed on the contribution of the hospitality segment, which is forecast to achieve a compound annual growth rate of 6.3% by 2026, according to Oman's National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The video outlines the importance of a broad range of offerings - from luxury resorts



and business hotels to eco-lodges - and explores Oman's efforts to align tourism development with environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles.

In line with Oman's National Tourism Strategy, the sector's

growth is being guided by a commitment to cultural preservation and sustainable development. Strategic projects such as the Sustainable City Yiti in Muscat - a US\$1bn eco-urban initiative - demonstrate how Oman is combining infrastructure modernisation

with climate-conscious planning. The country is also leveraging its rich cultural heritage and natural attractions, including Unesco World Heritage sites and diverse landscapes across its governorates.

Dana Carmen Agarbicean,

OBG's Country Director for Oman, said the country's growing profile as a tourism destination reflects effective public-private collaboration and a clear strategic vision.

"Oman's tourism and hospitality sectors are becoming in-

creasingly important pillars of economic diversification. The sector's expansion is supported by targeted investment, institutional coordination and an emphasis on sustainable, inclusive growth."

This Growth Perspectives Video forms part of Oxford Business Group's wider research for The Report: Oman 2025, the

ning Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. It is recognised internationally as a distinctive and respected provider of on-the-ground intelligence on world's fastest-growing markets, termed The Yellow Slice, in reference to OBG's corporate colour.

Through its range of products - Economic News and Views;

The video, titled 'Oman's tourism and hospitality sectors undergo transformative growth', highlights the country's target of attracting 11 mn tourists annually by 2040, supported by around RO20bn in projected investment to the sector

Group's forthcoming publication on the country's investment opportunities and economic developments. The report will also feature a detailed interview with Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, the Chief Executive Officer at Omran Group.

OBG is a global research and advisory company with a presence in over 30 countries, span-

OBG CEO Surveys; OBG Events and Conferences; Global Platform, which hosts exclusive video interviews; and The Report publications - as well as its Advisory division, OBG offers comprehensive and accurate analysis of macroeconomic and sector-level developments for sound investment opportunities and business decisions.



Ominvest signs MoU with Outward Bound for 'Young Shapers' programme

Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest), a leading investment company in the region, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Outward Bound Oman for the second edition of the 'Ominvest Young Shapers' programme, as part of the company's long-standing commitment to developing leadership capabilities among Omani youth.

Outward Bound Oman, in collaboration with Global Shapers Muscat Hub, will deliver six comprehensive leadership courses benefiting 100 participants until the end of 2025. The programme will target job seekers, students, employees, and entrepreneurs from across Oman.

The inaugural edition of the programme in 2024 trained 95 individuals through outdoor leadership experiences.

The curriculum is specifically designed to align with key UN Goals (SDGs), focusing on quality education, leadership, digital skills, and climate awareness. Participants will be challenged to develop skills in a hands-on, real-world context across Oman's diverse landscapes, including Salalah, Jabal Akhdar, and the Sharqiyah Sands. This immersive approach goes beyond traditional learning, building character, resilience, and a deep appreciation for the country's natural heritage.

"Our core strategy at Ominvest is to create lasting value for all our stakeholders by fostering sustainable growth, and that starts with investing in people," said Badar Awadh al Shanfari, Chief Operating Officer of Ominvest. "The Young Shapers programme is a powerful example of this strategy in action. By equipping young Omanis with critical leadership skills, we're directly contributing to Oman Vision 2040's goals of economic diversification and job creation. These are the future innovators and entrepreneurs who will drive progress and ensure the long-term prosperity of our nation."

Waleed Nasser al Yarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer, emphasised the programme's connection to Ominvest's broader sustainability commitments. "This partnership with Outward Bound Oman is a cornerstone of our sustainability strategy, which is guided by our commitment to making a positive impact on society and the environment. By focusing the curriculum on UN SDGs like quality education and climate awareness, we are not only developing individual leaders but also empowering them to be agents of change. This initiative is a powerful demonstration of how we integrate social and environmental progress into our business objectives."

Zubair champions road safety through ROP exhibition 2025

The Zubair Corporation contributed to the Royal Oman Police's Traffic Awareness Exhibition, held from July 30 to August 3 at Salalah Gardens Mall. The five-day initiative, organised under the patronage of the Royal Oman Police, served as a vital platform for raising public awareness about road safety, responsible driving habits, and collaborative action towards ensuring safer roads in the sultanate.

As part of the exhibition, Zubair Corporation showcased its longstanding commitment to national safety efforts, engaging the public through informative content that underscored the importance of vigilance on the road. The timing of the event, aligning with the Khareef travel season, amplified its significance, with thousands of visitors gaining valuable insights into safe driving practices.

Zubair's presence reflected its



broader vision of promoting behavioural change through community engagement. By joining hands with government entities, private organisations, and safety advocates, The Zubair Corporation contributed to a collective dialogue on improving traffic culture and fostering a safer road environment for all.

Rashid al Hooti, Head of Corporate Affairs at The Zubair Corporation, said, "Safety is a shared responsibility, and public engagement plays a crucial role in shaping a culture of accountability on our roads. At The Zubair Corporation, we believe that partnerships like these are essential to driving meaningful

change. Our participation in this exhibition reaffirms our commitment to social responsibility and the well-being of the communities we serve."

The event also exemplified the power of public-private collaboration, with Zubair reinforcing its role as a socially responsible business entity.

Sri Lions opens Oman Chapter in Muscat

Sri Lions International proudly inaugurated its Oman Chapter last Friday at a grand event held at Al Falaj Hotel, Muscat, in the presence of distinguished guests and community leaders.

The ceremony marked a significant milestone for the rapidly growing community-based sports and social organisation.

Dr Kelum Sujith Perera, Founder and Chairman of Sri Lions International, expressed his delight. "It is indeed a special occasion for us as we inaugurate our brand in the Sultanate of Oman. We are proud to appoint one of the most passionate Rugby lovers and a sportsman, Hamza Hidayathullah, as the first president of Sri Lions Oman."

Dr Perera further highlighted the collective effort behind the organisation's achievements. "Our accomplishments in such a short span are a result of the dedication and passion of everyone involved with Sri Lions. Together,



we have set a new standard, and I am confident that our future holds even greater promise - with Oman now becoming our 6th chapter following the UAE, Sri Lanka, the UK, Canada, Australia, and Bahrain."

Recognised by the Consulate

General in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, Sri Lions is known for its strong commitment to uplifting the Sri Lankan community through sports and social engagement, including Rugby, Cricket, and Netball.

Among the esteemed guests

was Anodya Chirasrie - Charge D' Affairs and Acting Ambassador at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Oman - who commended Sri Lions' impact on the global stage. "Sri Lions is the only Sri Lankan Rugby team competing in the Men's Open International Sevens Category at the Emirates Dubai Sevens. Their victories as Gulf Champions in 2019 and International Sevens Champions in 2024 are remarkable achievements."

Sri Lions UAE currently competes in various disciplines including Rugby, Netball, Cricket, Golf, Swimming, Badminton, Volleyball, and Football. The Oman chapter will begin with Rugby and Volleyball, with plans to expand into other sports by next year.

Nabs al Busaidi, Chairman of Oman Rugby, welcomed Sri Lions Oman as the 9th registered team in the country's rugby scene.

Swimmers from ISG surge ahead in India events

Indian School Ghubra (ISG) is brimming with pride as three of its exceptional student-swimmers have not only dominated recent state-level swimming competitions across India but have also secured coveted spots to represent their respective states at the upcoming 51st Junior National Aquatic Championship 2025.

Nitishsai Harinath, Avighna, and Kavin Sharma have showcased remarkable talent and dedication, bringing immense honour to the school.

Nitishsai, a student of Class 11A, demonstrated an outstanding performance at the 51st Junior State Aquatic Championship - 2025 held in Tamil Nadu, India. His prowess in the pool was undeniable, as he clinched an impressive four gold medals and one silver medal.

Adding to his remarkable achievements, Nitishsai also set two new Tamil Nadu state records, solidifying his position as a rising star in the state's aquatic arena. He will now proudly represent Tamil Nadu in five events at the 51st Junior National Aquatic Championship, scheduled to take place from August 3 to August 7, in Ahmedabad.

Joining Nitishsai on the national stage are two other promising ISG swimmers. Avighna of Class 10 delivered an equally stellar performance at the Andhra Pradesh state meet, where she secured an impressive four gold medals and one silver medal.

Kavin Sharma, another talented swimmer from ISG, showcased his mettle at the Chandigarh state swimming meet. Kevin secured three gold medals in the Under-14 category.



Suhar Investment Forum to be held in February next year

The organising committee of the Suhar Investment Forum has officially announced the start of preparations for the forthcoming edition of the forum, scheduled to take place on February 4 and February 5 next year.

The theme of the forum - Suhar: Industrial Investment Destination - reflects the growing ambition to reinforce Suhar's position as an advanced industrial hub and a leading investment destination in the region.

The announcement was made during the first meeting of the forum's organising committee, chaired by Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry - North Batinah branch.

The meeting included representatives from various public and private sector entities involved in investment and industrial development across the sultanate.

During the meeting, the committee discussed key focus areas for the upcoming edition, including building on the notable success of the previous forum, which saw wide regional and international participation. The 2024 edition of Suhar Investment Forum led to the signing of multiple Memoranda of Understanding and served as an effective platform for dialogue between investors and decision-makers while presenting promising investment opportunities in North Batinah governorate.

In this context, Said al Abri emphasised that the upcoming forum will highlight the industrial sector as a core pillar for achieving economic diversification. He noted that the forum would serve as a strategic platform for displaying industrial investment opportunities, strengthening public-private partnerships, and attracting high-value investments in sectors with

strong value-added potential. He further highlighted Oman's competitive advantages that enhance its investment appeal - chief among them being its strategic geographic location linking Asia, Africa, and Europe; advanced infrastructure including integrated ports, airports, and logistics networks; as well as the availability of specialised industrial zones, and well-designed legislative and economic incentives.

The forum would serve as a strategic platform for displaying industrial investment opportunities, strengthening public-private partnerships

SAID AL ABRI

He added, "Amid global challenges and rising tax burdens in many markets, the Sultanate stands out as a stable alternative investment destination, particularly with its Free Trade Agreement with the United States, giving Oman-made products a significant competitive edge in both U.S. and global markets."

The upcoming edition of the forum will target several priority industrial sectors, including - Food, Medical, downstream industries, Aluminium, Recycling industries, Steel and Plastic. This focus aligns with Oman's goals for industrial diversification and strengthening its investment ecosystem.

Said al Abri confirmed that the forum would present participants with a curated selection of ready-to-execute investment opportunities, developed in coordination with relevant authorities.

Powerful large-size SUV Lexus LX600 shines in bold

Make every experience extraordinary with a Lexus LX600, the bold, daring large-size SUV that is designed to enhance lifestyles. The LX600 surpasses all expectations in comfort with luxurious interiors, high-performance with its muscular appearance and captivating features.

The SUV brings a new-paradigm of luxury for those who seek pure perfection.

Designed to impress and powered by a mighty 3.5L turbocharged 6-cylinder engine, the SUV delivers high performance with rugged capabilities at its core. Mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission, the Lexus LX600 is equipped with advanced safety features that include Active Height Control with Adaptive Variable Suspension, Panoramic View Monitor, Multi-Terrain Mode with 4 Cameras, Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), for a balanced and smooth drive.

For an immersive driving experience, Inside the Lexus, it introduces the head-up display leather and wood wrapped steering wheel, enabling better focus and clarity of the road ahead. The 25-Speaker Mark Levinson Audio system to lift the ride mood and the Kick Sensor



The SUV brings a new-paradigm of luxury for those who seek pure perfection. Designed to impress and powered by a mighty 3.5L turbocharged 6-cylinder engine, the SUV delivers high performance with rugged capabilities at its core

for Hands-free backdoor opening when your hands are full. To make things more interesting, the built-in 11.6" Dual Rear Seat

Entertainment Screens with 2 Headphones and heated/ventilated front and rear seats take comfort to the next level.

Moreover, the Lexus Safety Sense features the Pre-Collision System, Lane Departure Alert, Lane Tracing Assist, SRS Airbags

for improved protection including Knee Airbags - Driver + Passenger, and a Tyre Pressure Warning System to thwart life-threatening situations.

Every ride is a delight in the Lexus LX600. To know more details and experience the LX600, head to your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom and take a test drive.

Meethaq Islamic crowned Oman's Best Islamic Bank

Reinforcing its leadership in Sharia-compliant banking and financial solutions across both retail and corporate customers, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has been awarded as the 'Best Islamic Bank in Oman 2025' title at the Euromoney Private Banking Awards.

This accolade reflects Meethaq's significant role in offering innovative Sharia-compliant banking services and facilities tailored to the diverse needs of its customers.

On this occasion, Ali Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Corporate Banking, expressed his pride in the ongoing global recognition Meethaq continues to receive. He noted: "We are deeply honored by this recognition, which reflects Meethaq's pioneering role in the industry by offering comprehensive solutions that meet the varied requirements of customers. Meethaq has significantly contributed to reshaping the Islamic banking landscape in



the sultanate, evident in the trust and strong uptake from customers for the Meethaq's sharia'a-compliant financial solutions, while maintaining a commitment to excellence and innovation. Meethaq will continue upholding its ongoing dedication to delivering distinguished and forward-thinking Islamic banking solutions aligned with customers' aspirations and financial goals."

Meethaq provides a full suite of sharia'a-compliant banking products and financing solutions designed to serve the needs of

individuals, SMEs, and corporate entities. All offerings are subject to the regulatory framework of the Central Bank of Oman and undergo thorough Sharia audit and supervision by Meethaq's Sharia'a Supervisory Board to ensure full compliance with Islamic jurisprudence. The sharia'a-compliant offerings which Meethaq provides to its retail customers include deposit products such as savings accounts, current accounts, children's savings accounts, and Meethaq's structured savings plans.

On the financing offerings, Meethaq offers a range of Islamic finance facilities including personal finance, auto finance, home finance, and funding for travel, education, marriage, and personal purchases. For its SME and corporate customers, Meethaq provides a variety of commercial banking solutions including current accounts, project finance, short-term and long-term financing facilities, trade finance based on 'Ijarah', and large-scale project financing.



TikTok removes over 16.5mn videos for violations of guidelines

TikTok has published its Q1 2025 Community Guidelines Enforcement Report, shedding light on its continued efforts to maintain a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for users across the MENA region.

From January to March this year, TikTok removed more than 16.5mn videos across MENA violating its Community Guidelines. The figures represent Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, UAE, and Morocco, offering a representative view of TikTok's enforcement efforts across the region during this period.

TikTok scaled up its enforcement across LIVE content, stopping more than 19mn violative LIVE videos globally in Q1 2025,

a 50% increase from the previous quarter. This robust intervention highlights the company's ongoing investment in advanced moderation technologies that can detect violative livestreams quickly and consistently.

Upholding community guidelines remains a core priority for the platform. In Q1 2025 alone, TikTok banned 849,976 LIVE hosts and proactively interrupted over 1.5mn livestreams across Egypt, the UAE, Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco.

These sustained enforcement efforts reflect TikTok's commitment to maintaining moderation accuracy as the scale of automated decisions continues to expand.

Smash Series Badminton Tournament concludes with thrilling finale at OCEC

The Smash Series Badminton Tournament, organized by ProEdge Sports as part of the Sports Spark initiative at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), came to an electrifying close, offering a refreshing escape for sports lovers during the scorching summer.

Over four days, more than 200 badminton players competed across nine categories, drawing hundreds of enthusiastic spectators who filled the air-conditioned courts with energy and excitement. In the Under-11 Girls' Singles, Vamika Vinod emerged champion while Diya Balaji was runner-up. The Boys' Under-11 saw Shazil Mohammed claim the title, with Aditya Singhal as runner-up.

In the Under-15 Girls' category, Shenelly Lewis triumphed



over runner-up Pallavi Abhilash Nair. Aman D'Costa won the Boys' Under-15, with Ian George as runner-up. The Under-19

Girls' title went to Uthra Abhilash Nair, with Ameena Zehra as runner-up, while Himnesh Shahalot won the Boys' Under-19 against

Vaibhav Ramdoss. In the Mixed Doubles, Bita Mansouri and Vaishakh Nair took the crown. The Men's "B"

Doubles title went to the duo of Jebin Jacob and Sandeep N, while Mohd Zakkeer and Damodar Shenoy emerged as

champions in the highly competitive Men's "A" Doubles category, with Anis Lal and Nithesh TD as runners-up. The Team Championship title was claimed by Marvel Badminton Academy.

The prize distribution ceremony was graced by Oman Racket Sports Committee Vice Chairman Tahir al Barwani, SABCO Sports Deputy General Manager Alistair, OCEC Operations Manager Safiya Hassan Sal al Abri, We Network Solutions Managing Director Yogendra Katyar, and Mohammed Ghulum Fajwani, Chairman of MBC. Match officials and referees from the Morning Star Badminton Group were also honored for their role in ensuring the smooth conduct of the tournament. SABCO Sports officials commended ProEdge Sports for or-

ganizing such a dynamic event and emphasized the value of sporting activities in providing both recreation and wellness, even during peak summer.

Chairman of ProEdge Sports, Nasar Abdullah al Harthi, expressed his delight at the overwhelming response received for the tournament, despite the summer vacation season and many families being away. He emphasised how events like this promote not only sporting enthusiasm but also a healthier lifestyle, and confirmed that the tournament will be organised on an even larger scale in the coming years. Sports Spark at OCEC remains open daily until August 16, offering more opportunities for families and fitness enthusiasts to engage in exciting indoor sports and recreational activities.

Deported to uncertainty: Over 1.3mn Afghan refugees forced to leave Iran

Zahra's family fled Afghanistan for Iran almost 30 years ago. Today, the 23-year-old - who is married with a young daughter - lives in constant fear of deportation. Her husband, who also fled Afghanistan, works as an agricultural labourer.

"He can be arrested at any time on his way to work or home and deported to Afghanistan, like so many others," said Zahra.

According to a UN report published in July, 1.35mn Afghan refugees have been forced to leave Iran in recent months. Many were arrested and deported, while others returned voluntarily for fear of arbitrary arrest.

Zahra, who was born and raised in Iran, only has a temporary residence permit. "I'm listed in my parents' family passport, which is valid until September," she explained. The travel document is checked regularly and renewed every six months.

Even those Afghan refugees who have lived in Iran for generations - some now in their second or third - they are not granted Iranian citizenship.

For over 40 years, people have been fleeing Afghanistan to escape war, poverty, and now the Taliban's rule. Many initially seek refuge in neighbouring countries such as Iran or Pakistan, however, they are often among the first people to be blamed for pushing up unemployment and crime.

Arbitrarily arrested and deported

After the recent 12-day war between Israel and Iran, Iranian authorities launched a large-scale deportation campaign against



Many children from refugee families were born in Iran and hardly know Afghanistan

The deportations in recent months have often been carried out without regard for international standards. Many of those deported were taken to border overnight - without shelter, medical care, or adequate food

ABDULLAH AHMADI

Afghans who they say are living in their country illegally.

In response to the deportation campaign, more than 1,300 Iranian and Afghan activists, journalists, artists, and citizens have written an open letter to the Iranian government. They are calling for an immediate end to the repression of Afghan refugees, who are being arbitrarily arrested and deported. They also call on the Iranian people to oppose

these attacks so that their silence is not perceived as complicity.

Refugees have long complained about systematic and increasingly intense racist attitudes in society, which they say are being fuelled by the authorities.

Negative coverage in Iranian media shifts blame for social and economic problems onto refugees, fuelling resentment among disadvantaged groups and turning them against the mi-

grants. Zahra recalls that, as a documented refugee, she wasn't even given a place in school, on the grounds that there weren't enough places for locals.

"The deportations in recent months have often been carried out without regard for international standards," argued Afghan human rights activist Abdullah Ahmadi. "Many of those deported were taken to the border overnight - without shelter, med-

ical care, or adequate food. Some even had to pay for the journey themselves."

Among the returnees are numerous families who returned to Afghanistan on their own initiative for fear of arbitrary arrest. Many of them say they have not received their outstanding wages or the deposits they paid for their apartments.

Cooperation with the Taliban

In response to growing criticism, the Iranian authorities emphasise that they had asked all 'illegal' refugees to leave the country six months ago.

Nader Yarahmadi, head of the Centre for Foreigners and

Refugees at the Ministry of the Interior, told the state news agency IRNA in early July: "We announced in March that all illegal migrants must leave the country by July 15 at the latest."

The increased number of irregular immigrants from Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover has placed an enormous strain on the country's limited resources. In January, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi travelled to the Afghan capital, Kabul, to negotiate cooperation with the Taliban, including the deportation of refugees.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said in July that he was 'ready to travel to Afghanistan to open a new chap-

ter in relations between the two countries'. His announcement was widely interpreted as possibly signalling recognition of the Taliban. However, Iran's Foreign Ministry later clarified that the statement was merely an expression of personal interest and there were no official travel plans.

The mass deportations have led to growing criticism of Iran within Afghan society. "The current situation is not conducive to a diplomatic trip," according to international relations expert Ahmad Ehsan Sarwaryar.

"In just 40 days, almost one million people have been deported. This is overwhelming basic services in western Afghanistan," he said.

Sarwaryar supports the accommodation of returnees in the western Afghan city of Herat, where he has described a worsening humanitarian catastrophe.

Almost 23mn people in Afghanistan already depend on humanitarian aid. Now hundreds of thousands of returnees are joining them, left without shelter, work, or prospects for the future.

"My plan was always to return to Afghanistan after school and study there," Zahra told DW. "In Iran, I have to pay for my studies because I don't have an Iranian passport. The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 and shattered my dreams."

Four of her friends and acquaintances, who were deported from Iran with their families in recent months, now live together with their young children in a sparsely-furnished small house that has no electricity.

DW

Australia to buy Japanese frigates

Canberra, Australia - Australia will upgrade its navy with 11 frigates from Japan, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Tuesday.

"This is clearly the biggest defence-industry agreement that has ever been struck between Japan and Australia," Marles said.

The 10bn Australian dollar (US\$6.5bn) deal saw Mitsubishi Heavy Industries awarded the tender to supply Mogami-class warships, beating out Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems.

Deal sees tightening of Australia-Japan partnership

Japan is one of Australia's most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

"This decision was made based on what was the best capability for Australia," Marles said. "We do have a very close



A Mogami frigate is seen docked at the Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan in April, 2025

strategic alignment with Japan."

The Mogami frigates are advanced warships equipped with a potent array of weapons.

"The Mogami-class frigate is the best frigate for Australia," Marles said. "It is a next-generation vessel. It is stealthy. It has 32

vertical launch cells capable of launching long-range missiles."

The Japanese bid was seen as 'more expensive and higher risk', according to the *The Australian* newspaper.

This is because Japan has little history of exporting defence

equipment, a legacy of its pacifist constitution introduced after World War II.

The deal is Japan's first warship export since before World War II and only its second major defence package sold abroad.

DW

Denmark zoo asks people to donate pets to feed predators

Aalborg, Denmark - A zoo in the northern Danish city of Aalborg is accepting donations in the form of pets to feed its predators.

The zoo issued an online call for people who 'have a healthy animal that needs to be given away for various reasons'.

Why the zoo asking for pets?

The zoo said it was trying to mimic the natural food chain of animals it housed. It listed guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens and horses as possible donations, noting that owners of donated horses can receive a tax deduction.

In a social media post, the zoo said that with such donations, 'nothing goes to waste - and we ensure natural behaviour, nutri-



Lions are among a group of carnivores housed by Aalborg Zoo

tion and well-being of our predators'. Donated animals will be 'gently euthanised' by trained staff, the zoo added.

The call for donations attracted international media attention. But Pia Nielsen, deputy director of Aalborg Zoo, said the

initiative was common practice in Denmark.

"For many years at Aalborg Zoo, we have fed our carnivores with smaller livestock," she said in a statement quoted by *The Guardian*.

DW

Japan sees record high temperature; South Korea records 2nd hottest July

Tokyo/Seoul - Japan on Tuesday saw a record high temperature of 41.8C (107.2F) in the Gunma region, a mountainous, landlocked province on Japan's Honshu Island, exceeding the previous record of 41.2C (106.1F), according to the country's Meteorological Agency.

"Authorities are urging people to take steps to prevent heat-related illnesses, such as making appropriate use of air conditioning and staying hydrated," Kyodo News reported.

The meteorological agency said a high-pressure system will continue to cover areas around the main island of Honshu, bringing hot and sunny weather.

On Monday, the Komatsu

area in Ishikawa recorded a temperature of 40.3C (104.5F), marking one of the hottest days this summer. Central Tokyo and the cities of Otsu, Takamatsu, Okayama, and Oita will likely experience 37C (98.6F).

Heatstroke alerts have been issued in 44 of Japan's 47 provinces. Officials are urging residents to stay indoors, use air conditioning, stay hydrated, and avoid outdoor activities during peak heat hours.

Hot Julys in S Korea

South Korea, meanwhile, recorded its second hottest July on record this year as intense heat waves and tropical nights gripped the nation, the Korea



Heatstroke alerts have been issued in 44 of Japan's 47 provinces

Meteorological Administration (KMA) said on Tuesday.

The average nationwide temperature in July was 27.1C (80.7F), just behind the record 27.7C (81.8F) reached in July 1994, Yonhap News Agency reported, citing the KMA.

The country experienced 14.5 days of heat waves, defined as daily highs above 33C (91.4F), marking the third most for July behind 17.7 days in 1994 and 15.4 days in 2018.

South Korea also recorded 6.7 tropical nights last month, marking the fourth most on record.

The scorching temperatures began early in July, driven by the earlier-than-usual influence of the North Pacific high-pressure

system, and intensified later with the added influence of the Tibetan high.

Portugal fights forest fires

Portugal continues to fight multiple forest fires under a state of alert as southern and northern parts of Europe are gripped by extreme weather, according to local media on Tuesday.

In Portugal, four major wildfires remain active, particularly in the northern regions of Vila Real and Mondim de Basto, where more than 800 firefighters are battling the blazes with the support of 282 vehicles and nine aircraft, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported.

26 more Palestinians killed in Israeli airstrikes in war-torn Gaza

Gaza City/Istanbul - At least 26 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded in a fresh wave of Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, medics said.

A medical source said five people were killed in an Israeli strikes targeting tents for displaced families in Al-Mawasi area of Khan Younis in southern Gaza.

Three more people lost their lives and several others were injured by Israeli fire while waiting near an aid distribution point south of Khan Younis.

In central Gaza, two Palestinians, including a woman, were killed and others wounded in an Israeli attack west of Nuseirat refugee camp.

Six Palestinians waiting for humanitarian aid were killed in an Israeli strike that targeted their gathering near a distribution centre at the Netzarim Corridor in the central Gaza Strip.

In Gaza City, four Palestinians were killed and others wounded in two Israeli airstrikes on two residential apartments.

Injuries were also reported in strikes targeting two homes in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of Gaza City.

Another Israeli strike killed six more people and injured several others in the northwestern part



of the same city.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry reported 95 new cases of the rare GuillainBarre syndrome, including 45 children.

Meanwhile, the Israeli Cabinet has approved a mechanism to allow what it called a 'gradual and controlled' entry of goods into the blockaded Gaza Strip via the private sector.

"This aims to increase the

volume of aid entering the Gaza Strip, while reducing reliance on aid collection by the UN and international organisations," COGAT, the Israeli military agency that coordinates aid, said in a statement on Tuesday.

It said a limited number of local merchants were approved as part of the new mechanism.

The move comes amid a tight Israeli blockade that has left Gaza's 2.4mn population on the verge of famine.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, at least 180 people, including 93 children, have died from starvation and malnutrition since October 2023.

Protest outside Trump's hotel

Protesters gathered outside the Trump International Hotel in New York on Monday to protest Israel's starvation policy in Gaza.

The protest, organised by Jewish-American anti-occupation group IfNotNow, drew hundreds to Columbus Circle under the banner 'Trump: Jews Say No More', calling for an end to the war in Gaza and greater access for humanitarian aid.

Protesters also held signs reading 'Stop ethnic cleansing', 'Never again is now', 'Stop starving Gaza', and 'Not in our name'.

Anadolu Agency

Netanyahu blocked ceasefire, hostage deal: Israeli channel

Jerusalem - Secret meeting protocols from Israeli political and security leaders during the most recent Gaza ceasefire deal show that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected proposals that could have secured the release of all hostages and paused the war, an Israel channel reported on Monday.

The documents indicate that Israel's top security officials believed a comprehensive agreement was possible and could have been followed by renewed fighting if necessary, but Netanyahu opposed the plan, said Channel 13.



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu rejected proposals that could have secured release of all hostages, said Channel 13

"All of Israel's leadership miscalculated that humanitarian pressure would force Hamas to surrender," the report added.

Five months later, Israel's approach to allowing aid into Gaza has significantly damaged its international reputation without weakening Hamas, it said.

The protocols show that the first of these meetings took place on March 1, 2025, during the initial stage of the ceasefire deal - shortly after the bodies of hostages Itzik Elgarat, Ohad Yahalomi, Tsahi Idan and Shlomo Mansour were returned.

At the time, Israeli leaders debated whether to move forward with the second phase of the deal, which involved negotiating terms to end the war and securing the release of more captives, or resume military operations.

Maj. Gen. Nitzan Alon, Israel's army official responsible for prisoners and missing persons, told officials that 'the only opportunity to release the captives is to discuss the conditions of phase

two', the channel reported.

Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, who currently heads Israel's negotiating team, responded: "We are not prepared to end the war while Hamas remains in power. We thought things would explode when negotiations began - but they didn't."

During the same discussion, then-Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar said: "My preferred option is to move forward with phase two. We can easily return to the war. Let's get everyone back first, then resume the fight," according to the network.

Israel estimates that 50 hostages remain in Gaza, including 20 believed to be alive. Meanwhile, over 10,800 Pales-

tinians are being held in Israeli prisons, many facing torture, starvation and medical neglect, according to both Palestinian and Israeli rights groups and media outlets.

Netanyahu's stance

The protocols reveal that days after the initial hostages were released, a senior Israeli security official told the ministers that 'it is possible to secure the release of more captives, but that requires engaging in talks about phase two - ending the war'.

The political leadership, headed by Netanyahu, rejected the proposal, the official said.

Bar suggested ending the war to bring the hostages home, with the option of resuming military

action later.

The first phase of the ceasefire and hostage exchange - brokered by Egypt and Qatar with US support - began on January 19 and ended in March. Hamas adhered to the agreement.

However, Netanyahu abandoned phase two and resumed the genocide in Gaza on March 18.

Last week, Israel withdrew from indirect talks with Hamas in Doha over disagreements on withdrawal from Gaza, ending the war, and the fate of Palestinian prisoners and humanitarian aid distribution.

Misleading the public

Following Channel 13's report on the secret discussions at the end

of the hostage exchange, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum called the findings 'deeply alarming'.

"The report definitively proves what we've been saying for a year and a half - a comprehensive deal to bring all captives home was possible," it said.

It accused the Israeli government of deliberately sabotaging potential deals while misleading the public.

We are not prepared to end the war while Hamas remains in power. We thought things would explode when negotiations began - but they didn't

RON DERMER

"Senior security officials repeatedly presented the government with creative, realistic proposals that would have freed all hostages and also defeated Hamas," the families said.

They added that dozens of their relatives were captured alive in Gaza but 'were killed while awaiting a deal the Israeli government had no intention of pursuing'.

"Since the end of the previous deal, 50 soldiers have died. There have been no military achievements, and no captives have returned," it added.

Anadolu Agency



56 migrants dead, 132 missing after boat capsizes off southern Yemen

Istanbul, Turkey - At least 56 migrants died and 132 remain missing after a boat carrying about 200 people capsized off the coast of southern Yemen's Abyan province, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Tuesday.

Among the victims were 14 women, with many of the dead believed to be Ethiopian nationals. The IOM said only 12 survivors, all men, have been rescued.

Describing the August 3 sinking as a 'heartbreaking incident', the UN agency stressed the urgent need to address the dangers of irregular migration along the Eastern Route, which links the Horn of Africa to Yemen.

It urged stronger international and regional cooperation to expand safe and regular migration pathways, enhance coordinated search and rescue operations, protect survivors, and support their safe return and reintegration in their home countries. "We commend the local

authorities for their swift response and reiterate our commitment to supporting ongoing interagency efforts to identify and assist survivors, recover bodies, and provide support to affected families," the IOM said in a statement.

Earlier, Yemeni officials had confirmed that dozens of bodies were recovered and buried, while many others remained unaccounted for after the vessel overturned due to bad weather conditions.

Since the beginning of 2025, the IOM has recorded more than 350 migrant deaths and disappearances along the Eastern Route, though the real number is believed to be significantly higher.

Yemen is a common destination for hundreds of illegal migrants from the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia, who undertake this perilous journey in hopes of reaching Gulf countries to seek better living conditions.

Anadolu Agency

US backtracks after conditioning disaster funds on Israel boycott refusal

Washington, D.C., US - The Trump administration changed course on Monday amid outrage sparked by its threat to withhold at least US\$1.9bn in disaster preparedness funding to states and local governments that support boycotts of Israel or Israeli firms.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appears to have deleted the relevant language from its internal terms and conditions, which included clauses mandating that entities seeking funding not support efforts to blacklist Israel.

The original language said applicants must not support severing 'commercial relations, or otherwise limiting commercial relations specifically with Israeli companies or with companies doing business in or with Israel or authorised by, licensed by, or organised under the laws of Israel to do business'.

The April language appears to

have been deleted from a newer version that was posted after the news media reported that 11 grant notices published on Friday referenced the terms and conditions that contained the anti-Israel boycott.

"There is NO FEMA requirement tied to Israel in any current NOFO. No states have lost funding, and no new conditions have been imposed. FEMA grants remain governed by existing law and policy and not political litmus tests," DHS said on X, using an acronym to refer to a notice of funding opportunity.

"DHS will enforce all anti-discrimination laws and policies, including as it relates to the BDS movement, which is expressly grounded in antisemitism. Those who engage in racial discrimination should not receive a single dollar of federal funding," it added.

The since-renege on politi-



cal requirement is unusual, particularly for funding that covers a wide range of critical programmes for state and local governments, including cybersecurity, emergency food and shelter, port security to thwart potential terrorist attacks, and search-and-rescue

equipment.

The media reports prompted a vocal backlash from prominent voices within US President Donald Trump's MAGA, or Make America Great Again, movement.

"Denying Americans who won't support the genocide

being conducted by your friends. Trump has fully betrayed America for (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu and if you cannot see that now you are completely blind," far-right MAGA personality Candace Owens said on X.

Already, over half of all US

states - 38 - have laws on the books, or executive orders in place, punishing individuals and businesses who participate in the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement,

2024 directing state departments to halt all business with entities supporting BDS. The laws and executive actions have come under intense scrutiny over whether they are in compli-

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appears to have deleted the relevant language from its internal terms and conditions, which included clauses mandating that entities seeking funding not support efforts to blacklist Israel

according to the Jewish Virtual Library.

The first to adopt such a measure was Tennessee in 2015, followed that year by South Carolina and Illinois.

Alaska is the last state to have taken action against BDS when Governor Mike Dunleavy issued an executive order in

ance with the US Constitution.

The BDS movement, launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, draws on a legacy of boycotts that helped topple apartheid in South Africa, linking the fight for Palestinian liberation to broader struggles against injustice.

Anadolu Agency

India, Philippines sign 14 MoUs

New Delhi, India - India and the Philippines signed and exchanged 14 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on Tuesday, looking to increase co-operation across sectors, including sharing the terms of reference for the negotiations for the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA).

The multiple MoUs were exchanged in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Philippines President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr on Tuesday boosting ties between both the nations and enhancing their trade relations.

Notably, this is President Marcos’ first state visit, with both countries celebrating 75 years of strong diplomatic relations.

The MoUs include cooperation in digital technologies, space, science, and tourism, and also increased cooperation between the armed forces and the coast guard, External Affairs Secretary (East) P Kumaran said in MEA media briefing in the national capital.

There was adoption of Terms of Reference for the negotiations on a Preferential Trade Agreement between India and the Philippines.

Incidentally, Indian and Philippine navies wrapped up their maritime cooperative activity (MCA) in the South China Sea, the first joint patrol of India and the Philippines in the waters contested by multiple countries, including China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan, among others.

Prime Minister Modi and President Marcos also issued a commemorative stamp, themed on national flowers, Lotus for India and Sampaguita, a variety of jasmine for the Philippines.



Indian President Droupadi Murmu and PM Narendra Modi with Philippines President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr and first lady Liza Araneta Marcos

Delhi-Manila flight to begin from Oct 1

New Delhi, India - In a significant step towards enhancing regional connectivity between India and the Philippines, direct flights from Delhi to Manila are expected to commence operations from October 1 this year, the Ministry of External Affairs stated on Tuesday.

During a special press briefing on the occasion of the state visit of the President of the

Philippines, Ferdinand R Marcos Jr, to India, the MEA indicated that the two countries are exploring possibilities of expanding air links to additional destinations shortly to provide a strong impetus to tourism, business, and people-to-people contacts.

“Direct Air India flight connectivity from Delhi to Manila will be operational from Octo-

ber 1 to the Philippines, hopefully. Further discussions on destinations and how to expand will be held later,” the MEA stated. During the joint press statement, President Marcos announced visa-free entry privileges for Indian tourists, while PM Modi reciprocated with a similar scheme for Filipino tourists.

ANI

fifth strategic partner for the Philippines. This new apex at-tests as much to the remarkably rapid growth, broadening and deepening of our 75-year-old bilateral relationship, the possibilities represented by the strong upward trajectory of our true economies as it does to the growing alignment of our inter-ests and views on the chal-lenges and imperatives of our time,” he said.

“This was also the auspicious context in which Prime Minister Modi and I engaged in far-reaching, productive and forward-looking discussions this past hour. We agreed to continue levelling up our collabora-tion in defence and security,” he

meeting in Delhi, said that India has become the fifth strategic partner for the Philippines.

Marcos said that Prime Min-

ister Modi and he have agreed to cooperate further in the de-fence and security sector.

“Today, India becomes the

added.

Marcos said that the Philip-pines was satisfied with the de-fence modernisation along with India’s Brahmos project.

The Philippines and India also agreed to establish mech-anisms for training among their militaries.

“So we have agreed to estab-lish mechanisms for service-to-service talks for information sharing and training exchanges amongst our militaries. We will foster naval and coast guard in-teroperability via port calls in cooperative activities and ca-pacity building in the maritime domain,” the Philippines Presi-dent said.

Marcos further felicitated Modi’s undertaking to make India a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047.

“Despite these challenges, I also bear felicitations on India’s remarkable transformation and inexorable march to become Viksit Bharat by 2047 under Prime Minister Modi’s guiding hand,” he said.

Marcos said that the two leaders, in a bid to expand eco-nomic partnership, have de-cided to work towards forging a bilateral trade agreement.

“The economic sphere has been a steady engine driving our ties for seven plus decades. Prime Minister Modi and I have charged our economic teams to shepherd our commerce now at US\$3.3bn in the last year to-wards a continued upward tra-jectory and expanded baskets of goods. To this end, we have de-cided to expedite the work that we are doing to forge a bilateral preferential trade agreement,” he said.

The Philippines’ President will be in India till August 8.

ANI

Mexico: 7 killed, 11 injured in prison riot

Mexico City, Mexico - A deadly riot in Mexico’s Tuxpan prison left seven inmates dead and eleven injured, following clashes between prisoners and the criminal gang Grupo Sombra, Khaama Press reported on Tuesday.

International media reported a deadly riot at the Tuxpan prison in Veracruz state, Mexico, that resulted in the deaths of at least seven inmates and left eleven others injured.

According to the Veracruz State Public Security Department, the violence erupted after a confrontation between a group of inmates and members of a criminal gang known as Grupo Sombra, who had reportedly been extorting and threatening other prisoners and their families.

Some inmates, in videos circulated on social media, claimed the riot was sparked in protest against these threats and acts of intimidation, as per Khaama Press.

Security forces were able to regain control of the prison on Sunday and extinguished fires that had been set by inmates during the chaos.

Footage from inside the Tuxpan prison showed plumes of smoke rising above the facility and several inmates with burn injuries being transferred to external medical centres for treatment.

ANI



Russia carried out ‘431 strikes on 16 settlements’ in the Zaporizhzhia region

5 killed in Russian strikes on Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia

Kyiv, Ukraine - At least five people have been killed and 13 injured in Russian strikes overnight on Tuesday that targeted the Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions, days before US President Donald Trump’s deadline for Moscow to agree to a truce or face additional tariffs expires.

One person was killed in a strike targeting the city of Lozova in the Kharkiv region that hit critical infrastructure, including high-rise buildings and a residential area, the city’s mayor said, calling it the ‘most intense attack’ on the town since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion in early 2022.

“Sadly, people have been injured, including two children. Rescue workers, medics and emergency services are working at the scene. We are documenting the consequences,” Serhii Zelenskyy said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia launched a ballistic missile and nearly 50 UAVs against

Ukraine, the majority of which were Iranian-made Shaheds and their Russian equivalents.

More than 25 hit Lozova in eastern Ukraine, he added. The strikes damaged a railway, including a depot and a station and left parts of the city without elec-

Overnight Russian strikes targeted Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia and Sumy regions, killing five people and damaging infrastructure

tricity. In the Zaporizhzhia region, four people were killed and three injured, according to Governor Ivan Federov.

Russia carried out ‘431 strikes on 16 settlements’ in the Zaporizhzhia region, Federov wrote on Telegram, saying the attack

struck residential buildings, homes, commercial buildings and warehouses.

Zelenskyy said two people were injured in the village of Bilenke. “Once again, the Russian army is hunting civilians in an attempt to terrorise frontline cities and communities,” the Ukrainian president added in a post on X.

The strikes come as Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff is set to travel to Russia, days before the end of the deadline for Moscow to reach a ceasefire deal with Ukraine or face significant US tariffs.

Trump has ramped up pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin to agree to a truce as Moscow continues to strike Ukrainian towns and cities, shortening a previous deadline of 50 days to August 8.

Despite this, Russia has continued to strike Ukraine overnight with additional attacks on the Odesa and Sumy regions, Zelenskyy said.

Euronews

Germany deploys fighter jets to Poland

Berlin, Germany - Germany has deployed fighter jets to Poland to strengthen NATO’s eastern flank amid escalating tensions with Russia, defence officials confirmed on Tuesday.

Five German Eurofighter Typhoon jets will operate from the Minsk Mazowiecki Air Base east of Warsaw and assist Polish forces with airspace surveillance operations, according to the German Defence Ministry officials.

“This deployment demonstrates NATO alliance solidarity and provides credible deterrence while protecting our



German Typhoon jets will operate from Minsk Mazowiecki Air Base

shared airspace,” a spokesperson from the German Air Force told Bild daily, adding that air-

poling flights would begin on Tuesday.

Nearly 150 German military

personnel are currently stationed at the Minsk Mazowiecki Air Base for this mission, defence officials said.

The operation is expected to be complete approximately by one month.

Poland, a member of both the EU and NATO, serves as a critical hub for Western military aid to Ukraine.

The German Air Force has been assisting Polish forces with airspace monitoring since April. Previously, the fighter jets conducting this mission operated from the city of Rostock.

Anadolu Agency

India: SC to hear J&K statehood plea on Aug 8

New Delhi, India - Indian Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on August 8 a plea seeking directions to the Centre for the restoration of statehood to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) B R Gavai, saying that the matter is shown as listed on August 8 and requested that it not be deleted from the list of that day. CJI accepted the request and said the matter will not be deleted from the list on August 8.

The application stated that it is necessary to pass appropriate directions to restore the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir as soon as possible, in a time-bound manner, as undertaken by the Union of India.

Filed by college teacher Zahoor Ahmed Bhat and activist Khurshaid Ahmad Malik, the ap-



plications stated that despite the assurance given by the Solicitor General that Jammu and Kashmir’s statehood will be restored, the Union has not taken any steps in that regard in the years after the judgment in the Article 370 case.

The application was filed through advocate Soyaib Qureshi in the disposed of case of abrogation of Article 370, in which the

Supreme Court upheld the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

Congress, PDP stage protest in J&K

Meanwhile, Congress and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Tuesday protested against the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir’s Srinagar while raising slogans, labelling the abrogation

day as ‘black day’.

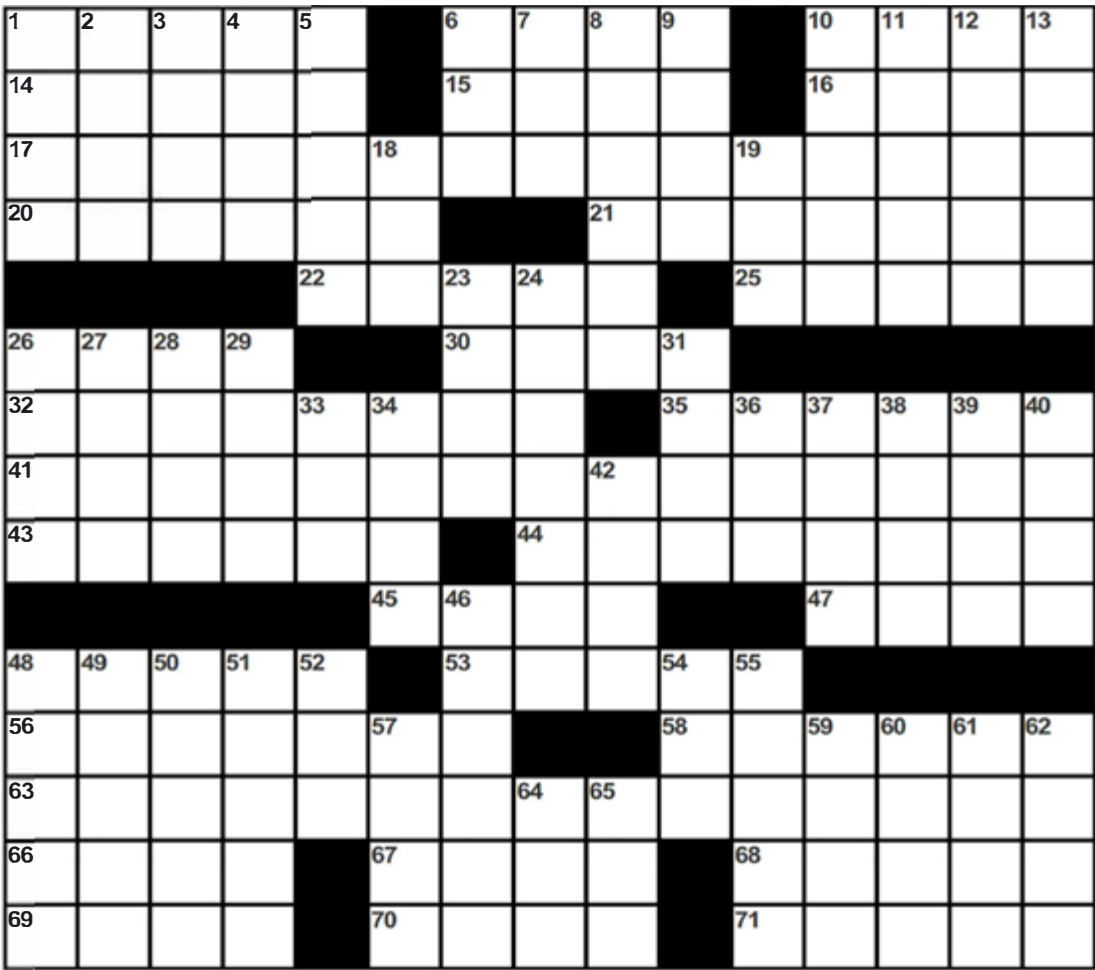
The protestors reiterated their demand for the restoration of statehood, carrying banners which read: ‘Black Day for Jammu & Kashmir. On this day, BJP snatched away the crown of statehood from us. People and Jammu & Kashmir will not forgive BJP’.

Labelling the abrogation of Article 370 ‘illegal’, PDP leader Iltija Mufti took a swipe at the centre, saying that they are not allowed to protest, despite being a ‘legal party’. Citing house arrests of political leaders in 2019, she asserted that nothing has changed even after six years of the scrapping of Article 370.

As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) extended greetings on the abrogation day, former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti called for a 15-minute blackout to mark a protest.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Fable conclusion
 - 6) Keeps having birthday parties
 - 10) Mattress supporter
 - 14) Flaring skirt style
 - 15) Fourth down option
 - 16) Animated _ E. Coyote
 - 17) Tow trucks, e.g.
 - 20) Oklahoma U. athlete
 - 21) Point of view
 - 22) Grating, voice-wise
 - 25) Kind of cash or officer
 - 26) Farmer, on occasion
 - 30) Bringing up the rear
 - 32) Major, as a highway
 - 35) Go around and around
 - 41) They are left to chance
 - 43) Blood component
 - 44) Place for a bell ringer
 - 45) Badly wound
 - 47) Dog show partner?
 - 48) Beauty pageant wear
 - 53) Remove wooden pins from
 - 56) Zambian's neighbor
 - 58) Biblical plague member
 - 63) Win an election

- 66) Wood source
 - 67) Food sticker
 - 68) Control_ (obsessive type)
 - 69) Puts in stitches
 - 70) "L to recall ... "
 - 71) Grassy plant
- DOWN**
- 1) "The War of the Worlds" planet
 - 2) Blue Bonnet, for one
 - 3) Puerto finisher
 - 4) Soon, in romantic poetry
 - 5) Part of a voting machine
 - 6) Busy IRS mo.
 - 7) Gal's partner
 - 8) Diplomats
 - 9) Kind of aerobics
 - 10) Pigs and such
 - 11) Allowed by law
 - 12) Dole out
 - 13) Itsy-bitsy
 - 18) Victorian, in history books
 - 19) Cool, old-school
 - 23) Belgrade citizen
 - 24) Traveling gunslinger of old TV
 - 26) Large stringed instrument
 - 27) Face-to-face exam
 - 28) Volcano in Italy
 - 29) 1990 World Series champs
 - 31) Group of three
 - 33) CD follower
 - 34) Mosque VIP
 - 36) Tool that makes waves
 - 37) Cookbook abbr.
 - 38) Kind of sax
 - 39) High schooler
 - 40) Catch a glimpse of
 - 42) Cakewalk, in sports
 - 46) Mame, for one
 - 48) Bake sale sweets
 - 49) Become accustomed
 - 50) Vice president who re-signed
 - 51) Gads about
 - 52) "Aladdin" prince
 - 54) "Boola Boola" warbler
 - 55) Makes silly mistakes
 - 57) Play parts
 - 59) Heal completely
 - 60) Brought into play
 - 61) Smelterly refuse
 - 62) Little kid
 - 64) Early afternoon
 - 65) Deep sleep stage

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You need some time alone to plan your next few weeks. While you may not be used to taking things so slowly, your energy is best suited for extremely detailed long-range planning that ensures that everything comes off as well as it can. Write it all down. Though you excel at seeing the big picture, sometimes the little things can escape you, and you definitely can't afford that risk now.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
When it comes to love, be open to anything. Recent developments have convinced you that you're better off alone for the time being, but a breakthrough is coming for sure. Its impact is memorable, but it might also mold the next few months with its daring, exciting energy. Be patient with yourself and remember that the best things in life are worth waiting for, especially when it comes to romance.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
If communication has hit some kind of wall, it's not all that surprising. It's been looming for a while. Ignoring it is sure to make it worse, though that is probably your first instinct. Though you may feel that you've reached some kind of resolution, a deeper issue is festering and stressing you both out. Express your feelings, and you should discover a new level of openness that was previously closed off by all that was left unsaid.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who are the only players in an ice hockey game allowed to be in the referee's crease?
A. Rink steward
B. A game official
C. Goaltender
D. Captain and alternate captain

2. On which coast of South America would you find the country of Venezuela?
A. South
B. East
C. West
D. North

3. In 1971, on which island was the largest underground test of nuclear weapons ever conducted by the USA?
A. Mururoa
B. Bikini
C. Amchitka
D. Christmas

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. C

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Your ego gets a well-deserved boost from a confidence-building success, and it's definitely coming at the right time too. You can take on any delays or complexities without breaking much of a sweat. When you face all these challenges without musing your do, some of your people are sure to ask how you do it. Tell them your secret! Meditation exercises and a willingness to look toward the future help you cope with any obstacles.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Thanks to the calming influences affecting your personal energy, you're one of the few people you know who is able to think clearly now. Use that brain to free yourself from shady people and their even shadier offers, no matter how awesome they may appear at first glance. Big risks might seem fun or even romantic in pop culture, but you know that in real life it usually ends up being a lot more trouble than it's worth.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Your brain is showered with a huge dose of assertive energy as the Universe helps you focus on work and responsibilities. This new synergy is amazing to behold, but the potential for burnout is getting higher. If you want to avoid it, keep your eyes open, and make sure not to overload on coffee. Remember that your mind needs breaks every now and then, so make sure to stick to a schedule.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You can throw democracy right out the window for now. Truly legendary leaders know that sometimes the best decision is the hardest decision, though it may not go down all that well with their citizens at first. Have courage and go ahead with what you believe to be the best choice for the long term and you should get enough support to ensure that you stay "boss for life."

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
A willingness to do what other people want is nice, but it isn't always effective. Today, take control of a situation that no one seems to want to be responsible for. Meaningless chitchat is causing everything to go nowhere, so step up and tell everyone what you think the best move should be. You won't get complaints. You will get gratitude for being confident enough to step in.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You're gaining a higher profile than ever, and this is a great day for self-promotion. If you've been looking for a time to win more popular support or get a lot of good publicity for your cause, then this is your day. People are ready to listen and use their power and money to help you. Momentum is building for something major to happen, and you're finally ready to take the big plunge you've been wanting to take for quite a while.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
You're definitely in the mood for snappy banter, and luckily you've walked straight onto the set of a wacky comedy right out of the classic days of Hollywood. You and someone close are all about the repartee and the winking one-liners. Don't be too surprised if all this wit takes a sudden turn toward something more serious, because with this kind of chemistry, is it any wonder you feel the need to talk about deeper topics?

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Are you feeling somewhat underappreciated recently? That's perfectly understandable. You've been working yourself to death and not giving your people the chance to reply in kind. Have a little more confidence in your friends and they should come through. And remember that you're worthy of support! When you learn to give them the chance to be generous, you may find yourself getting more attention.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
You, of all people, are the least likely to shy away from responsibility, except today, when a deeply personal issue could come up and force its way into your attention. Before you sit down and dream up a way to avoid this problem, why not roll up your sleeves and dive right in? Not only is it not as bad as you fear but it also will take considerably less energy than blowing it off.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	I	I	R
B	E	D	S
U	I	R	S
A	G	A	A

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.

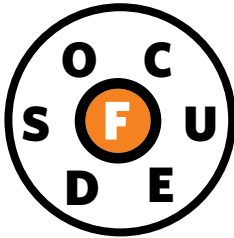
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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

Man United goalkeeper Onana hopes to be fit for opener

Atlanta, US - Andre Onana has revealed he is hoping to be fit for Manchester United's Premier League opener against Arsenal.

The Old Trafford clash with the Gunners is creeping ever closer, taking place on Sunday 17 August, as Ruben Amorim's side look to begin the campaign in positive fashion.

Onana travelled to the United States with the rest of the squad but worked on his fitness as he bids to return from injury.

The Cameroon international did not feature in the Summer Series, with Altay Bayindir and Tom Heaton keeping goal. Bayindir played against West Ham United and Everton, while Heaton started the 4-1 victory over Bournemouth.

Speaking to NBC Sports in Atlanta, Onana issued an update on his fitness and stressed the importance of getting off to a good start against Mikel Arteta's side. "I'm good, I feel great," the Cameroon international revealed to the American broadcasters. "It's been a few difficult weeks but yeah, hopefully, I will be back for the start of the season. I'm enjoying the training with my guys and we are looking forward."

In his chat with ex-United keeper Tim Howard, Onana also touched on what he feels is different this time around as the

It's been a few difficult weeks but yeah, hopefully, I will be back for the start of the season

ANDRE ONANA

Reds target a much more productive campaign.

"I think togetherness," he said. "We are together. We know that last season was tough for us and must make sure this doesn't happen again. We know the way. We work hard, we enjoy training together. We have fun and that is key. When we are together, we are going to be hard to beat."

"We're happy with the way things are going. We play well, score goals and I'm happy how the team is developing themselves. Let's see. I think it's going to be important to have a good start against Arsenal and then everything is possible."



PRIMED FOR FULL FLO!

Liverpool boss Slot counts on new signing Wirtz to carry creative burden

Liverpool, England - Trent Alexander-Arnold's departure to Real Madrid has left Liverpool wanting for creativity but the signing of attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz can help offset that deficiency, the Premier League club's manager Arne Slot said.

Liverpool smashed their transfer record in June to sign Wirtz and bolster their attacking options, with the German international having scored 57 goals and provided 65 assists in 197 appearances for Bayer Leverkusen.

Wirtz played in a Liverpool shirt for the first time at Anfield on Monday, putting in an im-

We've lost with Trent a lot of creativity from the back. Trent's crosses and picking out runners was so special - I think Flo has this quality as well in a totally different position

ARNE SLOT

pressive performance in the Merseyside club's 3-2 win over Athletic Bilbao in a pre-season match.

"I think there's always room for improvement in every department. Like I said, we've added a



Florian Wirtz put in an impressive performance against Athletic Bilbao in his first match in a Liverpool shirt at Anfield on Monday

few, in my opinion, extra weapons. So, Florian (Wirtz) has a lot of creativity in the final third," Slot told reporters.

"We've lost with Trent (Alexander-Arnold) a lot of creativity from the back. Trent's

crosses and picking out runners was so special - I think Flo has this quality as well in a totally different position.

"But he brings that creativity, the pace of Hugo (Ekitike), the pace of both full-backs - Milos (Kerkez) and Jeremie (Frimpong) today."

Frimpong linked up well with

Mohamed Salah, fellow full-back Kerkez was solid and Ekitike showed flexibility across the forward line.

Wirtz headed onto the crossbar before Ekitike crossed for Salah to fire home and Gakpo scored twice after the break after Oihan Sancet had levelled for the visitors.

Liverpool went into the double-header with just one recognised centre-back with Virgil van Dijk ill and Joe Gomez injured and looked vulnerable at set pieces, with Maroan Sannadi heading in an equaliser from a corner.

"The other games preseason we have conceded a few too

many chances, but today we hardly conceded anything at all and that pleased me as well," added Slot.

"So to concede two set-piece goals in the second game is not what you want, especially if you play Crystal Palace next week who are a team who are very strong on set pieces."



Eddie Howe (L) with Alexander Isak

Isak has to earn the right to train with us, says Newcastle manager Howe

Newcastle United head coach Eddie Howe insists Alexander Isak has "to earn the right to train with us" following recent media reports about his future at the club.

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

The 25-year-old returned to Newcastle on Monday, having

spent time training separately at his former club Real Sociedad.

"You have to earn the right to train with us," said Howe.

"He's like any other player, we would expect him to come in and train as normal."

Isak, who scored the winner against Liverpool in last season's EFL Cup final, to help Newcastle end their 70-year wait for domestic silverware, missed the Magpies' pre-season trip to South Korea.

"We are Newcastle United," Howe continued. "The player has a responsibility here to be part of a team and part of a squad - you have to act in the right way. So that is also at play here."

"We will make sure that any player does that, to earn the right to train with the group. No player can expect to act poorly and then train with the group as normal."

Newcastle kick off their Premier League campaign at Aston Villa on Saturday 16 August.

FIFA offers support to female referee Garcia over death threats

FIFA president Gianni Infantino expressed support for referee Katia Itzel Garcia and the Mexican Football Federation (FMF) after the official revealed she was subjected to online abuse following a Leagues Cup match.

Garcia, who has officiated in other men's competitions including Liga MX and the Olympic Games, reported receiving death threats after refereeing the Leagues Cup clash between FC Cincinnati and Monterrey on Thursday. Her decision to award a goal to the MLS side that appeared to be offside fuelled outrage among Monterrey fans after Cincinnati went on to win 3-2.

"I am dismayed and saddened by the threats against referee Katia Itzel," Infantino wrote on Instagram. "There is no place in football and society for abuse, discrimination and violence of any kind."

At FIFA, we stand in solidarity with the FMF and CONCACAF in condemning the actions of those who make these unacceptable threats," said Infantino.



Katia Itzel Garcia

Porto legend Jorge Costa dies aged 53 after cardiac arrest

Porto, Portugal - Former Porto captain Jorge Costa died on Tuesday at the age of 53 after suffering a cardiac arrest at the club's training centre, the Portuguese side said.

The former defender, who was serving as Porto's Director of Professional Football in his second season in the role, was rushed to hospital but could not be saved.

"Throughout his life, both on and off the pitch, Jorge Costa embodied the values that define FC Porto: dedication, leadership, passion and an unshakeable spirit of conquest," the club said in a statement. "He left his mark on generations of fans and became a symbol of Portismo."

Over his career, Costa played 530 games in all competitions - 383 for Porto and 50 for Portugal's national team.

Costa earned the nickname "Bicho" (Animal) from teammate Fernando Couto during their partnership in central defence.



Jorge Costa

As captain, he led Porto to UEFA Cup glory in 2003 and a Champions League triumph in 2004 under manager Jose Mourinho.

The defender was one of six players to win five consecutive Portuguese league championships with Porto.

Costa returned to the club in April 2024 as director under new president Andre Villas-Boas.

"Jorge Costa's legacy will always remain alive in the memory of all Porto fans. You will never be forgotten, Captain," the club added.

'AN INCREDIBLE SERIES'

Test cricket triumphs as India and England deliver an unforgettable five-match epic

London, England - England v India 2025 will go down as one of cricket's greatest test series of all time, five matches crammed into seven weeks of unrelenting, see-saw drama ending in a 2-2 draw after India's extraordinary six-run win in the final game on Monday.

Over 7,000 runs were scored, including a record-equalling 21 individual centuries, the sun shone most of the time and every match went into the fifth day.

The stadiums were packed and although tensions flared at times on the pitch - perhaps inevitable given the immense pressure - it was a series that featured all the best things that make test cricket such compulsive viewing.

It was a timely boost for the longest format of the sport which many people believe is fighting for its existence.

"It's been an incredible series, all five games going down to day five, so much has been put into this series from both teams," England captain Ben Stokes said.

"The commitment and energy has been outstanding. Stood here now, we're bitterly disappointed we couldn't get the series win but, being a massive advocate of the game of test cricket, this series has been an unbelievable advert for it across the world."

It all started at Headingley



India captain Shubman Gill (R) and his England counterpart Ben Stokes with the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy

We're bitterly disappointed we couldn't get the series win but this series has been an unbelievable advert for Test cricket

BEN STOKES

where three India batsmen made centuries, before a collapse that was to become a feature of the series, as they posted 471 and England replied with 465.

Rishabh Pant's second hundred of the game led India to 364 before Ben Duckett's 149 inspired England's textbook chase of a huge target of 371 to complete a five-wicket win.

India dominate at Edgbaston

The second test at Edgbaston

was by far the most one-sided.

India captain Shubman Gill made a brilliant 269 in his side's first-innings 587.

Harry Brook's 158 was the foundation of England's 407 in reply, but Gill made 161 to take his match tally to 430 runs and the hosts could muster only 271 as India levelled the series with a

RESULTS

First Test (Headingley) :
England won by five wickets

Second Test (Edgbaston):
India won by 336 runs

Third Test (Lord's):
England won by 22 runs

Fourth Test (Old Trafford): Draw

Fifth Test (The Oval):
India won by six runs

192 second time around but, as happened so often, the pendulum swung when they then reduced the touring side to 58-4 at the close on day four.

At lunch on the final day, India were teetering on 112-8 but Ravindra Jadeja batted for well over three hours, and it was deep into the last session when spinner Shoaib Bashir bowled Mohammed Siraj to complete a 22-run England win.

India hold on at Old Trafford

At Old Trafford, the bat dominated once more.

India made a respectable 358 before England racked up a massive 669, highlighted by Root's 150 and 141 from Stokes. Chris Woakes then took two wickets in the first over to reduce India to 0-2 before Rahul and Gill led a brilliant recovery.

Gill made another hundred but when they both fell on the final morning England had plenty of time to take the six remaining wickets with India facing a seemingly impossible run chase.

Jadeja and Washington Sun-

dar had other ideas, however, and doggedly resisted, both reaching three figures after England effectively gave up and were reduced to bowling part-timer Harry Brook to allow the batsmen to get to their milestones quicker.

The draw left England 2-1 up going into the final game at The Oval with the exertions of the series taking a heavy toll on both teams.

Siraj to the fore

England were missing Stokes and Jofra Archer while India were forced to leave out Pant and Jasprit Bumrah.

England skittled India for 224 before eking out a narrow first-innings lead of 23. Yashasvi Jaiswal's second century of the series lifted India to 396 and left England needing 374 for victory with two days remaining.

Twin centurions Root and Brook shared a superb fourth-wicket partnership of 195 to put England firmly in the driving seat with only 66 runs required.

Brook's reckless dismissal, however, gave India hope and, led by the tireless Siraj, they picked up two more wickets before bad weather forced an early close to leave England needing 35 runs on the final day. Siraj was inspired again and with England's batsmen losing their heads and their wickets, Woakes arrived at the crease wearing a sling to protect his dislocated shoulder.

Even then, England edged towards their target as Gus Atkinson farmed the strike and hit Siraj for six, only for the abrasive fast bowler to end proceedings with a brilliant yorker.

Zverev fights back to beat defending champion Popyrin at Canadian Open

Toronto, Canada - Alexander Zverev rallied from a set down to beat defending champion Alexei Popyrin 6-7(8) 6-4 6-3 in Toronto and move into the semi-finals of the Canadian Open on Monday.

Top seed Zverev was unable to convert two set points in a tight first set, but built up 3-0 leads in both the second and third sets to clinch the win in two hours and 42 minutes.

The victory took the German's head-to-head record against Australian Popyrin to 4-0 and sent him to his 75th semi-final on the ATP Tour, joining Novak Djokovic as the only active men's tennis player to have reached the mark.

"I had to tell myself, even

I had to find a return position in the beginning because he (Alexei Popyrin) is a very big server, and when he gets into a rhythm, it's very difficult against him

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

though I lost the first set, I thought we were both playing actually quite well," said Zverev, who won the Canadian Open in 2017. "I had to find a return position in the beginning because he's a very big server, and when he gets into a rhythm, it's very difficult against him."

"I did that in the second and third set. Honestly, I can't complain about much. I played one loose game on my serve in the

second set, but apart from that, it was pretty good."

Zverev next faces Russian Karen Khachanov, who beat Alex Michelsen of the United States 6-4 7-6(3).

Mboko marches on

Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko stormed into the semi-finals of the women's tournament in Montreal with a 6-4 6-2 win over Spain's Jessica Bouzas



Alexander Zverev

Maneiro.

The 18-year-old, ranked 85th in the world, found herself a break down early in the second set, but won six straight games to become the first Canadian to reach the semi-finals of the Canadian Open since 2019.

"I'm so excited to be in the semi-final here. I want to thank everyone for your support once again. It has been unreal," said Mboko, who beat No. 1 seed Coco Gauff on Saturday and is set to enter the top 50.

Mboko next takes on Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, who was leading 6-1 2-1 when her opponent, Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, was forced to retire from their quarter-final match due to a wrist injury.

Lyles was 'unsportsmanlike', says Bednarek after post-race scuffle

Eugene, US - American sprinter Kenny Bednarek labelled Noah Lyles "unsportsmanlike" after their heated 200 metres showdown at the USA Track & Field Championships almost led to blows on Sunday.

Lyles, the three-times world champion in the event, stormed past Bednarek to win in a world leading 19.63 seconds, turning his head to stare down Bednarek as they crossed the line.

Bednarek shoved Lyles in the back before the two exchanged what looked like heated words.

"Noah's going to be Noah. If he wants to stare me down, that's fine," Bednarek told reporters.

"The summary is, don't do that to me. I don't do any of that stuff. It's not good character right there. That's pretty much it. At the end of the day, he won the race. I've got to give him props.



Kenny Bednarek (L) with Noah Lyles after the 200 metres race at the USA Track & Field Championships

He was the better man today.

"What he said didn't matter, it's just what he did," Bednarek added. "Unsportsmanlike (expletive), and I don't deal with that. It's a respect factor. He's fresh. Last time we lined it up, I beat him, that's all I can say. Next time we line up, I'm going to win.

That's all that matters."

Sunday's final set the stage for what is sure to be a fiery rematch when the two race again at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. Both have also qualified in the 100m, with Lyles also the reigning world champion in that event.



Novak Djokovic

Djokovic withdraws from Cincinnati

Cincinnati, US - Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the Cincinnati Open for the second consecutive year, tournament organisers confirmed on Monday.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion has opted out of the U.S. Open warm-up tournament following consecutive semi-final exits at the French Open and Wimbledon at the hands of Jan-nik Sinner.

Thailand's Thitikul reclaims top spot in women's golf rankings

Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul has reached No. 1 in the Rolex Women's World Golf Rankings for the second time in her career.

Thitikul, 22, climbed one spot on Monday to pass Nelly Korda, who had held the No. 1 ranking since March 25, 2024.

Thitikul previously earned the No. 1 position on Oct. 31, 2022, and held it for two weeks, joining Ariya Jutanugarn as the second Thai player to ascend to the top.

"I am very grateful to become the No. 1 player in the world for the second time," Thitikul said. "This is not just about me - this is about my family, my team and my friends, not to mention the amazing support from my fans."

"There are so many incredible golfers competing every week and I will work my hardest to make sure I am a strong representative of our game."

Thitikul leads the LPGA Tour



Jeeno Thitikul

with eight top-10 finishes this season, including a win at the Mizuho Americas Open in May and strong major finishes at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship (T4) in June and at last month's Amundi Evian Championship, where she lost to Grace Kim in a playoff.

Thitikul finished T30 on Sun-

day at the AIG Women's Open. Korda placed T36 on Sunday and is still looking for her first tournament win of 2025 after collecting seven titles last year.

Korda's 17-month run at No. 1 raised her career total to 108 weeks atop the Rolex Rankings, making her the sixth player to reach triple digits.

THIS IS US

Captain Gill says Oval finale summed up India's spirit

London, India - Shubman Gill celebrated his first series as India captain by leading his team to a dramatic victory in the fifth Test against England at The Oval on Monday to share a series 2-2 in which the result has been in doubt until the final day of each match.

"There are moments like this when you feel the journey is worth it," Gill said at the post-match press conference.

"There have been a lot of highs and lows. That's kind of expected, especially with sport. Obviously, every time you go in to bat you want to score a century but that's not how the game of life works.

"You should be able to navigate through the high and lows of life. I wanted to stay balanced. I'm still learning but so far so good."

Gill, 25, was appointed captain in May following the retirement of two great Indian batsmen and leaders in Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has also quit Test cricket while the world's premier fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah was rested for two tests in this series, including the Oval match.

Gill has responded magnificently with the bat, scoring four centuries and finishing with an average of 75.40 in his first seven weeks as captain, the sec-



Indian captain Shubman Gill (C) celebrates with Mohammad Siraj (R) and Prasidh Krishna after their thrilling win against England on Monday

We just wanted to make sure that they're feeling the pressure throughout. Pressure makes everyone do things that they don't want to, and we just wanted to make sure of it

SHUBMAN GILL

ond-highest aggregate as a skipper behind Australia's Don Bradman.

The final Test ended with Gill's outstanding pace bowler Mohammad Siraj, who bowled with undiminished vigour throughout the match, yorked Gus Atkinson to give his team victory by six runs.

"What happened this morning summarised what this team is all about," Gill said. "This team

believes if there is some kind of opening we can get through that opening."

Gill said India were "pretty confident" of taking the remaining four wickets on the final morning at The Oval.

"Yeah, we were pretty confident," Gill said at the post-match presentation. "Even yesterday we knew that they [England] are a little bit under pressure. We just wanted to make sure that

they're feeling the pressure throughout. Pressure makes everyone do things that they don't want to, and we just wanted to make sure that they're feeling the pressure.

"When bowlers like Siraj and Prasidh are bowling like that then 35 runs is also too much," Gill said. "As a batsman you are under pressure as you feel the ball is doing something and it takes just one ball. And that is what we were reminding them about the same frequently. If the conditions are like this and the momentum is with you then 30-35 runs are enough, then you know it is a matter of one or two balls falling in the right place and the game will get over there and then."

"I think the way both the teams played in the entire series, every day coming on day four, day five, and never really knowing which team is going to win... it shows that both the teams came up with their A game and very happy to get over the line in this one."

Gill noted that the dismissals of Yorkshire pair Harry Brook and then Joe Root on Sunday evening had been that opening.

"Seventy runs on day four, even 50 runs they would be under pressure," Gill said.

Gill added that his four hundreds in the series had carried a different significance.

"Each of them has a story and each of them means a lot to me," he said.



Ben Stokes with Chris Woakes, who came out to bat with a sling after suffering a shoulder injury on the first day of the Test

England captain Stokes upbeat despite painful defeat at Oval

London, England - England captain Ben Stokes tried to focus on the positives after his team's agonising six-run loss to India in their riveting final Test at The Oval on Monday. Stokes, who did not play in the match due to injury, watched on as the hosts collapsed from 301-3 to 367 all out to give India a share of the series.

"Credit both teams. The amount of effort from both teams to end up here 2-2 is incredible," he said.

"The heart and passion and everything that was shown, especially in our second bowling innings, I thought was outstanding."

Stokes, who scored a century and completed a five-wicket haul in the drawn fourth Test against India, said England had been well on top at various times in the final game under the captaincy of Ollie Pope.

"We got ourselves into some good positions throughout the Test match, not just the last innings," he said.

"To come within seven runs of victory, it's tough to look back and feel anything but disappointment."

Stokes felt the loss of Chris Woakes to a shoulder injury on the first day had been a crucial factor.

The all-rounder did come out to bat with a sling on to try to get England over the line but his absence along with that of Stokes and Jofra Archer left England with an inexperienced pace attack.

"Losing Woakesy early on in the game changed the whole responsibility on the bowlers in particular, the roles they were selected for," added Stokes.

"But you can look back on a Test match that goes five days and pick out loads of moments as to why (you lost)."

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BLACK & WHITE

DO YOU LIKE ‘BLACK AND WHITE’ CLOTHING – HERE’S HOW TO BRING OUT THE BEST LOOK TO SUIT YOUR OWN URBAN COSMOPOLITAN STYLE

Monochrome attire

Hubert Vaz

In the constantly shifting world of fashion, where bold hues and fleeting trends often take centre stage, the timeless power of black and white continues to hold its ground. Minimalist yet bold, classic yet modern, black and white clothing remains the go-to palette for those who want to make an impact without saying a word. Nowhere is this aesthetic more at home than in the urban cosmopolitan wardrobe — sleek, smart, and endlessly adaptable.

Universal language of style

Black and white is more than just a colour combination — it’s a philosophy. It speaks of confidence, balance, and deliberate simplicity. Whether in the fast-paced business district of Dubai, the vibrant streets of London, or the fashionable alleys of Tokyo, black and white outfits can seamlessly adapt to the local rhythm while maintaining a global edge.



Black tailored trousers

Every cosmopolitan wardrobe needs a sharply cut pair of black trousers. Slim-fit, wide-leg, or cropped - the choice depends on your silhouette. Pair them with a simple white tee or a structured white blazer, and you’re ready for everything from boardrooms to art galleries.

Black blazer

A well-fitted black blazer is the hero piece in any city dweller’s closet. Wear it over a white turtleneck or even a graphic tee for an instant upgrade. Bonus: it can double as outerwear during cooler evenings.

White dress

Forget frilly summer dresses — look for a white dress with bold lines, clean cuts, or architectural structure. A white midi

the colour palette. Use them in skirts, trousers, or even accessories to keep things interesting.

Proportions and textures

One of the smartest ways to keep black and white from looking too stark or predictable is to experiment with texture and shape. Urban style thrives on contrast.

Pair a white silk blouse with matte black leather pants. Or try a chunky black knit with a flowing white pleated skirt. Layering materials — like cotton with satin, or denim with chiffon — creates dimension and depth, especially in photographs.

Don’t be afraid to go oversized - an exaggerated black coat over a fitted white ensemble creates drama, while an oversized white shirt dress cinched with a black corset belt channels modern chic.

Minimal accessories

In a black and white outfit, accessories become more than add-ons — they are punctuation marks.

- Footwear: Pointed black pumps, white sneakers, or black ankle boots — choose one based on mood and purpose.
- Bags: A black tote or white cross-body can finish the look. Structured designs work best in an urban setting.
- Jewellery: Gold or silver both complement black and white, but keep it sleek. Think hoop earrings, layered chains, or a minimalist watch.
- Sunglasses: Oversized black frames are a must for a metropolitan look that channels both mystery and glamour.

All-season favourite

The black-and-white look isn’t seasonal — it’s perennial. In summer, opt for airy white linen pants paired with a fitted black crop top. In winter, layer a white turtleneck under a long black wool coat, complete with leather gloves and boots.

Even in transitional weather, layering becomes your secret weapon. Try a black sleeveless vest over a white button-down, paired with wide-leg black trousers. Or mix a white denim jacket with a black midi dress for effortless edge.

One of the strongest aspects of black and white clothing is its genderless appeal. Designers have used the palette to blur lines and create fashion that suits all expressions of identity. Whether you’re styling a sharp three-piece suit or a flowy dress, the look is universally empowering.

In a world increasingly obsessed with fast trends and ever-evolving aesthetics, black and white clothing is never out of style. It offers an antidote — timelessness. It is the wardrobe of the thinker, the creator, the innovator — someone who doesn’t need loud prints to be noticed



nate designer runways, editorial spreads, and Instagram grids. Black represents power, elegance, and mystery. White, on the other hand, conveys freshness, purity, and clarity. When combined, they offer a balance of strength and softness, seriousness and play, say local fashionistas.

From a psychological perspective, monochrome clothing creates a sense of control. In high-paced urban settings where impressions matter, wearing black and white gives off a confident, composed, and chic impression — perfect for navigating office meetings, after-hours events, and impromptu dinners.

Black and White wardrobe

The beauty of a black-and-white wardrobe lies in its versatility. You don’t need dozens of items — just a few key pieces that mix and match effortlessly across occasions.

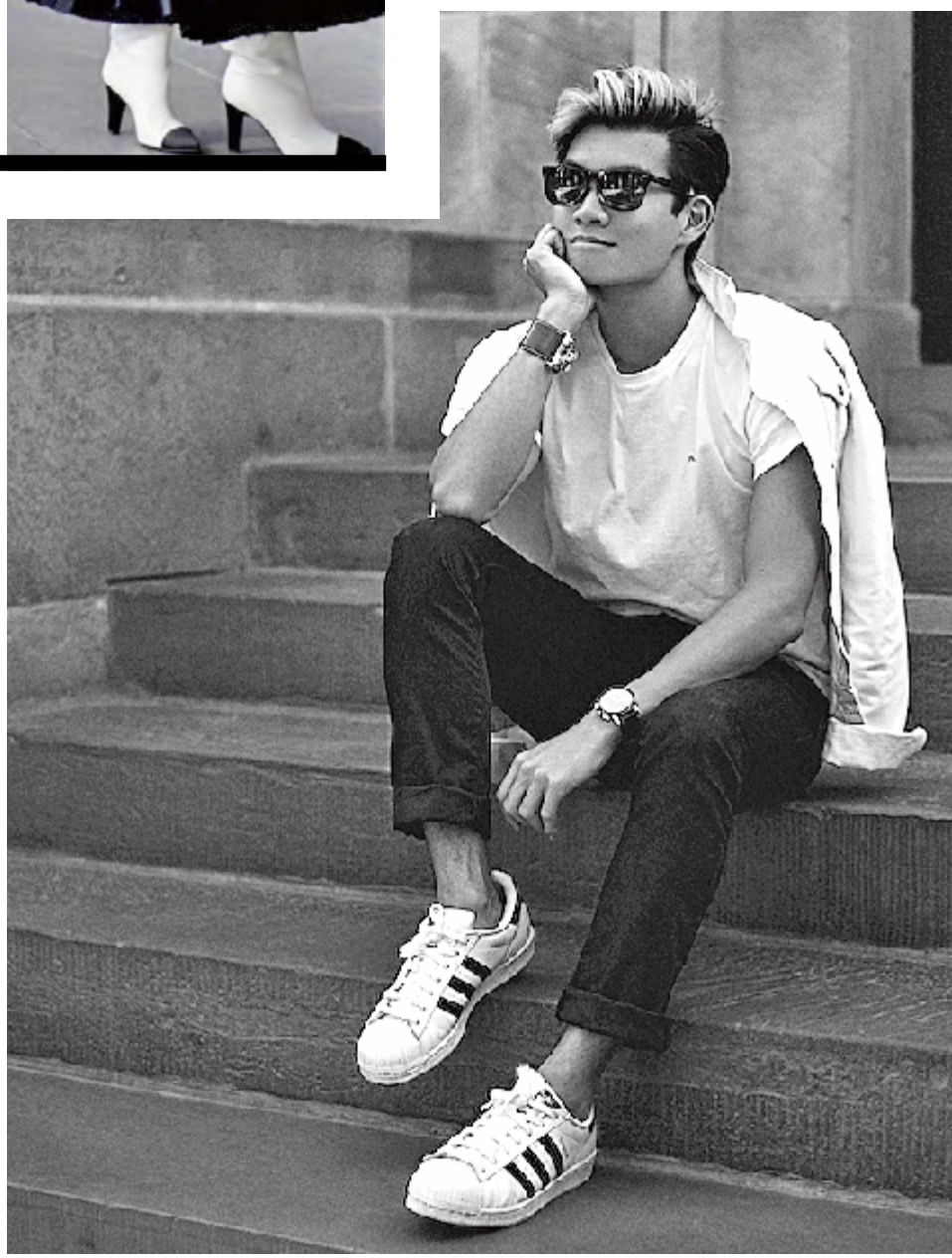
Crisp white shirt

This is your foundation. Whether it’s tailored, oversized, or asymmetrical, a good white shirt is the ultimate blank canvas. Tuck it into high-waisted black trousers for a sleek office look, or layer it under a black slip dress for weekend brunch.

Urban cosmopolitan style is all about blending comfort with sophistication, utility with elegance. And when done right, black and white can transform into a powerful personal signature — one that’s at once understated and unforgettable.

Psychology of monochrome

There’s a reason why black and white fashion continues to domi-



Is your favourite model real?

AI GIMMICKS

THANKS TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MODELS USED IN PRINT AS WELL AS AUDIO-VISUAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS, THESE DAYS, MIGHT NOT BE REAL. RECENTLY, US CLOTHING BRAND 'GUESS' USED AI-GENERATED MODELS IN ITS LATEST CAMPAIGN CREATED BY SERAPHINNE VALLORA, AN AI-DRIVEN MARKETING AGENCY

American Vogue's August 2025 issue has been making headlines - and not only for its cover featuring actor Anne Hathaway, who is back in the limelight as she films 'The Devil Wears Prada' sequel. What has drawn much, if not more, attention can be found in the pages of the magazine - advertisements for the Californian clothing company Guess.

At a cursory glance, nothing appears unusual - A Caucasian woman with wavy blonde hair, flushed cheeks and perfect teeth, bared in a wide smile, shows off a long stripe dress with a matching top-handle bag. In another image, she models a floral playsuit with a drawstring that cinches her waist.

Yet, in small print on the page, it is revealed that the model was created using artificial intelligence. The campaign was developed by Seraphinne Vallora, a London-based AI-driven marketing agency, whose work has

also been featured in titles including Elle, The Wall Street Journal and Harper's Bazaar. The discourse around the AI photos was ignited by TikTok user @lala4an, whose video on the Guess ad has since been viewed more than 2.7 million times.

The revelation that AI models were inside the pages of Vogue sparked debate over what it might mean for real-life models pushing for greater representation and diversity, and consumers - particularly younger people - who often face unrealistic expectations of beauty.

"It's insane because it's not like we're short on people looking for modelling gigs or anything," wrote one user on TikTok in a comment that, to date, has over 67,700 likes. "So first normal women are comparing themselves to edited models... Now we have to compare ourselves to women that don't even exist?" wrote another.

Several people have since called for a boycott against Guess and Vogue. Guess did not respond to CNN's request for comment. While the Guess campaign was a commercial decision, it would have still required internal approval at Vogue to be printed.

A Condé Nast spokesperson confirmed to CNN that an AI model has never appeared editorially in Vogue. Though, digitally created models have featured in international editions of the title - Vogue Singapore previously showcased AI-generated avatars in its March 2023 issue.

AI-GENERATED IMAGE



pealed to many, added Gonzalez. "The reason it went viral was because people were like, 'oh my god, is she real?'"

Lack of diversity

Guess is not the only brand to have used AI models. Last July, Mango introduced its first AI-generated campaign to promote clothing for teenage girls. In one image, a young woman is wearing a colourful co-ord set. While the garments shown were real and available to purchase, the model was entirely AI generated. In March 2023, Levi's said that it would begin testing AI-generated models to ensure more diverse body types and skin tones in its marketing.

Those launches were also met with criticism, with some seeing the AI creation of a model - especially a person

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'We still hire models'

Valentina Gonzalez and Andreea Petrescu, the 25-year-old co-founders of Seraphinne Vallora, believe the outrage behind the Guess campaign is misplaced. Speaking to CNN on a video call, Petrescu explained that "people think these images just came to be by AI, which is not true. We have a team, and we also still hire models."

Gonzalez and Petrescu were approached by Guess co-founder Paul Marciano to create AI models for the brand, they said. After reviewing multiple drafts, Marciano picked a digitally created blonde (Vivienne) and brunette (Anastasia) for further development. Both ended up being featured in Guess' ads, which appeared in Vogue and other magazines, Gonzalez said (though only Vivienne went viral).

To create the campaign, Seraphinne Vallora employed a real model, who, over the course of a week, was photographed in the studio wearing Guess clothing. That informed how the clothes looked on an AI model, said Gonzalez. "We needed to see what poses would flatter the product most, and how it looked on a real woman. We cannot generate an



AI-GENERATED IMAGE

image if we don't have an informed idea of what positions will be the most flattering. To create an AI model, it takes time, so we want to make sure that people engage with it."

Asked why brands wouldn't simply use a real model in their ads, Petrescu argued that AI gave clients greater choice and efficiency, by requiring less time and

smaller budgets to execute than a typical marketing campaign.

No budget for models

Seraphinne Vallora was initially founded as a jewellery label before pivoting into providing AI-led marketing services, Petrescu explained. "We realised that to sell this jewellery, we had to put a lot of good content out there that attracted people. But we didn't have budgets at the time to hire real people to be the face of our brand, so we tried to make our own model."

As architecture graduates, both Petrescu and Gonzalez were well versed in photography, drawing and digital media, so they turned to AI to create a model that would tout their products online. The results, according to Petrescu, were positive. "We had millions of views on our Instagram Reels and tens of thousands of likes on some posts," she said.

The novelty of an AI model has ap-

peared to many, added Gonzalez. "The reason it went viral was because people were like, 'oh my god, is she real?'"

Others feared the move would also negatively impact the livelihoods of photographers, makeup artists and other creatives traditionally involved in creating a campaign.

In an October 2024 interview with Bloomberg, Mango's CEO Toni Ruiz justified the use of AI models, saying that advertising could be created more quickly. "It's about faster content creation," he said. Mango did not reply to CNN's request for comment.

Levi's responded to criticism at the time of its announcement, clarifying that it was not 'a means to advance diversity' and the company remained committed to working with diverse models. The brand said it would not scale back photoshoots with models.

Noticeably, the AI models shared by Seraphinne Vallora on its Instagram are largely white and have conventionally attractive features, such as luscious hair, a fit body and facial symmetry, which align with widely held societal standards of beauty.

The rise of AI models is not worlds apart from virtual influencers, who are already overlapping with real-life ones. Digital avatars such as Lil Miquela and Shudu have large followings on social media and wear clothing from luxury brands like Prada, Dior and Calvin Klein. Neither digital model is Caucasian, and both have at least one white creator (Shudu was created by British visual artist Cameron-James Wilson and Miquela by Los Angeles-based creatives Trevor McFedries and Sara DeCou).

(Courtesy: cnn.com)

Model 110



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