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FDI HITS RO30.6BN

Oil and gas sector accounts for 81% of total FDI stock

Our Correspondent
Muscat

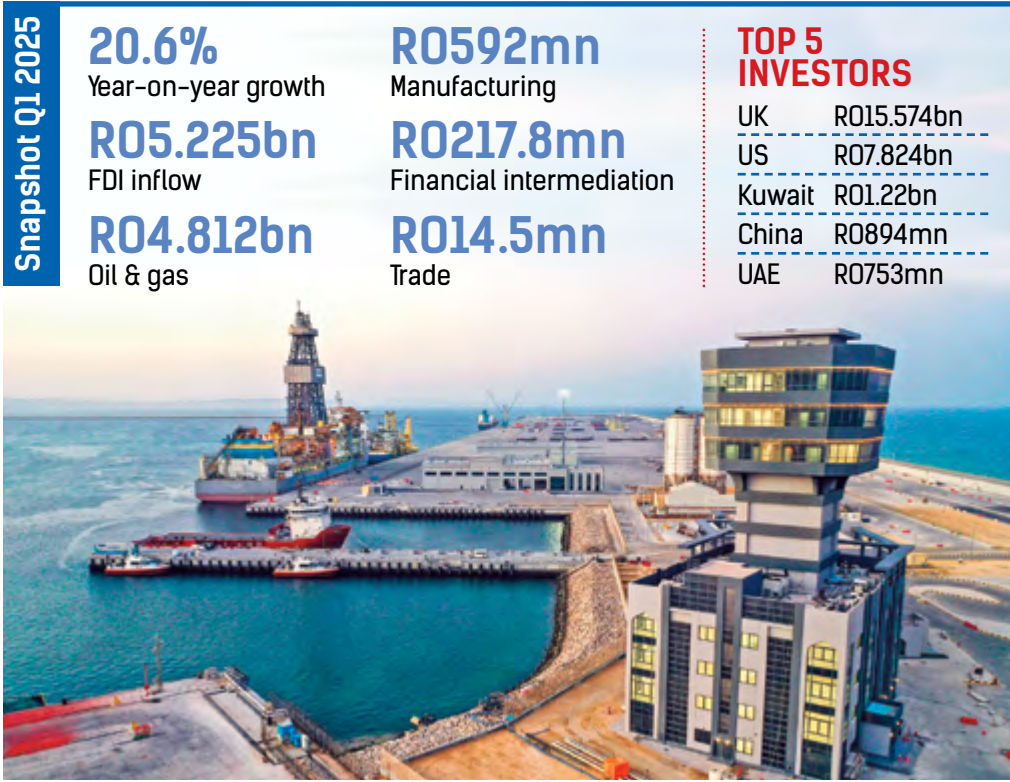
Oman recorded a 20.6% year-on-year increase in the volume of foreign direct investment by the end of the first quarter of 2025, with total FDI reaching RO30.611bn, according to preliminary data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

FDI flows into the sultanate stood at RO5.225bn during Q1 2025, compared to RO4.111bn in the same period of 2024. The NCSI data showed that the oil and gas sector accounted for 81% of total FDI stock, amounting to RO24.701bn. Inflow into this sector alone stood at RO4.812bn during the first quarter.

The manufacturing sector attracted foreign investments totalling RO2.749bn by the end of Q1 2025, with quarterly inflow of RO592mn. In the financial intermediation sector, FDI reached RO1.3bn, including Q1 inflow of RO217.8mn.

In real estate, rental and commercial project activities sectors, FDI totalled RO653.1mn, representing a 36.8% decline compared to Q1 2024.

The transportation, storage



TOP 5 INVESTORS

UK

RO15.574bn

US

RO7.824bn

Kuwait

RO1.22bn

China

RO894mn

UAE

RO753mn

and communications sector attracted RO357.9mn in total investment, with Q1 inflow of RO3.2mn. Investments in the electricity and water sector amounted to RO292mn, a decrease of 11% year-on-year. The trade sector recorded RO262mn in total FDI, with Q1 inflow of RO14.5mn.

FDI in the hotels and restaurants sector reached RO116.6mn by the end of Q1 2025, marking a slight decrease of 0.5% compared to the same period in 2024. The construction sector saw total FDI of RO88.5mn, with Q1 inflow of RO4.9mn.

The UK continued to be the largest foreign investor in Oman,

accounting for 50.9% of total FDI. British investments in the sultanate stood at RO15.574bn by the end of the first quarter. The United States followed with RO7.824bn, Kuwait (RO1.22bn), China (RO894mn), the UAE (RO753mn), Qatar (RO669mn), the Netherlands (RO364mn) and India (RO306mn).

National roadmap to drive circular economy transition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has begun preparing a national roadmap for the circular economy, marking a key step in aligning its economic model with sustainability goals and low-carbon development.

Ministry of Economy hosted the second workshop of the Circular Economy Gap Calculation Project on Monday to review initial results and consult stakeholders on the proposed strategy. The roadmap aims to serve as a guiding framework for policy integration and resource management in the coming decades.

The project also seeks to define a baseline for measuring the circular economy gap and comparing Oman's performance with international benchmarks. It will assess how far the country is from adopting a circular model and provide tools to measure the environmental and economic impacts of new policies, including the creation of green jobs.

H E Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Undersecretary in Ministry of Economy, said the initiative is the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa. "This national project will support sustainable, low-carbon develop-



This national project will support sustainable, low-carbon development and create investment opportunities in renewable energy and the green economy

H E DR NASSER AL MAAWALI

ment and create investment opportunities in renewable energy and the green economy."

Ahmed bin Saeed al Siyabi, Director General of Economic Policies and Programmes at the ministry, said the workshop was designed to discuss early findings and showcase models for measuring the outcomes of circular economy strategies. He also highlighted training programmes and a proposed digital platform

that will display project data and outcomes.

During the session, participants reviewed preliminary models and scenarios focused on the environmental and labour-market impacts of implementing circular economy practices. Group discussions were held to evaluate sector-specific strategies and refine the roadmap's policy recommendations.

The workshop was part of wider consultations with government entities, the private sector, academic institutions and civil society. The ministry is working with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and the Circle Economy Foundation to implement the project.

The project reflects Oman's broader ambition to shift away from traditional linear consumption patterns and meet its carbon neutrality target by 2050.

Hamra ad Duru sizzles at 48.2°C, Dhofar enjoys mild weather

Muscat - Oman experienced wide temperature variation over the past 24 hours with the highest reaching 48.2°C in Hamra ad Duru in Dakhliyah and the lowest dipping to 21.5°C in Qairoon Hairiti and Dhalkut in Dhofar.

According to data from Civil Aviation Authority's meteorological stations, the hottest locations after Hamra ad Duru on Sunday were Muqshin (46.9°C), Sunaynah (46.7°C), Fahud (46.6°C), Dima wal Taiyyin (46.2°C) and lbri (46°C).

Meanwhile, the lowest temperatures after Qairoon Hairiti and Dhalkut were recorded in Shalim (21.6°C), Saiq (23°C), Mirbat and Salalah (24°C), Sadah and Taqah (24.2°C), Al Ashkharah (24.3°C) and Ras al Hadd at (24.8°C).

On Monday, cumulus cloud activity was observed over the mountainous areas of Buraimi and Dhahirah, accompanied by thunderstorms and strong down winds. Monsoon conditions persisted along the Dhofar coast and adjacent mountains.



16 Finding comfort in parasocial relationships

SHABAB OMAN II WINS 'BEST SHIP' AWARD IN SCOTLAND



Shabab Oman II has been awarded the 'Best Ship' title at the Tall Ships Races 2025 in Aberdeen, Scotland in recognition of its role in promoting friendship and cultural exchange. Royal Navy of Oman's vessel also secured third place among Class A sailing ships competing against 38 others during the second leg of the prestigious international race. The crew of Shabab Oman II took part in the crew parade of ships in Aberdeen, held as part of the event's celebrations, further reflecting Oman's strong maritime presence and contribution to fostering global goodwill through sailing.

Oman opens visa, medical examination centre in Manila

Manila, Philippines - Oman Visa and Medical Examination Centre was inaugurated in the Philippines capital Manila on Monday as part of a strategic initiative by the sultanate to streamline and regulate work visa procedures in accordance with employment contracts approved under Omani Labour Law.

The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and H E Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'awin, Minister of Labour.

The centre is a comprehensive, one-stop facility, including biometric fingerprint registration, medical examinations, document and employment contract attestation, and other services.

Designed to enhance efficiency, protect both workers and employers, and reduce reliance on unregulated intermediaries, the centre enables employers to verify skills and qualifications to ensure they match job requirements.

Additionally, the centre provides services such as issuing Omani phone numbers and



H E Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'awin and H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi

opening bank accounts in Oman. It also features a dedicated application information centre and will

workers receive the necessary information and support throughout the employment process, facilitating a smooth pre-departure experience, a statement said.

The Manila centre is the first in a series of similar facilities Oman plans to establish in key labour-exporting countries, with additional centres expected to open in the near future. 'This initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance labour mobility frameworks and safeguard the rights of workers and employers in accordance with Omani

Labour Law.'

The Omani delegation held official talks with the Philippines Department of Migrant Workers, where both sides reaffirmed their shared commitment to protecting workers and employers while promoting ethical employment practices. The two sides agreed to cooperate closely to ensure the success of this initiative in line with their mutual objectives.

The event was attended by H E Nasser bin Said al Manwari, Oman's Ambassador to the Philippines.

Evolving face of contemporary Omani art

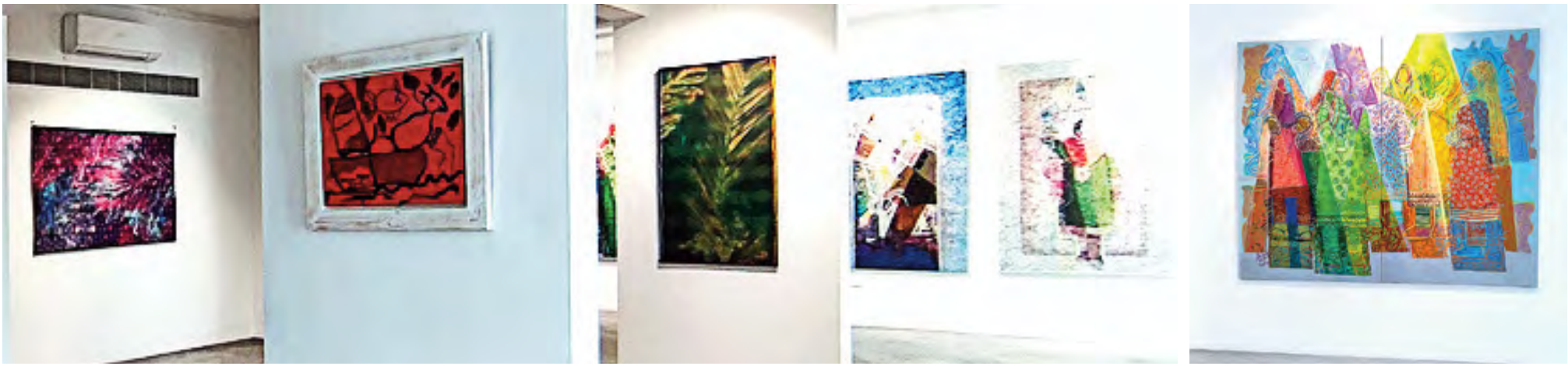
Our Correspondent
Muscat

A group exhibition at Stal Gallery and Studio is offering a reflective look at cultural memory, personal identity and evolving artistic expression in Oman. Titled *Narratives of Colour - Contemporary Vision*, the show running till August 31 brings together works of seven Omani artists.

Among the participating artists is Sayyida Afra bint Talal al Said, whose series *Shadows of Oman* uses textiles and natural motifs to explore the emotional weight of memory and tradition. Palm frond shadows over fabric are a recurring element, bridging past and present through quiet, textured scenes.

"This exhibition marks an important milestone in my journey," said Sayyida Afra. "It's my first participation in Stal Gallery, and it strengthens my commitment to experimentation using fabric, texture and layered memory." For her, the use of light and shadow creates a dialogue between reality and imagination, capturing the essence of Oman's landscapes and emotional depth.

Veteran artist Anwar Sonia contributes paintings that revisit traditional customs with renewed energy. His works evoke scenes rooted in Omani rituals and daily life, reinterpreted with bold colours and emotional immediacy.



Colour, for us, becomes a personal language - sometimes introspective, sometimes deeply connected to place and memory

ANWAR SONIA

"Each artist here reflects their own vision," Sonia noted. "Colour, for us, becomes a personal language - sometimes introspective, sometimes deeply connected to place and memory."

Hassan Meer's series includes works



(L-R) Anwar Sonia, Sayyida Afra bint Talal al Said and Hassan Meer

such as *Father and Son* and *Omani Women Gather*, depicting intimate scenes of familial bonds and cultural continuity. "This exhibition gathers a range of voices - established and emerging - that reflect how colour and memory shape identity," Meer said. "It's

a conversation about who we are and how we express ourselves in a rapidly changing world."

Idris al Hooti focuses on the neighbourhood of Muttrah, its quiet alleys and fading buildings forming a nostalgic portrait of Muscat. His paintings cap-

ture everyday scenes slowly receding from public memory, yet vividly alive in collective experience.

Hussain Obaid offers abstract interpretations of Omani symbols - desert motifs, maritime elements and social patterns - reimagined through a modern lens. "His work creates a visual timeline linking the past and present in a subtle, layered way," said a gallery visitor.

The exhibition also honours the late Moosa Omar, whose series *Departed Hearts* features circular, textured canvases in dialogue with Oman's natural terrain. His inclusion serves as a tribute by fellow artists, whose works echo his contemplative spirit.

Among the younger voices, Suha Salem presents *Dispersion*, a Cubist-in-

spired collection investigating the fragmentation of modern life. Her geometric compositions confront the pressures and paradoxes of daily existence, offering visual metaphors for identity in flux.

"Art is more than technique - it's a translation of inner experience," said Sayyida Afra. "Through these paintings, we share universal emotions rooted in Omani culture - nostalgia, wonder, reflection and resilience."

In gathering diverse artistic perspectives, *Narratives of Colour* not only examines tradition and memory, but also charts a path forward for contemporary Omani art. The exhibition positions itself as a space for open questions - about time, identity and the stories that shape a nation's evolving visual language.

Dhahirah, Al Wusta work on aligning urban strategies with Vision 2040

Our Correspondent
Haima

Authorities in Al Wusta and Dhahirah have launched a series of planning workshops aimed at advancing local development strategies and aligning these with Oman Vision 2040 and national development plans.

In Haima, a workshop was held on Monday to assess progress of the urban strategy for Al Wusta. The session was organised jointly by the Governor's Office and Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. It focused on monitoring implementation of strategic goals, project classification and data management.

Participants agreed on a joint working mechanism between the Governor's Office and Directorate of Housing to coordinate development efforts. The workshop also addressed key challenges in data updates and reviewed possible solutions. Officials stressed the need for effective



Workshops in Haima and Ibri reflect decentralisation efforts and role of governorates in shaping local development agendas

communication among relevant bodies to ensure integration across sectors.

The workshop was attended by Sheikh Mohammed Ali al Ghafaili, Wali of Haima, and several local officials.

In Ibri, a workshop was held on Sunday themed 'Defining the

Strategic Goal of Dhahirah'. It brought together representatives of government bodies, the private sector and local community. Discussions centred on the governorate's strategic vision, drawing on its comparative advantages to guide future planning.

The workshop was part of the

first phase of the Dhahirah Strategy Development Project, which seeks to position the governorate as a gateway linking Oman with neighbouring countries. The project follows a participatory approach and aims to develop an inclusive roadmap with clear implementation steps.

Both workshops reflect the sultanate's broader decentralisation efforts and the growing role of governorates in shaping local development agendas.

Dar al Atta'a support programmes focus on sustainability, innovation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The charity Dar al Atta'a continues to expand its reach and impact through a wide range of assistance programmes and sustainable housing initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable families across the sultanate.

Founded in 2002 and formally recognised in 2006, the charity has played a key role in improving the lives of underprivileged families across Oman. Its work focuses on rehabilitation and empowerment to ensure long-term stability.

Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali, founder and chairperson of Dar al Atta'a, said the charity provides support through multiple initiatives, including its Family Care Programme, Distress Relief Programme, Education Programme, Relief and Disaster Management, Safe Housing Programme, Empowerment Programme, Islamic Values



Programme and the Let's Read Programme.

She stated that Dar al Atta'a spent more than RO4.094mn on these programmes in 2024, supporting basic needs and offering livelihood assistance. In the first half of 2025, spending exceeded RO2.038mn.

It is also adopting new approaches to charitable work, having launched a department dedicated to social innovation. The unit aims to apply modern technology to improve services, streamline procedures and en-

hance overall programme delivery.

As part of ongoing projects, work is currently underway on the second phase of the Al Atta'a neighbourhood in Khabourah. The development includes a mosque, community centre and commercial facilities, alongside 36 model homes each measuring 274sqm. The housing units will be equipped with solar power and water purification systems in line with the charity's focus on sustainability.

To date, Dar al Atta'a has delivered 175 homes to families across Oman and carried out maintenance on over 2,500 units.

Maryam stated that the charity will continue to expand its support and programmes while enhancing collaboration with public and private sector partners to further community development and advance Oman's charitable sector.



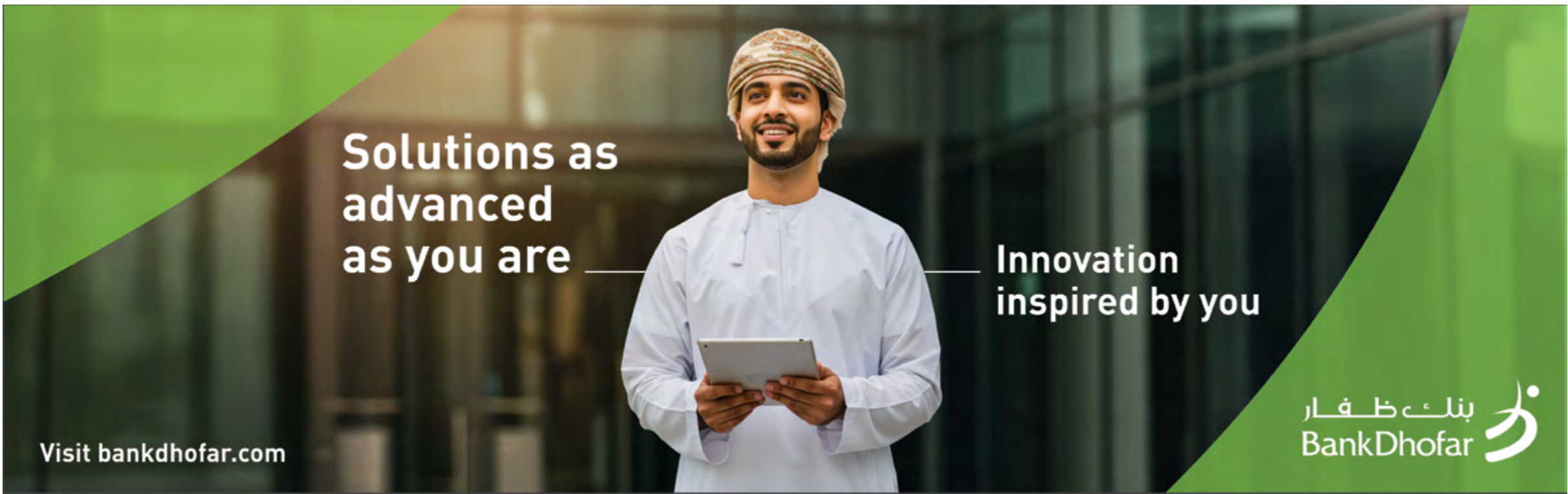
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Khuta adds smart tools to support students

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Employment Programme (NEP) has launched the second phase of services in its national career guidance platform - Khuta - to support students and jobseekers in making informed academic and professional decisions aligned with the country's evolving labour market needs.

Khuta is the first national e-platform dedicated to career counselling. The new set of tools introduced in the latest phase includes AI-powered guidance services, personalised planning support and inclusive features for students with disabilities.

Among the tools is 'Curriculum Plan', which enables school students - particularly those in Grade 10 - to map their academic paths based on their interests, abilities and higher education entry requirements. Another feature - Entrepreneurial Traits Scale - helps assess students' readiness for entrepreneurship using a model adapted to Oman's context.

The platform now also offers



Khuta reflects Oman's strategy to build a knowledge-based economy by improving vocational guidance and preparing youth for a shifting economic landscape

DR BADR AL KHAROUSI

'AI Assistant', which analyses user data and suggests career and academic paths that match their skills and aspirations. A new tool tailored for visually impaired users - Career Interest Scale for the Visually Impaired - is the first of its kind in the sultanate.



By the end of June, the platform had attracted more than 26,300 users. It now offers information on 861 academic programmes, 263 professional certificates and over 100 training courses in collaboration with online course provider Coursera.

Over 2,460 individuals have already benefited from these online learning offerings.

Dr Badr bin Hamoud al Kharousi, advisor and head of capacity building at NEP, said career guidance plays a critical role in aligning education with em-

ployment needs. "Khuta is a key element in our national effort to equip youth with the knowledge and tools to plan their future careers," he said. "It was developed as a public-private partnership, in coordination with ministries and higher education institutions."

According to Kharousi, the platform reflects Oman's strategy to build a knowledge-based economy by improving vocational guidance and preparing youth for a shifting economic landscape. It also supports Oman Vision 2040 goals to strengthen

national human capital and enhance employability.

World Economic Forum's January Skills Report recognised Khuta for its role in advancing youth readiness for the labour market. The platform's growing relevance is seen in its expansion of services, including the 'My Study' and 'My Profession' modules, offering users data on academic programmes, career options and job roles.

Khuta also offers training in future skills through Coursera, mapped to the Omani National Framework for Future Skills. Users can access learning in technical, entrepreneurial and applied skills, along with professional resources and guidance support.

An interactive counselling feature allows users to schedule one-on-one consultations with career advisors on topics such as academic subject selection and assessment interpretation.

NEP plans to continue expanding the platform by integrating additional analytical tools and widening partnerships with training and academic institutions to further improve workforce readiness.



Over 400 students to join Eidaad internship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has launched the sixth phase of the Eidaad programme - aimed at deepening collaboration between industry and academia - in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and higher education institutions.

Eidaad is a national internship initiative offering one-year placements for university students in leading companies across the sultanate. The programme focuses on applied learning in fields aligned with market needs, equipping participants with technical expertise, communication skills and professional competencies suited for Oman's evolving economy.

The sixth phase was formalised on Monday with a signing ceremony at Arab Open University. The agreement was signed by representatives of Mo-

HERI, PDO, academic institutions and private sector partners.

Speaking at the event, H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said the programme is part of efforts to align education with Oman Vision 2040 goals. "Enabling Omani youth by nurturing their capabilities and skills to better prepare them for the rapidly changing job market is one of the strategic goals of Vision 2040."

Hamed al Hadhrami, External Learning and Development Manager at PDO, described the initiative as a national effort to align academic outcomes with real-world demands.

Since its inception in 2020, over 1,000 students have graduated from the Eidaad programme. In the current phase, more than 400 students from across Oman's higher education institutions are expected to be placed in over 40 companies spanning various sectors.

Omran, Ministry of Education wrap up tourism career camp for students

Muscat - The first edition of a summer camp designed to familiarise school students with careers in tourism and hospitality concluded on Monday. It was organised by Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) in collaboration with Directorate of Career Guidance and Student Counselling under Ministry of Education (MoE).

The ten-day programme included 50 students from Grades 10 and 11 who engaged in a series



of site visits and interactive workshops across Omran-affiliated tourism and hospitality en-

tities. The aim was to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the tourism in-

dustry and its career possibilities.

The closing ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Abdullah Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education in MoE, with Dr Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, and officials of the group and ministry in attendance.

Maha al Farsi, HR Business Partner at Omran, said the camp served as a practical introduction to the sector's core areas. "We were impressed by the students'

enthusiasm and commitment. The camp provided real-world exposure and helped raise early career awareness. We see this as an important step towards building local talent for Oman's tourism sector."

Zahrán bin Nasser al Maghadri, Assistant Director of Studies and Entrepreneurship at MoE's Vocational Guidance Centre, said, "The camp bridged the gap between education and the job market."

Fest highlights Oman's credentials as kiteboarding hub

Our Correspondent
Al Ashkharah

Oman Kite Festival 2025 is continuing its journey along the sultanate's coastline with the third leg of Oman Downwinder reaching Al Ashkharah, as 90 international and local riders advance through the multi-stage event aimed at highlighting the country's coastal tourism and marine sports potential.

Since its launch on July 15, the fleet of kiteboarders has crossed some of Oman's most scenic and wind-rich marine locations, including Bar al Hikman, Masirah Island and Ras Ruwais, en route to Pink Lagoon.

Organised by Omran Group in



collaboration with Oman Sail, Visit Oman and Oman Adventure Centre, the festival is part of a broader effort to position Oman as a global destination for adven-



ture sports and experience-based tourism.

The second leg on Sunday, covering a 42km stretch between Masirah Island and Ras al

Ruwais, saw 15 riders race along clear waters and an unspoilt coastline. Omani athlete Al Mukhtar Abdul Karim al Mujaini claimed first place, followed by fellow Omani Ayman Abdullah al Ghafri in second and Egypt's Ahmed Mohammed in third.

After two stages, Mujaini leads the overall rankings, followed by Mohammed and Ghafri.

The Masirah Island leg also hosted the Coastal Race, contested by 33 riders. Germany's Fryderyk Cuba secured the top spot, with Mujaini finishing second and Marta Morlo of Poland in third. A Big Air Show and Freestyle Show were also held, giving participants a platform to

demonstrate their technical skills and the dynamic capabilities of modern kiteboarding equipment.

With its open beaches and consistent wind, Masirah Island has emerged as a promising venue for future international events, reinforcing Oman's place on the global map of kiteboarding and marine adventure sports.

Shaima al Asmi, Project Manager of the festival, said the event's impact is already visible. "It has brought together international athletes and raised the profile of our coastline. It promotes Oman as a year-round destination for adventure seekers, especially during the summer season," she said.

MARKET WATCH

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Sensex

82,200.34

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India

224.18

Pakistan

740.06

Bangladesh

315.73

Philippines

148.40

Sri Lanka

783.25

*Rates as on July 21
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Dubai real estate trade hits AED431bn in H1

Dubai's real estate sector recorded an exceptional performance in H1 2025, further reinforcing the emirate's position as a leading global hub in this vital sector.

According to data issued by the Dubai Land Department, the number of real estate transactions reached 125,538, up from 99,947 during the same period in 2024, an increase of 26%.

The total value of these transactions reached approximately AED431bn, compared to AED345bn last year, a 25% rise, highlighting the strong growth momentum in the market.

Dubai's real estate investment market delivered outstanding results in the first half of the year, attracting 94,717 investors, a 26% increase, who completed 118,132 investments valued at approximately AED326bn. This represents a 39% rise from AED234bn during the same period last year.

GCC bond and sukuk issuances decline 22% to \$100bn in H1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Aggregate bond and sukuk issuances in the GCC region stood at \$100.3bn during the first half of 2025, compared with \$128.8bn during the same period last year, marking a year-on-year decline of \$28.5bn or 22.1%.

The drop was primarily driven by a more than 50% decline in government issuances during H1 2025, although a rise in corporate issuances helped partially offset the overall decline.

Government bond and sukuk issuances across GCC countries fell to \$36.6bn in H1 2025, down from \$76.9bn in H1 2024. Meanwhile, corporate issuances rose to \$63.7bn, up from \$51.9bn in the first half of last year, according to a research report published by Kuwait-based Kamco Investment.

By type, sukuk issuances saw a sharp decline in H1 2025, while bond issuances remained largely flat year-on-year. Total GCC bond issuances amounted to \$60.9bn this year versus \$60.2bn in H1 2024, whereas sukuk issuances dropped by nearly a third to \$39.4bn from \$68.6bn in the same period last year.

Broad-based decline

At the country level, a broad-



based year-on-year decline in issuances was observed across the GCC in H1 2025, with the exception of marginal growth in the UAE and Bahrain. Issuances from the UAE rose 3.8% to \$32.9bn, compared with \$31.7bn in H1 2024.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar recorded double-digit declines. Total issuances from Saudi Arabia stood at \$50.2bn - still accounting for half of the GCC total - but this figure was down by nearly a third from \$72.4bn in H1 2024. Issuances from Qatar and Oman nearly halved, falling to \$8.7bn

and \$1.1bn, respectively.

'We believe that the GCC will witness back-end loaded issuances this year, in contrast to heavier issuances at the start of last year. Fixed income issuers are likely to focus on locking in lower rates as expectations for rate cuts gain momentum towards the end of the year, especially as uncertainty regarding tariffs becomes clearer,' Kamco Investment noted.

Kamco Investment expects GCC sukuk issuances to regain momentum in the second half of 2025, supported by demand from niche investors and diversi-

fication of funding sources.

Elevated debt maturities

According to Kamco Investment, GCC governments are expected to face elevated levels of debt maturities over the next five years, particularly for bonds issued in the post-pandemic period.

Data from Bloomberg shows that GCC sovereign debt maturities stand at \$226.1bn between 2025 and 2029, while corporate debt maturities are slightly lower at \$223bn.

'Both bond and sukuk matu-

rities are projected to remain high from 2025 to 2029 before gradually tapering off. The elevated maturities reflect a concentration of short-term (less than five-year) issuances by both governments and corporates,' Kamco Investment said.

A majority of these maturities are denominated in US dol-

lars (59.3%), followed by local currency issuances in Saudi riyal and Qatari riyal, accounting for 16.9% and 7.0% respectively.

Given the strong credit rating profile of GCC governments, a substantial portion of these maturities are categorised as high investment grade or A-rated instruments, totalling \$158.5bn. Investment-grade maturities overall amounted to \$171.7bn.

By instrument type, conventional bonds dominate the GCC debt market, with \$278bn in maturities expected over the next five years, compared with \$171bn

in sukuk maturities. Within the conventional bond category, corporate maturities amounted to \$144.3bn, surpassing government bond maturities of \$133.7bn. In the sukuk market, government maturities stood at \$92.4bn, while corporate maturities totalled \$78.6bn.

At the country level, Saudi Arabia is forecasted to record the highest fixed income maturities from 2025 to 2029, totalling \$166bn. It is followed by the UAE and Qatar, with maturities of \$146.8bn and \$74.7bn, respectively. However, the majority of Saudi Arabia's maturities are for government-issued bonds and sukuk (\$96.7bn), whereas in the UAE, corporates account for the bulk of maturities at \$119.1bn.

Kuwait has the smallest maturities in the five-year period at \$13.2bn, while Oman and Bahrain are expected to see maturities of approximately \$24bn each.

Government bond and sukuk issuances in the GCC countries fell to \$36.6bn in the first half of 2025, down from \$76.9bn in H1 2024. Meanwhile, corporate issuances rose to \$63.7bn, up from \$51.9bn in the first half of last year

Oman's transport sector advances sustainable trade, connectivity

Muscat - Oman's transport and logistics sector is playing a central role in the country's economic transformation under Vision 2040, supported by large-scale investment, policy development and digital integration.

A new Growth Perspectives video produced by global research and advisory firm Oxford Business Group (OBG), in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), examines how infrastructure upgrades and sustainability initiatives are reinforcing Oman's role as a strategic trade and logistics hub.

The video, titled Oman's transport sector seeks to drive sustainable trade, highlights the sector's contribution of 7% to GDP in 2023, with aims to surpass 10% by 2040. Backed by RO2.5bn in targeted investment from 2021 to 2025, Oman is enhancing efficiency, boosting non-oil exports and improving multimodal connectivity.

Particular focus is placed on the role of the country's deepwater ports - Sohar, Duqm and



Oman's investment in infrastructure and innovation is enabling the country to strengthen its position as a regional gateway for trade. The transport and logistics sector is a vital enabler of Oman Vision 2040

H E ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MA'AWALI

Salalah - which are positioned to support industrial development, energy production and international trans-shipment. These ports, together with improved road and airport access, are enabling Oman to expand its logistics footprint regionally and globally.

The video also outlines the

country's efforts to advance green and digital logistics solutions in support of its target of net-zero emissions by 2050. New initiatives include incentives for electric vehicles, adoption of blockchain and e-seal technologies, and the development of green trade corridors.

The Oman Logistics Centre, a

directorate under MTCIT, is leading the National Logistics Strategy and overseeing the sector's digital transformation. Key projects include Customs streamlining, last-mile delivery improvements and measures to increase transparency and efficiency across the logistics value chain.

H E Eng Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said Oman's investment in infrastructure and innovation is enabling the country to strengthen its position as a regional gateway for trade.

Asyad Express introduces seamless technology-driven Reverse Logistics Platform

Muscat - Asyad Express, part of Asyad Group, has launched a strategic, technology driven 'Reverse Logistics Platform' that re-defines how businesses in Oman and the GCC manage product returns, exchanges, and refunds.

The service is designed to give e-commerce businesses a competitive edge by turning complexity into simplicity, helping them streamline returns while reinforcing trust at every touch-point.

Addressing the increasing demand from retailers and digital-first brands for agile, transparent, and consumer-centric return processes, Asyad Express' new offering delivers a seamless 'end to end' reverse logistics experience. With comprehensive GCC-wide coverage, this service encompasses convenient doorstep pickup, quality checks, and efficient reintegration of returned goods into inventory, all supported by complete visibility and tracking throughout the entire lifecycle.

Engineered for effortless inte-



gration into current e-commerce and retail workflows, Asyad Express's reverse logistics solution supports businesses of all sizes, from SMEs to large enterprises. This enables businesses to adopt more flexible return policies, significantly shorten turnaround times, and ultimately boost customer satisfaction.

This launch underscores Asyad Express' commitment to e-commerce logistics excellence in the region, offering a comprehensive range of services tailored to

meet the diverse customer needs.

With a strong focus on express delivery, e-commerce solutions, and warehousing, Asyad Express utilises an extensive global network to efficiently process, package, and ship thousands of deliveries across 220 destinations and territories. This is complemented by a variety of convenient customer-centric services and the ability to ensure rapid deliveries, and in-house customs clearance for international shipments.

Poland unveils major oil discovery

Warsaw, Poland - The largest conventional oil field in Poland has been discovered, the Canadian firm Central European Petroleum announced Monday.

The discovery was made in the Baltic Sea, six kilometers from the northwestern Polish port of Swinoujscie. The Wolin East field is estimated to contain 22mn tonnes of recoverable hydrocarbons and 5bn cubic meters of commercial-grade natural gas.

Central European Petroleum described it as the largest con-



ventional oil discovery in Poland's history and one of the biggest in Europe. Natural gas deposits within the Wolin concession could be equivalent to more than 300mn barrels of oil.

Drilling is being carried out by

the US firm Noble Corporation, while Zenith Energy, a well engineering consultancy and project management company, announced earlier this year that the Wolin East 1 well had been successfully delivered to Central European Petroleum.

Poland imports much of its gas as liquefied natural gas from the Middle East and the US via new terminals in Gdansk and Swinoujscie, as well as natural gas delivered via pipeline from Norway.

Anadolu Agency

bp names Albert Manifold as new chairman

London, UK - Global energy giant bp on Monday appointed Albert Manifold as its next chairman, succeeding Helge Lund, who will step down from the board in October.

Manifold will join bp's board as a non-executive director and chair-elect on September 1 and formally take over as chair on October 1, the company said in a statement.

The former chief executive of CRH plc, a global building materials group, led a strategic overhaul of the company's portfolio



and "delivered superior growth and performance," according to the statement.

"He has a strong track record of strategic leadership and operational delivery with a focus on cost efficiency, disciplined capital allocation and cash flow generation," the statement added.

Dame Amanda Blanc, bp's senior independent director, who led the succession process on behalf of the board, said, "His impressive track record of shareholder value creation at CRH demonstrates he is the ideal candidate to oversee bp's next chapter."

Manifold is currently a non-

executive director at Lyondell-Basell, a global chemicals producer, listed on the New York Stock Exchange, and Mercury Engineering, a privately held engineering consultancy.

"Albert has a relentless focus on performance, which is well suited to bp's needs now and into the future," Blanc added. "He transformed and refocused CRH into a global leader by building on its rich heritage to deliver superior growth, cash generation and returns."

Anadolu Agency

Can debt-laden NATO nations afford to spend billions more on defence?

Arthur Sullivan

The NATO summit at the end of June left Donald Trump pleased. The US president hailed the "tremendous" agreement by the military alliance's 32 members to ramp up defence spending to 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2035.

Trump had spent years pressuring fellow NATO members to boost their spending. However, he reserved his customary ire for one member in particular: Spain.

After vocal opposition from the country's Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, Spain's government found a way to sidestep the 5% commitment by claiming it could meet its defence obligations by spending significantly less.

Trump described the decision as "very terrible" and warned that Spain would be made to "pay twice as much".

Sánchez argued that the 5% target – which breaks down to 3.5% on defence and 1.5% on related infrastructure – was unreasonable, and that diverting public spending in such a way could damage the economy.

In the end, Spain secured an agreement with NATO that granted it an effective opt-out. This has raised questions about whether many member nations will ultimately be able to honour the spending pledges they have made.

Tightened budgets

"The choice to ring-fence and prioritise defence amidst public spending cuts is politically challenging and will need strong public messaging to be accepted by the electorate and indeed across governments in office," Fenella McGerty, senior fellow for defence economics at the International Institute for Strategic



Europe's rearmament could overburden indebted countries, leading to budget cuts and ultimately social unrest (DW)

Studies (IISS), told DW.

When Spain's government signalled a planned rise in defence spending back in April, McGerty noted that Sánchez was keen to stress the increase would not add to the country's debt or affect social spending.

Ike Toygür, director of the Global Policy Centre at Madrid's IE University, told DW that Spain's position is partly about initiating an "open conversation" around the reality that prioritising defence spending would inevitably impact other key areas of national budgets — and could lead to a damaging public backlash.

"If there is no understanding about the importance of the fight against climate change or on other social issues – for example, housing, or support for health or education – then this [defence spending hike] will create the op-

posite effect that European leaders are trying to achieve," Toygür said.

What European countries really need, she argued, is a "sustained defence investment that will make the continent more secure". She warned that a "sus-

NATO members plan to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035 – a "quantum leap", according to the military alliance's chief, Mark Rutte. But doubts remain as to whether the most indebted members can realistically afford the increase

tained public backlash could create the opposite effect".

NATO's 'quantum leap' NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has hailed the increase as a "quantum leap" and said it "laid the foundations for a stronger, fairer and more lethal NATO".

McGerty said the pledge was

a "significant commitment", particularly if European members succeed in "increasing core defence spending to 3.5% of GDP" – up from the current average of around 2%.

The NATO agreement specifies that 3.5% of GDP should go

networks, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defence industrial base".

McGerty acknowledged that the pledge to bolster spending comes "at a time of considerable fiscal pressures" for member

states. However, she said, the 1.5% infrastructure component has a "broad definition", which gives countries greater flexibility.

"Many countries are likely already spending this much on such funding areas," McGerty said.

The debt problem

There are substantial doubts

about the capacity of some member states to reach the agreed levels. According to NATO's most recent defence spending figures from 2024, all but eight alliance members were meeting the existing 2% target. A few have since caught up.

Those furthest behind in terms of military spending – Spain, Belgium, Canada, Italy and Portugal – also face the added challenge of government debt that is close to, or even exceeds, 100% of their GDP. Greece is an outlier – it has the highest debt level of all, yet already spends more than 3% of GDP on defence.

Toygür is sceptical that some Northern European countries, which during the 2008-09 financial crisis criticised the debt levels of Southern European nations, fully appreciate the scale of the challenge faced by countries trying to increase defence

spending while managing high existing debt.

"What will happen if these countries use the next five to ten years to increase their defence spending?" she asked. "Does it mean more private sector investment is needed?"

Toygür called for a "fairer assessment of the debt question and the overall impact on the European economy at large".

McGerty said countries with strong fiscal positions, such as Germany, could borrow to meet the targets, but members already dealing with long-term debt concerns would be reluctant to do so.

For member states that have not yet reached the 2% threshold to have "any hope of meeting the 5% target without borrowing more", McGerty said, they would need to make the sort of drastic choices that Sánchez has warned against — or hope that the private sector steps in to help.

Increases in military spending would have to be funded by other means, McGerty said, such as "higher taxation, cuts to other areas of public spending, or via other creative funding options – including special funds administered by central banks or treasuries, multilateral lending instruments, or mobilising private investment".

The high cost of security

Though leaders such as Sánchez have expressed concern over borrowing and potential cuts, experts say the warning signs have been evident for some time.

McGerty noted that NATO chief Rutte stated as early as December 2024 that increases in European defence spending would inevitably affect budgets for pensions, education, and healthcare.

DW



Are stablecoins a risk to traditional bank deposits?

Vahid Karaahmetovic

Stablecoins are not yet a substitute for traditional bank deposits, but that could soon change, according to Morgan Stanley analysts.

Though stablecoins currently lack deposit insurance and don't pay interest, their utility in fast settlement and global dollar access could make them increasingly attractive, particularly to institutional users.

"Banks should not be complacent," analysts led by Betsy L. Graseck note, adding that some are already responding by developing tokenised deposits, as JPMorgan has done with JPM Coin and the planned JPM-D.

Stablecoins are already reshaping short-term funding markets. Tether, the largest

stablecoin, held 66% of its reserves in US Treasury bills as of March 2025, representing roughly 2% of the entire T-bill market.

According to Morgan Stanley, "continued growth could boost demand for short-term Treasuries and give the US Treasury more flexibility in debt issuance."

Compared to money market funds, stablecoins are constrained by regulation under the Genius Act in the US, which prohibits interest payments and treats holders as unsecured creditors.

In contrast, money funds can offer yield and give investors equity-like ownership. Still, both instruments share similarities in function – providing stable, cash-like vehicles backed by high-quality liquid assets.

"They aim to maintain a stable value – money funds target a \$1 net asset value (NAV), while stablecoins aim to maintain a 1:1 peg with fiat currency like the US dollar. During times of market stress, both tend to attract inflows as investors seek safety," analysts explain.

The market cap of stablecoins, now at \$263bn, is currently driven by retail crypto usage, but further adoption is expected to come from institutions seeking faster transaction speeds and greater collateral mobility.

"Unlike traditional bank deposits, which are locked within a single institution, stablecoins can move freely across blockchain platforms," Morgan Stanley's team continued, suggesting broader financial utility.

(Source: Investing.com)

US tech giants surge ahead while Europe lags in AI race

Piero Cingari

Europe appears to be falling behind in the AI race. The continent's largest listed companies are increasingly outpaced by their US counterparts, particularly in the fast-moving tech sector.

Despite the broader European equity market outperforming the S&P 500 so far this year, Europe's corporate champions are slipping in the global stock market rankings. This growing divide underscores deeper transatlantic differences in innovation capacity, private capital investment, and long-term competitiveness.

As of mid-July, the combined market capitalisation of Europe's seven largest listed firms – SAP, Novo Nordisk, Hermès, ASML, LVMH, Roche and Nestlé – stood at \$2.2tn, remaining virtually flat since the beginning of the year.

By contrast, the combined market value of the US's seven largest companies has soared to \$18.8tn, a rise of 10.2% since January.

Tech dominance defines US-Europe divide

The stark divergence reflects the central role of technology and AI in determining market leadership today.

All seven of the largest Amer-



The US 'Magnificent Seven' have surged far ahead of Europe's corporate heavyweights, driven by explosive growth in AI. While American tech giants soar, Europe's top firms – mostly rooted in traditional sectors – are struggling to keep pace in today's innovation-led economy

ican firms – Nvidia, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta and Broadcom (replacing Tesla in this ranking) – are technology companies with significant stakes in AI infrastructure, cloud computing, or data platforms.

In Europe, just two of the top seven – SAP and ASML – operate within the technology sector. The rest are concentrated in lux-

ury goods, pharmaceuticals, and consumer staples.

Nvidia alone is valued at 3.59tn euro – more than the combined market capitalisation of Europe's top seven firms. Its dominance stems from its pivotal role in powering global AI infrastructure, from model training to real-time inference.

"While the others use AI to

power their platforms and services, Nvidia supplies the very foundation on which those ambitions are built," said Natalie Hwang, founder of Apeira Capital, in an emailed statement.

"It quietly enables the success of every other member of the Magnificent Seven, while remaining their most indispensable partner."

According to industry estimates, Meta, Amazon, Alphabet and Microsoft are expected to spend over \$320bn on AI infrastructure in 2025, much of it aimed at inference optimisation and hyperscale data centres.

'Europe is losing'

JP Morgan Chase chief executive Jamie Dimon echoed wider concerns over Europe's global standing during a recent event in Dublin, hosted by Ireland's foreign ministry.

"Europe has gone from 90% of US GDP to 65% over 10 or 15 years. That's not good," Dimon said. "You're losing." He cited overregulation, market fragmentation, and weak productivity as key structural weaknesses urged European leaders to act on the 2024 report led by former ECB President Mario Draghi, which called for 800bn euro in annual investment to boost industrial competitiveness.

(Source: Euronews.com)



ASUS accelerates use of AI powered Innovations

ASUS, alongside its partner, Suhail Bahwan Group, successfully hosted the 'Innovating with the Future: Transforming Business with IT Solutions' event in Oman.

Over 100 delegates from the education, business and public sectors attended the event to gain insight into ASUS's latest solutions, a press release said.

The event had an exceptional turnout and is a testament to ASUS's passion for innovation with the highest quality, making them a trusted name in their target industries. Attendees had the chance to see ASUS's lineup of award-winning devices that include the ExpertBook P and B

The event is a platform for us to engage with customers to understand their evolving needs and innovate our products and services to benefit them

MOHIT BECTOR

Chromebook and All-in-One (AiO) series. ASUS demonstrated its commitment to the country, supporting Oman Vision 2040, which intends to transform Oman into a developed nation that offers an enhanced quality of life.

"The event is a platform for us to engage with customers to understand their evolving needs

and innovate our products and services to benefit them," said Mohit Bector, commercial head - UAE and GCC, ASUS Business. "We would like to thank Suhail Bahwan Group for their continued partnership and support in Oman, an important market that plays a key role in our regional growth strategy. Together, we are working towards a common

vision of delivering cutting-edge technologies to government, business and educational institutions across the country. As a trusted technology enabler, ASUS continues to drive a smarter and more efficient business and learning environment with our industry-leading products and solutions."

The ASUS ExpertBook series gives users the right balance of portability, performance and reliability. Long-term durability and enterprise-grade security make the ExpertBook series capable of handling demanding workloads. The ASUS Chromebook offers fast and streamlined performance for students thanks to

regular Chrome OS updates and all-day battery life. The ASUS ExpertCentre AiO PCs are the perfect companion for any business, delivering sturdy construction, quality components and strong security features.

Having 71,192 awards under its name, ASUS continues to create the best products and solutions designed for everyone. It also reinforced its sustainability pledge by increasing the use of environment-friendly materials and embracing 100% renewable energy in its Taiwan operation centers. With the event's resounding success, ASUS aims to carry the momentum forward with more activities in Oman.

Bank Muscat enables IBAN

In a commitment to enhance payment system efficiency and align with international standards for improved customer experience, Bank Muscat has begun to support the International Bank Account Number (IBAN) for fund transfers across borders starting July 1.

This initiative, in accordance with directives from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), aims to reduce operational errors and speed up financial transactions between individuals and businesses, ultimately providing beneficiaries with safer and smoother transfers, a press release said.

As part of these directives, cross-border transfers that do not utilise the IBAN will no longer be accepted as of July 1. The IBAN will be a prerequisite to receive all fund transfers to Oman, while domestic transfers will still have the option to use either the IBAN or the traditional account number.

Zuwaina Abdullah al Sharji, assistant general manager of Central Operations and Change Management at Bank Muscat, stated, "The bank is committed to complying with international standards and implementing best banking practices. The decision to adopt the IBAN is intended to accelerate bank transfers (STP), standardise account coordination among all banks, reduce human errors in account entry, and adhere to international standards like the



SWIFT system. This will significantly enhance the security and speed of transaction processing."

Al Sharji emphasised Bank Muscat's dedication to integrating the latest banking systems to facilitate the swift completion of transactions for individual and corporate customers, ensuring an exceptional banking experience that meets contemporary local and international standards. She encouraged customers to include a valid IBAN from their account information and to follow the issued guidelines to avoid any complications during transfer operations.

Customers can easily obtain their IBAN through various channels, including Internet Banking, Mobile Banking, visiting a branch, calling customer service, or accessing the dedicated page: (<https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/iban.aspx>). The IBAN is also typically displayed next to the account number on bank statements.

Bank Muscat is committed to excellence in managing its operations and services, striving to apply the highest efficiency standards in fund transfers and transactions.

Samsung introduces Galaxy Z Fold7 and Z Flip7 phones

Samsung Gulf Electronics has announced that the new Galaxy Z Fold7 and Galaxy Z Flip7 are now available for pre-order for customers across Oman until July 24.

Setting a new benchmark for intelligent design and premium performance, both devices represent the next leap in Galaxy innovation, blending cutting-edge AI with sleek, durable engineering, a press release said.

The Galaxy Z Fold7, Samsung's thinnest and lightest foldable yet, combines the power of an immersive large screen with pro-grade creative tools and built-in Galaxy AI, delivering a next-level multitasking and content creation experience. Meanwhile, the Galaxy Z Flip7 redefines the flip phone with a compact edge-to-edge FlexWin-



dow, flagship-level camera capabilities, and intuitive AI features, perfectly sized to fit in your pocket and your lifestyle.

Fadi Abu Shamat, vice president and Head of the Mobile eXperience Division at Samsung Gulf Electronics, said, "Galaxy Z Flip7 is proof that big intelligence

can come in a small, pocket-sized form factor. By bringing rich multimodal AI capabilities and seamless functionality to the FlexWindow, we've created a device that adapts, anticipates and empowers. Meanwhile, the Galaxy Z Fold7 combines Galaxy AI with powerful hardware.

SQU delegation visits Expo 2025 Osaka



A delegation from SQU visited Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan, from July 19 to 21, as part of the University's efforts to strengthen its international presence and enhance its academic and research engagement.

The delegation included a number of students representing

university-based student startups, including Aura, Ilaj, Tuba, and Serbal. Their participation aimed to benefit from the experiences showcased at Expo 2025 Osaka and to explore innovative ideas in education and technology, a press release said.

During the visit, the delega-

tion toured several national and corporate pavilions, enabling direct interaction with various research and academic institutions and exposure to a wide range of global cultures.

The University's participation in this international event reflects its commitment to international

cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the expansion of its academic and research collaborations and strategic partnerships. It also reinforces SQU's leadership role in education and knowledge, supporting the development of its academic and research programmes.

UAE shares model for women empowerment and gender equality

The UAE has reaffirmed the critical role of women empowerment and gender equality in achieving the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda during the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development in New York.

The UAE delegation highlighted the nation's model for women empowerment, gender equality, and its focus on motherhood and childhood as the basis for inclusive and sustainable growth, a press release said.

The UAE built this model through the comprehensive empowerment system that it provides for women and families, who form the nucleus of society and guarantee the sustainability of human, social, and economic development.

The UAE delegation presented national policies and legislation that have contributed to increasing the number of women



in leadership and decision-making positions. This includes the Equal Pay Law and the Constitution guaranteeing equal opportunities for both genders.

The delegation highlighted

several milestones, including the fact that women now represent 50% of Federal National Council members and 26% of Cabinet members. Women also constitute 46% of STEM graduates in

the UAE and 80% of the scientific leadership team in the Emirates Mars Mission.

The delegation also addressed the UAE's role in supporting women empowerment

globally through initiatives like Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak's Women in Peace and Security Initiative. The delegation concluded by reiterating the UAE's willingness to share its expertise

and success with the international community to promote gender equality towards 2030 and beyond.

The National Secretariat on SDGs and the UAE Consulate General in New York City hosted a roundtable on 'Accelerating Innovation in Promoting Gender Equality to Continue Achieving Sustainable Development in the Post-2030.'

The discussion explored bridging the digital gender gap, transforming the care economy, and empowering women in leadership. It presented scalable solutions and practical models to drive progress around SDG 5.

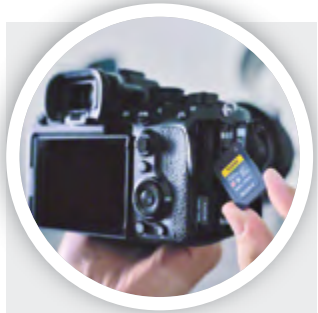
The discussion featured contributions from Savannah Mazhya, minister of Information and Communications Technology in the Kingdom of Eswatini and Chair of the Global Council for SDG 5, Abdulla Lootah, assistant minister of Cabinet Affairs

for Competitiveness and Experience Exchange and Chair of the National Committee on SDGs, Dr Manal Taryam, CEO and board member of Noor Dubai Foundation, besides other participants.

Lootah said, "Over decades of sustainable development centred on the family, the UAE has made community empowerment both the finish line and the starting point of development. This approach is what the UAE is ready to share with everyone around the world.

"Through the UAE's participation in HLPF, and through the delegation's meetings and partnerships, we are sharing knowledge gained in empowering society to ensure inclusive development."

The delegation also shared the country's experiences in establishing the National Committee on SDGs in 2017.



Sony launches shotgun microphone

Sony is pleased to announce today the launch of its new ECM-778 shotgun microphone designed for content production where audio quality is paramount, such as films, dramas and documentaries, this flagship mono high-resolution model delivers immersive, high-quality audio recordings.

The microphone offers versatile mounting options, whether fixed to a boom pole or directly attached to compatible cameras, adapting easily to a wide range of audio recording scenarios, a press release said.

Additionally, Sony is launching CFexpress Type A cards for its Cinema Line and Alpha mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras: the CEA-G1920T (1920 GB) and CEA-G960T (960 GB), along with the MRW-G3 CFexpress Type A card reader. These new CFexpress 4 – compatible products achieve read speeds exceeding 1800 MB/s – more than twice as fast as earlier models – and a storage capacity of upto 1920 GB.

The ECM-778 shotgun microphone features a newly developed microphone capsule, a brass acoustic tube, and a specifically designed electronic circuit board for superior sound quality, that together enable high-quality recording with high frequencies and stable mid-low frequencies. Despite its compact size of 176 mm in length and weight of just 102 g, ECM-778 achieves excellent forward directivity.

Toyota Gazoo Racing secures podium finish in Acropolis rally

Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team (TGR-WRT) has braved turbulent roads, twisting mountain trails and searing ambient temperatures to claim a hard-fought podium finish at Acropolis Rally Greece.

Sébastien Ogier and co-driver Vincent Landais secured second place in their No 17 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, their performance helping the team maintain its drivers' championship lead and Toyota its 65-point manufacturers' championship advantage, a press release said.

Greece's rough, rocky terrain and temperatures exceeding 40°C posed a significant challenge for TGR-WRT and the GR YARIS Rally1. The early stages west of Athens were especially demanding, with loose stones and step-like bedrock testing the car's durability, while the narrow, twisting mountain roads in the final legs left no room for error. Ogier maintained a leading pace despite running second on the road during the first day, helping clear a racing line while still delivering competitive times.

Building on that performance, he and co-driver Landais began



Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people and the people build the cars,' TGR highlights the role of motor-sports as a pillar of Toyota's commitment

the final leg 43.6 seconds behind the leader and mounted a determined push, clocking the fastest times in both the penultimate test and the rally-ending Power Stage. The result saw them top the final-day classification and

earn 10 bonus points, in addition to 17 for securing second place overall.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World

Endurance Championship (WEC) and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people and the people build the cars,' TGR highlights the role of motor-sports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure and joy of driving to everyone.

Round 8 of the 2025 FIA WRC is Rally Estonia (July 17-20), which returns to the calendar after a one-year absence. The event features high-speed gravel stages around Tartu, Estonia's second-largest city and the rally's central hub, combining wide and narrow sections with a predominantly soft, sandy surface.

UAE shapes sustainable development future

The UAE launched the 2025 edition of the 2045 SDG Report at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York City, as part of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2025, organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

This took place at the headquarters of the United Nations, where Abdulla Nasser Lootah, assistant minister of Cabinet Affairs for Competitiveness and Knowledge Exchange, chair of the National Committee on SDGs welcomed the high-level attendees of the launch event, which included Savanna Maziya,



minister of Information and Communication Technology of the Kingdom of Eswatini, Victor Verdon, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay, Seema Sami Iskander

Bahouth, executive director of UN Women, Eliot Minchenberg, director of the UNESCO Office for Communication in New York and UNESCO representative to the United Nations, Benjiran

Herani Tajuddin, permanent representative of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations, and Tsai Yelma Sabo, permanent representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, while the open-

ing speech was delivered by ambassador Mohamed Abushahab, permanent representative of the UAE to the UN.

Created by the National Committee on SDGs 2025, the report builds on outcomes from the ministerial session held at the World Government Summit (WGS) 2025, in addition to recommendations from the high-level 2045 SDG roundtable held during Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week 2025, and survey responses from the 2045 SDG Global Survey.

During the forum, the UAE delegation also presented findings from the UAE-led 2045

SDG Global Survey, which gathered insights from participants across 55 countries, spanning a wide range of age groups and academic disciplines.

Titled "Envisioning 2045: Comprehensive Pathways towards Sustainable Development," the report outlines five key priorities: redefining SDGs for 2045; proactively future-proofing economies and societies; enhancing global cooperation at the leadership level; accelerating the transition of global development to a new phase; and establishing a shared international commitment to the future development agenda.

'Unlock Geneva' invites tourists to a new experience in the city

This summer, 'Unlock Geneva' invites travellers to see the city in a whole new light.

Where shimmering lakes meet shaded parks, open-air terraces give way to live music stages, and Michelin-starred restaurants sit alongside laid-back bistros, Geneva is a city of contrasts, perfectly suited to every mood and moment, a press release said.

At first glance, its peaceful landscapes and relaxed rhythm may seem serene, but through the 'Unlock Geneva' campaign, visitors are encouraged to look beyond the surface and uncover the vibrant energy that pulses through the city in summer.

The journey unfolds across five themed realms, each showcasing a different facet of Geneva. The Water World invites visitors to swim, paddle, cruise or simply float, soaking up lakeside life from every angle. The Culinary World offers a flavourful path through bistros, gourmet spots and Michelin-starred tables.

Adventure seekers will enjoy the Outdoor Sports World, filled with trails, parks and fresh-air ac-



tivities. The Cultural World transforms the city into a stage, from beachside jazz to sunrise concerts. Lastly, the Family World ensures fun for all ages, with boat rides, lakeside swims and ice creams in the sun creating shared memories for every generation.

Getting to Geneva's best swimming spots is now easier than ever thanks to the new Beach Shuttle Line 29, running every 15 minutes from Rive throughout summer. From the sandy shores of Plage des Eaux-

Vives to the iconic Bains des Pâquis, where locals gather for morning swims and sunset aperitifs, the lake is at the heart of Geneva's summer.

For those seeking adventure, the water becomes a playground — with paddleboarding, pedal boats, wakeboarding, and paddle yoga at Tropical Corner, or rafting down the Arve and Rhône rivers.

Beyond the lake, Geneva's parks and trails offer peaceful escapes. Parc La Grange, with its rose garden, Parc de la Perle du

Lac, and the Botanical Garden invite moments of calm, while the Reformation Wall in Parc des Bastions tells the city's history in stone.

As the sun sets, Geneva hums with live music — from Les Aubes Musicales' sunrise concerts at Bains des Pâquis to OSR Festival nights at Genève-Plage and lakeside jazz in Hermance.

Food lovers are spoilt for choice, with 13 Michelin-starred restaurants, including L'Atelier Robuchon and Bayview by Michel Roth.

Dubai luxury hotels offer summer family experiences

This summer, luxury hotels across Dubai are rolling out the red carpet with exclusive family-friendly deals.

Offering five-star experiences, world-class amenities, and iconic city views, these handpicked ultra luxury hotels not only have plenty to keep you, and the kids entertained they're also not going to break the bank thanks to incredible savings.

Whether you're planning a sun-soaked staycation or flying in for an action-packed family escape, these high-end hotels allow you to enjoy the height of indulgence while creating unforgettable memories with your loved ones this summer.

Few infinity pools around the world can rival the one atop of the Address Sky View overlooking the unmistakable Burj Khalifa and adjoined by the incredible Sky Bridge. Here you'll make memories for a lifetime and have the photos to prove it. When you're not enjoying relaxing in the infinity pool, you'll be treating yourself to a deeply rejuvenating treatment on the hotel's 54th floor.

When it comes to dinner time, it's over to, CÉ LA VI Dubai, a



popular Michelin guide restaurant serving superb Asian cuisine along with world-class entertainment and magnificent views. The Address Sky View also has direct access to the Dubai Mall so you and the kids can shop and dine at your leisure.

If you're looking for a luxury address to call home for a few days for all the family, this is the place for you. Here you can enjoy exceptional services such as a personalised butler and your

very own chef, while you and your family make the most of your luxury vacation by relaxing in the private pool and jacuzzi.

The hotel villas are located close to the Mall of Emirates so it's ideal for when you need to keep the kids entertained or fancy dining out. As part of the Hala Summer with MyMillennium offer, not only do two kids stay free you can also enjoy 20% off your stay, making your stay at the villas even more attractive.

ICE to target all undocumented immigrants in sweeping crackdown

Washington, D.C., US - US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will arrest anyone found living in the country unlawfully, regardless of their criminal history or lack thereof, and is ramping up enforcement against employers hiring unauthorised workers, the agency's acting director, Todd Lyons, said on Sunday.

Under orders from the Trump administration, ICE has reinstated wide-ranging immigration enforcement policies, including so-called collateral arrests - detaining non-criminal undocumented immigrants found during broader operations - which had been curtailed during the Biden era.

"What's, again, frustrating for me is the fact that we would love to focus on these criminal aliens that are inside a jail facility," Lyons said in an exclusive interview with CBS News.

"A local law enforcement agency, state agency already deemed that person a public safety threat and arrested them and they're in detention."



Lyons said the current rise in community arrests is a consequence of states and cities with sanctuary policies refusing to hand over noncitizen inmates, forcing ICE agents to go into

neighbourhoods.

"I'd much rather focus all of our limited resources on that...but we do have to go out into the community," he said.

In the first half of 2025, ICE deported nearly 150,000 people, including around 70,000 with criminal convictions, many of which were minor, according to internal government data obtained by CBS News.

Lyons did not rule out reaching the administration's target of one million deportations this year, citing a recent multi-billion-dollar boost in congressional funding.

"ICE is always focused on the worst of the worst," Lyons said. "One difference you'll see now is under this administration, we have opened up the whole aperture of the immigration portfolio."

He also confirmed the agency has resumed large-scale worksite raids, including recent operations at a Nebraska meat plant, a Louisiana racetrack and California cannabis farms, where over 300 unauthorised workers were arrested, including minors.

ICE will now prioritise not only the arrest of undocumented workers but also prosecution of the companies hiring them.

"Not only are we focused on those individuals...we're focused on these American companies that are actually exploiting these labourers," Lyons said. When asked if employers will be held accountable, he responded: "One hundred per cent."

Anadolu Agency

Japan's Ishiba vows to stay on after defeat in election

Ishiba's ruling coalition failed to secure a majority in election for the 248-seat upper house of parliament

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's ruling coalition has failed to secure a majority in Sunday's election for the 248-seat upper house of parliament, Japan's public NHK TV outlet said.

Ishiba's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), already in a minority in the lower house since last October's snap election, faced mounting public discontent over inflation, political scandals and a surge in anti-immigration sentiment.

Why Ishiba won't resign

The LDP and its junior partner Komeito needed to win 50 of the 125 contested seats in addition to the 75 they already have. They fell short, winning only 46 of the seats.

In recent years, such an electoral defeat has usually led to a prime minister's resignation. Ishiba, however, vowed to stay on to lead Japan through the difficult terrain of striking a trade deal with the US in the face of looming tariffs.



Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's future is uncertain as his LDP is now in the minority in both houses of parliament

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba promised to stay in office as US trade talks loom. At the same time, an openly xenophobic far-right party made major gains in the country's upper house election held on Sunday

"We are engaged in extremely critical tariff negotiations with the United States ... we must never ruin these negotiations," he told a press conference after vowing to stay on as party leader through the trade talks.

The loss is another blow to Ishiba's coalition, which is now a minority in both houses following its October defeat in the lower

house election. It is the first time the LDP has lost a majority in both houses of parliament since the party's founding in 1955.

The poor performance in the election will not immediately trigger a change of government because the upper house lacks the power to file a no-confidence motion against a leader. Despite his determination to stay on,

Ishiba could face calls from within his party to step down or find another coalition partner.

Rise of 'Japanese First' party

The surge of the right-wing populist Sanseito party complicated the election.

Once a fringe movement, spreading conspiracy theories about vaccinations and global elites during the COVID-19 pandemic on YouTube, the party is now gaining momentum with its 'Japanese First' rhetoric and criticism of immigration, globalism, and foreign capital.

Sanseito is expected to win 14 seats in the upper house, ap-

pealing especially to young male voters.

Its leader, Sohei Kamiya, has drawn comparisons to Trump and Germany's AfD for his anti-establishment stance and social media reach.

According to AFP news agency, a Sunday interview by Russia's Sputnik news agency with a Sanseito candidate courted controversy and prompted Kamiya to deny ties to Russia.

The European Union has banned Sputnik and other Russian state media for 'disinformation and information manipulation'.

DW

US: Trump posts AI video of FBI arresting Obama

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump on Monday shared an AI-generated video of showing former President Barack Obama being arrested.

The AI video that was shared on Trump's Truth Social platform shows the former President being arrested by FBI agents in the Oval Office at the White House.

In the clip Obama is heard saying 'especially the President is above the law', followed by a montage of various US leaders asserting, 'no one is above the law'.



US President Donald Trump

The video also shows two FBI agents handcuffing Obama in the Oval Office while Trump watches from the sidelines with a grin.

The video ends with shots of Obama dressed in an orange jumpsuit sitting, and pacing inside a jail.

On Friday, US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic lawmaker, called for Obama administration to be 'prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law', alleging a 'conspiracy' by which officials 'manufactured' intelligence to claim that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to boost Trump's presidential campaign.

Gabbard, her press release claims, declassified documents that 'revealed overwhelming evidence' allegedly showing Obama and national security officials 'manufactured and politicised intelligence to lay the groundwork for what was essentially a years-long coup against President Trump'.

The Obama administration's 'goal was to usurp President

Trump and subvert the will of the American people', Gabbard posted on X. "No matter how powerful, every person involved in this conspiracy must be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. The integrity of our democratic republic depends on it."

White House posted on X: "Six months in, President Trump took command - launched an all-out offensive to crush the left's mess and bring American power roaring back. The border is fortified. The economy is unleashed. The One Big Beautiful Bill is law. This is unapologetic, America-first leadership."

On Thursday night, the White House social team had posted a poster replacing actor David Corenswet with Trump in the new movie 'Superman'. It read 'A Trump presidency', at the top followed by the slogan: "Truth. Justice. The American Way." The accompanying caption referred to 'Superman Trump' as the 'Symbol of hope'.

ANI

Ecuador's gang leader extradited to US

Washington, D.C., US - Ecuador extradited notorious drug trafficker and gang leader Jose Adolfo Macias Villamar, known as 'El Fito', to the US on Sunday, a month after his recapture following a prison escape that sparked nationwide unrest.

Macias, leader of the violent Los Choneros cartel, was moved under heavy guard from Guayaquil's maximum-security prison to the city airport and handed over to US authorities to complete his extradition. In April, the US Attorney's Office charged Macias with cocaine distribution, conspiracy, and firearms offenses, including weapons smuggling.

Anadolu Agency

Germany: Car crashes into trampoline, lodges in roof of a barn

Bohmte, Germany - A hole in a hedge, a smashed up trampoline, branches ripped off trees, tiles torn off roofs, and a car lodged in the roof of a barn.

The small town of Bohmte near the city of Osnabrück in the northwestern German state of Lower Saxony was the scene of a spectacular accident on Saturday evening which has left two people seriously injured, including a seven-year-old boy.

For as yet unknown reasons, local police reported on Sunday, the car appears to have come off the road at high speed before colliding with a parked vehicle and crashing through a hedge.

On the other side of the hedge, the car then fell around 1.5 metres (five feet) into a lower-lying back garden where it appears to have landed on a trampoline, hitting and injuring the child who was playing on it.

Then, either as a result of the topography of the area or of bouncing off the trampoline, or both, it appears to have been flung further through the air,



A policeman on a ladder surveys a smashed up car which is lodged in the roof of a barn after an accident

eventually crashing into the attic of a barn about 3 metres off the ground. "There was a massive clatter and we just thought: Help! What has happened?" said a local resident. "Then we ran outside and saw the car in the roof."

The driver of the car, a 42-

year-old man, sustained only light injuries, as did three boys aged 11, 12 and 13 in the back seat. A 43-year-old woman in the passenger seat was seriously injured, as was the little boy on the trampoline, who police said was in a life-threatening condition.

Huge rescue operation

After being alerted to the accident, dozens of emergency service personnel attended the scene, including firefighters, police, technical relief staff, 12 ambulance crews and emergency pastoral carers, while two rescue

helicopters circled overhead.

"This is clearly an extraordinary deployment," said a fire brigade spokesman.

The occupants of the car were taken to various local clinics where the driver had blood samples taken and his driving license confiscated. Police said they are

ruling out alcohol as a cause of the accident. The car had to be removed from barn roof with a crane and was also subsequently

Two people, including a child, were seriously injured in a spectacular accident which saw a car leave the road, crash through a hedge and hit a trampoline before lodging itself in the roof of a barn

impounded by prosecutors.

Photographs and video footage from the scene show a trail of destruction left by the car as it hurtled along: branches ripped off trees, tiles torn off roofs, a smashed hedge and a wrecked trampoline.

DW

Deadly chaos in Gaza as aid programme sparks violence and desperation: Report

Gaza City/Istanbul - A controversial Israeli-backed food distribution programme in Gaza has triggered deadly chaos, leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured as desperate Palestinians clash at overcrowded aid sites operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), according to a report by the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ).

The GHF is an American organisation backed by Israel. Israel cut off supplies to Gaza in March, and the group started operating in Gaza in late May, bypassing the UN and other established NGOs, but has been criticised by Palestinians and international groups for the high numbers of casualties linked to its operations.

Last Tuesday, thousands of Palestinians gathered at a GHF distribution site near Khan Younis. As the gate opened, the crowd surged forward. American security contractors failed to control the mass of starving civilians, many of whom broke through barricades to grab whatever food they could. Within 15 minutes, all supplies were gone. Gunshots rang out, though the source was unclear.

The WSJ report said that a firsthand observation - from when it kicked off to when it was overrun - showed 'some reasons why the setup has been so beset with problems'.

GHF depends on the nearby presence of Israeli troops for security and the protection of its staff. This often puts desperate



Hundreds of people have died and hundreds more have been wounded trying to access food at GHF's four sites

Palestinian crowds in direct contact with soldiers - a contrast to UN distribution sites, which typically operate without an Israeli military presence, the report noted.

The demand for food is also much greater than what GHF can provide, leading to huge crowds and fierce competition over the limited supplies, it said.

Last Wednesday, at least 20 people were killed in a crush at the site, according to health authorities and GHF.

The WSJ report said that Ahmad Tareq al-Dahoudi, a

Palestinian who was seeking food, said: "I couldn't breathe from the smell. ... I didn't get anything and ran away. There were lots of children, women and elderly people. I saw about 15 dead bodies."

According to local health authorities, since the programme began, hundreds of people have died and hundreds more have been wounded trying to access food at GHF's four sites. The Israeli army acknowledged opening fire on crowds that come too close to its troops.

The report added that Israel

Ziv, a retired Israeli general who once was the head of Israel's Gaza division, said: "The area is not stable, it's under chaos. The threat of starvation under those conditions is so severe that there's no way you can create a stable system in unstable surroundings."

Speaking to WSJ, Israeli soldiers admitted to using rifles, machine guns, and even artillery when Palestinian crowds strayed from designated routes to GHF aid sites or attempted to take shortcuts. They said shots were fired around gatherings to

deter them, as well as at times directly at anyone who move in their direction.

The Israeli military said it tries to avoid using gunfire and reviews every incident to minimise harm. While some officials acknowledged that troops have caused fatalities, claiming Palestinian-reported death tolls are exaggerated.

One Israeli reservist recalled an incident in mid-June where Israeli soldiers fired at Gazans carrying white flags who had left the approved route. "We have an unwritten rule that if you are wor-

ried and they get too close and you see that it could be something that puts you and your team at risk, you don't take that risk," he was quoted as saying.

Girl dies of hunger
A 4-year-old Palestinian girl has died of hunger in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid have driven a worsening humanitarian disaster, Palestinian health officials said.

The Palestinian girl, Rezzan

others were injured in a strike targeting a tent sheltering displaced families in Al-Mawasi, west of Khan Younis in southern Gaza.

Two more Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike in the south of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza.

Medics said that five bodies were transferred to the Shifa Hospital after Israeli forces shelled a crowd waiting for aid delivery near the Netzarim Corridor last night in the central Gaza Strip.

Israeli drone strikes also killed five more civilians and wounded several others in the Al-Nazla Roundabout in Jabalia in northern Gaza.

At least 59,029 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip since October 2023, the Health Ministry said on Monday.

GHF depends on nearby presence of Israeli troops for security and the protection of its staff. This often puts desperate Palestinian crowds in direct contact with soldiers

Abu Zahir, died due to complications caused by malnutrition and starvation, according to a report by Palestine's official news agency WAFA, citing sources at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the Gaza Strip. The report stated that hundreds of people of all ages in Gaza's hospitals are suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition.

21 more killed in Gaza
At least 21 Palestinians were killed and others injured on Monday in a new wave of Israeli airstrikes in the war-torn Gaza Strip, medical sources said.

Seven Palestinians, including a child, lost their lives and several

OIC meeting
Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said on Monday that it will hold an emergency meeting on Tuesday to discuss the ongoing Israeli assaults against Palestinians.

In a statement, the Jeddah-based grouping said the meeting will be held at the level of permanent representatives 'regarding the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and the targeting of holy sites in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Ibrahimi Mosque in Al-Khalil (Hebron)'.

Anadolu Agency

Israel strikes Houthi targets at Al Hudaydah port

Sanaa, Yemen - The Israeli military launched airstrikes on Monday on Houthi targets at the Port of Al Hudaydah in western Yemen.

Defence Minister Israel Katz claimed that the strikes were launched to prevent 'any attempt to rebuild infrastructure that was attacked previously'.

"Yemen will be treated like Tehran. The Houthis will pay heavy prices for firing missiles at the State of Israel," he said.

The Israeli army said it destroyed the military infrastructure of the Houthis in the port of Al Hudaydah, which Tel Aviv claims is being used for arms shipments from Iran and carrying out operations against Israel.

A military statement said the strikes targeted the engineering vehicles that were used to rebuild, in addition to fuel contain-



Monday's attacks were the 12th wave of Israeli strikes on Yemen since the outbreak of the Gaza war

ers, naval vessels, and weapons.

The Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV confirmed the Israeli attacks, without providing any details

about injuries or damage.

Monday's attacks were the 12th wave of Israeli strikes on Yemen since the outbreak of the

Gaza war on October 7, 2023.

The Houthis have intensified missile and drone strikes on Israel since Israeli forces resumed

attacks on the Gaza Strip in March after two months of a shaky ceasefire.

Since November 2023, the

Israeli army said it destroyed military infrastructure of the Houthis, which 'is being used for arms shipments and for carrying out operations against Israel'

group has also targeted commercial shipping in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

Anadolu Agency



Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid

Syria strike hasty, unnecessary, says Israel's Lapid

Jerusalem/Istanbul - Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid on Monday called Israel's recent strike on Syria 'unnecessary and hasty', criticising Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and renewing calls for early elections.

In an interview with Israeli Army Radio, Lapid said the response 'was in the wrong place' and suggested Israel was acting without a coherent regional strategy. "It seemed as if we were drunk on power. Now we strike anywhere in the Middle East without a clear policy," he said.

He was referring to Israel's recent airstrike on Syrian military positions and infrastructure in Damascus, which the government claimed was aimed at protecting Druze communities.

Lapid also urged early elections, saying: "Everyone says that once we return from recess, we'll head straight to elections. We must go to elections to save ourselves from this terrible government."

The Knesset recess begins July 27 and extends through October, during which parliamentary sessions are suspended.

Although the current government's term officially ends next year, early elections could be triggered if a majority in the Knesset supports it or if Netanyahu agrees to dissolve parliament.

So far, Netanyahu has rejected calls for early elections, citing the ongoing war in Gaza as a reason to avoid political disruption. Earlier this month, the opposition attempted to advance a motion to dissolve the Knesset but failed to secure the necessary support.

Erdogan vows support for Syrian president
Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reiterated support for his Syrian counterpart, vowing not to 'leave Al-Sharaa alone', rejected fragmentation in Syria, and called recovery of the war-torn country beneficial for Turkey.

"At a time when even unlikely actors are coming together on Syria, it's crucial to explain to the world Israel is disrupting efforts to restore stability," Erdogan told reporters on his return flight from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) late on Sunday.

Anadolu Agency

Lebanese President Aoun delivers country's response to US proposal aimed at disarming Hezbollah group

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Monday delivered his country's formal response to a US proposal aimed at disarming the Hezbollah group in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, a senior political source told Anadolu.

The presidency confirmed that Aoun met with US Envoy Tom Barrack at the presidential palace in eastern Beirut. According to a post by the Lebanese presidency on X, Aoun handed Beirut's response to the US envoy regarding Lebanon's commitments under the ceasefire deal with Israel.

Deal 'didn't work'
US Envoy Tom Barrack said on



Lebanese President Joseph Aoun

Monday that a ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah 'didn't work'.

"The bottom line is, you have

a cessation of hostilities agreement that's in effect, it didn't work, right? So, there's reasons why that cessation of hostilities agreement didn't work, which is

part of what we're all trying to solve," he told reporters in Beirut.

Cross-border warfare between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon escalated into a full-scale war in September 2024. Despite a November ceasefire, Israeli forces have conducted near-daily attacks in southern Lebanon, claiming to target Hezbollah's activities.

Under the ceasefire deal, Israel was supposed to fully withdraw from southern Lebanon by January 26, but the deadline was extended to February 18 after Tel Aviv refused to comply. Israel still maintains a military presence at five border outposts.

Commenting on the security situation in Suwayda province in

southern Syria, Barrack called for allowing the Syrian government to shoulder its responsibility.

"What's happened is horrible, it's unthinkable. And the hope is that out of this, a consolidation of these issues occurs quicker," he said. "You have a Syrian government, in effect, they need to be held accountable. They also need to be given the responsibility that they're there to do."

The US envoy stressed that Washington 'has reacted to all the events in Syria with unbelievable concern, pain, empathy and aid'. "The US has no business in trying to compel Israel to do anything. We're here, as I said 100 times, to help you come to a conclusion with your neighbours."

India: Former Kerala CM V S Achuthanandan dies at age of 101

Thiruvananthapuram, India - Veteran CPI(M) leader and former Kerala CM V S Achuthanandan passed away on Monday at the age of 101.

He was undergoing treatment in a private hospital after a cardiac arrest.

“We salute Comrade V S Achuthanandan - an architect of Kerala’s progressive journey, a voice of the voiceless, and a lifelong champion of the working class,” the CPIM said in a statement.

“His life of struggle and unwavering dedication to the cause of the people will forever be an inspiration,” it said. Velikkakathu Sankaran Achuthanandan was the Chief Minister of Kerala from 2006 to 2011.

He was the longest-serving opposition leader in the Kerala Assembly, holding the position for 15 years.



V S Achuthanandan

Achuthanandan was a founding member of the CPM. He served as the Secretary of the CPM Kerala State Committee from 1980 to 1992. He was the LDF convener between 1996 and 2000, and Leader of the Opposition in three separate terms - 1992 to 1996, 2001 to 2006, and 2011 to 2016.

ANI



UK Navy’s F-35 fighter jet remains grounded in India

Thiruvananthapuram, India - The British Navy’s F-35 fighter aircraft, which remained grounded in Kerala with a hydraulic valve failure, since making an emergency landing on June 14, was on Monday seen being towed into a hangar at the Thiruvananthapuram airport here.

Officials said that the aircraft will not leave today and the exact date of its departure is yet to be confirmed.

On June 14, the aircraft operating from UK Aircraft Carrier, HMS Prince of Wales was undertaking a routine sortie outside Indian ADIZ when it requested to land at the Thiruvananthapuram airport, which was earmarked as the emergency recovery airfield.

The Indian Air Force provided all required support and assisted in the process, including in refuelling. A technical team of the UK Royal Air Force had arrived to repair it and the 5th generation

stealth fighter aircraft was parked at the Bay in the airport for many days.

The aircraft developed a hydraulic failure, and possibly, it would be taken back in a military transport aircraft, defence officials said on June 14.

It was later moved to Air India hanger where a team from the UK were brought to repair the fighter jet. F-35Bs are highly advanced stealth jets, built by Lockheed Martin, and are prized for their short take-off and vertical landing capability.

Earlier, the Indian Navy and the United Kingdom’s Carrier Strike Group (UK CSG25) conducted a joint naval drill, commonly known as a Passage Exercise (PASSEX), in the western Arabian Sea.

This marked the UK Strike Group’s ‘first major engagement’ after entering the Indo-Pacific region.

ANI

Mumbai train blasts: Indian court acquits all 12 accused

Mumbai, India - The Bombay High Court on Monday acquitted all 12 accused in the 19-year-old case of the Mumbai train blasts, quashing a decade-old ruling by a special court which awarded death penalty to five and life sentences to seven of the accused.

A two-judge panel observed that ‘the prosecution has utterly failed to prove the case against the accused. It is hard to believe that the accused committed the crime’.

“Hence, their conviction is quashed and set aside,” the panel said on Monday, as per several local media outlets, including NDTV.

The attack, earlier judgement

On July 11, 2006, seven bombs rocked crowded Mumbai local trains during the evening rush hour, killing 189 people and injuring over 800.

On September 2015, a special trial court under the state’s organised crime law awarded the death penalty to five of the defendants for planting the bombs and life sentences to seven others for other involvement.

Another accused was acquitted by the trial court but only after he spent nine years in jail.

This judgment was then referred to the high court for confirmation of the death penalty, while the accused also appealed the matter.

Pending in the High Court since 2015, a special bench was constituted in July 2024 to arbitrate the matter.



The court ruled that the defendants had been falsely convicted of the July 11, 2006 bombings

Meanwhile, one of the accused passed away in prison in 2021 due to a COVID-19 infection.

What did the high court say?

While the detailed hearing judgment is yet to be released, legal news outlet Bar and Bench reported that the High Court bench found nearly all of the state’s witnesses unreliable.

“According to the Court, there was no reason for the taxi drivers or people in the train to remember the accused after almost 100 days,” the website

BJP urges state to approach SC

New Delhi, India - Former BJP MP, Kriit Somaiya has urged the state government to approach the Supreme Court and appeal against the verdict.

“The verdict has caused great sorrow and shock. Certainly, there must have been some shortcomings in the 2006 investigation, legal representation, and court presentation. I have appealed to CM Devendra Fadnis to form a competent investigation committee and legal team, and to approach the Supreme Court. The people of Mumbai deserve justice,” Somaiya said.

reported.

Even the recovery of bombs, guns, maps, etc. submitted as crucial evidence by the prosecution was immaterial to the case and did not clearly tie those accused to the attacks, the court said.

The remaining 11 accused will now be released from prison after having spent nearly two decades in prison for crimes, which the court believes they did not commit.

India’s judiciary has long been overburdened. A 2025 India Justice Report showed over 50mn pending cases across high courts and subordinate courts since the end of 2024. Meanwhile, the courts work with less than the prescribed number of judges, who often get only minutes to decide on a case. DW

Air India flight skids off runway in Mumbai

New Delhi, India - An Air India flight from Kochi skidded off the runway while landing at Mumbai’s Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) on Monday morning amid heavy rainfall. No injuries were reported among passengers or crew.

Flight AI2744 experienced a runway excursion at approximately 09:27am shortly after touchdown on the airport’s primary runway, which was slick due to monsoon rains. Despite the incident, the aircraft managed to taxi safely to the gate, and all passengers and crew disembarked without harm.

In a statement, an Air India spokesperson said: “Flight AI2744, operating from Kochi to Mumbai on July 21, 2025, experienced heavy rain during landing, resulting in a runway excursion after touchdown. The aircraft taxied safely to the gate and all



passengers and crew members have since disembarked. The aircraft has been grounded for checks. The safety of passengers and crew remain our top priority.’

Airport authorities confirmed the incident and said emergency protocols were activated immediately.

AI-171 crash probe

Meanwhile, answering a question on the probe into the AI-171

coding of the Black Box has happened in India.”

Lauding the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), Naidu said that the agency is ‘unbiased’. “I want to say to the country that AAIB has a thorough rule-based process and they are totally unbiased,” the Union Minister said.

He added: “I have seen multiple articles not only by the Indian media but also by the Western media trying to promote their own viewpoint. The way we are seeing the investigation is through facts. We want to stand by the truth. And that will only be revealed when the investigation is complete.”

Answering a follow-up question on Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) working on 50 per cent of sanctioned strength, he said: “The number of aircraft and passengers almost

doubled in the last 10 years. The Ministry also recommended more posts in the DGCA. These vacant posts have been created over the last 2-3 years. Last year, we recruited 103 posts, which is the highest in the history of DGCA.”

Earlier on Sunday, the Civil Aviation Minister stressed that no comments should be made until the final investigation report is released.

“The data is here. The preliminary report has also been seen, but making any comments until the final report has come - I don’t think it is a good exercise on behalf of anyone. That’s why we are also very cautious,” he told ANI. His remarks come amid reports, particularly Western media outlets, suggesting that pilot error was a factor in the incident. ANI

Bangladesh Air Force plane crashes into school, 19 killed

Dhaka, Bangladesh - At least 19 people were killed and dozens injured on Monday when a training aircraft of the Bangladesh Air Force crashed into a school campus in Dhaka, marking the country’s deadliest aviation accident in decades, authorities said.

“The bodies of those whose identities can be confirmed will be handed over to their families as soon as possible,” Bangladesh’s interim leader Muhammad Yunus said on X. “The bodies of those whose identities cannot be immediately confirmed will be identified through DNA testing and subsequently handed over to their families.”

“To ensure uninterrupted medical operations, the general



Bangladesh Fire Service carrying out a rescue and firefighting operation

At least 19 people were killed and more than 100 were injured after a Bangladesh Air Force plane crashed into a school building in Dhaka

public is specially requested to avoid unnecessary crowding in the hospital area,” he added.

What do we know so far?

At least 19 people were killed and more than 100 were injured in the crash, with at least 83 need-

ing hospital treatment, the office of Yunus said.

The Chinese-made F-7 BJI aircraft took off at 1:06pm local time (0706 GMT) and crashed soon after at the Milestone School and College campus. The educational institution is located in the Uttara neighborhood and students were in class at the time of the accident. The school has students from elementary up to 12th grade.

Footage of the aftermath of the crash showed a big fire near a lawn emitting a thick plume of smoke into the sky, as crowds watched on from afar.

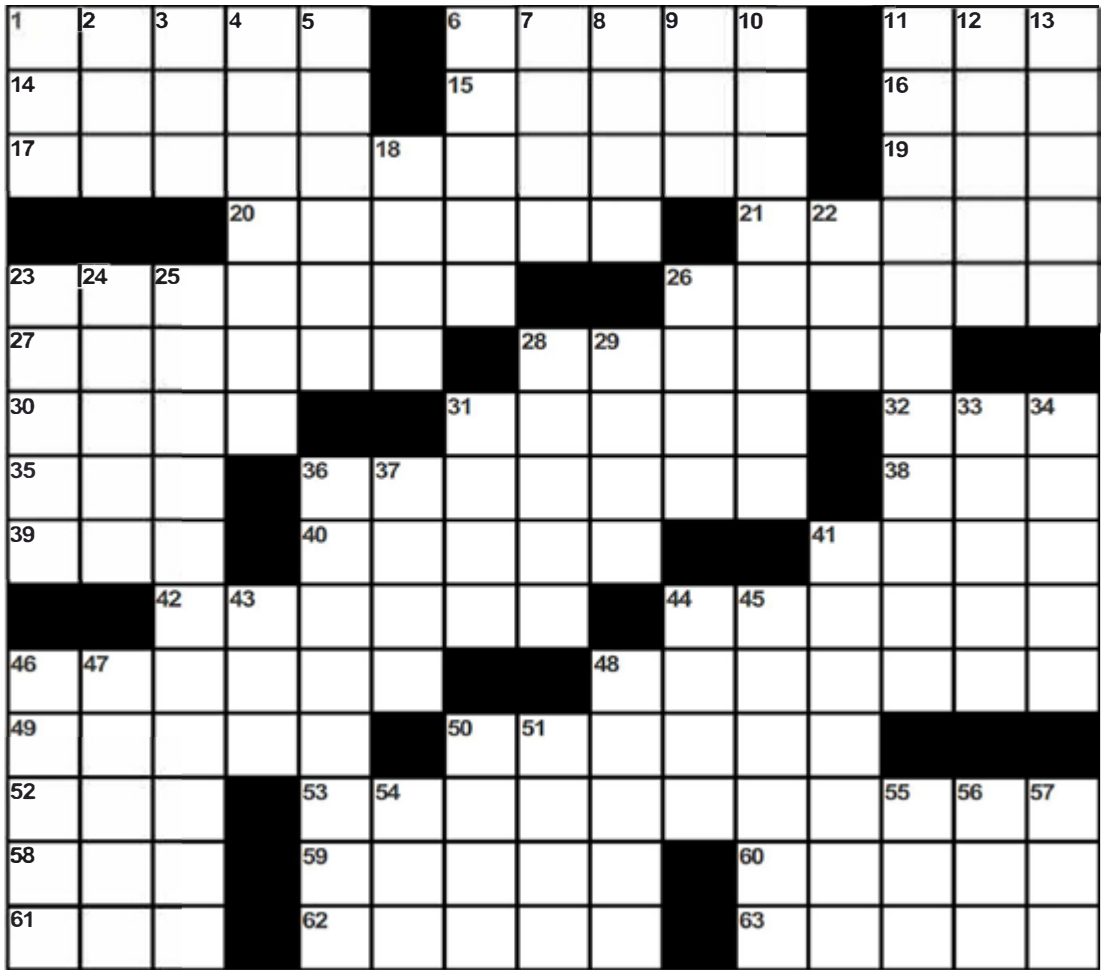
Firefighters sprayed water on the mangled remains of the plane, which appeared to have rammed into the side of a build-

ing, damaging iron grills and creating a gaping hole in the structure, Reuters TV visuals showed. The cause of the crash is not yet known and the government said it would launch an investigation.

Bangladesh’s deadliest ever aviation disaster occurred in 1984 when a plane flying from Chattogram to Dhaka crashed, killing all 49 on board.

Monday’s incident comes a little over a month after an Air India plane crashed on top of a medical college hostel in India’s Ahmedabad city, killing 241 of the 242 people on board and 19 on the ground, making it the world’s deadliest aviation disaster in a decade. DW

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Guitar relative
 - 6) Ewelike
 - 11) Yang's opposite
 - 14) "... a Grecian Urn" (Keats)
 - 15) Helped
 - 16) "Double Fantasy" artist
 - 17) Comment to a sneezer
 - 19) Flying saucer, for short
 - 20) Door frame part
 - 21) Blackens, as steaks
 - 23) Insults
 - 26) Animal life of various regions
 - 27) Handbags
 - 28) Addressed a crowd
 - 30) Winged Greek god
 - 31) Sharp mountain ridge
 - 32) Sharp bark
 - 35) "CD" follower
 - 36) Put into action
 - 38) Hockey great Bobby
 - 39) Supply with weapons
 - 40) Kind of jar
 - 41) Enormous
 - 42) Nightly news hour, often
 - 44) He flew too close to the sun
 - 46) Extensive landed property
 - 48) Barley and rye, for two
 - 49) Live like a parasite
 - 50) Puddle-stomping boot
 - 52) At-cost connection
 - 53) "I'm not the only one!"
 - 58) Wedding declaration
 - 59) Figures in Iranian history
 - 60) Unlas' partners
 - 61) Basic unit of Romanian currency
 - 62) Large books
 - 63) City near Salt Lake
- DOWN**
- 1) Cranberry field
 - 2) "Much... About Nothing"
 - 3) Beatty of Hollywood
 - 4) Unemployed
 - 5) Using a Web browser
 - 6) Drying kilns
 - 7) Strong grip, metaphorically
 - 8) Pastoral composition (Var.)
 - 9) Classic introduction?
 - 10) Taught
 - 11) Who to wish "Merry Christmas" to
 - 12) Prefix with "red" or "sound"
 - 13) Hangman's knot
 - 18) Concludes
 - 22) Crayola gradation
 - 23) Diva's setting
 - 24) Angry display
 - 25) Where a tip may travel
 - 26) It may have a twist
 - 28) Fabric introduced by DuPont
 - 29) Bridle strap
 - 31) Church alcove
 - 33) Dispute
 - 34) Decrease?
 - 36) Purple birthstone
 - 37) Surface, as a road
 - 41) # in a tweet
 - 43) Fond du..., Wis.
 - 44) See 34-Down
 - 45) Cuba's Fidel or Raul
 - 46) Internet messages
 - 47) Balloon probe
 - 48) Water holder
 - 50) Island discovered by Magellan
 - 51) Exercise aftermath, sometimes
 - 54) "Eureka!" relative
 - 55) Find sums
 - 56) Be dishonest, in a way
 - 57) Relatives

NOTE PAD

SPOIL MITE'S CWM
MERLE ALONE OHO
OLD LAWYERS NEVER
ROES ABOUT TWEET
ETA DYES BRENDA
SALSA BAY ALL
TREASON ENE
DIETHEY JUST
SIR HOTDOGS
GUS HAY LEDGE
APPIAN PLAY RAY
SPORT CRAG SIRE
LOSE THEIR APPEAL
IRA EIDER SURGE
TTL REEDY INSET

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're feeling quite eccentric, wildly erratic, and super impulsive. Volatile, even! Spontaneous and free are the words people are using to describe you now. You're not exactly unhappy about it all either. In fact, you're loving it! You might be a little worried that your people aren't quite as tickled about this bold new you. Of course, you can always bribe them with praise or favours

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Someone you love has been kind of remote lately, and it's probably making you a little crazy. It's also kept them on your mind, which is pretty distracting, and that could mean you're not paying enough attention at work. Don't get upset, though. You've been making them crazy too! One of you has to make the first move, of course. Are you going to let them take all the credit for the big reunion?

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You tend to be somewhat excessive every now and again. Overdoing it feels like second nature to you, actually, and most times you don't even know that you're doing it. You may even think that everyone is this way: utterly engaged with anything that captures their attention for as long as it lasts. Of course, all that excess can add up to good fun most of the time. For now, though, you've got to dial that urge back.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You may feel somewhat edgy as you work through your daily routines. It could be the fact that there are still a few unfinished projects you need to deal with. Don't let it get you down. Think about everything you've got done so far, because that's precisely what certain higher-ups are doing now. They may have decided it's time for some much-deserved praise, and maybe a better view too.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're one of those few people who do more than is required, reliably, without bragging or trying to make others look bad because they didn't get there first. This often means that people can take advantage of you if you're not careful, and today is one of those days. If your instincts tell you there's something fishy going on, or if you've been asked for help with something that's not quite fully fleshed out.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You sometimes get the urge to have a totally extravagant, utterly unnecessary shopping spree, despite what others may think. Since you're one of the very few people who rarely buy much for yourself under ordinary circumstances, that means that it's finally your turn. It's all good, you can afford it, and everybody deserves the chance to do right by themselves.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

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

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You don't mind helping out anyone you love. In fact, you usually figure out that they need help way before they do. If someone close comes to you today for another favour, though, and if you swore that the last time was actually, no kidding, the last time, ask yourself whether you're really helping, or just ena-bling. If you're in any doubt at all, that could be your answer.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

When a good reason pops up for you to cancel plans you thought were absolutely unskippable, plans you wanted to rid yourself of anyway, you find yourself suddenly in a much better mood. Now that the Universe has stepped up to the plate, you need to show some appreciation and at least feign disappointment when you let the others know that they have to get along without you. You can try to make it up to them later.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A shared financial arrangement is all set to change, but don't freak out over it. Whatever happens, the time is right, and it should come about thanks to your own actions. That means you get the ball rolling, and you aren't left scrambling to find some way to deal. When the news comes, don't hesitate for even a moment. Start thinking about how you can get your brand-new life off to a great start.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Secrets are a part of your life, but you've just learned one that you simply cannot share with anyone. It's so delicate that you're not even sure you should have heard it in the first place. Now that you have, you can't help but research a little bit further. Once you have proof, and knowing you, that shouldn't take too long, you need to decide what to do next. Rely on your seriously powerful intuition.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You really don't know how charming you can be when you're not trying (in fact, especially when you're not trying). Right now, no matter how hard that rabidly jealous person in your life is trying to catch you in that crazy scheme they think you've got going, maybe lavishing attention on the wrong person for the wrong reason, your honest charm saves the day.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these items used to be part of some kinds of typewriter?
- A. Daisy wheel
 - B. Primrose circle
 - C. Rose water
 - D. Daffodil twister
02. The era of political liberalisation in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was called what?
- A. Svoboda Times
 - B. Dubček's Summer
 - C. Wenceslas Winter
 - D. Prague Spring
03. Who is remembered in the name for the "cold rain" process, the process by which precipitation starts in a mixed cloud with a temperature below freezing, e.g. how ice crystals grow at the expense of liquid cloud droplets within the cloud?
- A. Jonathan E. Pleim
 - B. Bert Holtslag and Byron Boville
 - C. Robert C. Gilliam
 - D. Tor Bergeron

Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	U	R	Y
R	E	I	N
A	A	L	M
S	L	R	N

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 Boggler Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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



Mikel Arteta with Martin Zubimendi

Arteta pleased with Arsenal’s early transfer business

London, England - Mikel Arteta said he was happy that Arsenal had signed a number of top-quality players in the early stages of the transfer window, and that they had given the Premier League club impetus to raise their level in the coming season.

Runners-up for the last three seasons, Arsenal have signed winger Noni Madueke and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from Chelsea, as well as midfielders Christian Norgaard from Brentford and Martin Zubimendi from Real Sociedad.

“They bring new excitement, a new energy as well,” Arteta told reporters in Singapore on Monday ahead of a pre-season match against Serie A side AC Milan.

“We signed very important players as well. Again, everybody feels like their height has to go to a different level, and that’s what

we’re seeking,” he added.

“Ideally, you want it (transfers) done on day one in pre-season. We’ve done very, very well so far. I’m very pleased with the way the club is supporting the necessities and improvements that we required in the team.”

Swedish striker Viktor Gyokeres, who scored 54 goals in 52 games for Sporting last season, is also expected to move to the Emirates. “There’s still a long time in the window, and we are seeking. In terms of numbers, we are short, and we have to improve the depth and the quality of the squad,” Arteta added.

“We are constantly looking in the market, but until that happens, I can focus on the players that we actually have, work with them, and I’m very pleased with what I’ve seen so far in the first 10-15 days.”

GUNNERS RELOADED

This year will be different, says Gabriel as Arsenal chase trophies

London, England - Arsenal let Premier League titles slip through their grasp in the last couple of years but the arrival of top-quality signings will make a difference this season, said defender Gabriel Magalhaes.

Runners-up for the last three seasons, Arsenal have signed winger Noni Madueke and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from Chelsea, as well as midfielders Christian Norgaard from Brentford and Martin Zubimendi from Real Sociedad.

They are also working to complete transfers for striker Viktor Gyokeres and young defender Cristhian Mosquera.

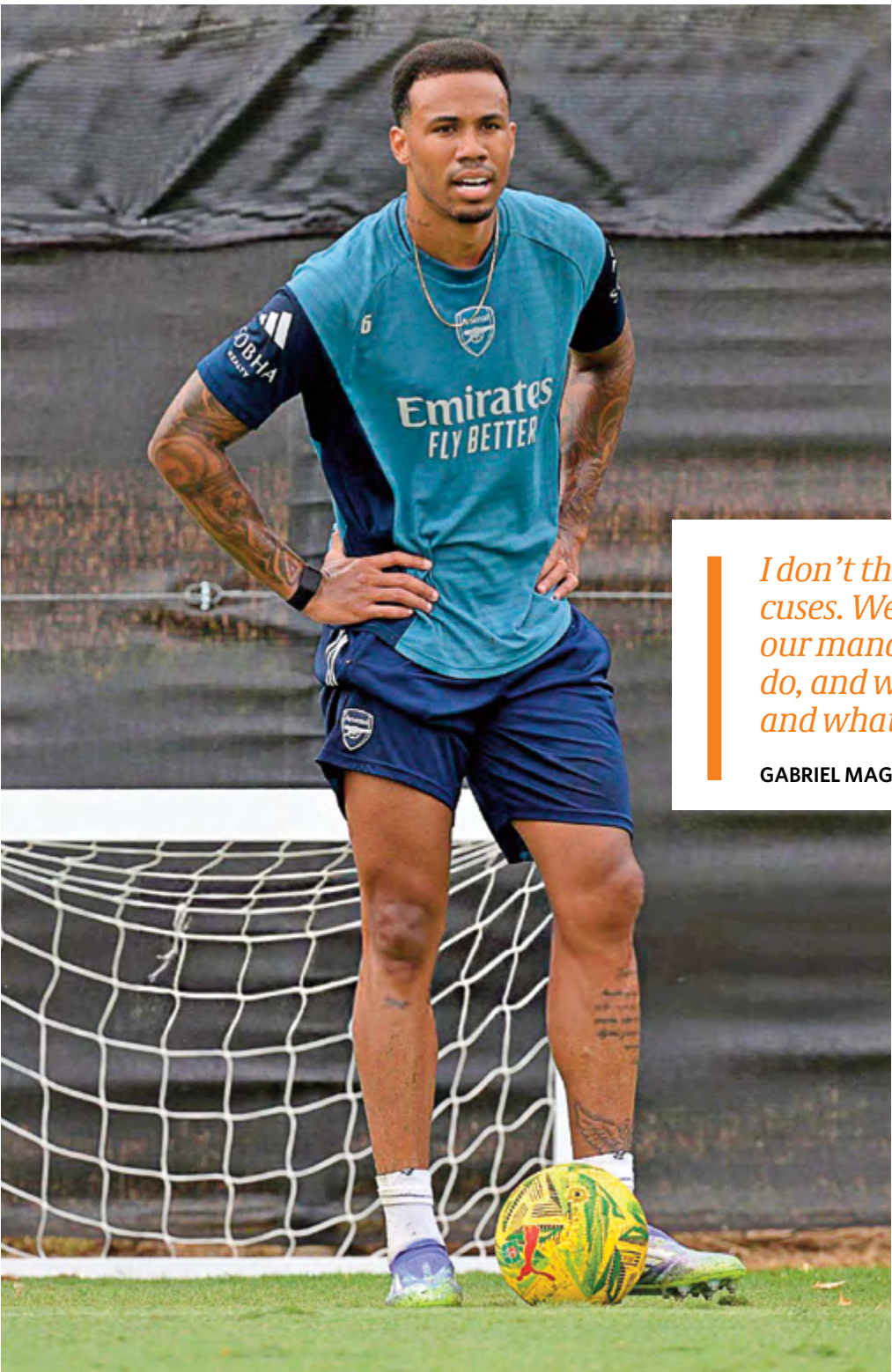
“I don’t think we can give excuses,” Gabriel, 27, told the BBC in an interview published on Sunday. “We did everything we could in the last three years. I feel like we had a little bit of bad luck sometimes, but we all believe that we can win big titles.

“We’re focused on what our manager is telling us to do, and what we have to do, and what we have to improve. I think this year will be different.”

Zubimendi is one of the most highly rated defensive midfielders in Europe.

Premier League champions Liverpool tried to sign him last season, and he played a crucial role in the Euro 2024 final as a half-time substitute as Spain beat England.

Alongside him, Arsenal have brought in midfielder Norgaard from Brentford to provide experience now Jorginho and Thomas Partey have departed.



Arsenal’s Gabriel Magalhaes during a pre-season team training session

Madueke is seen as ideal back-up for Saka, but also someone who can play on both wings, challenge Martinelli for his position, and continue developing his own game.

Swedish striker Viktor Gyokeres, who scored 54 goals in 52

games for Sporting last season, is also expected to make the switch to the Emirates Stadium.

“I think the players that came will help us out a lot. The club is doing what is best for the players and the manager,” Gabriel said.

“They are definitely doing

players. To be in the dispute for titles, you have to have the best players ...

Arsenal will hope the expected arrival of Gyokeres from Sporting will bring goals, with the Swede having scored 54 in 52 games last season.

Gabriel has played against Gyokeres, and mimicked the forward’s celebration after scoring in Arsenal’s 5-0 win over Sporting in November in the Champions League.

“We all know he is a great player, but he is a Sporting player not an Arsenal player,” Gabriel said.

I don’t think we can give excuses. We’re focused on what our manager is telling us to do, and what we have to do, and what we have to improve

GABRIEL MAGALHAES

“Playing against him last year was a challenge. He is great and had a great season. About the celebration, it is something I can’t talk about right now.”

Gabriel missed the final weeks of last season after injuring a hamstring in April. He had surgery to fix the problem and is working to be fit for the beginning of the season.

The Brazilian has signed a contract that will keep him at the club until 2029 - and says he “didn’t hear” about links with a move to Saudi Arabia.

The feeling around Arsenal is they are ready to take the next step, and feel confident to say publicly they are ready to lift a trophy.

“I’ve been at the club for five years now and I’ve seen how much the club has grown,” added Gabriel, who was speaking before the club’s pre-season tour, where the Gunners will play AC Milan on 23 July and Newcastle on 27 July in the Singapore Festival of Football.

England defender Carter target of online racist abuse

Zurich, Switzerland - England defender Jess Carter said she has been the target of online racist abuse since Euro 2025 began in Switzerland, and announced on Sunday that she is stepping away from social media for the duration of the tournament.

“Whilst every fan is entitled to their opinion on performance and result I don’t agree or think that it’s ok to target someone’s appearance or race,” Carter, who is Black, posted in a lengthy Instagram statement.

“I am taking this measure to protect myself in a bid to keep



Jess Carter

Hopefully speaking out will make the people writing this abuse think twice so that others won’t have to deal with it

JESS CARTER

my focus on helping the team anyway I can.

“Hopefully speaking out will make the people writing this abuse think twice so that others won’t have to deal with it.”

The 27-year-old has started all four of England’s games at the tournament, but struggled in their quarter-final win over Swe-

den on Thursday as the Lionesses conceded two first-half goals.

England play Italy in the semi-finals on Tuesday in Geneva, and while they traditionally take a knee before matches - including their four matches so far in Switzerland, as a symbolic gesture against racism - they will not

do so on Tuesday.

“It is clear we and football need to find another way to tackle racism, we have agreed as a squad to remain standing before kickoff on Tuesday,” the team said in a statement. “Those behind the online poison must be held accountable.”

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer posted his support for Carter on X.

“There is no place for racism in football or anywhere in society,” Starmer said. “I stand with Jess, the Lionesses, and any players who have suffered racism, on and off the pitch.”

Football Association CEO Mark Bullingham condemned the abuse, and said the FA has been in contact with UK police, who are in touch with the relevant social media platform, to “ensure those responsible for this hate crime are brought to justice,” he said.

“Our priority is Jess and giving her all the support she needs,” Bullingham said in a statement. “We strongly condemn those responsible for this disgusting racism.

“Regrettably this is not the first time this has happened to an England player.”

Other teams should fear Italy, says Serturini ahead of Euro semifinal against England

Oberentfelden, Switzerland - Italy might be heading into their Women’s Euro semifinal against reigning champions England as underdogs on Tuesday, but the squad believe that they have earned the right to be feared by the other teams remaining in the competition.

The Italians scored a late winner to beat Norway 2-1 in their quarter-final to make it into the last four of the tournament for the first time since 1997, setting up the meeting with England in Geneva on Tuesday. Germany and Spain face off in Zurich a day later.

“It’s not a coincidence to be



Annamaria Serturini

among the top four in Europe. The path we took with (coach) Mr. (Andrea) Soncin is very im-

portant. He brought us so much tranquility, enthusiasm and security,” midfielder Annamaria Ser-

turini told reporters on Sunday.

“I think we can see how much the group can make a difference, and today I tell you that if we are there, it is because we deserve it ... it is not a coincidence if we are there, so I welcome that the other teams start to fear us.”

The 27-year-old said that the sense of unity in the squad had filled them with confidence as they prepare to take on an England side that squeezed past Sweden and into the semi-finals after a dramatic penalty shootout.

“We have the possibility to make everyone believe in us,” Serturini said.

Napoli sign defender Beukema from Bologna

Naples, Italy - Napoli have further bolstered their squad with the signing of defender Sam Beukema from Bologna, the Serie champions announced on Sunday, with the Dutchman joining on a five-year deal worth 30 million euros (\$34.88 million) according to Italian media.

Beukema joined Bologna in 2023 from AZ Alkmaar, and the 26-year-old made 80 appearances across all competitions for the Italian side over the past two seasons, including starting all eight games in their Champions League campaign last season.

Napoli have also added Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, Dutch winger Noa Lang and Italian striker Lorenzo Lucca in the close season.



Sam Beukema



Rory McIlroy

No dream return, but McIlroy still had an ‘awesome week’ at Portrush

Portrush, Northern Ireland - It was not quite the glorious homecoming Rory McIlroy had dared to dream of on his return to Royal Portrush but it felt like redemption for Northern Ireland’s favourite sporting son after the heartbreak of six years ago.

Five-time major champion McIlroy produced a few magical moments over four days for the thousands who descended on the Antrim coast hoping to roar him to glory. In the end the Northern Irishman finished tied seventh, seven strokes behind Scottie Scheffler.

After the gloom of missing the cut in 2019 when the Open returned to the land of his birth for the first time since 1951, though, it felt like a celebration for the 36-year-old who arrived at the course wearing his Masters green jacket.

“I tried as best as I could to keep my emotions in check, especially walking up the last there and that reception,” said McIlroy, who briefly threat-

ened to make a charge on Sunday before a double-bogey on the 10th ended his hopes.

“It’s been an awesome week,” he said. “I’ve gotten everything I wanted out of this week apart from a Claret Jug, and that’s because one person was just a little bit better than the rest of us.”

McIlroy remains the world number two and is hungry for more majors after completing his career Grand Slam by winning this year’s Masters to end an 11-year major drought.

It will be a few years before golf’s oldest major returns to Royal Portrush, though, where McIlroy shot a course record 61 as a teenager.

“I feel so thankful and just so lucky that I get to do this, I get to do this in front of this crowd,” he said. “Hopefully, I’ll have one or two Opens left here, if the R&A decide to keep coming back, probably one while I’m still competitive and another one while I’m more gray than I already am.”

CHILD’S PLAY

Scheffler cruises to first British Open title

Portrush, Northern Ireland - A relentless Scottie Scheffler sealed his first British Open triumph by four shots as he turned the final day of the tournament into a procession at Royal Portrush on Sunday.

The 29-year-old American world number one started out with a four-stroke lead and apart from one blip, never looked like relinquishing his iron-like grip on the chasing pack.

Scheffler resembled a towering giant amongst men all week on the glorious Causeway Coast, rekindling memories of 15-times major winner Tiger Woods in his pomp as he rubber-stamped his fourth major title with a clinical final-round 68.

After tapping in for par in front of a packed 18th green grandstand, Scheffler’s laser-focus finally cracked and he threw his white cap skywards, tearfully embracing caddie Ted Scott and wife Meredith and scooping up his toddler son Bennett.

“Thanks to the fans for all the support. I know I wasn’t the fan favourite today so I appreciate you guys coming out to support, overall it’s been a great week,” the under-stated Scheffler, the third successive American to win the Open and fourth in five years, said after lifting the Claret Jug.

Take the dominant Scheffler out of the equation and the 153rd Open would have been a thriller with the leaderboard un-



Scottie Scheffler with his son Bennett after winning the Claret Jug

derneath him chopping and changing all weekend.

In the end, Harris English was the best of the rest on 13 under after a 66 with fellow American Chris Gotterup, winner of last week’s Scottish Open, a further shot back.

Huge galleries descended on the course all week and thousands arrived on a sunny Sunday hoping to witness a Rory McIlroy miracle.

But Northern Ireland’s favourite sporting son, who began six shots behind Scheffler, was unable to mount a charge

Thanks to the fans for all the support. I know I wasn’t the fan favourite today so I appreciate you guys coming out to support, overall it’s been a great week

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

first four majors by three strokes or more and the first world number one to win the Open since Tiger Woods in 2006.

Those who thought that Texas-based Scheffler might stumble on a layout featuring holes known as Calamity Corner and Purgatory should probably have known better.

On the last nine occasions Scheffler had gone into the final round of a PGA Tour event

ahead, he emerged victorious. His three previous major wins also came after a 54-hole lead.

A sense of anticipation brewed as the leading groups reached the first tee but when Scheffler birdied the first, fourth and fifth holes the only question seemed to be whether he could eclipse Woods’s modern era Open record winning margin of eight strokes at St Andrews in 2000.

Wellens wins Stage 15 of Tour de France

Carcassonne, France - Tim Wellens overpowered his breakaway companions in brutal fashion to claim victory on Stage 15 of the Tour de France, offering yet another sign - if one was needed - of UAE Team Emirates-XRG’s iron grip on the race.

The Belgian national champion, one of defending champion and overall leader Tadej Pogacar’s domestiques, jumped away from a leading group of six some 43 kilometres from the finish and never looked back, beating compatriot Victor Campenaerts (Visma-Lease a Bike) by 1:28.

France’s Julian Alaphilippe took third place, nine seconds further back.

“It’s a very special victory, everybody wants to ride the Tour but not everybody wins on the Tour de France,” said Wellens.

“Suddenly there was a big crash... I followed one move and I was in the breakaway.

“I had an opportunity, I took it and I had legs to finish it.”



Tim Wellens celebrates after winning Stage 15 of the Tour de France

Wellens’ master, Pogacar, still leads Denmark’s Jonas Vingegaard by 4:13 in the overall standings, edging 169.3km closer to a fourth Tour title after the hilly ride between Muret and Carcassonne.

German Florian Lipowitz sits

in third place, 7:53 off the pace.

“I’m actually happier than for any of my wins,” said Pogacar, who added he was recovering from a sore throat.

“With all the ice we’re having (to cool down from the heat) and the air conditioning, half of

the peloton has a sore throat, it’s a pain.”

The top riders stayed quiet all day, Pogacar slowing down after Lipowitz and Vingegaard were caught up behind an early crash.

It was a hectic stage with relentless attacks from riders look-

ing to capitalise on the rare opportunity of a victory as flat and mountain stages are the exclusive domain of top sprinters and general classification contenders.

The group who would fight for the win took shape after more than 100 kilometres and Wellens was not only the stronger rider, he was also the smartest.

Having done very little in the breakaway - one of the perks of riding for the yellow jersey holder - Wellens attacked on a slightly uphill section, catching everyone off guard.

The 34-year-old attacked and the chasing group quickly disappeared into the background as he sped to his maiden Tour de France win to complete his grands tours stage victory collection after prevailing in the Giro d’Italia in 2016 and 2018 and in the Vuelta a Espana in 2020.

Monday is a rest day on the Tour de France, in Montpellier.



Venus Williams

Venus ‘looking to have fun’ as she returns after 16-month absence

Washington, US - Former world number one Venus Williams said she was embracing the challenge and joy of tennis after a difficult year marked by health concerns and time away from the court as the 45-year-old prepares for her return at the Washington Open on Monday.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion declined wildcard entries into the tournament in the nation’s capital in the past but said she felt up to the challenge this year.

“Most of the time I don’t (take up the offer to play as a wildcard),” she said with a laugh on Sunday.

“But this time I had been hitting the ball. And of course I love the game and the hard courts, it’s my favourite surface, what I feel comfortable on. So all those different factors.”

Williams is setting new personal goals, prioritising enjoyment over results.

“My personal goal is to have fun and enjoy the moment, not put too much pressure on myself,” she said.

“I don’t know if I define success at this moment in any sort of way other than believing in myself and sticking to my process. That’s not easy to do, especially after a layoff. So those are my goals.”

Williams has won the Wimbledon singles title five times and the U.S. Open twice, as well as 14 Grand Slam women’s doubles titles alongside her younger sister Serena.

She has not competed since the Miami Open in March 2024 and has not won a match since defeating Russia’s Veronika Kudermetova in the first round of the Cincinnati Open in August 2023.

She faces fellow American Peyton Stearns in the first round of the WTA 500 tournament on Monday.

Boisson survives early jitters to win first WTA title in Hamburg

Hamburg, Germany - French Open semi-finalist Lois Boisson clinched her first tour-level title at the Hamburg Open on Sunday after a 7-5 6-3 win over Hungarian Anna Bondar.

In a clash of first-time WTA singles finalists, fifth seed Boisson came back from 4-0 down in the first set and a break down in both sets to secure the WTA 250 claycourt title.

The 22-year-old made waves last month in her Grand Slam main draw debut when she, ranked 361st, soared through the French Open as a wild card entrant, bowing out at the semi-final stage to eventual champion Coco Gauff.

“This is the first time I’ve given a (winner’s) speech, so please bear with me,” Boisson said before offering a simple “Danke”

(Thank you) to the German crowd.

Boisson faced heartbreak with a first-round qualifying loss at Wimbledon, but found her form again on clay and is set to rise above her career best ranking of number 63 in Monday’s updated WTA rankings.

Lois Boisson



SHOW OF RESILIENCE

Al Zubair, Klingmann recover from race one crash to finish fourth in second Sprint Series race at Misano

Misano, Italy - Al Manar Racing by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair and German colleague Jens Klingmann overcame the disappointment of a first-lap retirement from race one to finish fourth in the Gold Cup category in race two at the 2025 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Sprint Series on Sunday.

At the wheel of their BMW M4 GT3 EVO, the duo performed well in the practice and qualifying sessions at the demanding Misano track in Italy, but Al Zubair was handed a 10-place penalty on the starting grid for race two after the disappointment of the premature retirement from race one.

The second race was red-flagged in the early stages and there was a significant delay while circuit armco was repaired. It developed into the longest one-hour race in history and took 3hr 18min to complete by the time the safety aspect of the circuit run-off area had been secured.

Al Zubair eventually handed over to Klingmann for the final 30 minutes but the Al Manar Racing duo could not make further inroads and had to settle for fourth



A testing weekend at Misano for Al Faisal al Zubair and Jens Klingmann ended with a gritty fourth-place finish in race two in the Gold Cup category

We finished P4. After collecting no points in the first race on Saturday, it was difficult and not the best weekend for us. We hope to collect more points at the next one

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

place in the Gold Cup category and 20th overall behind the Emil Frey Racing Ferrari, the Saintéloc Racing Audi and the race one-winning Garage 59 McLaren.

Oman-based Al Zubair said: "It was a long race and I think it was a bit difficult because we had a grid penalty to start. We started P32 (overall) but the car felt

mega the whole race. We made it up to P21 in my stint but, unfortunately, we lost a bit of time in the pits, about seven seconds, and that dropped us out of P3 in Gold Cup.

"We finished P4. After collecting no points in the first race on Saturday, it was difficult and not the best weekend for us. We

hope to collect more points at the next one and continue the fight for the championship.

"In race one, there was a bit of contact at turn six between my team-mate Jens, Chris Lulham and Maxime Martin. We were out of the race but we also got a penalty, so to finish P4 today is a result we should be happy with."

Al Zubair and Klingmann made the perfect start to their weekend by topping the times in the free practice session on Friday. They ran for 49 laps with a fastest run of 1min 33.026sec to lead the way from Emil Frey Racing and Saintéloc Racing. They then went on to top the Gold Cup

times in the evening's pre-qualifying session.

Klingmann finished first qualifying in second place behind Lulham in the Emil Frey Racing Ferrari and would line up in second place in the Gold Cup category and eighth overall on the grid for the first of the one-hour races.

But Klingmann's challenge for honours in the first of the races was short-lived: after a twilight start, the German was clouted from behind after a few turns of lap one and was only able to limp to the pits with rear suspension damage before the Al Manar Racing BMW was sidelined.



Nitish Kumar Reddy

Knee injury rules Reddy out of England tour, Arshdeep out of fourth Test

Beckenham, England - India all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy has been ruled out of the remainder of the tour of England after suffering an injury in his left knee. Reddy had picked up the injury while training in the gym, and a BCCI update on Monday morning confirmed he was out of the series and would fly back home.

The same BCCI release also stated left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh had been ruled out of the fourth Test after sustaining an impact injury to his left thumb while bowling in the nets in Beckenham. He is being monitored by the BCCI medical team and the selectors have added Haryana seam bowler Anshul Kamboj to the squad.

The development is another blow to India's preparations for the fourth Test of the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy in Manchester, which starts on July 23, with fast bowler Akash Deep also nursing an injury that could keep him out of the match.

All this comes in addition to workload-management concerns limiting Jasprit Bumrah to just three out of the five Tests of the series.

Bumrah played the first and third Tests, and India have indi-

cated that they are "leaning towards" including him at Old Trafford, with the players getting an eight-day break between the third and fourth Tests.

After sitting out the series-opener in Leeds, Reddy played the second and third Tests. He did not make much of an impact in Birmingham. He, however, took crucial top-order wickets at Lord's, sending back openers Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley in the fourth Test after sustaining an impact injury to his left thumb while bowling in the nets in Beckenham. He is being monitored by the BCCI medical team and the selectors have added Haryana seam bowler Anshul Kamboj to the squad.

Reddy would have fancied his chances of playing the fourth Test, though he may have potentially contested for a spot with Dhruv Jurel, who could be in contention to play as wicketkeeper at Old Trafford in case Rishabh Pant, who is recovering from a finger injury, has to play as a specialist batter.

India have played a seam-bowling allrounder in all three Tests so far, with Shardul Thakur playing the first Test before Reddy replaced him in Birmingham. Thakur could return at Old Trafford if India want to keep the same combination as Reddy is now unavailable.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Accountant Vacancy Indian, MBA graduate with 12 years of experience in audit, Finalisation with Tally, SAP certificate, having DL.
Rizthaash8089@gmail.com
Contact: 71220318

FOR RENT

Flat in Ruwi with two rooms and accessories.
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Medical marvel

BILATERAL HEART FAILURE

KING FAISAL SPECIALIST HOSPITAL AND RESEARCH CENTRE PERFORMS WORLD'S FIRST ROBOTIC-ASSISTED BIVAD IMPLANTATION - A MINIMALLY INVASIVE PROCEDURE WHICH OFFERS A LIFE-SAVING OPTION FOR HIGH-RISK PATIENTS WHO CANNOT UNDERGO TRANSPLANTS OR TRADITIONAL OPEN-HEART PROCEDURES



King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre (KFSHRC) in Riyadh has successfully performed the world's first implantation of two artificial pumps for biven-

tricular support (BiVAD-HMIII) using robotic technology on a patient with advanced heart failure.

This groundbreaking procedure opens new horizons in circulatory support techniques for patients with complex cardiac conditions and marks a medical achievement that culminated in the patient's recovery within a short period following the surgery.

The procedure represents a major advancement in the treatment of bilateral heart failure, which was traditionally performed through full sternotomy, an approach associated with higher surgical risks and prolonged recovery. However, the car-

diac surgery team at KFSHRC, led by Prof Feras Khaliel, successfully performed the operation through small incisions using remotely controlled high-precision robotic arms, resulting in reduced blood loss, lower risk of infection, and faster patient recovery.

Ineligible for heart transplant

The 61-year-old patient was admitted after spending over two months bedridden, suffering from end-stage heart failure unresponsive to medical therapy, in addition to multiple chronic conditions including diabetes, stroke, and renal impairment. After a comprehensive clinical evaluation, the patient was deemed ineligible for a heart transplant, making robotic implantation of the artificial pumps a vital and unique solution suited to his health status.

This milestone reflects the integration of expertise across multiple

departments at KFSHRC including cardiac surgery, cardiology, anaesthesia, critical care, biomedical engineering, and advanced life support. The procedure was meticulously planned and benefited from 3D imaging technologies, real-time surgical navigation, and innovative solutions for safely securing the mechanical assist devices.

KFSHRC aims to publish the results of this procedure in peer-reviewed medical journals and present them at global cardiology conferences to promote knowledge exchange and establish innovative partnerships with leading international centres in robotic care and advanced heart failure management.

Milestones

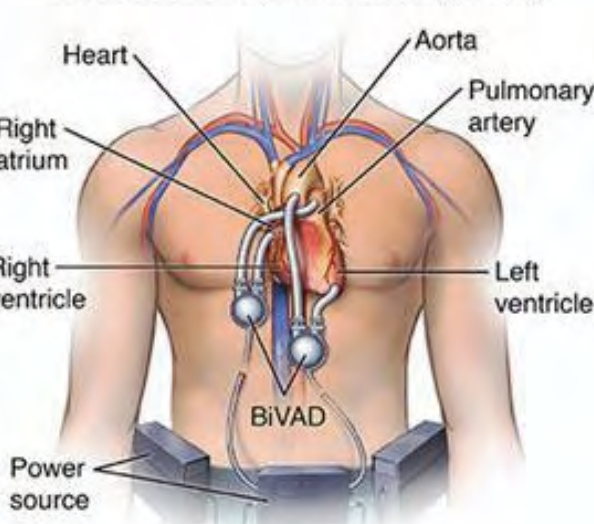
This achievement adds to KFSHRC's track record in robotic surgery which includes the world's first fully robotic heart transplant and the World's

First Robotic-Assisted Artificial Heart Pump Implantation. These milestones serve as evidence of its leadership in adopting cutting-edge cardiac technologies and managing critical conditions with the highest standards of precision and safety, further reinforcing its position as a leading academic medical centre both, regionally and globally.

It is noteworthy that KFSHRC has been ranked first in the Middle East and Africa and 20th globally in the list of the world's top 250 Academic Medical Centres for the second consecutive year and has been recognised as the most valuable healthcare brand in the Kingdom and the Middle East, according to the 2024 Brand Finance rankings.

Additionally, in the same year, KFSHRC was ranked among the world's best 250 hospitals and included in the World's Best Smart Hospitals list for 2025 by Newsweek magazine.

Biventricular assist device (BiVAD)



What is a biventricular assist device?

A biventricular assist device (BiVAD) is an implantable pump. It is designed to help your heart function better when both the right and left pumping chambers of your heart are failing.

When blood from your body returns to the right side of your heart, the right ventricle (one of the pumping chambers) pumps the blood into your lungs to receive oxygen. The oxygen-rich blood then goes back to the left side of your heart. Here your left ventricle pumps blood out through the main artery leaving your heart.

A person may need a device to help pumping blood from both the right ventricle into the lungs and the left ventricle out to the body under extreme circumstances. There are 2 main types of ventricular assist devices - a left ventricular assist device and a right ventricular assist device. When used in combination, they are called a BiVAD. A BiVAD is a battery-operated pump that helps both your right and left ventricles move blood through your heart. It is usually implanted during an open-heart surgery.

NUTRITION

Citrus fruits and immunity

Citrus fruits are known for their immune-boosting properties, primarily due to their high vitamin C content. This vitamin plays a crucial role in supporting the immune system by increasing the production of white blood cells, which are essential for fighting off infections.

Citrus fruits are long associated with immunity due to their high content of vitamin C - the key vitamin in building immunity. However, they also contain other beneficial nutrients like vitamin A and flavonoids, which further contribute to immune health.

Vitamin C and immunity

Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that helps protect cells from damage caused by free radicals. It enhances the function of various immune cells, including white blood cells, which are vital for fighting off pathogens. By increasing white blood cell production, vitamin C helps the body respond more effectively to infections.

Other nutrients in citrus fruits

VITAMIN A

It plays a role in immune function, particularly mucosal immunity (the immune system in the lining of the respiratory and digestive tracts).

FLAVONOIDS

These compounds found in citrus fruits have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, further supporting immune



health.

CITRUS FRUITS FOR IMMUNITY

- Oranges: A well-known source of vitamin C and other nutrients.
- Grapefruit: Contains vitamin C and flavonoids, providing double the immune-boosting benefits.
- Lemons and Limes: Offer vitamin C and can be easily incorporated into meals and drinks.
- Tangerines and Clementines: Smaller citrus fruits packed with vitamin C and other beneficial compounds.

Enjoy whole citrus fruits as snacks or add them to salads and other dishes. Squeeze lemon or lime juice into water, tea, or onto food.

Consider adding grapefruit to your diet. By including a variety of citrus fruits in your diet, you can help support your immune system and potentially reduce the severity and duration of colds and other illnesses.

Role in kidney stones

Kidney stones can form when your urine is very concentrated or when you have higher-than-normal amounts of stone-forming minerals in your urine. One type of kidney stone is caused by low levels of citrate in urine.

Many fruits and vegetables, especially citrus fruits, can raise the levels of citrate in your urine, lowering the risk of kidney stones. Hence, drinking citrus juices and eating these fruits can offer a natural alternative to potassium citrate supplements.

According to data on American eating habits over the last 40 years, kidney stones are more common in people who eat fewer citrus fruits.



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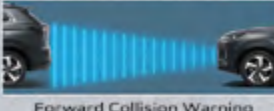
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Are you so taken up by some of your screen idols or the fictional characters you admire that you tend to imitate their style, mannerisms, even their way of life to bring in fulfillment in your own life?

Such an obsession is not uncommon among people of all ages and across cultures. The idols people focus on are called 'comfort characters', and for many, they're more than just made-up figures on a screen or from a book - they are emotional anchors, silent therapists, and sometimes, the only ones who feel like they truly understand.

Why do so many people, especially youth, build these strong emotional ties to characters that don't even exist, one might wonder. Is it a form of escapism or a way of adapting? There is a psychological element behind this behavior that might not really come across as deviant.

From anime to K-pop, movies to video games, comfort characters have carved out a psychological niche in the minds of fans around the world.



Sumaya al Balushi

'My symbol of survival'

Zamzam al Awaimari, a university student, credits BTS member V (Kim Taehyung) with giving her voice when words failed her.

"His music speaks for me. It expresses everything I can't say out loud," she says, adding that while struggling with pressure

Zamzam al Awaimari



life personalities who also influence young minds. Yaqoub al Rawahi, a budding entrepreneur, finds motivation in real-life figures like Dr Salim al Harthi (Omani) as well as controversial influencer Andrew Tate.

"Dr Salim started out from zero and his persistence inspires me," he says. "I want to meet him - to learn from his mistakes." For Yaqoub, such characters aren't quite an 'escape', they're models of ambition and logic, reflections of his own vision.



Yaqoub al Rawahi



Comfort Characters

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In a world saturated with digital noise, endless scrolling, and the pressures of reality, some people find fulfillment in the most unexpected places - not in another person but in a fictional character who brings solace, and sometimes even dictates actions and attitudes

According to a study published in March 2024 by researchers Mula Márquez, Nava-Arquillo, and Matias-Garcia from the Universidad de Sevilla, the phenomenon falls under what's known as 'parasocial relationships' - one-sided emotional bonds formed with media figures - real and fictional.

These relationships, while imaginary, can have very real effects. They offer companionship, emotional regulation, even identity exploration. But as the study warns, they also come with risks: social stigma, detachment from reality, or emotional dependency.

So what drives people to form these connections? Muscat Daily asked a few youngsters about their own personal leanings and obsessions with fictional beings from whom they draw inspiration as well as instruction for their own lives.

Psychological lifelines

For Sumaya al Balushi, a fan of Jujutsu Kaisen, her comfort characters Sukuna and Satoru Gojo serve two very different emotional needs. "Sukuna was betrayed, but he turned that into strength," she asserts, adding, "He respects strong people. He does what he wants, without hesitation... That's power."

In contrast, Gojo is her emotional uplift - "He hates injustice. He'd sacrifice his life for others. He cheers me on when I need it," she points out. But for Sumaya, these characters aren't just fiction - they're psychological lifelines.



'More than just an idol'

Al Wasan al Duhani, a teenaged devoted fan of Stray Kids, describes her connection with band leader Bang Chan in deeply personal terms. "He's more than just an idol," she says. "During the darkest times of my life, his sacrifices, his music - especially his song Goodbye - gave me hope."

She recalls how his live stream 'Chanroom' made her feel seen in a world where she struggled to express herself. "Even if I grow old and become a grandmother, I'll still smile talking about a great man named Bang Christopher Chan," she assures.



'He's my courage'

For Muna al Balushi, her comfort character isn't a human at all - it's the gentle, furry forest spirit from 'My Neighbour Totoro'. "He represents my courage," she shares. "He's imaginary but so full of life. I can't imagine losing interest in him."

It's not about fantasy, it's about emotional grounding, she asserts, adding that Totoro is the embodiment of quiet strength.



Al Wasan al Duhani

and misunderstood feelings, she found solace in V's vocal skills.

"He reflects the deeper side of me - bravery, softness, resilience. He's not just an idol. He's my symbol of survival."

Potter reflects my virtues

For Abrar al Darmaki, discovering her comfort character was accidental - but powerful. "I didn't know it was Harry Potter that governed my existence until I realised I kept going back to that world," she says, adding, "It reminds me of childhood - when life was simple, and magic felt real."

More than nostalgia, Harry represents resilience and honesty—qualities she both admires and sees in herself.

'My Omani Superman'

Not all comfort characters are fictional, there are some real



Abrar al Darmaki

Reflections of the aspired 'self'

Backed by research, it's clear that parasocial relationships often fulfill emotional gaps - especially when real-world connections feel strained or inaccessible. These relationships provide comfort, identity, and resilience, especially during transitional or difficult phases of life.

The downside? Some still judge these bonds as 'immature' or 'weird', often leading to isolation or shame. But as society becomes more open to emotional health conversations, perhaps it's time to recognise comfort characters not as fantasy or a form of escapism, rather as emotional adaptation - a mental tool for survival.

So, comfort characters aren't just beloved figures from the screen - they're like mirrors, helping fans explore who they are, who they were, and who they want to be. Whether it's a wizard, a pop star, or a cartoon creature, these characters offer

something universal - understanding, strength, and hope. And sometimes, that's exactly what one needs to cope, whether real or not.

(Contributed by Asma al Balushi)



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